

TORKLAW

Ultimate Guide to Avoid Vacation Hazards



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Research Your Destination

Summertime means vacation for many U.S. families. Whether staying close to home or traveling afar, **avoid vacation hazards by planning for fun, and preparing for the worst!** When planning travel, explore the health risks and available medical services where you're going.

Geographically Localized Illnesses

Are there diseases or illnesses common to the location? How can you avoid them?



Lyme Disease: Caused by deer tick bites, Lyme disease is prevalent in the Northeastern and Midwestern U.S. Ticks are found in woodlands and grassy areas, and are active between May and August. To avoid tick-borne diseases such as babesiosis, Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever and [Powassan virus](#):

- Avoid contact with tall shrubs and long grass: walk in the center of trails and/or wear long-sleeved shirts and pants tucked into socks/hiking boots.
- Use an [Environmental Protection Agency \(EPA\)-registered insect repellent](#) containing 20-30% DEET. Oil of lemon eucalyptus is also a non-toxic, organic option for repelling mosquitoes.
- Apply [permethrin](#) to tents, sleeping bags and outside clothing, but not on skin.
- After being in grassy or wooded areas, do a tick check. Bring an adhesive lint roller and roll it over clothing and skin. Shower and scrub all areas of the body.
- Remove ticks with tweezers at the head, pull upward carefully. Clean the area with soap and water and alcohol/antiseptic.
- **If you develop a “bullseye” rash – an expanding red circle with a lighter center, seek emergency medical treatment immediately.**

Geographically Localized Illnesses, continued

Yellow fever is found in South America and Africa. A serious disease spread by mosquito bites, it can cause fever, flu-like symptoms, jaundice (yellow skin/eyes), bleeding, and even organ failure and death. If traveling to risky areas, have a yellow fever vaccine before traveling; proof of vaccination may be required to enter certain countries. Also see the below advice to avoid mosquito bites.

Dengue fever: This viral disease is also spread by mosquito bites. It's common in Southeast Asia and Pacific islands, and in the Caribbean and Latin America. Symptoms include fever, severe headache, muscle and joint pain, and rash. There is no vaccine – avoid it by using insect repellent, wearing long-sleeved shirts and long pants, and treating clothing and gear with permethrin. Keep doors and windows closed, use mosquito netting, and avoid areas with standing water, especially at dawn or dusk.

Zika virus: Also spread by mosquito bites, the Zika virus can cause Guillain-Barré syndrome and severe birth defects if pregnant women contract it. Check the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website](#) for Zika travel information. Follow the advice above to avoid mosquitos.

Malaria: Also spread through mosquito bites, malaria is common in tropical/subtropical areas. Start taking malaria-prevention tablets a week or two before travel. Ask your doctor to recommend the right medication, especially if you are pregnant or take other medications. Follow the advice to avoid mosquito bites.

Norovirus is highly contagious, and common on cruise ships. To avoid it, wash your hands often with soap and warm water, and/or use hand sanitizer, especially after touching shared bathroom fixtures, doorknobs, and handrails. Avoid the buffet or food that's been sitting out.

Flu: Receive the latest flu vaccine before your vacation, and practice good sanitation habits, as described above for avoiding Norovirus. See your doctor for an antiviral drug prescription you can take if symptoms start.

Diarrhea: Traveler's diarrhea is caused by bacteria in food and water. High-risk destinations are Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Mexico, and Central and South America. Non-pregnant adults can reduce their risk by taking two Pepto-Bismol tablets four times a day. Drink bottled water; avoid drinking tap water, well water, or unpasteurized milk. Practice good sanitation habits.

Dangerous Wildlife



Besides insects, other forms of wildlife can ruin your vacation, including spiders, snakes, sharks, jellyfish, bears, and other dangerous animals.

Research wildlife you may encounter where you're going; learn local laws and regulations to avoid contact and injury. Many parks have food storage requirements to protect bears and humans. Know and follow the requirements and

recommendations.

Spider and snake bites can also be dangerous. Shake out your sleeping bags, gloves, and shoes before using them. Wear thick hiking boots and long pants when walking in tall shrubs and long grass. Insect repellent with DEET is also effective for spiders.

In general, keep your distance from all wild animals, even if they look cute and friendly. Animals are unpredictable, and even small animals can be dangerous.

Crime or Political Unrest

Vacationers are frequent crime victims, and this can be especially traumatic when you are unfamiliar with the laws and customs. To avoid being a vacation crime victim:

- Stay aware of your surroundings.
- Don't drink to excess.
- Keep an eye on your drink.
- Don't drive if you've been drinking.
- Keep your cash, credit cards, passport, and wallet safe.
- Contact your credit card company before you travel so your card is not suspended for suspected fraud.



Crime or Political Unrest, continued

Before traveling abroad, [check the U.S. Department of State's Travel Advisories](#). If your destination is high-risk, follow [these recommendations](#). Even if your destination is listed as safe, enroll in the [Smart Traveler Enrollment Program](#) (STEP).

When traveling out of the country, know that you are subject to the laws where you're visiting. The State Department may be unable to help if you break the law, so know what you legally can and cannot do in your destination country. Go to [this site for more information on victim services and victim assistance for U.S. citizens traveling overseas](#).

Extreme Weather or Natural Disasters

Check whether any extreme weather is common in your destination for the time you'll be visiting. Understand the types of natural disasters that may occur there, and have a plan for what to do if something happens.



Summertime Hazards

In the summertime, whether on vacation or sticking close to home, people across the United States tend to be more active, go more places and try new things.

During the summer, we tend more injuries from [amusement park accidents](#), transportation accidents like [helicopter accidents](#), [bicycle accidents](#), and [cruise and passenger ship](#) injuries. There are also more injuries from extreme sports and other activities.

Sports Injuries

When having fun, be safety-conscious and know your limits:

- **Always use the appropriate safety gear.** Have you noticed that professional athletes always use safety gear, such as helmets, gloves, correct shoes, shin and shoulder pads, etc.? They do that to prevent injury, so they can take the field again for the next game. “Weekend warriors” should follow their lead and suit up to prevent contact sports injuries so you can keep enjoying your summer.
- **Remember to warm up and cool down** by doing some stretches to prevent common sports injuries like muscle and ligament tears, sprains, strains, or stress fractures.
- **Stay hydrated**, preferably with water, although sports drinks are also a source of electrolytes if needed. Stay away from alcohol until the game or activity is over! Playing sports or performing other activities while drunk is an invitation to injury.
- **Don’t do anything that makes you uncomfortable.** Sure, it might be embarrassing to beg off from skydiving or bungee-jumping just because you have a bad feeling about the instructor or safety harness. But given the choice between embarrassment and the alternative, if you’re right, it’s worth a little ribbing at the bar later.

Camping Safety

Insects and animals are covered above. Other camping safety tips:

- **Choose your campsite based on your camping skills.** If you’re a novice, consider a cabin or renting an RV, where you’ll have beds and access to running water. If you have a little experience with tent camping, you may want to reserve a site on a campground where you can pitch a tent but still have access to toilets, showers, and other amenities. Keep safety in mind when making your choice.
- **Check the weather so you know what to expect.** Pack accordingly – if you’re going to an area where it will be mostly sunny, be sure to bring protective clothing, hats, and sunscreen. If it will get cold at night, bring lots of layers so you can bundle up. If you expect rain, bring waterproof gear.
- **Remember, only you can prevent forest fires;** or fires in any location, for that matter. Only light fires in designated areas. Don’t light a fire within 15 feet of anything flammable, including tents, shrubs, or trees. Dig a fire pit, or create one with large rocks. Keep a large bucket of water nearby, and douse your fire before you go to sleep. Never leave a fire unattended. Also, don’t smoke in the wilderness – or if you must, extinguish your cigarette completely and store the butt in a fireproof container until you can dispose of it properly.
- **Don’t leave food out or unattended.** To keep from attracting animals, and to keep your food free of bacteria, store it in airtight, waterproof containers. Find out what the food storage requirements are for where you’re going, and make sure you follow them.
- **Stay hydrated**, don’t drink alcohol to excess, and see the section below on sun safety.



- **Pack a camping first aid kit containing:**
 - Bandages - both adhesive and gauze & tape
 - Antibiotic ointment or cream
 - Alcohol or another antiseptic
 - EPA- recommended insect repellent
 - Ibuprofen, acetaminophen or NSAIDs for inflammation or pain relief.
 - Benadryl for allergic reactions, or an EpiPen for those with extreme allergies
 - Cortisone cream for rashes or insect bites
 - Pepto Bismol to prevent diarrhea & Imodium if you have diarrhea
 - Cold packs/compresses & Heat packs
 - Emergency blanket
 - Sunscreen
 - Whistles
 - Cell phone charger

Sun Damage

Sun damage is a common summertime injury. Most sunburns are [first-degree or superficial burns](#); however, they can cause lasting skin damage and increase your risk of skin cancer. **Young children especially should be protected from sunburn.**

Whenever spending time in the daylight, even when cloudy, wear sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of 30 or above. Sunscreen only protects for so long, so after a couple of hours, go inside, seek shade, or cover up with long sleeves and pants. Wear a wide-brimmed hat and UVA-UVB sunglasses to protect your head, neck, and eyes.

Water safety

More people in the water means more [boating injuries](#) and drownings. Each year, about ten people per day die from drowning in the U.S. Even nonfatal drowning injuries can cause long-term disabilities.



Drowning can happen anywhere – oceans, lakes, ponds, and swimming pools. Many U.S. beaches post warnings about water conditions – pay attention, and follow the recommendations. Otherwise, watch what the locals are doing, or ask them how the water is. Unless you’re a proficient swimmer, stay in areas monitored by lifeguards. Also be aware of dangerous ocean life: sharks, stingrays, or jellyfish.

One ocean danger is a rip current, a long, narrow band of rapidly moving water that may pull swimmers away from shore. When caught in one, the instinct is to swim to shore – however, even the strongest swimmers cannot fight a rip current.

Instead, remain calm: a rip current will not pull you under. Focus on keeping your head above water. Summon help if you can, and either swim or float parallel to the shore. Conserve your energy until the current weakens and you’re able to break through and swim back to the shore.

Water safety, continued

To keep your family safe in the water or by the pool, follow these water safety tips:

- Make sure pool fences are at least 4 feet high, with a latching/locking gate.
- Make sure pool ladders are secure.
- Instruct kids and young teens to never swim alone.
- Provide certified life jackets vs. inflatables for non-swimmers.
- Keep toddlers within arm's length of adults when swimming.
- Have a swim monitor watch kids whenever they're in the water.
- Never swim under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
- Put the pool toys away after swimming to remove temptation.
- Know the signs of drowning/water distress, and act if you see a swimmer that is:
 - Silent, with mouth at water level
 - Moving downward or holding arms out to the sides
 - Bobbing or trying to swim but not making progress
 - Upright in the water with head tilted back
 - Gasping or hyperventilating
 - Floating face down
 - Glassy-eyed
- Learn CPR so you can revive or keep a drowning victim alive until help arrives.



General Travel Risks

Some hazards are part of the travel experience. Transportation accidents can happen anywhere, and our [practice areas](#) section has information on dealing with many accidents that can occur on vacation.



Airplane Hazards

We've detailed risks and advice for dealing with [airplane accidents on this page](#). Other airplane hazards are deep-vein thrombosis (DVT), and sleep disturbance, or jet lag.

DVT happens when a blood clot forms in a vein, such as in one of your legs, sometimes caused by sitting for an extended time. These clots can travel through your bloodstream and cause a life-threatening condition known as pulmonary embolism (PE).

To avoid DVT when flying, move around as often as possible during the flight, and avoid crossing your legs. Stay hydrated and avoid alcohol. While you're sitting, do some leg exercises to keep them active. If you're at risk for blood clots, talk to your doctor before traveling.



To avoid **jet lag**, try to adjust your sleep schedule to your destination before your trip. If your flight happens when you'd be asleep in your destination, try to sleep on your flight. Be sure you dress comfortably, and bring a travel pillow and sleep mask. Use ear plugs or listen to a white, pink, or brown noise app. You may want to take melatonin beforehand. If you'd normally be awake, avoid sleeping on your flight

by drinking coffee, watching a movie, or reading a book.

Once you arrive, adjust your schedule to the sun. If it's dark when you arrive, go to sleep (see above tips). If it's light, stay awake. Spend at least 30 minutes in the sun to release melatonin, and synchronize your body's [circadian rhythm](#).

Lodging hazards

When traveling away from home, and renting an Airbnb or similar lodging, read our [Ultimate Guide to Airbnb Accidents](#).

When staying at a hotel or resort, be aware of common hazards like [slip and fall accidents](#) and [negligent security](#). [Food poisoning](#) (and Norovirus) can also be a problem, as can bed bugs.

To avoid **food poisoning**, make sure meat is thoroughly cooked and hot when served. Watch for signs of poor food hygiene. Avoid buffets, which can attract bacteria. Wash your hands before eating.

To avoid **bed bugs**, pack your clothes in giant sealable bags. You can also purchase plastic suitcase covers. If you're staying in the U.S., you can check [The Bedbug Registry](#) for your hotel.

Upon arrival, do a visual inspection. Bed bug droppings look like tiny ink blots. Search the bedsheets, pillowcases, mattress seams, and furniture cracks and crevices. If you find bed bugs, find another place to stay.



If your room seems pest-free, you should still take care. Keep foldable clothes in suitcases/plastic bags. Keep suitcases off the floor. Don't drape clothes on furniture. You can purchase non-toxic bed bug repellent to bring along for extra assurance. When you arrive home, wash all clothes in hot water and vacuum your luggage to eliminate unwelcome pests.

Emergency Medical Services

Becoming ill or injured in another country can be risky, because emergency medical services may be hours away, unreliable, or not covered by medical insurance.

Before traveling, research available emergency medical services. Ask your medical insurance company about options or supplemental travel insurance.



Heart Attacks

Believe it or not, but the single most common vacation-related cause of death for Americans is [heart attacks](#). While the purpose of taking a vacation is to take a break, the process of going on vacation can create a great deal of stress: flight delays; lost luggage; reservation snafus; [rental car accidents](#), etc.

The best way to avoid a heart attack or other stress-related incident on vacation is good planning. Don't put off packing until the last minute; make a packing checklist so you don't forget anything important, like prescription medications or your cell phone. Be sure to keep those items in your carry-on bag, in case your luggage is lost.

If you are on medication, changing time zones can interfere with your prescribed schedule; but do your best to stay on track and not skip any dosages. Also, stay hydrated. Air travel can be very dehydrating, which can negatively impact your mood and general health, so keep drinking water.

Eat regularly, and try to maintain a healthy overall diet. While it's fine to enjoy your food while on vacation, also be health care conscious. Do your best to maintain a balance of fresh fruits and vegetables, healthy proteins, and whole grains, along with rich, sugary, or high-fat foods we all often eat when traveling.

Finally, do your best to maintain a balanced perspective. Even if you've planned everything perfectly, life still happens. If you're late to the airport, most airlines will work with you to reschedule your flight, even if you must pay a small fee. Flights are delayed for many reasons, some of which are for our own safety. Lost luggage is usually located, and airlines will deliver it to you, so if you have your necessities in your carry-on, you'll live.

So long as you and your family are safe, nothing is worth stressing yourself into a cardiac event. Take some deep breaths, do what you can to resolve the situation, and think of it as an adventure – or at least, an amusing story to tell your friends later.

If You Are Injured

If you are injured this summer as the result of another person's actions or carelessness, whether you're on vacation or at home, you may be entitled to recover monetary damages.

If your injury is due to premises liability, such as an unsafe condition at a rental property, hotel, cruise ship, or amusement park – or a transportation accident caused by another party, such as an airplane, helicopter, or rental car accident, call TorkLaw. Our personal injury attorneys are experienced in obtaining injury and crime victims compensation for their losses.



We hope you have a fun and safe summer, with no need to contact us. But know that TorkLaw is here for you if needed.