

## 8. Health precautions

It is very important that you research the health issues associated with the country/countries and specific regions and environments you may be travelling in, so that you can fully prepare for these before departure. For example, some regions are high risk malaria zones and you will need to take precautions such as specialist medication, kit and/or clothing. You may require vaccination against diseases such as Hepatitis, Yellow Fever, Cholera or Rabies. If you plan to work or volunteer in a certain environment, such as in health care, or in remote or less developed areas additional measures to protect yourself against infection and disease may also be wise. It is important to take precautions against the risk of infection from HIV in all countries. Above all, you should seek expert medical advice from your GP or travel clinic before embarking on an overseas trip so you can be prepared for the health risks associated with your chosen destination.

If you have the time and budget and are planning to undertake some independent travel, you may also wish to consider completing a basic first aid course. This will give you both the skills and confidence to cope with any minor medical emergencies whilst you're overseas and is a valuable life skill in itself anyway.

### **Pre-existing medical conditions**

- If you have suffered or are currently suffering from an existing illness, you will need to talk to your doctor about the implications that this may have for your travels.
- You will need to declare these existing medical conditions when you apply for insurance. Not to do so may invalidate any insurance claim later.
- If you need to take personal medication, ensure you obtain sufficient supplies for the duration of your stay abroad. Inhalers and other common prescriptions and over-the-counter medicines are banned in some countries so check with the embassy of the country you are travelling to, that your medication will be legal in that country. If you need to take medication you should ensure that you have a note from your doctor and that the medicine is in its original packaging.
- If you have an allergy or a particular medical condition that could have serious implications if it suddenly worsens or that is hard for someone to recognise (such as diabetes or epilepsy, for instance), make sure you wear a medical ID tag or carry a card (preferably written in the language of the country you're going to). If you are incapacitated for any reason, this will alert anyone who tries to help you to your condition.
- Similarly, if you are travelling with others let them know how they can help, should your medical condition worsen.

### **Resources**

#### **Where to get travel health advice:**

- Department of Health Advice for Travellers: [www.nhs.uk/Healthcareabroad](http://www.nhs.uk/Healthcareabroad) - advice for travellers about planning ahead, staying healthy and getting treatment elsewhere in the world. Also in this area is information about the EHIC, UK citizens' passport to free or reduced-cost emergency care in most other European countries.
- [www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk](http://www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk) - an NHS Scotland website on travel issues worldwide.
- [www.iamat.org](http://www.iamat.org) - English-speaking doctors around the world.
- [www.interhealth.org.uk](http://www.interhealth.org.uk) - a medical charity providing specialist healthcare to people working primarily in the aid, development, mission and voluntary sectors both in the UK and overseas. They act as medical, travel health and occupational health advisors and also provide Psychological Health services.  
<http://www.masta-travel-health.com/> - provides travel health advice on anti-malarials, vaccinations and disease prevention for the public travelling abroad. MASTA Travel Clinics are private travel clinics in the UK. They provide immunisations and medical advice on malaria, yellow fever and a host of other travel health related issues for travellers.

- [www.travelhealth.co.uk](http://www.travelhealth.co.uk) Travelhealth provides information and practical advice for people who are travelling abroad. They also provide information about where your nearest travel clinic is.
- [www.nomadtravel.co.uk](http://www.nomadtravel.co.uk) Nomad Travel clinics can be found in many major cities in the UK. They also have travel stores where useful kit and equipment can be bought for overseas trips.

### **Medical risk assessment**

- Use the resources above to identify the key health risks that affect travellers in the places you are hoping to visit.
- You will then need to decide what precautions you are going to take to avoid them.
- If health risks are significant, you might like to find an alternative location where you can carry out a similar activity, but where the health risks are reduced.

### **Health precautions**

- Visit the dentist before you leave for a check-up and to have any remedial work done.
- Visit your GP surgery or a Travel Health clinic to discuss what vaccinations you need and plan your vaccination programme - you may be required to start treatment several months before you depart. For travel clinics see [www.nomadtravel.co.uk/clinics](http://www.nomadtravel.co.uk/clinics) or for a list in your area see [www.travelhealth.co.uk/travelclinics](http://www.travelhealth.co.uk/travelclinics)
- Ensure that you have got all the medications you will need whilst you are away. Always take spares in case you lose your bag or it is stolen.
- Check what you need to help protect yourself against Malaria e.g. mosquito nets, repellents, cover up, and which particular anti-malarial medication to take, if needed.
- Take a well-stocked first aid/medical kit. Nomad Travel Clinics provide advice on adventure travel health and can provide advice on first aid kits. [www.nomadtravel.co.uk](http://www.nomadtravel.co.uk).
- If you feel unwell when you get back, get checked out by your GP and tell them which countries you have been travelling in.

### **Planning for medical emergencies**

- Buy a pocket guide to travel health and take it with you to help you cope with common problems such as 'traveller's diarrhea', sun stroke, heat or cold-related illnesses or altitude-related illnesses if you're travelling to high altitude regions.
- Be aware of the symptoms and treatment for other, less common illnesses. In particular, make sure you're aware of the actions you need to take if you suspect you have been exposed to the rabies virus and remember that even if you have had the vaccination, you are not protected and will still need further post-exposure vaccines if infected. Research whether the country you're travelling to is likely to have these available or where you'll have to go to access them.
- Know your Blood Group.
- Know how to access medical help when travelling. Note the name and contact details of the nearest doctor/hospital for your destinations.
- Medical insurance is ESSENTIAL. Check what you need to do if you need help and in particular keep safe the telephone numbers you need to call to get help.
- For travelling in Europe, it is essential to carry a European Health Insurance Card. These are free to order and can be obtained easily from [www.ehic.org.uk](http://www.ehic.org.uk)

### **Exploratory questions to ask yourself:**

- What are the health risks to consider in the countries/environments I want to travel to, (for example: dirty drinking water, diseases such as malaria, high prevalence of HIV, high altitude or extreme environments).
- What can I do to protect myself against these health risks?
- Do I need to undertake any training to ensure my personal fitness and ability is suitable for my chosen activity? How will I do this if so?
- Do I need any specific vaccinations for travel to these regions? When do I need to start having them or taking the medication?

- Do I have any pre-existing medical conditions and do they limit where I should travel, the activities I may be able to undertake or environments I could travel in? Would I require any special travel arrangements?
- Will I need to take personal medication with me and is it legal in the countries I want to travel to?
- Have I informed my insurance company and the organisation or companions I'm travelling with about my medical condition and suitable treatment in the event of a medical incident?
- What is the procedure if I need to see a doctor whilst travelling in the country?
- What is the name and location of the nearest hospital for each area I plan to visit? How far will it be from my place of accommodation and how will I get there if needed?