

# THE ALLERGY & ASTHMA CLINIC

Andrew C. Engler, M.D.

290 Baldwin Avenue, San Mateo, California 94401

(650) 343-4597 FAX (650) 343- 3402

[www.theallergyclinic.com](http://www.theallergyclinic.com)

NEWSLETTER

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## Asthma and Allergy-free Vacations Suitcase Checklist for Travelers with Allergic Conditions

If you're planning a vacation, and you or your child have allergies or asthma, proper planning can help you keep sneezes, sniffles, wheezing and coughing under control. Use the following tips from the American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology (ACAAI) as a checklist to make sure that allergy misery doesn't derail your vacation fun:

### DO YOUR HOMEWORK

- **Check weather and pollen forecasts** for your vacation choices, then plan accordingly. For example, if you're allergic to ragweed, New York can be significantly better early in August rather than later.
- **Consider the beach or mountains.** These locations are usually good bets for allergy sufferers any time of year. Ocean breezes are generally free of allergens, and dust mites don't thrive at elevations above 2,500 feet. Mold spores are usually killed by snow.
- **Talk to your allergist.** This is especially important if you are going to travel abroad and may need vaccinations or immunizations. You also may want to talk to your allergist about where you're going and what activities you may do. For example, locations with elevations above 5,000 feet may make breathing difficult and cold weather can be a trigger for asthma patients. Asthma patients also should discuss activities like scuba diving, which can be dangerous when it causes conditions such as "barotrauma".
- **Check access to medical care.** If you are going to a remote location or on a cruise, you should inquire about the type of medical care available.

### CHECK LODGING OPTIONS

- Request a non-smoking room with air conditioning (a little more difficult when traveling abroad).
- Check availability of a portable HEPA (High Efficiency Particulate Arresting) air purifier or HEPA filters for your room's air conditioner.
- Find out if wood, tile or seamless vinyl floors are available (a little less difficult

when traveling abroad). Carpeting can be a breeding ground for dust mites.

- Consider renting a room with a kitchen or shipping food ahead if you have food allergies.

### PACK IN YOUR SUITCASE

- **Medications.** Don't forget to put them in your carry-on luggage — and in the original bottles to avoid questions from airport security and customs agents. Make sure you pack quick-relief medications for asthma and an epinephrine kit if you or a family member has food or insect sting allergies. You also might want to bring a topical hydrocortisone cream and an over-the-counter antihistamine. We can provide you with a "travel letter" you can show to the TSA and other travel officials.
- **Allergy Shots.** If you're being treated with allergy shots, make sure you get your scheduled shot before you leave. If you will be traveling for more than a few weeks, we can discuss providing you with a treatment dose(s) to take with you, and, if possible, the name of a local allergist who can give you your shots.
- **Pillowcase.** Consider packing your dust mite-proof pillow covers to help keep dust mites under control.
- **Peak flow meter and nebulizer.** These can help you monitor your breathing and deliver medication. Many nebulizers come with an adaptor you can plug into your car. If you are traveling abroad, make sure you bring an adaptor to convert the electrical current.
- **Wipes for trays and tables.** This can help protect travelers with food allergies.
- **Translated information on your allergies.** This can be shared with a chef when dining out in a foreign country.

### PREPARE FOR THE RIDE

#### By car:

- Keep your windows rolled up and use your air conditioner. Consider getting your automobile's air conditioner cleaned in advance.
- Travel during early morning or late evening hours, when air quality is better and traffic isn't as heavy.
- If you plan to rent a car, ask for one where no one has smoked.

#### By air:

- Take an antihistamine in advance. If you're congested, use your regular medication and consider using a long-acting decongestant nasal spray before take-off and landing. But be careful, these products can be habit forming.
- Notify the airline of food allergies ahead of time.
- Get up frequently and walk around the cabin.
- Drink plenty of fluids and avoid alcohol to stay hydrated.
- Use a saline nasal spray once every hour to keep your nasal membranes moist.

### GET KIDS READY FOR CAMP

- Write down any allergies to food or insect stings or strong sensitivities to poison ivy, oak or sumac.
- Inform teachers, camp counselors or other adult supervisors about your child's allergies.
- Provide a copy of your child's allergy or asthma action plan.
- Send a written list of your child's medications, dosages and instructions on how they should be taken.
- Pack enough medications to last through the entire trip and consider sending them in a carry-on case or bag so that they're not lost in case your child's luggage is delayed.
- Provide a written action plan to teachers, counselors or other adult supervisors with instructions for responding to any allergic or asthmatic reaction.
- If your child is allergic to insect stings, pack an emergency epinephrine kit and make sure he or she knows how to use it; children who have asthma should travel with a peak flow meter and other emergency medications such as bronchodilators and corticosteroids.
- Provide permission (preferably notarized) for emergency care by an adult supervisor at the camp.
- If it's been more than 6 months since we saw you in the office for a follow-up visit, try to schedule an appointment before you leave so we can review your allergy treatment plan and take all necessary steps to help prevent allergy problems from interfering with your vacation plans. Best wishes for a happy, healthy summer.