



*Guiding the Profession
Protecting the Public*

THE PRACTICE OF TRAVEL MEDICINE POLICY STATEMENT

The practice of travel medicine is complex. There are dynamic changes in global health risk and with increasing population mobility and various host factors all of which result in the complexity of travel medicine. There is an increase in drug resistance malaria, tuberculosis is re-emerging and there are more travellers with chronic diseases (diabetes, heart disease, HIV, cancer, pulmonary disease). In addition, travellers include pregnant women and people at extremes of age. To add to the complexity of the practice of travel medicine there is an expansion in new vaccines targeted to travellers.

The South Africa Society of Travel Medicine is concerned with the setting of what it believes to be appropriate standards and practice of Travel Medicine in South Africa. There are anecdotal reports of travellers receiving far from appropriate advice from health-care practitioners who are ill-equipped to provide up-to-date and correct advice. This can have a negative impact on the health and well-being of the traveller often with disastrous consequences.

Individuals who practice travel medicine should be licensed health-care practitioners (e.g. a registered nurse and a medical practitioner working collaboratively) with a background in family practice, internal medicine, paediatrics, public health or infectious diseases.

The knowledge base is broad, and it is for this reason that SASTM believes that a Travel Medicine Clinic must be supervised by a health-care professional as indicated above.

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The core knowledge includes a basic knowledge and understanding of the following:

- ❖ Geography
- ❖ Global distribution, epidemiology, mode of transmission, prevention and, if appropriate, self-treatment of travel-associated infectious diseases
- ❖ Immunology and the immune system
- ❖ Indications, contraindications, pharmacology, drug interactions and adverse events of available travel-related drugs and vaccines
- ❖ Preventions and management of non-infectious disease risks for travellers

Aside from the skills required to practice as a health care professional, the following skills are mandatory for the travel medicine practitioner:

- ❖ The ability to undertake a basic health assessment
- ❖ Evaluation of any underlying health problems

The assessment of the health of the traveller is an important aspect of the pre-travel consultation. This would often necessitate examination of the traveller, evaluation of underlying or concurrent chronic conditions, general health and providing information to obtain optimal control of chronic illness.

- ❖ Individual risk assessment to determine the traveller's health risks
- ❖ Risk reduction strategies
- ❖ Recognition of any travel-related illness

All post-travel consultations should be managed by a medical practitioner.

- ❖ Timely medical assessment for the management of travel-related illness

The above is not attainable without medical supervision with access to the medical practitioner on a twenty-four hour basis.

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