

Know Before You Go

Working and Travelling/Vacationing Outside Canada

An Ounce of Prevention

Is there work outside the country in your future? Then help make it more successful by following these tips to keep you and your family safe and healthy.

Before you go:

- **Get Check-Ups:** book medical/dental appointments at least two months before departure in case follow-up tests or treatments are necessary. Have your doctor write new prescriptions for all medications, listing the generic and brand names of each drug. Schedule eye exams, too, and obtain prescriptions for glasses and contact lenses, even a back-up pair, in case of loss. Finally, take the address, phone and fax numbers of your physician, dentist, optometrist, etc.
- **Get Shots:** be sure everyone's immunizations are up-to-date. Check with your local Community Health Travel Immunization Clinic to find out what's recommended for your destination. Refer to Canada's Public Health Agency/Travel Health website (<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca>) and Vancouver Coastal Health, Immunization and Vaccination webpage (http://www.vch.ca/your_health/health_topics/immunization_&_vaccination/).
- **Check Your Health Insurance:** whether you're leaving the country or only the province, contact your provincial health care office first; you may be surprised. For example, to maintain MSP health coverage, you must be physically present in Canada at least six months in a calendar year and continue to maintain your home in B.C. in order to retain coverage. You may be eligible to receive coverage for up to 24 months during a temporary absence from B.C. Approval is limited to once in five years for absences that exceed six months in a calendar year.

If heading out of Canada, talk to Benefits, for details about your supplementary insurance coverage. Confirm how bills should be paid/submitted, and be sure to note your insurance company's address, customer service phone and fax numbers, plus your plan and ID numbers.

- **Pack a First Aid Kit:** in addition to the normal contents, include favourite over-the-counter medications that may not be available at your destination. For international travel, ask your local hospital pharmacy to assemble a 'traveller's kit' containing sterile needles, gloves, syringes, and IV bag (around \$30). Request an official letter stating that you are carrying these items for medical purposes, and then pack this kit in your checked luggage, not carry-on.

- **Fill Prescriptions:** if possible, reduce potential hassles by bringing enough prescription medicines to last the length of time you are outside Canada. Draft a letter that your doctor can print on letterhead and sign, stating the reason why you are carrying so much medication. You may need to show it at Customs and Immigration, so keep it and all medicines handy.

While You're Away:

- **Find a Doctor:** ask co-workers for recommendations or, if language is an issue, check the lists of English-speaking doctors often provided by the Canadian, American and British embassies. Don't wait until someone is sick or injured – register with a doctor's office as soon as possible.
- **Know the Local Emergency Number:** don't assume it's 911; in New Zealand, for example, it's 111.
- **Find the Hospital Emergency Room:** locate the nearest hospital and emergency room entrance. Be prepared.
- **Beware of the Water:** if you're told "don't drink the water", that includes avoiding ice cubes and rinsed lettuce too. When the local water supply is iffy, bottled or boiled water is best – even to brush your teeth.
- **Talk to the Locals:** find out what precautions your neighbours observe and follow suit.
- **Book Return Check-Ups:** send scenic postcards to your family doctor and dentist, requesting appointments for everyone in the month following your arrival.

Back Home:

- Visit the doctor and dentist, get new medical cards (if necessary) and start planning your next trip!