

Policy on medicine supply for British Nationals going abroad

Plan Ahead

If you're taking medicines for a health condition, and you're planning on being away from home for a while, it's good to be prepared.

Visit your GP practice or travel clinic at least eight weeks before you travel, especially if you're going abroad. They will be able to recommend that you have certain vaccinations which may consist of several doses. They will also be able to advise you about any other precautions you should take when visiting specific countries.

This leaflet tells you about the medicines you can take abroad. Please see further advice about the provision of healthcare services whilst abroad at:-

<http://www.nhs.uk/nhsengland/Healthcareabroad/pages/Healthcareabroad.aspx>

Going abroad for less than three months

Your GP will usually be willing to prescribe up to a maximum of three months' supply of your regular medicines. See BMA Guidance Prescribing in General Practice.

<https://www.bma.org.uk/advice/employment/gp-practices/service-provision/prescribing/prescribing-and-dispensing>

However, please be aware that if a medicine requires frequent monitoring or your clinical condition is not stable, it may not be appropriate for the GP to prescribe for such an extended period.

Going abroad for more than three months

If you are no longer resident in the UK and are living abroad, the NHS normally won't pay for any treatment or services. This includes people who are in receipt of UK state retirement pensions.

No longer resident, means that you have left the country for more than three months. Therefore, you will have to obtain healthcare cover in the country you are in, or get private medical insurance.

If you are going abroad for more than 3 months then all you are entitled to at NHS expense is a sufficient supply of your regular medication to get to the destination and find an alternative supply of that medication. The maximum quantity that can be supplied is sufficient for 3 months.

You should take a copy of your repeat medication list with you. It may be worthwhile having your prescription translated into the language of the country or countries that you're visiting.

Travelling with your medication

You will need to find out whether there are any restrictions on taking your medicines in and out of the UK or the country you are visiting, as some medicines that are available over the counter in the UK may be controlled in other countries and vice versa. If you're in any doubt, you should declare them at customs when you return.

For example, some prescribed medicines, such as morphine, are controlled drugs, so the amount you can take abroad is limited. If you need to take more than the maximum allowance with you, you'll need a special license from the Home Office.

<https://www.gov.uk/travelling-controlled-drugs>

Countries such as India, Pakistan and Turkey have very specific rules about medications that you can, or cannot, bring into the country. If you're unsure about taking your medication into a certain country, contact the appropriate embassy or high commission. The UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) website provides the relevant contact details for every country. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/98058/embassy-list.pdf

If you are travelling abroad with your prescribed medicines, you should always ensure that they are in a correctly labelled container. If you are carrying needles or syringes in your luggage, it is a good idea to have a letter from your GP with you, so that, if required, you can prove that the drugs are for medical use. This may help you avoid any problems at customs. Your GP is entitled to charge you for this service, but it could be worth it.

Carry your medication in your hand luggage (airline regulations permitting), with a copy of your prescription. Pack a spare supply of medication in your suitcase or hold luggage, in case you lose your hand luggage.

Some medicines need to be kept at room temperature (below 25C) or stored in the fridge. If you're travelling to a warm country, get advice from your pharmacist about storing your medicine. For example, to keep your medicine at the right temperature you may need to store it using:

- a thermos flask
- an ice pack
- a cool bag
- an insulated pouch

For more information about travel health, please speak to your GP, practice nurse or pharmacist or see <http://www.nhs.uk/chq/pages/Category.aspx?CategoryID=70>

Document written: October 2013

Reviewed – November 2017 by Pharmaceutical Advisers