

Knowledge regarding common communicable diseases among tourists visiting Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Traveller's health is a major concern related to ecotourism in Sri Lanka. More than 2.1 million visitors (one tenth of the country's population) arrived in Sri Lanka (SL) in 2017. Though Sri Lankan public health programme is one of the best in the region, travel health is usually neglected. The purpose of this study was to assess the knowledge of communicable diseases in Sri Lanka, among the short-term travelers. A cross sectional study was conducted from May to August 2017 in selected main tourist destinations. Randomly selected foreign nationals were interviewed by trained undergraduates reading for BA (tourism). There were 385 visitors, representing 44 countries with 159(41.3%) males and 212(55.1%) females. The mean age was 37.7 years (SD 20.0). Of them, 53(13.8%) had history of previous visits to SL and 260(67.5%) planned to stay for more than 14 days. Health visits during Sri Lankan stay was reported by 41(10.6%) and 8(19.5%) of them were for vaccinations. Only 247(64.2%) sought medical advices before coming to SL. The main perceived health concern was vaccination 156 (40.5%), followed by mosquito bites 46 (11.9%) and food and water sanitation 21 (5.5%). Dengue was known to 231(60%) as a common health threat, while 189(49.1%), 110(28.6%), 100(26%), 83(21.6%) thought that Hepatitis A, Rabies, Typhoid and Tuberculosis as common diseases respectively. Uncommon diseases such as Yellow fever, Malaria, Cholera, MERScov, Zeca and Ebola were reported as common in SL by 64(16.6%), 63(16.4%), 39(10.1%), 18(4.7%), 16(4.2%) and 9(2.3%) of tourists respectively. Reported vaccine coverages were Hepatitis A: 258(77.4%), Hepatitis B; 239(72.8%), Diphtheria: 178(57.6%), Typhoid: 174(55.9%), Tuberculosis: 82(29.0%), Rabies: 58(20.2%) and Dengue: 18(6.4%). The knowledge and preventive strategies of common communicable diseases among foreign tourists visiting SL seems highly inadequate. Information dissemination and preventive strategies for visitors should be strengthened as a major concern of ecotourism.

Keywords: Communicable diseases, Health, Sri Lanka, Tourists, Traveler's health, Vaccines

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