

Pregnant traveller returns from Phuket (Thailand) with Zika infection and subsequent foetal microcephaly

https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/eid/article/31/2/24-1510_article

Ever though this viral disease was first recognised in patients from the Zika Forest in Uganda in 1947 this mosquito-borne disease only rose to serious notoriety following its introduction to South America in 2015. The suggestion that it was the underlying cause for the major increase in cases of microcephaly which was seen in Brazil was initially treated with incredulity (and disbelief!) as commonsense pointed towards a more obvious cause such as foetal poisoning or radiation or some other environmental pollution. However since 2016 it is now well accepted that unfortunately infection with Zika (especially in the first trimester) can lead to what is now known as Congenital Zika Syndrome (CZS) with microcephaly being just one consequence of that (usually simple) infection.

This dreadfully sad report relates to a couple from Netherlands who travelled to Phuket (Thailand) for a very standard 3-week holiday but in the early stage of pregnancy. Apparently only very few mosquito bites were reported but the mild illness mid-way through the trip could certainly have been the initial sign of a Zika infection. Following their return home all standard antenatal care showed nothing of concern, although no Zika tests were undertaken at that stage. However a later ultrasound (26 weeks) showed evidence of very significant microcephaly. A short holiday with disastrous consequences.

There have been a number of similar reports over the past years, but this just emphasises the need for all of us to be so aware of the risks associated with travel during pregnancy and this is not just to concentrate on the mosquito-borne problems as the miracle of pregnancy is always a delicate balance.

When providing a travel medicine service, we are frequently asked by our patients "what is the risk of contracting Zika during my trip to" Frequently this is linked to the patient informing us that their internet search has shown that the numbers have "decreased very significantly" at their planned destination! This fails to take into account that only 20% of those infected with Zika have any symptoms and also that, after the initial outbreak, many within the local population will themselves have developed protective antibodies and so the main risk is for those from our shores who have never previously been infected.

It is essential that in all our consultation rooms we have clear notices advising our travellers of the issues relating to Zika and other potential risks associated with travelling which pregnant.

Siu Mei meal in Hong Kong linked with significant food poisoning outbreak affecting at least 57 individuals

<https://www.thestandard.com.hk/breaking-news/section/4/225105/Probe-launched-as-57-suffer-food-poisoning-after-%E2%80%98siu-mei%E2%80%99-dinner>

A Siu Mei meal is very popular and frequently it may be bulk prepared in a factory setting before being distributed to local restaurants and hotels. That process could mean that, no matter how upper class the facility used by our tourists, the meal itself may have been contaminated during mass production or transportation.

Report on Polio situation in Nigeria and Mozambique

<https://allafrica.com/stories/202501030154.html>

The countries of Afghanistan and Pakistan tend to be where our mind wanders when considering where the risk associated with Polio occurs. Nevertheless there are certainly sporadic reports of outbreaks of this viral disease in many other regions, particularly in Africa. Frequently this may be related to the use of the older live Polio Sabin vaccine which is still widely used despite the best efforts of WHO and other international advisory bodies.

Frozen blueberries linked to outbreak of Hepatitis A in Netherlands

<https://nltimes.nl/2025/01/14/hundreds-hepatitis-infections-will-tied-blueberries-albert-heijn-recall>

It seems that several hundred people may have already become infected with Hepatitis A in the Netherlands from contaminated blueberries. This risk from frozen berries has been known about for quite a few years and so you will occasionally see a sign on the door of the cold cabinets in supermarkets encouraging you to 'boil your berries before consumption'. So, blueberries causing yellow jaundice – clearly quite a colourful thought!

Cases of Japanese Encephalitis being detected at more locations across Australia

<https://www1.racgp.org.au/newsgp/clinical/japanese-encephalitis-virus-spreads-to-new-areas>

The spread of this horrible mosquito-borne disease has reared its head in Australia for the past couple of years and now the authorities in New South Wales and Victoria are ramping up their efforts to warn of this risk and also how best to protect against mosquitoes. There is no suggestion that mass vaccinations will be introduced but if that ever were to be the case we should be aware that in Australia (and many other regions in Asia) they have a different vaccine to the one we have in Europe which is hugely cheaper and easily available!

Rabies warning issued in Dak Lak region of Vietnam after a recent death

<https://vietnamnews.vn/society/1690561/dak-lak-warns-of-rabies-in-region.html>

We really shouldn't need to be reminded that we always need to warn our travellers to avoid any and all animal contact during their travels and that the risk is from salivary contact (bite, lick, scratch or spit!) which may lead to this fatal disease. We are so fortunate that we don't have this miserable disease within our shores. Long may it remain that way.

Malaria alert issued in Uganda as cases surge

<https://www.the-star.co.ke/news/africa/2025-01-12-ugandan-authorities-warn-of-malaria-upsurge>

When local health authorities issue alerts which could so easily affect their tourist trade we really do need to sit up and treat their advice seriously. Ever since the very unfair reporting of issues linked to the use of Mefloquine (Lariam) back in the early and mid 90's it has been difficult to encourage our international travellers regarding the seriousness of this disease and the safety of the current options. Of course, no drug is perfectly safe (it is was it would de facto also be perfectly useless!) but the wide spread panic which emanated at that time was both unfair and also frequently placed international travellers at undue risk. We know that over 90% of all the world's reported cases of malaria occur in Africa and that care is essential when advising our patients regarding their specific and personal itinerary.

Tourists warned to have cover against Hepatitis A if visiting Cuba

<https://www.codigosanluis.com/alerta-en-cuba-por-brote-de-hepatitis-a/>

Again, if the local health authorities are warning our tourists against a disease risk (Hepatitis A in this case) I would have thought we would be well served by paying close attention!

International concern as now hMPV identified in Dhaka (Bangladesh)

<https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/health/370602/iedcr-hmpv-detected-in-one-person-in-bangladesh>

You may hear about the "new Chinese virus" which is now circulating and causing panic. Is this the next COVID19 pandemic? Are we back into isolation and masks? hMPV (Human metapneumovirus) was first recognised in 2001 but frequently circulates through populations (especially children, older adults and those with compromised immunity) during the colder seasons and can cause all the typical respiratory symptoms. Due to increased global awareness and better testing facilities new cases are being reported and this tends to raise concerns. The main question at present relates to whether or not these current cases are associated with a new variation in its genetic structure which could increase morbidity/mortality..

Two bitten by a dog with Rabies in Hatay (Turkey)

<https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/turkiye/hatayda-kuduz-alarmi-bir-mahalle-karantinaya-alindi-2286663>

Just another reminder that Rabies occurs within many of our most popular tourist destinations and our travellers need to exercise constant caution especially where children are concerned.

Second foodborne outbreak on Cathay Pacific flight from Nepal to Hong Kong with beetroot being blamed

<https://travelradar.aero/food-poisoning-on-cathay-pacific-flights-inbound-to-hong-kong/>

To be fair, even though airline foods are mass produced, and typically supplied by facilities at the point of departure, they are usually hygienically safe - even if our taste buds may be too frequently rather unimpressed! However, have you ever wondered why the policy is in place to ensure that the pilot and the co-pilot don't eat the same meal!

Death from Tick Borne Encephalitis in a 57yo in Trentino region of Italy following a bite two months previously

https://www.tgcom24.mediaset.it/cronaca/trentino-morso-zecca-57enne-muore_91628974-202402k.shtml

TBE is one of those horrible diseases which is spreading inexorably across Europe and into regions previously free from this viral disease (including the UK). The vaccine is frequently administered within the childhood programmes of many endemic regions (eg Austria) but otherwise, for our tourists, the main emphasis tends to be aimed at those undertaking a camping holiday in at-risk regions (Germany, Sweden etc). Nevertheless an ill informed tourist may be overtaken by a desire to take an unplanned trek up a beautiful mountain trail and unwittingly place themselves at risk. Of course Lyme disease should also not be forgotten as another consequence of these pesky blighters.

Worrying rise in cases of Malaria and other mosquito-borne diseases in Delhi

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/delhi/malaria-cases-nearly-double-compared-to-last-year-chikungunya-also-surges/articleshow/116720780.cms>

Frequently our patients may arrive into the clinic with clipping from a paper (or more likely nowadays, a news report on their phone!) relating to a disease outbreak where they are planning to visit! They want your opinion on what is the risk and what can they do about avoiding the disease in question. This report from New Delhi is a good example of even when the details reported are perfectly correct the end risk for our travellers should almost always be significantly less. Tourists (except the VFR fraternity) don't tend to use miserable local accommodation and may frequently sleep under a mosquito net or in an air conditioned room and so end up being protected from the mosquito's attention. However having the information to hand should help us emphasise to our patients the need for constant care and attention during their travels.

Two dead and many ill after suspected food poisoning at conference in Hanoi

<https://tuoitrenews.vn/news/society/20241221/suspected-food-poisoning-kills-2-after-party-in-hanoi/83506.html>

This report does not identify the underlying cause of this significant outbreak but certainly mass food preparation always has the possibility of lowering the bar relating to hygiene and safe food preparation.

Oysters at Los Angeles Times festival sicken over 80 with Norovirus

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2024/12/20/norovirus-oysters-people-sick-la-times-event/77104061007/>

OK, I know I am biased and that I loath the thought that anyone in their right mind would purposely want to consume any undercooked faecal feeding bivalve shellfish meal. But there you go, it takes all kinds to keep the world circulating, even though having your bowels circulating brings all this into a very different perspective!