BGTHA
The British Global and Travel Health Association

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Dead monkeys in Rio Grande do Sul raises Yellow Fever alert in Brazil
https://saude.rs.gov.br/secretaria-da-saude-alerta-para-nova-circulacao-da-febre-amarela-em-macacos-no-estado
Within the Yellow Fever regions of our world the death of monkeys tends to raise the epidemiological antenna very significantly as unfortunately this may point to the expansion of the disease into previously low risk regions. Despite the massive vaccination programme which has been undertaken in Brazil there are still regions where the level of cover is still inadequate.

Update on Dengue cases in Tamil Nadu (India)
https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chennai/tamil-nadu-dengue-cases/articleshow/105323494.cms
Tamil Nadu is an enormous state within India and stretches from its capital Chennai down towards Kerala both of which are popular tourist destinations for our travellers. This recent report of thousands of Dengue cases confirms the need for our travellers to be aware of the problem and to take extra care to avoid mosquito bites – even during the dry season. The recent availability of a new Dengue Fever vaccine raises the possibility of us providing protection but the main foundation of avoiding this sickening disease has to be the avoidance of the bites.

Over 14,000 reports of Leishmaniasis in Syria during 2023
https://bit.ly/46snG5f
We frequently think that the vector borne diseases are only a major problem within the tropics and other far off distant lands. Unfortunately, that is not true and, as we have seen over the past few years, diseases are moving location all too frequently. Leishmaniasis is transmitted by the sandfly which is about 1/3 the size of a mosquito but nevertheless carries a mighty bite! The disease has several differing presentations (cutaneous, mucocutaneous and visceral) but none of them are at all pleasant. The cutaneous version will usually self-heal over a period of months but can leave an unsightly scar for those infected. The mucocutaneous version can lead to major disfigurement and the visceral form of the disease will frequently be fatal if left unrecognized and untreated. The Mediterranean basin is a known breeding ground for this disease and the only protection (again!) is avoidance of the bites.

Rabies Alert Teams active in Bali to control risks in Denpasar
https://www.precisionvaccinations.com/2023/11/25/bali-establishes-rabies-alert-teams
Despite the advantages to being an island the authorities in Bali have had a number of rabies-related scares during the past few years (in fact since 2008 when a major dog related outbreak caused serious concern for both the local population and tourists alike). However, the problem continues and over 80,000 'rabies-transmitting animals' are reported in Denpasar City according to this article. Certainly, this is a risk factor frequently disregarded by many tourists judging by the number of panic phone calls which are coming through. Frequently the animal in question is a monkey and they can't understand how they could have gotten bitten after all they just '*picked up the monkey for a photograph*'!

Mycoplasma Pneumonia cases reaching epidemic levels in Denmark
https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/pneumonia/denmark-reports-mycoplasma-pneumonia-epidemic
The reports of an unusual spike in 'respiratory' illnesses initially came from China a few months ago but over the past weeks the presence of mycoplasma related outbreaks have come through from many other regions. Perhaps the world is just more cautious following the COVID-19 outbreak but it will certainly be interesting to see how this all develops particularly in the northern hemisphere as we head into the winter months.

Alert as significant increase in Dengue cases reported in western Sri Lanka
https://www.dailymirror.lk/print/front-page/Dengue-sweeps-across-Sri-Lanka/238-272374
Sri Lanka is just across the water from Tamil Nadu State in south eastern India and with its double monsoon seasonal weather pattern (and so increased humidity) it is not too surprising that Dengue is a common problem in this region. However, having over 76,000 cases so far in 2023 (with 16,125 in Colombo) is causing concern and we need to be advising our travellers accordingly.

Update on drug-resistant Tuberculosis in Mozambique

https://medicalxpress.com/news/2023-12-drug-resistant-tuberculosis-under-diagnosed-genomic-analysis.html

Antibiotics and antituberculosis drugs are of course fantastic and have transformed the risk of serious infections since first becoming widely available after the second World War. We need to remember that bugs are cunning creatures and resistance is always going to be a problem as they adapt and modify their structures. This is not seen anywhere better than with what we experience while seeking to treat Tuberculosis. The hope and expectation is that the pharmaceutical companies will develop new and better drugs to control diseases but that all takes both time and huge resources and the end result after years of painful research is not always fruitful. There is still no good vaccine against TB and perhaps that is where the fight really needs to be fought.

Update on Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever cases in USA in travellers returning from Mexico

https://emergency.cdc.gov/han/2023/han00502.asp

As has been mentioned so frequently, the world is a small place and becoming even smaller as we travel across from East to West and North to South within even shortening time frames and after going to more and more out of the way destinations than would have been considered in days past. When these nomadic travellers return home that places strain on the healthcare services in their home countries especially if a geographic travel history is not considered. Certainly, considering a rickettsial disease like Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever might not be within the differential diagnosis of many practitioners and that could have serious consequences.

Report on extent of Rabies problems in India as dog bites increase

https://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2023/dec/06/dog-bite-cases-double-in-3-years-36-cases-of-rabies-occur-in-india-says-govt-2639017.html

This news article reports that approximately 6 people in India are bitten every minute in India. If that is anywhere close to being correct it is really a horrific figure. For our travellers we need to strongly emphasis the need to avoid any and all animal contact (bite, or lick or scratch – basically any salivary contact) but should that occur they must wash out the wound and seek very urgent medical treatment – whether or not they have been vaccinated. The main difference is that those who have already received a recognised full course of vaccination against rabies will not require the expensive (and difficult to obtain) Rabies Immune Globulin and their travel plans may not be disturbed too significantly.

German tourists with Zika after returning home from Thailand

https://promedmail.org/promed-post?place=8713690,101

Since this mosquito borne disease was first recognised (1947 in the Zika Forest in Uganda) it has led a quiet life and been of little interest to travel medicine practitioners. A disease which only presents in about 20% of those infected (and even in those cases usually with mild symptoms) was never going to gain much notoriety! However, since 2015/2016, when the disease hit the America's for the first time, all that changed. In Brazil the healthcare systems suddenly became aware of this new disease which hit their shores and a short while later they saw a massive increase in babies being borne with microcephaly. After their initial investigations for a cause (e.g. radiation, pollution, poisoning etc) they suggested that Zika could be the link to this horrible disease spike. Nevertheless, it still took some time before the international community came to accept that Zika and Microcephaly are connected much to the alarm of those with an on-going pregnancy or travellers to these regions.

In the practice of travel medicine, we are constantly asked 'what is the risk of Zika in "country X" and of course, with a disease where 80% 0f those infected remain asymptomatic, that is a miserably difficult question to answer. One possible solution is to suggest to the enquiring party that if Dengue Fever is an issue in their proposed destination, then it is likely that Chikungunya and Zika are also potential problems which definitely always need to be considered. Afterall they are all transmitted by the Aedes mosquito which is just as much at home in the towns and cities as within the countryside.

We need to be cautious when patients say that they have used Dr G and the incidence in "country X" is now reported as being minimal based on the reduction in numbers of babies being born with microcephaly. One reason for this reduction is almost certainly down to the fact that those who became infected previously with Zika now have circulating antibody protection (IgG) against future attacks. However, that cover would of course not be in place for our travellers from regions where Zika is not endemic.

A Very Happy Christmas Season to all our Members