

Respiratory infections and other diseases of close personal contact

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Viral respiratory tract infections

Viral respiratory tract infections are among the commonest illnesses in the general population but there is little published evidence about their incidence in travellers. It is reasonable to suppose that they occur as frequently in travellers but their symptoms are familiar, and travellers might not, therefore, report them as travel-related illness. If travellers are confined in close contact for prolonged periods, for example during air travel, they may transmit viral infections by means of respiratory droplets. Such spread is likely to occur only to adjacent passengers as re-circulated air passes through HEPA (High Efficiency Particulate Arresting) filters¹ that prevent recirculation of infection.

Influenza vaccination prior to travel should be considered for all the groups of patients for whom it would be advised in standard UK practice. The epidemiology of influenza² is such that the influenza season at the traveller's destination may differ from that of the UK. The World Health Organisation tracks the progress of the influenza virus and consulting its website – www.who.int - may be useful in updating information about the influenza situation in other countries.

Other respiratory tract infections

Lower respiratory tract infections with organisms such as *Streptococcus pneumoniae*, *Chlamydia*, *Mycoplasma* and *Haemophilus influenzae* may occur in travellers.

If they occur in the returning traveller it is important to realise that their patterns of antibiotic resistance may be different from those of strains normally encountered in the UK. This is due to differences in the use of antibiotics in other countries. *Strep. pneumoniae*, for example, is more likely to be penicillin resistant³ when penicillins are freely available without prescription or are over-prescribed by physicians.