

The NW GA Epi-Center



Epi Disease Spotlight: Guide to Travel-Related Illnesses



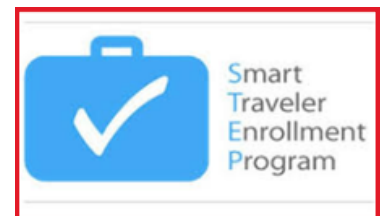
As we head further into the spring and summer seasons, traveling and tourism begins to increase. It's important to protect yourself and your loved ones when you travel by preparing for travel-related illnesses and other events that might occur. Travel-related infections can include diseases spread by bug bites, through food, water, person-to-person, and animals. There are steps you can take before, during, and after your travel to help you stay safe and healthy.

Before Traveling

- Check what diseases or health risks are ongoing at your destination by visiting [CDC's Travel Health Notices](#) webpage
- Make an appointment with a provider or travel health specialist
- Plan for the unexpected: enroll in the free [Smart Traveler Enrollment Program \(STEP\)](#) through MyTravelGov
- [Prepare a travel health kit](#) with prescriptions, masks, sanitizer, insect repellent, and other items

General Prevention Tips

Before, during, and after travel checklist:



Guide to Travel-Related Illnesses cont.

During Travel

- Wash your hands and avoid touching your face
- Avoid those who are sick
- Prevent bug bites with repellent and by wearing long shirts and pants
- Choose safe foods and drinks
 - Fully cooked and hot foods
 - Only eat fruits/veggies that you have washed and peeled yourself
 - Drinking from bottled or sealed drinks, and avoiding ice
- Avoid contact with or feeding animals
- If you do get sick, stay at your accommodations and seek medical care if needed

After travel

- Contact a medical provider if you are sick or become sick. Let them know:
 - Where you traveled and where you stayed
 - What you ate and drank
 - What activities you participated in
 - Any injuries, contact with animals, or other sick individuals

Travel Information Center

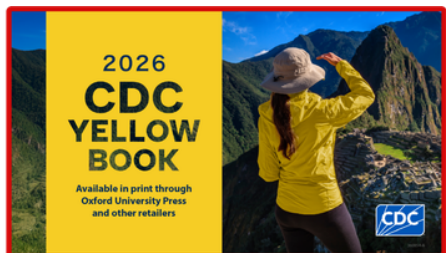
In addition to general resources, the CDC's [Travel Information Center](#) has specific information based on:

- **Reasons for travel**, like information for [cruise ship travel](#) or [visiting friends and relatives](#)
- **Information for travelers with special considerations**, like those with [disabilities](#), [weakened immune systems](#), or [families with children](#)
- **General tips** including a [survival guide](#) and information on [traveling with medications](#)
- **Events that can occur during travel** with information spanning from [seafood food poisoning](#) and [heat illnesses](#) to [blood clots](#)

CDC Yellow Book

If you're looking for country or disease specific information, the [CDC Yellow Book](#) has a vast catalog of travel medicine topics, geared for providers, with valuable information for all.

No matter your destination, preparing for travel before, during, and after can help keep you safe.



Gastrointestinal (GI) Illness

Gastrointestinal (GI) illnesses, often called “stomach bugs” or food poisoning, are very common and can affect anyone. These illnesses are infections of the digestive system caused by viruses, bacteria, or parasites, including norovirus, Salmonella, and E. coli.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), about 48 million people in the United States experience foodborne illnesses each year.

GI illnesses are typically spread through contaminated food or water, unclean hands, or contact with infected people, animals, or surfaces.

Common symptoms include:

- Diarrhea (which may be bloody)
- Nausea and vomiting
- Stomach pain or cramps
- Fever



How to Protect Yourself

Many GI illnesses spread through the “fecal-oral route,” meaning germs from contaminated hands, food, or surfaces enter the body through the mouth. Because of this, the following prevention steps are essential:

Wash Your Hands Often

Handwashing is one of the most effective ways to prevent GI illness. The CDC notes that proper handwashing—using soap and clean running water and scrubbing for at least 20 seconds—can reduce diarrheal illness by 30%.

Be sure to wash your hands:

- Before eating or preparing food
- After using the restroom
- After handling raw meat or garbage
- After coughing, sneezing, or touching animals

Practice Safe Food Handling

Follow the CDC’s four key food safety steps to prevent the spread of harmful germs:

- Clean: wash hands, utensils, and surfaces often
- Separate: keep raw meat separate from other foods
- Cook: cook foods to safe temperatures
- Chill: refrigerate foods promptly

Be Careful with Water and Travel

Drinking unsafe water or eating contaminated food while traveling can increase your risk of GI illness.

Always:

- Drink safe, clean water
- Avoid swallowing water from lakes, rivers, or streams
- Avoid raw or undercooked foods

Click on Each Illness to Learn More

Common Foodborne, Waterborne, and Animal-Related GI Illnesses

- [Campylobacteriosis](#)
- [Cholera](#)
- [Cryptosporidiosis](#)
- [E. coli infection](#)
- [Giardiasis](#)
- [Hepatitis A](#)
- [Listeriosis](#)
- [Norovirus](#)
- [Salmonellosis](#)
- [Vibriosis](#)



Tickborne and Arboviral Diseases

TICKBORNE DISEASES



Lyme Disease

- Lyme disease is a bacterial infection caused by the bacterium *Borrelia burgdorferi* and is spread to humans through tick bites. *B. burgdorferi* is commonly found in the Northeast, mid-Atlantic and upper Midwest regions of the U.S. Lyme disease is diagnosed through a blood test in conjunction with compatible signs and symptoms.
- Early signs of Lyme disease (3-30 days after tick bite) include fever, chills, headache, fatigue, and erythema migrans rash or “bull’s-eye” rash. The “bull’s-eye” rash is a classic Lyme disease symptom but does not always occur. Late signs and symptoms that can occur months after a tick bite include swollen knees, irregular heartbeat and facial palsy (muscle droop).
- The best Lyme disease prevention is using an EPA-registered insect repellent, avoiding wooded or brushy areas, wearing long-sleeved shirts and pants, and by performing body checks on yourself and animals after being outdoors.
- Most cases of Lyme disease can be treated with 10-14 days of antibiotics, and if treated early, most people recover rapidly and completely. Antibiotics may be given as a precaution after a tick bite as well, so consult with your healthcare provider if you notice a tick bite or have symptoms.

Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever (RMSF)

- Like Lyme disease, RMSF is a bacterial infection spread through tick bites. It is spread by several species of ticks including the American dog tick (found in most of North America) and the Brown dog tick (found in parts of Southwest U.S. and Mexico). It is diagnosed through a blood test in conjunction with signs and symptoms.
- Early signs and symptoms are not specific to RMSF, so it is important to seek care if you have the following symptoms and have noticed a tick bite and/or have been in the woods/brushy areas: fever, headache, rash, nausea and/or vomiting, muscle pain, etc. Rash is a common symptom and usually develops 2-4 days after fever onset. Some patients that recover experience permanent damage such as hearing loss, amputation of extremities from blood vessel damage, and mental disability.
- RMSF can be treated with an antibiotic known as doxycycline, and is the recommended treatment of RMSF in all age groups. When treated early, death and severe outcomes can be prevented.
- Similarly to Lyme disease, RMSF can be prevented by using an EPA-registered insect repellent, avoiding wooded/brushy areas, wearing protective clothing, and performing body checks on yourself and animals.

ARBOVIRAL DISEASES



West Nile Virus (WNV)

- WNV is spread through the bite of infected mosquitoes, most commonly Culex mosquitoes, and WNV typically peaks in late August–early September. It is diagnosed based on lab testing, symptoms, and history of mosquito exposure. WNV cases have been reported across the U.S., with ~ 2,000 cases diagnosed yearly, although this number is believed to be an underestimate as most people do not develop symptoms.
- If symptoms do develop, they usually start 2–6 days after being bitten by an infected mosquito and are usually mild with flu-like symptoms or rash. Some individuals can develop serious illness, although rare, like high fever, neck stiffness, disorientation, vision loss, paralysis, meningitis, etc.
- No treatment is currently available for WNV, but rest, fluids, and pain medication can help relieve symptoms. If more severe symptoms develop, hospitalization may be needed. Most people infected with WNV are believed to have lifelong immunity and are protected from getting the disease again.
- To prevent WNV, use an EPA-registered insect repellent, wear protective clothing outdoors, avoid being outside between dusk and dawn (mosquitoes that transmit WNV are most active during this time), and use screens on windows and doors, mosquito nets, etc.



Dengue

- Dengue is a virus spread through infected mosquitoes, and a person can be infected multiple times in their lifetime. There are 4 Dengue viruses, all closely related, and up to 400 million are infected by Dengue each year.
- Dengue is common in tropical and subtropical regions, and is common in U.S. territories like Puerto Rico, American Samoa, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Dengue vaccination in the U.S. is recommended for children ages 9–16 with lab confirmation of a past infection, or if they live in areas where Dengue is common.
- Dengue symptoms typically start 2 weeks after being bitten by an infected mosquito and include muscle aches and pain (eye pain, typically behind the eyes), nausea, vomiting, rash, or any other warning signs.
- While there is no treatment for Dengue, rest, pain medication, and fluids can treat symptoms. Visit a healthcare provider if you have symptoms of Dengue and be sure to share travel history.

For more information, please see the links below.

- <https://www.cdc.gov/lyme/about/index.html>
- <https://www.cdc.gov/rocky-mountain-spotted-fever/about/>
- <https://www.cdc.gov/west-nile-virus/about/index.html>
- <https://www.cdc.gov/dengue/about/index.html>

Animal Bites and Rabies



When warm weather arrives, many go outside to enjoy a variety of activities. Many animals are more active during the spring and summer. According to the Centers for Disease Control, 1.4 million Americans receive healthcare for possible rabies exposure each year. Rabies is rare; however, it is a serious health concern in the U.S. Rabies is a viral infection usually spread through the saliva of infected animals. This can occur when an infected animal bites a human or another animal. In the U.S., more than 90% of cases occur in wildlife including bats, raccoons, skunks, and foxes. Northwest Public Health District has had over 79 animals test positive for rabies since 2020. Rabies infection in humans is almost always fatal. Only a few humans have survived infection. A decrease in human deaths from rabies is directly correlated to vaccinating pets, animal control programs, public health tracking and testing of rabies cases, and the availability and use of post exposure prophylaxis for possible human exposures to rabies.



Important Tips to Avoid Rabies Infection in Humans and Animals:

- Keep pets up to date on rabies vaccination.
- Notify your local animal control of suspicious animal behavior.
- Do not pet, feed, or have contact with wild animals. You cannot always tell if an animal has rabies. If the animal is injured call animal control for assistance when needed.
- If you find a bat in your home, contact your local environmental health office or animal control office. You may be at risk of rabies.
- If you or your pet gets injured by a wild or domestic animal, seek medical attention and work with your local county environmental health office for next steps.
- Get a human rabies health assessment from GA Poison Control experts 24/7 by calling 404-616-9000. If staff recommend rabies post-exposure prophylaxis, immediately go to a local hospital ED for services.
- Medical offices and hospitals are required to report all patient animal bite cases to public health.

For more information please visit the CDC and GA DPH websites below.

<https://www.cdc.gov/rabies/>

<https://dph.georgia.gov/environmental-health/rabies>

Health Alerts

GA DPH Measles Health Alert

- GA DPH Measles Alert

The GA Department of Public Health confirmed a case of measles in the Coastal Health District. This is the second reported measles case in Georgia in 2026. The patient was unvaccinated against measles and recently traveled out of state.

For more information, please go to the following website:

<https://dph.georgia.gov/epidemiology/epidemiology-emergency-preparedness/gahan>

CDC Health Alerts

- No recent alerts

For more information previous alerts, please go the website below:

[cdc.gov/han/php/about/](https://www.cdc.gov/han/php/about/)

Isolate, Identify, and Inform

To report routine notifiable disease cases staff can send the information 24/7 to:

- Our confidential fax number: 706-802-5342
- Electronically in SendSS, <https://sendss.state.ga.us/newsendss/index.html>

For a complete list of reportable conditions or for more information please visit:

<https://dph.georgia.gov/epidemiology/disease-reporting>

Reporting Notifiable Disease Conditions to NW GA Public Health

All reports should include the patient's name, date of birth, address, phone number, copy of lab result(s), symptoms, treatment, pregnancy status, and any other pertinent information pertaining to the condition.

Report all suspect measles cases immediately by phone.

- During normal business hours, call 706-295-6656 and select option 0.
- During after hours, holidays, and weekends call the GA Public Health Hotline at 1-866-PUB-HLTH or 1-866-782-4584 and ask to speak with a medical epidemiologist.

***Do not wait until lab results come back to report a measles case to public health staff.**

Contact Us:

Epidemiology Section
1309 Redmond Road, NW
Rome, Georgia 30165-9655
PH: 706-295-6656
FAX: 706-802-5342
www.nwgapublichealth.org