

Helping Trip Members Remain Healthy



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As trip arrangers and leaders, we face many challenges when out in the field with our groups. We expect the usual challenges of seeing that our trips run smoothly, our participants enjoy themselves, our step-on guides are excellent, our meals delicious, and our hotels attractive and comfy.

But occasionally we have to face something we don't expect, like a tour member becoming ill or injured while on tour with us. Do we have any procedures in place as to how such an occurrence should be handled? If not, perhaps now is the time to think about this and sketch out some thoughts as to the best way to deal with such an en-route happening.

Of course, the best procedure is to pre-plan so that hopefully our trip members start out healthy. I like to suggest in my pre-departure information bulletins that everyone have a medical and dental checkup before embarking on a major trip. I also distribute a form that I ask each member to complete and return to me well before the trip that gives me the name and contact information of their personal physician and the number of their medical insurance policy.

I also ask questions about their health history that may be pertinent to the trip. For example, if the trip includes visits to high altitudes, you would want to know if anyone had a history of uncontrolled high blood pressure, cardiac disease or even asthma or other respiratory condition.

I remind participants in my pre-trip information bulletins to be sure to take an adequate supply of any medication with them (not packed in their checked luggage) as well as a copy of the prescription with generic name and dosage in case an en-route refill should become necessary. I recommend they take their eyeglass prescription as well.

One of the reasons tour participants often become ill while traveling is not only that they are encountering new food and bacteria along the way but they are often pushing themselves beyond

their strength because they don't want to miss anything. They've paid for it, by golly, so they're not going to skip an activity even if they don't feel up to it.

I purposely try to plan day-to-day schedules so that everyone can get enough rest. If you've had an early start and a full morning activity and you have an evening event planned as well, give them a free afternoon to catch their breath. The problem is that once they've become overtired and are pushing themselves, they become more likely to lack the resistance to ward off colds, the flu, or whatever's going around. This can be a particular problem on a coach tour where a "bug" will make the rounds throughout the group one day after another.

I also like to suggest that each trip participant carry a mini first aid kit ... nothing big and bulky. This could include aspirin, a few band aids for blisters, perhaps some Tylenol or similar, a disinfectant, maybe some antacids.

You, as tour leader, may wish to carry a more complete kit or check with the tour company with which you'll be traveling as to what their company policy is and what their tour leader will be carrying. You'll want to check what medical training, if any, their tour leaders have and how they are instructed to handle en route medical emergencies.

In the next issue we'll be discussing more serious en route medical emergencies: locating reliable medical care on the road, dealing with occasional medical evacuations, the "Good Samaritan" law and other legal/medical issues. While such events may never happen on your trips, and while such issues may not be as glamorous as the fun activities on a trip, it's good to give it some serious thought and be prepared.



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