

SCGH ED Guidelines for Management of Patients with Acute Diarrhoea after Overseas Travel



Traveller's Diarrhoea

Traveller's diarrhoea is defined as the passage of three or more loose or liquid stools in a 24-hour period, starting within 10 days of returning from travel.

Severity relates to the degree of incapacity caused by the diarrhoea (see table below).

Severity	Mild	Moderate	Severe
Definition	Patient is able to undertake normal activities.	Patient is able to function but needs to modify normal activities.	Patient is incapacitated and may require admission to hospital. Dysentery (bloody stools or mucus in stools), fever $\geq 38^{\circ}\text{C}$, severe abdominal pain.

Stool Samples

Request stools M/C/S, ova & parasites AND Faecal multiplex PCR.

Mention on the request form "traveller's diarrhoea" and countries travelled to.

Principles of Management and Treatment

- Antidiarrhoeal drugs should not be used in children or in adults with bloody diarrhoea, high fever or systemic symptoms.
- Antibiotic prophylaxis is rarely indicated for travellers' diarrhoea.
- Consider antibiotic treatment for patients with severe diarrhoea, or moderate diarrhoea in patients who are immunocompromised or those in whom dehydration would exacerbate comorbidities (e.g. heart failure).

Mild disease

- Mild cases are usually self-limiting and require symptomatic treatment only.
- Rehydration is the mainstay of therapy.

Moderate to severe disease

1. Rehydration is the mainstay of therapy.
2. A single large dose of antibiotics is usually effective for uncomplicated moderate to severe travellers' diarrhoea:

- Azithromycin 1 g PO as a single dose
OR
- Ciprofloxacin 750 mg PO as a single dose
OR
- Norfloxacin 800 mg PO as a single dose

If fever or bloody stools are present OR if symptoms do not improve after a single large dose of antibiotic, continue with:

- Azithromycin 500 mg PO once daily for a further 2 days
OR
- Ciprofloxacin 500 mg PO 12-hourly for a further 2 days
OR
- Norfloxacin 400 mg PO 12-hourly for a further 2 days

References:

Therapeutic Guidelines 2025. Antibiotic. Infectious Diarrhoea. Traveller's diarrhoea.
Guideline designed by Dr Ioana Vlad (ED) & Dr Eric Chu (ID) — July 2026.