

UCSD's New Clinic Offers Help for Those Traveling Abroad

Travelers' Health Clinic in La Jolla headed by expert in tropical diseases

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The checklist for those traveling to exotic locations probably includes passport, guidebook, a camera and comfortable shoes. But what about advice on how to avoid contracting African sleeping sickness? Or what shots are needed for travel in Indonesia?

An international expert in tropical diseases at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD) Medical Center has opened a new travelers' health clinic at UCSD Medical Center's Perlman Ambulatory Care Center in La Jolla to answer just those questions.

Joseph Vinetz, M.D., Associate Professor of Medicine in UCSD's Division of Infectious Diseases, is also the new Director of Tropical Medicine and Travelers' Health. Trained in internal medicine and infectious diseases at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, with further training in parasitology at the National Institutes of Health, Vinetz has been studying diseases such as malaria since 1988. He also carries out research in the Peruvian Amazon and travels around the world as part of his research in tropical diseases.

"It's not only the dispossessed people of the world who are subject to getting tropical diseases," said Vinetz. "It's businessmen, students on round-the-world trips, adventure sports travelers, people on safari in Africa, missionaries – anyone traveling to a destination in the world where there are tropical diseases."

Vinetz offers pre-trip consultation with detailed, patient-focused advice. He notes, "It is helpful for travelers to talk with someone who is active in the field of international health and who travels to foreign destinations to get the right advice – the kind of advice based on experience, not just on the internet or published materials."

"We offer necessary vaccinations and prescriptions for medications – keeping in mind that recommendations for preventing malaria, for example, may be different than the information that someone might find on the Internet or on the Centers for Disease Control web site, which is country-based, not village or even city-based," he said.

Vinetz offers comprehensive, patient-focused services including e-mail advice and consultation during the trip for established patients, and immediate follow-up for those travelers unfortunate enough to get ill while abroad. He can also provide the official international certification of vaccination for yellow fever, required for entry into some third-world countries.

"Most travel clinics don't have internationally-trained medical doctors on staff," Vinetz added. "Someone in UCSD's Infectious Disease Division is available 24/7 for emergency matters. We have connections to the important reference laboratories and federal resources that allow us to make difficult diagnoses and provide timely access to important medications for parasitic diseases that might not be otherwise available in the United States."

He said that pre-travel services aren't usually covered by insurance, but for many people, the cost is a very small portion of their trip expenditures, "and can buy peace of mind."

For more information about the UCSD Tropical Medicine and Traveler's Health clinic, call (858) 822-5320. For appointments, call (858) 534-4848.

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