

# travelling with your hiv drugs

This factsheet provides an introduction to some of the issues you may want to think about if you are taking anti-HIV drugs and are planning to travel.

## Is travel possible?

Make sure you consider HIV, your health, and any medication that you may be taking when you make your travel plans. At the most basic level, consider if you are well enough to undertake the trip you are planning. If you are planning to travel internationally, find out in advance if the country you are planning to travel to puts any restrictions on entry for people with HIV. There are no problems with EU countries, but many other countries ban people from HIV from entering. The USA is the most obvious example, and there's more information on travel to the USA below.

Also, find out if you need any vaccinations, and if it is safe for you to have them. People with HIV are recommended to avoid live vaccinations.

## Take enough medication

It might be very difficult, or even impossible to get supplies of your medication once you've left home - even if you are just taking a short trip in the UK or Europe. Therefore, make sure you take enough of all your medicines with you to last the full duration of your trip. It might be wise to count out your medicines before you travel and to take a few additional doses just in case you get delayed.

## Carrying your medication

It's safest to carry your medication in your hand luggage, as this is less likely to get lost. If you are traveling across borders it might be wise to have a copy of your prescription or a letter from your doctor saying you are taking the medicines you are carrying for a chronic medical condition.

## Getting medical treatment away from home

If your trip is in the UK you should contact the nearest accident and emergency department if you need emergency care. You can be seen by a GP away from home as a 'temporary resident' if your trip is for under two weeks. If you are entitled to free NHS care you can get this anywhere in the UK.

If you are traveling to Europe you should obtain an E111 from a post office. Take this with you when you travel as it allows you to obtain free or reduced cost medical care in EU and some other countries.

It may also be wise to consider taking out travel insurance. Most policies specifically exclude treatment for HIV or any pre-existing medical condition, but will still provide cover if you have an accident or become ill with something unrelated to HIV. In recent years some companies have started to provide travel insurance cover that includes HIV. Premiums are often higher and are calculated on an individual basis.

## Timing your doses

If you are travelling across international time zones, then this is likely to have implications for the time you take your medication at. There are three options you may wish to consider. These include, continuing to take your medicines at your UK time - but this could mean that you have to take your doses at inconvenient times. Another option is to gradually adjust the time you take your medicines at from UK time to the time in the country you are visiting. A third option might be altering your dose time to fit in with the time zone of the country you are visiting, but this could mean that there are some long intervals between doses as you adjust. It might be wise to talk over your plan with a doctor or pharmacist before you travel.

## Travel to the US

Although people with HIV cannot legally enter the USA unless they obtain special permission from the US Embassy before traveling, many have, and the vast majority continue to do so with no serious consequences. However, if you enter the USA without this permission you are in breach of US immigration law and could be deported. If you are travelling with medication then this might be found if your luggage is searched. Some people send their medicine ahead of them, but this is illegal and delays may mean you have no treatment during your trip.

## Taking a treatment break to travel

Do not do this without talking to your doctor first. There's a risk of developing resistance to your drugs, and if you have a low cell count, of becoming ill.

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