

The use of disinfectants among international travellers during the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic

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Travel is a known risk factor for colonisation or infection with viral, bacterial and parasitic pathogens. During the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, there were significant changes in personal hygiene behaviours. However, their impact on acquisition of multiresistant pathogens is unknown.

The participants of two travel medicine outpatient clinics in south-west Germany and Luxembourg were surveyed between July 2021 and September 2023 on the use of disinfectants for personal use when travelling. Only disinfectants listed by the German Association for Applied Hygiene (VAH) were classified as reliable.

Among 214 (49.7%) participating travellers, 191 (89.3%) were from Germany. Participants were on average 44.4 years old (range 16-75), with more women (116 (54.2%)). Most common occupations were in the public sector or healthcare system. Before travelling, 179 (83.6%) participants planned to take disinfectants along, and 174 (81.3%) used it during travel. While 39 (22.4%) participants used disinfectants that are on the VAH-list, 57 (32.8%) could not state the exact product, while 78 (44.8%) used disinfectants that could not be classified according to the VAH-list. (Figure 1)

Almost all participants who planned to carry disinfectants actually used it. However, only a fraction of 22.4% used disinfectants listed by VAH.

The composition and application of the disinfectants is of importance, e.g. also to avoid skin irritation. In travel advice, the disinfectant use should be a topic like repellents. Here, the use of disinfectants should be balanced in relation to the specific risks of the travel destination.