

## *Long-awaited overseas trips could be marred by infectious disease: expert warns*

**Sydney, Australia, 7 November 2022:** A leading travel health expert is concerned that many of the 8.5 million Australians planning overseas trips are unprepared when it comes to travel health and could be at risk of contracting infectious diseases such as measles, hepatitis, typhoid and polio.<sup>1</sup>

The warning comes as a nationwide survey reveals that only 15 per cent of people who plan to travel overseas this year have fully researched and understand the health recommendations relevant to their destination.<sup>1</sup>

The survey of more than 1,000 Australians who intend to travel overseas found one-in-three (31 per cent) would either not see a doctor to discuss travel health and vaccination requirements or would leave a consultation too close to their departure to receive optimum protection.<sup>1,2</sup>

Dr Deb Mills, Medical Director of the Travel Medicine Alliance group of Travel health clinics warned that “many Australians are tempting fate” and that “enthusiasm to head overseas mustn’t overshadow the health risks.”

“A consultation with a doctor at least six weeks before travelling could be the difference between lying on a beach or lying on a hospital bed in a foreign country,” Dr Mills said.

“Last minute vaccinations do not give the immune system long enough to do its job. Timing is an incredibly important factor for good travel health.”

Dr Mills said the poll indicates many people do not realise the dangers from infectious diseases other than COVID-19, “many of which have serious health consequences, including hospitalisation and long-term illness”.

Survey respondents indicated they were more likely to investigate COVID-19 vaccination requirements (56 per cent) than other travel vaccination recommendations (36 per cent).<sup>1</sup>

“Australians need to look beyond COVID and understand other health risks and prevention strategies before they travel,” Dr Mills said. “There are many other travel-related diseases that have not gone away.”

“Preventable illness can turn a long-awaited and expensive trip into a holiday from hell, where not only time is lost but financial losses are significant as well.”

UNICEF and the World Health Organization recently warned of a “perfect storm” of conditions for measles outbreaks, with recent trends showing a surge in global cases.<sup>3</sup>

“Many people are surprised to discover that some the vaccines they received as a child do not provide lifelong protection and that many infectious diseases that have disappeared from Australia are still very much present overseas,” Dr Mills said.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, there were nearly a million monthly overseas departures in July and August 2022, the highest since mid-2020.<sup>4</sup> This figure is expected to increase, with the poll indicating that 43 per cent of adult Australians intend to travel overseas in the remainder of 2022 or 2023.<sup>1</sup>

Dr Mills advises international holiday-makers, people visiting friends and relatives, and those going on business trips, to follow Government recommendations on [www.smartraveller.gov.au](http://www.smartraveller.gov.au) or visit [www.vaccinehub.com.au/travel](http://www.vaccinehub.com.au/travel).

### ***Key findings from the Travel Poll<sup>1</sup>***

Of those who confirmed their intention to travel overseas:<sup>1</sup>

- Only 15 per cent of people who plan to travel overseas this year have fully researched and understand the health recommendations relevant to their destination.<sup>1</sup>
- One-in-three (31 per cent) would either not see a doctor to discuss travel health / vaccination requirements or would only book an appointment a month before their departure – with 6 weeks the shortest amount of time recommended by the Federal Department of Health and Ageing to visit a travel health clinic.<sup>2</sup>
- 78 per cent are concerned about becoming seriously ill in another country and more than two-thirds (68 per cent) are worried about being caught in an infectious disease outbreak other than for COVID-19.
- Only around half of people surveyed will consider vaccination to reduce their risk of infectious diseases, including when travelling to developing countries and visiting rural areas or going 'off the beaten track'.
- The majority believe it is more important to be protected against COVID-19 (64 per cent) than infectious diseases generally immunised against in childhood such as measles, chickenpox, whooping cough, tetanus and diphtheria (36 per cent).

### ***Interview opportunities***

#### ***Dr Deb Mills, Medical Director of The Travel Medicine Alliance group***

Dr Mills is considered a pioneer of travel medicine in Australia. As well as studying infectious diseases in Australia and many corners of the globe, she draws from her own travel experiences on all seven continents to ensure travellers get the critical information that they need to travel with confidence and make the most of their journeys. Dr Mills is based in Brisbane.

#### ***Rena Leith-Manos, travel writer infected by typhoid in 2022***

As a travel writer buoyed by international borders reopening, Rena was one of the first to leave Australia, setting up a new base in Jakarta. Not long after, Rena and her two visiting teenage children contracted typhoid, a condition that is fatal in one in five sufferers without treatment.<sup>5</sup> Renee has now recovered from typhoid and is available for interview.

### **About the Travel Poll**

The nationwide poll of a representative sample (1,023) of respondents aged 18 years and over who indicate an intention to travel overseas was undertaken by YouGov in September 2022 on behalf of Sanofi Australia.

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### **About Sanofi**

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