



ADVICE SHEET: NHS treatment for travel abroad

Advice:

Under NHS legislation, the NHS ceases to have responsibility for people when they leave the UK to live abroad on a permanent basis. This is because the NHS is a [residency based system](#)

People traveling within Europe should be advised to carry a [European Health Insurance Card](#) (EHIC) which entitles them to necessary medical treatment while in a European Economic Area (EEA) country or Switzerland, either at reduced cost or sometimes free. The EHIC has replaced the old E111. From 1 January 2006, E111s are no longer valid.

Requests for extra supplies of medication for patients who wish to travel abroad:

If a patient is going to be abroad for more than three months then all that he or she is entitled to at NHS expense is a sufficient supply of his/her regular medication to get to the destination and find an alternative supply of that medication abroad [BMA guidance on prescribing in General Practice](#). This applies equally to people holidaying or working abroad. Further information is available on the [on the NHS choices website](#).

For longer visits abroad, the patient should be advised to register with a local doctor for continuing medication, which they may need to pay for. NB it is wise for the patient to check with the manufacturer that medicines required are available in the country being visited.

GP practices are NOT responsible for finding a doctor or ensuring medication supplies are available at the holiday destination.

The PATIENT is responsible for finding and registering with a local doctor and for confirming a regular supply of their [medication](#).

Controlled drugs and travellers:

A personal licence is not required by the Home Office if a person travelling is carrying less than 3 month supply of a controlled drug, but is required for longer periods.

Advice to prescriber - It is advised that a covering letter from the prescriber is obtained that confirms the name of the patient, travel plans, the name of the prescribed controlled drug, total quantity and dose.

Patient responsibilities - The patient should check with the embassies or high commission for the countries they will be travelling through to ensure that import and export regulations in those countries are complied with

Patients should also check any additional requirements that their travel operator/airline company may impose.

Communications from the Department of Health:

- ❖ 'The Department of Health (personal communication September 2015) does not normally specify the period for which prescriptions may be issued, as that decision is best made by the patients GP, taking into account their detailed knowledge of the patient's medical history and current medical condition

- ❖ It would not be considered good clinical practice for a doctor to prescribe large amounts of drugs to a patient going abroad for an extended period of time, whose progress that GP is not able to monitor
- ❖ Under the [National Health Service \(General Medical Services Contracts\) Regulations 2004](#), where a person for whose treatment a doctor is responsible leaves the United Kingdom with the intention of being away for a period of at least three months, that person should be removed from the doctor's list. This remains in the updated [contract](#).

Seafarers:

'The Department of Health (personal communication September 2015) understands that there may be special arrangements for seafarers whereby the seafarer's employer makes arrangements in the UK and/or abroad for their medication. There is nothing to prevent a patient obtaining supplies privately. However, as set out previously it would not be considered good clinical practice for a doctor to prescribe large amounts of drugs to a patient going abroad for an extended time, whose progress that GP is not able to monitor.

Miscellaneous items for conditions while travel abroad:

GPs are not responsible for the prescribing of items for conditions which may arise while abroad or traveling e.g. sun screens, flight socks, antibiotics, travel sickness tablets or diarrhoea treatments. Patients should be advised to purchase these items locally prior to travel. Advice is available from community pharmacists if required. For conditions unresponsive to self-medication the patient should seek medical attention abroad.

Under the NHS regulations a GP can write a private prescription for a patient but cannot charge the patient for writing a private prescription if the patient is registered for NHS care with that GP or any other GP in the same practice. An exception is when an NHS GP writes a private prescription for drugs which are either being issued solely in anticipation of the onset of an ailment whilst outside the UK but for which the patient does not require treatment when the medicine is prescribed or drugs issued for the prevention of malaria.

Travel kits:

Travel kits containing disposable needles, syringes, IV cannulae, sutures (sometimes plasma substitutes and medicines) may be purchased. These kits are not available via the NHS, although some components may require a private prescription.

Acetazolamide:

Proper acclimatisation is the best way to prevent altitude sickness. In the UK [acetazolamide](#) is not licensed for preventing (or treating) altitude sickness. However, it may sometimes be considered for 'off-label' use to prevent altitude sickness in people who may be at risk of developing it. When requested for travel purpose, GPs should note that this is unlicensed special and GPs who prescribe *unlicensed* drugs carry a greater medico-legal responsibility for their actions than when they prescribe licensed treatments.

Malaria prevention:

Public Health England updated the [Guidelines for malaria prevention in travellers from the UK \(September 2015\)](#)

Key changes for 2015 are as follows:

- ❖ Guidance on the use of insect repellent and sun protection
- ❖ Clarification on the use of hydroxychloroquine
- ❖ Updated guidance on the use of anticoagulants with antimalarials
- ❖ Updated guidance on the use of doxycycline in epilepsy
- ❖ Changes to recommendations for Vietnam and Malaysian Borneo and clarification on the recommendations for India
- ❖ New malaria maps for India and South Africa
- ❖ Clarification of advice for travellers moving through areas where different antimalarials are recommended