



## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **European travellers continue to put their health at risk**

**21 JULY 2009:** European travellers are still putting their health at risk says the European Society of Clinical Microbiology and Infectious Diseases (ESCMID), with one third experiencing travel-related illness when visiting abroad. On a typical two-week trip, travellers lose an average of three days due to illness - almost 20 percent of them remain ill after their return home, and another 10 percent need medical care.

“Anyone travelling abroad cannot afford to be complacent, especially when there are many simple things travellers can do help prevent travel-related infections,” says Professor Robert Read from the University of Sheffield and ESCMID Executive Committee Member. “Be prepared to minimize the risks by ensuring the necessary preparations before travelling, taking sensible measures whilst away and watching out for any problems after you return”.

Diarrhoea and upper respiratory infection are the most common illnesses faced by travellers with an incidence rate of 25-90 percent in the first 2 weeks abroad. Hepatitis A is the most common travel-related disease (transmitted by stools) that can be prevented by vaccination. “Evidence suggests that factors such as advance booking and the number of hotel’s stars seems to be a protective factor against travel-related infections, as well as sleeping in single room or drinking mineral water”, says Professor Read.

In spite of the known malaria risks in some parts of the world, only 35 percent of European travellers to malaria-endemic areas take anti-malarial prophylaxis and as a result up to almost two percent of those visiting high risk areas contract this potentially fatal disease. “The finding that only one person out of three or four takes effective prophylaxis against malaria is both surprising and potentially dangerous”, comments Professor Read.

Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) also frequently occur as some 5 percent of European travellers engage in casual sex, half without using condoms. STDs are most often seen in men and young adults travelling without a regular partner and among those who have higher numbers of partners at home. Alcohol and recreational drug use may increase the risks.

“Tick-borne illnesses are also something to be aware of as the summer holidays approach, especially as ticks are more active during warmer months”, says Professor Didier Raoult of the Marseille School of Medicine and ESCMID Executive Committee Member. “Lyme disease first appeared 25 years ago and since then some 15 tick-borne diseases have emerged throughout the world. These may be severe and even fatal, though can be treated effectively with antibiotics”, notes Dr Philippe Parola from the Department of Rickettsias, Université de la Méditerranée.

“Although influenza is not a typical summertime health risk, the current spread of the A H1N1 virus in the Southern Hemisphere enhances the possibility of catching the flu for all Europeans travelling abroad,” warns Professor Javier Garau of the University of Barcelona and ESCMID President. “Whilst the new virus seems to have largely displaced the seasonal one, precautions in people contacts and therapeutic measures do not differ from those normally suggested. Resistance to antiviral drugs, should they be needed, is still extremely rare (three cases worldwide). It is worth remembering that a vaccine will not be available until the autumn”.

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For more information go to [www.escmid.org](http://www.escmid.org) or contact Claire Hoffman  
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The European Society of Clinical Microbiology and Infectious Diseases is a non-profit organization whose mission is to improve the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of infection-related diseases. This is achieved by promoting and supporting research, education, training, and good medical practice.