



Travel health update

Travel health can be complicated, and advice for health professionals and travellers is ever-changing. In this regular feature, Jane Chiodini seeks out and presents the latest travel advice and information to help you keep your practice up to date. She also revisits areas of on-going concern, for spot checks and further clarification

TRAVEL ADVICE SPECIFIC TO WOMEN

The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG) has updated its document *Air travel and pregnancy*, which is a very useful leaflet to give to your patients in this situation. Topics covered include facts on whether or not flying will harm the baby; when the safest time to fly during pregnancy is; information about the airport security scanners; use of aircraft seatbelts; increased risk of problems such as deep vein thrombosis. For example, the leaflet advises the pregnant traveller she may develop leg oedema, nasal congestion or ear problems as a blocked nose is more likely during pregnancy, and explains that changes in air pressure in the plane can lead to these problems. If motion sickness is experienced during the flight, this can make pregnancy sickness worse. The leaflet goes on to relate when it may be advisable not to fly: if at increased risk of going into labour early, if a pregnant woman has severe anaemia or sickle cell disease with a recent sickle crisis, recent vaginal bleeding or a serious medical condition that makes breathing difficult. Resources at the end of the leaflet lead to the Scientific Impact Paper which contains a full list of the sources of evidence to create this patient leaflet. See <http://goo.gl/u6sd7N>

Although mentioned briefly in the

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The RCOG offers a wealth of advice for travelling and pregnancy

December update, the RCOG has also recently updated its *Malaria and pregnancy*, available at <http://goo.gl/3N69dc>. This states that a pregnant woman should only travel to a malaria-risk country when the trip is essential – this is a useful statement to point out and document you have advised as such. The RCOG leaflet also gives clear instructions regarding the ABCD of malaria prevention advice, including advice to use an insect repellent containing 50% DEET and to apply it after a sunscreen; warns that antimalarial medication bought in a malaria-risk area and/or over the internet may be cheaper but may also be fake; explains to the traveller the symptoms of malaria, how malaria is diagnosed and how it is treated during pregnancy. There is also a small section on planning to get pregnant which includes the warning that it may be harmful to the baby if antimalarial

medication is taken at the time of conception, and that a woman should wait until the drugs are out of her body before trying to get pregnant, specifying a wait of 3 months after completing mefloquine, 2 weeks for atovaquone proguanil and 1 week for doxycycline.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office provides sensible advice for women travellers at <http://goo.gl/9fmPwC>, which also gives links to other helpful resources. Forced marriage is one of the topics addressed by this government department. Taking someone overseas to force them to marry is illegal and can result in a prison sentence of up to 7 years (<http://goo.gl/hGF7xb>). Female genital mutilation is also illegal, and carries a 14 year prison sentence. Intending to procure FGM may be the reason for taking a female child or young adult on a trip abroad, and this is something we should all be vigilant for in the travel consultation. (<http://goo.gl/QFncbf>)

Safety and security for the female traveller is another important topic to discuss. For example, wearing a ring on the wedding finger can help the female traveller to avoid harassment. Apps are now available to promote safety, and some include the capability to raise the alarm in a dangerous situation. Search on the Apple App pages or on Google Play for titles such as Circle of 6, bSafe, Guardly and CRF – Safer travel.

Useful resources for the female traveller to make her journey more comfortable, include information about the female urination device, the Shewee at www.shewee.com or Whiz Freedom at <http://whizproducts.co.uk/>, the menstrual cup at <http://www.mooncup.co.uk/> Links to all the above resources can also be found at <http://www.janechiodini.co.uk/news/help/>