

Prevention of Food and Water Borne Diseases

Many illnesses, including [travellers' diarrhoea](#), [hepatitis A](#), [typhoid and cholera](#) are passed on through contaminated food and water. Travellers' diarrhoea is the most common illness contracted abroad, affecting 20% to 60% of overseas travellers.

You can reduce your risk of these diseases by following basic guidelines:

Water

In countries with poor sanitation, it is not advisable to drink tap water or use it to brush your teeth unless it has been treated. Filtered, bottled, boiled or chemically treated water should be used.

Bottled fizzy drinks with an intact seal are usually safe, as is boiled water and hot drinks made with boiled water. Ice in drinks should be avoided.

The most reliable way to purify water is by boiling, but this is not always convenient. Chemical disinfectants such as iodine and chlorine will usually kill bacteria and viruses, and can easily be obtained from larger chemists or specialist travel shops. However, some parasites are not reliably killed with iodine or chlorine preparations. In this instance, combining iodine or chlorine with filtration using a specialist filter, again bought from a travel shop, should be effective. Domestic water filters designed for use in the UK are not suitable.

Food

Some developing countries use animal waste as fertiliser. Certain foods, especially those growing close to the ground, are particularly prone to contamination and should be avoided. Food items that may be unsafe include:

- Salads, such as lettuce
- Uncooked fruits and vegetables, unless they have been washed and peeled by the traveller.
- Food that has been allowed to stand at room temperature in warm environments, or that has been exposed to flies, such as with open buffets.
- Unpasteurised milk, cheese, ice cream and other dairy products.
- Raw or undercooked shellfish or seafood.
- Food from street traders unless it is has been freshly prepared and is served hot on clean crockery.

Food served in good standard hotels or restaurants may not always be safe, as it may have been contaminated during preparation. Try to pick places to eat that have a reputation for serving safe foods.

You should only eat freshly prepared food that is thoroughly cooked and served piping hot.

Hands must always be washed after visiting the toilet and before preparing or eating food.

Boil it, cook it, peel it or forget it!

Resource

World Health Organization. Preventing Travellers' Diarrhoea: How to Make Drinking Water Safe. WHO/SDE/WSH/05.07. Geneva 2005. Available at:
http://www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/hygiene/envsan/sdwtravel.pdf