

The hospital ship

The Boy Scout phrase of 'be prepared' is highly pertinent when it comes to stocking medical supplies for a blue water cruise, as **Jess Lloyd-Mostyn** notes

The first lesson of parenting is really to expect the unexpected. Funnily enough, the same can be said of liveboard sailing.

Often our travels see us going from one extreme to the other in terms of available supplies – we've sailed both to big, bustling, yachting-hub cities as well as to tiny remote islands, without roads, vehicles or currency. One of the challenges of life on board is to look at your plans for the next sailing stretch and try to pre-empt as many potential hiccups to your happiness as possible. And, as always, we also stock our first aid kit with some pretty thorough and helpful advice from our cruising friends who've travelled some of these routes ahead of us.

So, setting out from lands of plenty – such as when we left Europe, or pushed out to the Pacific or sailed back to the islands from New Zealand – means stocking up on all manner of items 'just in case'. Since leaving Mexico, I have to try to predict the misfortunes that could occur to any of the teeny crew members as well.

Before we first set out, I took the RYA course in first aid to try to bolster my confidence should the worst befall my darling skipper. However, I remember feeling somewhat intimidated by the sheer volume of potential disasters that I needed to learn how to prepare for. "Ok, James," I would say, checking and rechecking my list of medical supplies, "I think I'm happy with how to splint a broken arm, and we have some emergency dentistry supplies stored here. Do you think we need to track down some morphine as well?" This would be met with a smirk and a clearly dubious raised eyebrow.

In my somewhat shaky role as doctor-mama-bear, I periodically restock the medical kit on board, tailored precisely to where we're sailing to this year. We've had a lot more time in remote islands these last few seasons so I've upped the ante somewhat, to allow for all sorts of illnesses that our small fry may or may not get. Calamine lotion for chicken pox, nit lotion and combs in case they get head lice, even worming pills and dehydration salts were on my shopping list. I've got us antibiotics for the adults and antibiotic powders for the kiddos,



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numerous varieties of allergy and seasickness tablets, as well as all the standard types of painkillers.

Insect bites are a constant irritation of ours and can easily get infected in the tropics by being scratched with a grubby fingernail. So I've loaded up on antiseptic, steroid, hydrocortisone, antihistamine and antibiotic creams – a veritable spectrum of treatments. We're also no strangers to the risk of malaria, having spent well over a year in places that show as bright red/high incidence, on every map you look at. This means permethrin-treated mosquito nets on every bunk, screens on every hatch and a veritable trunk of repellents ranging from gentle-baby-natural-herbal types to hardcore 100% DEET-atomic-blast-level-mass-mosquito-genocide types to cover all bases. We also have anti-malarial meds and malaria testing

kits on board to help confirm any suspicious symptoms.

We've even had requests for medicines and, to an extent, medical care as well. Our first day at Longan Island, an outer island of Papua New Guinea, saw us invite on board a man who had recently cut one of his toes off with a chainsaw – apparently this was an occupational hazard of boatbuilding there. We were able to treat him with painkillers and properly clean and dress the wound.

The truth of the matter is that as a layman you simply cannot be prepared for every medical eventuality. Sometimes, knowing what you're confident in dealing with alone and what circumstances you'd need additional help in is just as important as possessing the skills yourself. Also, familiarising yourself with what facilities are available nearby, how far away the nearest hospital is or who you could call on a satellite phone is as valuable medical preparation as having the right painkillers on board.

I should probably add that some of my preparations involve things like making sure I have birthday or Christmas presents stashed away for the little ones and ensuring there are enough ingredients on board to whip up some fairly special impromptu cakes, too. So, yes, sometimes that's the medicine prescribed on this particular boat.



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Jess and James left the UK in 2011 in their Crossbow 42 and have sailed halfway round the world, growing their crew en route. Follow their journey at water-log.com