

Travel-related illnesses in paediatrics

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Each year, increasing numbers of Canadian children and youth travel internationally. Up to 75% of travellers may develop a travel-related illness, and children account for a disproportionate number of travel-related hospitalizations. However, there is very little data available regarding travel-related illnesses among Canadian children. The purpose of the survey was to determine how frequently CPSP participants had seen paediatric patients with travel-related illnesses, where they had travelled, and what types of illnesses had been seen.

The one-time survey was sent to approximately 2,499 CPSP participants in August 2008. There were 629 respondents (25%), of whom 184 (29%) had seen patients with travel-related illnesses during the previous 12 months. Children who were travelling to visit friends and relatives (VFRs) were seen by 70% of the respondents while tourist travellers and immigrant travellers were seen by 46% of respondents. Half of the respondents had seen travel-related illnesses among travellers to Africa while 42% of the illnesses occurred among travellers to India. Travel to Mexico, the Caribbean, and South and Central America was also commonly associated with travel-related illnesses. The most commonly seen travel-related illnesses were diarrheal diseases requiring hospitalization (57% of respondents), enteric fever (35%), malaria (34%) and other parasitic infections (22%).

Preliminary results of this survey were published as a CPSP Highlights in the March 2009 issue of *Paediatrics & Child Health*. Almost one-third of survey respondents see patients with travel-related illnesses. This emphasizes the need to obtain a detailed travel history. In addition, the majority of travel-related illnesses were seen among paediatric VFRs, which highlights the importance of discussing upcoming travel with families who are likely to visit friends and relatives in their countries of origin and providing or recommending pre-travel health advice for these patients. A CPSP surveillance study examining travel-related illnesses in paediatric travellers who visit friends and relatives abroad started in March 2009 to provide more detailed information about the illnesses experienced by this very at-risk group of travellers.

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