

Safe Passage

Pre-trip care can help travelers avoid serious illnesses

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Before flying to South Africa this week, Troy Carl made another kind of trip for a final round of shots at New Mexico Travel Health in Albuquerque.

For this visit, medical director Dr. Francine Olmstead rolls up one of Carl's sleeves for a hepatitis A vaccine and the other for a hepatitis B vaccine, the final leg in a journey of preventive care that also included polio, tetanus and typhoid vaccines and a flu shot.

Carl, national director of Faith Comes by Hearing, a nonprofit that distributes audio versions of the Bible in 400 languages, has traveled widely in Thailand, China, Vietnam, Korea and Japan. Before each trip, he makes sure to schedule a visit with Olmstead.

"When you do as much international travel as we do, you shouldn't be reckless," he says.

Travel medicine specialists say a dose of prevention goes far to help travelers avoid everything from serious illnesses like malaria to traveler's diarrhea or H1N1 influenza. About 8 percent of travelers to developing countries need medical care during or after a trip, according to a review published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* of more than 17,000 ill patients who visited 30 international clinics.

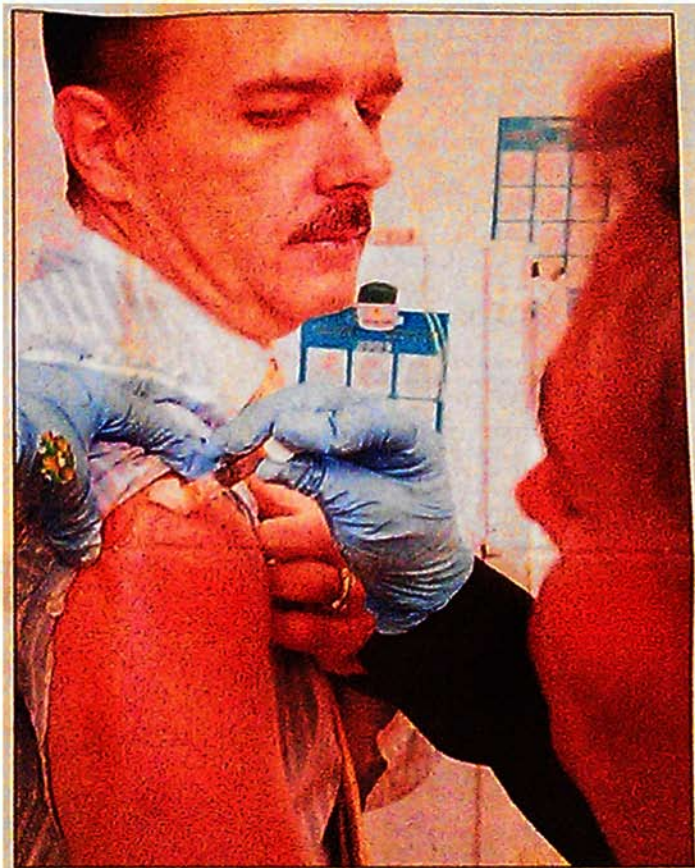
But studies show that most travelers don't seek pre-travel advice, says Dr. Ralph Bryan, medical epidemiologist with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and director of the University of New Mexico International Travel Clinic.

"It's a little alarming to us in the business how many people don't seek out care," he says.

Start early

The first line of defense for international travelers is a visit to the CDC Web site, which lists health advisories for most countries. Next is a visit to a travel health specialist who can tailor preventive care. Travelers should also see a primary care doctor to be sure they don't have other problems, such as heart disease or diabetes, that may affect treatment, Olmstead says.

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Before traveling to Africa, Troy Carl receives hepatitis A and hepatitis B vaccines from Dr. Francine Olmstead at New Mexico Travel Health.

Before you travel

Check the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Web site at cdc.gov/travel/ for country-specific information, disease information, vaccinations and preventive care. The CDC also offers an interactive worldwide malaria map.

The State Department also has travel and safety tips at travel.state.gov/. The International Society of Travel Medicine has a list of travel health clinics in New Mexico at istm.org.

