

Travel-minded Belgians need more health information

ITM and the Flemish Government will develop a broader range of health information for the evermore travelling Belgians.

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Dit is de omschrijving

The Institute of Tropical Medicine (ITM) has the largest travel clinic in Flanders and has been a partner of the Flemish Government in travel medicine since 2014. In January 2019, the Flemish Government approved a new management agreement for 2019-2023. Over the next five years, ITM and its partners will develop a broader range of health information for the evermore travelling Belgians.

More and more Belgians travel and head to more exotic destinations. In 2010, around 16 500 travellers consulted ITM for travel advice, compared to almost 20 000 in 2018. The number of vaccinations administered increased from more than 35 000 to over 45 000 in the same period.

International exchange projects, both in- and outside Europe, led to a rise in the number of students gaining professional experience abroad. The group of people visiting relatives in their country of origin is also on the increase. The elderly, the less mobile and people suffering from an immune disorder also travel more extensively due to improved control of certain diseases and the availability of packages tailored to their specific needs.

“However, health information from the medical sector does not keep pace with these trends. There is a lot of knowledge about travel medicine, but it is not always readily available to everyone. Also, not all professionals consulted by travellers are sufficiently trained to give tailor-made and up-to-date health advice”, says Dr Patrick Soentjens, head of ITM’s travel clinic.

The institute closely monitors the latest developments in travel medicine and acute outbreaks, and translates this information into travel recommendations. Among other things, the website (www.travelhealth.be) which offers this up-to-date information, will receive a thorough overhaul in the coming months.

ITM experts also coordinate the federal Scientific Study Group on Travel Medicine and sit in multiple federal and Flemish consultative bodies. The objective of the doctors is to further streamline the travel health processes for the coming years.

“Currently, travellers sometimes receive different advice from their GP, in pre-travel centres or through various websites. Clear recommendations are important to avoid divergent recommendations”, says Dr Ula Maniewski of ITM’s travel clinic. “Correct travel advice is also tailor-made, and it is important that travellers and health professionals know where to go for answers to their queries.”

In the years ahead, ITM aims to share its expertise even more through training and clear communication with health professionals. “Travel clinics cannot handle the increased demand for health advice on their own. We should definitely interact more closely with GPs and pharmacists”, says Soentjens.

- www.travelhealth.be