The Immunocompromised Traveller

Before you travel:

If you have a weakened immune system, whether due to disease or as a result of a transplant or certain medications or treatments, you will need to consider a number of issues before international travel:

- Consult a travel health professional to learn more about identifying and decreasing your health risks during travel. Be aware of the infections that can occur at your destination.
- Weigh the risks and benefits of travel. This personal decision will be based on:
  - your current health status
  - itinerary
  - travel activities
  - length of stay
  - access to medical care
  - ability to fight infections
  - ability to be immunized
  - international border restrictions
- Carry a letter from your doctor summarizing your medical history and health status, in case you must seek medical care while travelling.
- Ask your travel health professional to help you prepare a list of reliable medical facilities at your destination.
- Purchase trip cancellation and medical evacuation insurance. Specialized medical care may not be available at your destination or could be very expensive.

Increased Severity of Infection

- Infections may be more severe or last longer if you have a weakened immune system. It is important to strictly follow preventive measures, especially food/water and insect precautions (see handouts). Stomach or intestinal infections (such as giardia, cryptosporidium and salmonella) may be more severe, so you should pack a self-treatment that is prescribed by your doctor.
- Travel may involve an increased risk of air-borne fungal infections or tuberculosis (TB). The nurse may recommend a TB skin test after travel, depending on your degree of immune suppression and your travel activities. This test shows if you have been exposed to someone with active TB.
- It is important to take appropriate antimalarial drugs if travelling to malarious areas. Some of these drugs may interfere with your current medications. If you have HIV or if you have no spleen, malaria disease can be a more severe. Antimalarial drugs and insect precautions are important protection measures. Seek medical treatment if you develop a fever during or following travel.
- Certain sexually transmitted infections may also be more severe. Prevention is very important, as well as testing upon return home if there has been a risk.
Immunizations

- Visit a travel centre at least 2 months before you travel. The travel nurse can help you identify disease risks and provide information and immunizations.
- The travel centre staff can advise you about which vaccines are required or recommended, and which can be safely given. Begin immunization as soon as possible as antibody blood tests and/or extra doses of vaccine may be needed.
- Killed vaccines such as hepatitis A & B, influenza, tetanus/diphtheria/pertussis are safe for you to receive but may be less effective, so it is very important to take other preventive measures.
- You may wish to consider the travellers' diarrhea vaccine (Dukoral®) for extra protection. This can be purchased at a pharmacy.
- Influenza vaccine may be recommended, depending on the season.
- Live vaccines may be harmful because the virus or bacteria could cause disease-like symptoms. Yellow fever, oral typhoid vaccine, and measles/mumps/rubella vaccine are examples of live vaccines.

Crossing Borders

- Some countries restrict the entry of travellers with HIV infection or AIDS. These countries may insist on HIV testing for foreigners as a requirement of entry. Some countries insist on HIV testing after arrival.
- The Global Database on HIV-Specific Travel & Residence Restrictions (www.hivtravel.org) has a country list of information regarding restrictions.
- HIV test requirements do not fall under the jurisdiction of the International Health Regulations. You should contact the embassy or consulate of the destination country before you depart, to inquire about these requirements.

Please refer to the following International Travel Centre information sheets for further information:
- Food and Water Precautions
- Traveller's Diarrhea
- Blood and Body Fluid Precautions
- Insect Precautions
- Malaria
- Health and Safety Abroad
- Travel Medical Kit
- Travel Health Resources

For more information, call the International Travel Centre at (306) 655-4780
www.saskatoonhealthregion.ca/internationaltravel