

Emergencies While at Walt Disney World: Surviving Medical Issues in the Land of Magic

by Laura Schmitt, PassPorter Guest Contributor

For many of us, there is no magic to rival a vacation at Walt Disney World.

Submerged in the depth of free-form joy, so far away from the worries of day-to-day, we can truly be carefree. If only life would allow us to travel through vacations without accidents, injuries, or emergencies, we wouldn't need to broach this topic, but a little villain can sneak up on us at any time during our vacations.

□As the unexpected has a way of happening, I'd like to help you plan ahead for those emergencies you can prepare for, as well as talk about what happens in the unlikely event that you are faced with one of those emergencies for which you can't prepare.

□Over the eight trips our family has made to Disney in the past five years, we have experienced a range of situations, and those experiences have altered how we pack, prepare, and plan. With a little luck, and pixie dust, you won't need this type of precaution, but the planning and discussion can make all the difference, should you need it.

□THE EASILY PREDICTED

□There are those emergencies that you can easily predict, plan, and often avoid, when you travel to Disney World, so why not be prepared?

□Hydrate!

□Every tour book will remind you to drink plenty of water when touring parks in the peak of Orlando's summer heat. That goes for any time of year when you are out in the sun and heat. Staying hydrated with refillable filter bottles, or water from any stand, is a great way to avoid a potential hydration disaster.

Sun Protection

□The runner-up for obvious injuries to avoid is sunburn. Bring sunblock, or purchase it at the resort store and then apply and reapply as needed. Sun hats and protective clothing can be a life saver! There is no need to lose vacation time or enjoyment due to weather, if you remember to take the time for sun and heat protection. That seems so obvious, I almost didn't mention it, but sometimes, that Orlando sun can sneak up on you!

□Scrapes, Cuts and Bruises

☐ While you don't have full control over accidental cuts, scrapes, bumps and bruises, you can avoid some very predictable injuries by following some guidelines.

☐ Don't run for the bus. I have seen many children and adults fall when chasing a resort bus at Disney. Besides the obvious accidental fall from running, there are frequently wet areas on the ground from rain, watered plants, general cleaning, and spills. Don't run! There will be another bus, and it will be there soon. Instead, sit down and enjoy a little break while you wait for the next one.

☐ When you are in the parks, try to be aware of water on ground surfaces. Cast members do a good job of marking areas, but I have seen people slip, and even hurt themselves severely, from the morning moisture on the pavement when getting off the train at Magic Kingdom, or from walking on a brick or stone edging and slipping off.

☐ Another area of injury that we witnessed first-hand was debris in the eyes after fireworks. We happened to be in the First Aid station at Magic Kingdom as a fireworks show was ending, and multiple people came in to ask for medical help as they had eye injuries due to debris. If you have glasses, or light sunglasses, consider wearing them when watching the fireworks show, and don't forget the kids!

☐ Finally, under this category, we have to remember to wear sensible shoes. Blisters, sprained ankles, and strains on the feet can land a person at the hotel room instead of in their favorite park. Let's avoid this by making sure you arrive with comfortable shoes that are already broken in.

☐ Allergies, Asthma, and The Like

☐ If you have allergies, bring your medications with you at all times during your vacation. Don't assume that you can avoid peanuts, flowers, or shellfish (for example). Odds are that you will have a wonderful vacation with your allergies at bay, but if you truly have a life-threatening allergy, keep your epi-pen or other medications with you. My stepmom had an anaphylactic reaction to a meal that was said to be shellfish-free (off property). This was a prime example of where a quick dose of Benadryl would have prevented quite a bit of discomfort and scare factor!

☐ Wash Your Hands

☐ Before your hands go into your mouth or on your food, please wash them. Children will need help from parents with compliance on this one. This can help prevent a huge number of potential illnesses. Hand sanitizer can be used if a sink is not available for proper washing. When we travel to Disney, I am militant about hand washing as well as taking

vitamins and getting enough sleep. I will say that we maintain overall good health when we travel the vast majority of the time. We even traveled to Disney at the peak of the Swine Flu scare, and we managed in good health throughout our trip and en route home.

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□THE LESS COMMON

□Some injuries you certainly don't plan to experience while on a magical vacation, but some pre-planning for these difficult-to-predict situations can give you ample piece of mind, should you find yourself in a pinch.

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□Burns

□Of course any severe burns need prompt medical attention, but very minor burns can be treated with burn cream, antibiotic cream, and pain relief ointment. My youngest daughter received a minor burn the size of a nickel, on her arm. This injury was from a light bulb in the shop at Epcot's Japan pavilion. We ran outside to the nearest drink cart for some ice, covered the burn with temporary wrappings, then cleaned and treated it when we made it back at the resort. While I was able to locate antibiotic ointment in the resort store, I couldn't locate the type that had pain relief built in. Now, I bring this from home, just in case. Also, we found some gauze for protecting an injury, but the size available was very limited.

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□Because of this, I like to bring along a variety of bandages and gauze when we go on vacation. They take up a minimal amount of space in packing, and should you need it, you'll be grateful you thought ahead. Ace wrap and a sling are also easy items to bring along, should you want to create a small first aid kit in your packing. We would consider this for our eldest daughter, who has a connective tissue disorder.

□Motion Sickness

□For those of you prone to motion sickness or even if you suspect that you may become motion sick, take your medication before you start moving. This will save you plenty of grief (speaking from personal experience on this one). The medication works better when you have it in your system before you put yourself out to sea or on a ride.

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□UNCOMMON EMERGENCIES

□Now that we have covered some basics of easy to avoid disaster as well as the more difficult to predict, let's discuss true emergencies.

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□You can't control everything, but you can always get help. Each park has a medical care station where you can go to receive quick care, such as pain relievers. Emergency vehicles can be arranged to pick up from these locations as well. During one trip, our daughters developed eye infections that came on suddenly and caused them severe reaction during a meal while we were at a Disney park. We went to the medical

care station, where they ordered us a van to take our family to a nearby urgent care facility. The van arrived promptly and took us out of the park, so that we did not have to walk out to the bus depot. It drove us through the backlot at Disney's Hollywood Studios and delivered us to a clinic that was able to treat the girls and get us all back on track. This was all handled very smoothly and with great kindness and care, as is the case for all things Disney. It was a relief to me to find that we were not on our own in a strange city, when looking for help. They even provided a booster seat for the transfer back and forth. I called our resort and had them change bedding, and both kids were better the next day, once their eye drops kicked in.

□ Of course in a true emergent situation, call 911. Let's hope you never need to use this service, but don't hesitate if that is what's warranted. Keep your cell phone charged and on you during your trip. If you don't have a phone, odds are high that everyone around you will, so ask for help when it is needed. As each person has their own unique needs, discuss any pre-planning recommendations from your health care team before travelling, as your unique situation may benefit from some planning that would not fall under the general categories discussed.

□ Finally, here are some key items to bring as part of your basic travel first aid kit for Disney, and vacation. Bring your insurance cards, or copies of them. I always keep a photocopy of my card on my cell phone so I can access it quickly. I keep a backup copy in my bag. The same advice goes for prescription medical cards as well as medication and allergy listings.

□ Remember to pack basic first aid items such as bandages, blister pads, antibiotic ointment, pain relievers, anti-diarrheal medication, and sunblock. For those of you who take prescription medications, bring them with you as well as any emergent medications that could be required, inhalers, and so on. Talk to your, or your child's, medical care provider before leaving for vacation if your unique situation would benefit from their guidance.

□ By taking the steps recommended above and thinking ahead, you can avoid predictable injuries and you can save yourself plenty of discomfort and hassle for many others. It's true that you cannot plan for everything in life, but with a little preparation, hopefully your trip to the land of magic will be carefree and joyful from the start to that bittersweet goodbye as you head home safely. Now, you can set off to enjoy that unrivaled magic and joy that is Walt Disney World.

About The Author: Laura Schmitt and her family of four travel to Disney each year for the fun, food, and memories. You can view photos of the

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gluten-free, dairy-free meals the Schmitts enjoy throughout Disney property on Laura's blog, LauraSchmittne.com

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