

Travelling with your HIV drugs

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This factsheet provides an introduction to some of the issues you may want to think about if you are taking HIV treatment 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 some other countries ban people from HIV from entering.

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 travelling to another country it makes good sense 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 travelling to Europe you should obtain a European Health Insurance Card (EHIC). 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. You can apply for an EHIC online here: www.ehic.org.uk. You can also apply by telephone on 0845 606 2030.

The UK also has agreements with some other, non-EU countries allowing for free or reduced cost emergency medical care that a person may need. Check before travelling.

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, or short, 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

The USA's long-standing ban on non-US citizens visiting or migrating to the country ended in January 2010.

Taking a treatment break to travel

Treatment breaks are not recommended. If you are thinking of taking a break from your HIV treatment to travel, then you should discuss the possible risks of this with your doctor. These risks may include developing resistance to your drugs, and if you have a low CD4 cell count, of becoming ill.