

## **Health Advice for Outings in Countryside**

Having activities and outings in countryside brings a lot of fun and joy. However, countryside can potentially pose health threats to visitors and campers. The following is health advice for persons having outings or camping in countryside.

### ***ADVICE ON PREVENTION OF INFECTIOUS DISEASES***

#### **1. Avoiding mosquito-borne diseases:**

Mosquito can transmit several serious infectious diseases such as dengue fever, Japanese encephalitis and malaria. Preventing mosquito bites is of paramount importance at all times (especially during the high biting activity time). Be faithful in carrying out the following personal protective measures to prevent mosquito bite:

- Wear long-sleeved clothing and trousers to cover arms, legs and particularly the ankles;
- Use insect repellents containing 25 % - 35 % DEET (for children keep DEET concentration below 10%) on clothing and exposed skin (but not to the eyes, mouth, or open wounds) and reapply every 4 to 6 hours;
- Use mosquito nets, preferably impregnated with insect repellent and use bed-nets in sleeping areas that are not air-conditioned or screened, or use a mosquito coil, which fills the area/ room with insecticide throughout the night.

#### **2. Prevention of diseases caused by insect bite:**

Apart from mosquito, some diseases can be caused by biting of small insects such as mites or fleas. Examples are spotted fever and typhus. In order to prevent them, persons should take the following precautions:

- When going to scrubby areas, wear long-sleeved shirts and trousers to prevent flea/ mite bites;
- Apply insect repellent to exposed parts of your body such as the hands and neck, and also on clothing and shoes, if necessary;
- Avoid visiting or staying in places where the environmental hygiene is poor;
- Do not sit or rest on grassland and haystacks.

#### **3. Infections related to wounds:**

Some microorganisms can get entry into the body through broken skin or wound and cause diseases, examples are leptospirosis, tetanus, etc. Any person who has sustained a wound, particularly in exposed parts, should follow the following steps of wound care:

- Wash wound sustained from injury or insect bite thoroughly with antiseptics or plain water and soap immediately;
- Cover all wounds properly and avoid contacting wounds with soil, polluted stream or pond water and any object likely to be contaminated by urine of live mammals;
- For unclean wounds, thorough treatment of the wound by health care professionals is essential. Consult a doctor early if there are signs of fever and wound infection (e.g. redness, swelling, heat) afterwards;
- Depending on the type of wound and immunization history of the person, he/she may need to receive tetanus toxoid to prevent tetanus.

#### 4. Prevention of zoonotic diseases:

Some infections of animals can be transmitted to human when a person gets into contact with infected animals, such as hantavirus infection, leptospirosis, rabies, etc. Persons should observe the following advice:

- Do not have direct contact with infected animals; avoid stray animals, including dogs, cats, and monkeys;
- After being bitten by animal, wash wound thoroughly with plain water and soap immediately. Then seek medical attention at the nearest Accident and Emergency Department. If necessary, immunization against rabies may be given;
- Do not walk barefoot in watery rice paddies or muddy land and do not wash face with stream or pond water; both might be contaminated with animal urine or faeces;
- Do not try to disturb, clean or enter closed and rarely used rodent infested structures. Under no circumstances should you touch dead or trapped rats, catch rodents or contact their excreta with bare hands;
- When camping, choose sites which are open and dry to lessen the chance of rodent invasion;
- Stay away from places where rats are prevalent. These are usually places that are dirty and full of left-over food.

#### 5. Prevention of infections related to food and water:

Diseases such as food poisoning, typhoid fever, paratyphoid fever, *E. coli* O157 infection, cholera and dysentery are mainly caused by ingestion of contaminated food and water. To prevent food-borne diseases, observing good food and personal hygiene is essential, especially when going to places with poor sanitary conditions, persons should take the following precautions:

- Always wash hands before eating and after going to toilets;
- Drink only boiled water, or bottled water and drinks produced by reputable companies, and pasteurized milk or dairy products;
- Avoid drinks prepared by ice of unknown origin;
- Eat only thoroughly cooked food;
- Avoid partially cooked seafood including shellfish;
- Avoid using polluted stream water to wash fruits, vegetable or any ready-to-eat food.

#### 6. Swimming/ water sports:

Contact with water in countryside might involve risk of transmission of infectious diseases, the following precautions should be taken:

- Do not swim in polluted water, which might cause eye, ear and intestinal infections. Also, avoid swimming, rafting or wading in water that might be contaminated;
- Avoid playing or bathing in fresh water rivers and lakes, which may harbour bacteria and parasites that can cause illness.

Moreover, beware of jellyfish stings when swimming in sea, which may cause severe pain and skin irritation.

### ***GENERAL ADVICE WHEN HAVING ACTIVITY IN HOT WEATHER***

#### 1. Drink plenty of fluid:

- During hot weather, one needs to drink more liquid than the thirst indicates. This is especially true for people above 65 years of age, who often have a decreased ability to respond to external temperature changes;
- During heavy exercise in a hot environment, drink 2- 4 glasses (0.5-1 litre) of cool fluids each hour.

#### 2. Replace salt and minerals:

- Profuse sweating removes salt and minerals from the body. Salt and minerals are essential to your body and must be replaced. The easiest and safest way to replace these is through your diet. Drink plenty fruit juice or sports beverage during exercise or any activities in the heat.

#### 3. Wear appropriate clothing and apply sunscreen:

- Choose lightweight, light-colour, loose-fitting clothing;
- Avoid mid-day sun (11 a.m. – 3 p.m.) to protect your skin. Fair skinned people are especially vulnerable, although all colours of skin are at risk;
- Always use a sunscreen of at least SPF (Sun Protection Factor)15 (SPF30 for children) to protect the skin and reapply again if you stay out in the sun for more than 2 hours, or after swimming or sweating;
- In the hot sun, a wide-brimmed hat will provide shade and keep the head cool.

4. Plan outdoor activities carefully:

- If you are unaccustomed to having activities in a hot environment, start slowly and pick up the pace gradually;
- If exertion in the heat makes your heart pound and leaves you gasping for breath, STOP all activities, get into a cool area, or at least in the shade, and rest, especially if you become light-headed, weak, or faint;
- While outdoors, rest frequently in a shady area. Resting periodically will give your body a chance to recover.