Editorial

Travel medicine has become more and more important within the field of tropical medicine. This is not only because of the increase in volume of people travelling for business or leisure but also because travel destinations have become more exotic and far away and within reach of many. While in many countries excellent pre travel advice can be obtained including vaccinations and malaria prophylaxis, many travellers are not well prepared and put themselves at risk. In addition patients who are immunosuppressed because of their illness or the medication they use are particularly at risk and need counselling in specialized centres.

Other conditions are coming closer to home as vectors such the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito, the vector for West Nile, Dengue and Chikungunya virus has spread because of global warming to previously non endemic regions such as southern Europe. Mass migration is another important factor as is currently happening with concern of tuberculosis and spread of antimicrobial resistance. A relatively new category are Visiting Friends and Relatives (VFRs); these are immigrants who are settled e.g. in the Netherlands and travel back to their home country for holidays. This group rarely seeks pre travel advice and are at risk of e.g. malaria as they did not realize that they lose their immunity over time.

Increased air travel carries another danger as communicable diseases can quickly spread to any other part of the world and this was the scare in the recent Ebola outbreak. This condition and other haemorrhagic fevers are likely to recur as the result of a failing public health structure as Leo Visser describes.

While old enemies such as malaria are still around and should be considered in any traveller returning from the tropics with fever, the landscape has changed in the Netherlands and probably in other countries too. One contentious issue is whether malaria prophylaxis may be replaced by stand by medication for convenience but also to avoid side-effects.

In contrast Zika virus infection that few had ever heard of is now a hot topic in the news causing major concern worldwide. This also applies to the World Health Organization (WHO) that was criticized for its handling of the Ebola crisis last year. Zika virus infection usually causes not much concern in terms of illness but the association with microcephaly in newborns is extremely worrying. Pregnant women or those who want to become pregnant are advised against traveling to South America. The economic impact of this outbreak is tremendous with the Olympic Games coming up in Brasil this summer.

Travel medicine has become established as an important medical specialty but it cannot be in the domain of few specialized centres as every doctor should ask questions such as: ‘*where have you travelled recently*?’

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