

Prescribing for Patients Travelling Abroad

NHS patients travelling for 3 months or less

Under NHS legislation, the NHS ceases to have responsibility for people when they leave the UK. However, to ensure good patient care the following guidance for prescribing is offered:

- Medication required for a pre-existing condition should be provided in sufficient quantity to cover the journey and allow the patient to obtain medical attention abroad. If the patient is returning within the timescale of a normal prescription (usually 1 and no more than 3 months) then this could be issued, providing it is clinically appropriate. This does not, however, apply to all regular or one off medications, especially those regarded as high-risk ones. Of course, the actual length of any prescription would depend on the GPs clinical judgement.

- GPs are not required to provide prescriptions for medication which is requested solely in anticipation of the onset of an ailment whilst outside the UK, but for which treatment is not required at the time of prescribing (e.g. travel sickness, diarrhoea). Patients should be advised to purchase these items locally prior to travel; advice is available from community pharmacists if required. A private prescription may be provided for any prescription-only medicines, such as ciprofloxacin for traveller's diarrhoea. For conditions unresponsive to self-medication, the patient should normally seek medical attention abroad.

NHS patients living or travelling abroad for more than three months of the year

- For longer visits abroad, the patient should be advised to register with a local doctor for continuing medication; this may need to be paid for by the patient. It is wise for the patient to check with the manufacturer that medicines required are available in the country being visited.

- Medication required for a pre-existing condition should be provided in sufficient quantity to cover the journey and to allow the patient to obtain medical attention abroad.

Patients should also be advised to check whether there are any restrictions on taking their medicine(s) in and out of the UK or the countries they are visiting or passing through – they can contact the country's Embassy, Consulate, or High Commission. Different countries have different rules and regulations about the types of medication they allow to be taken into the country and the maximum quantities allowed. Of course, this is of particular importance for controlled drugs as their legal status varies between countries.

It is a good idea for patients to travel with a copy of their prescription and a letter from their GP giving details of their medication and the name of the health condition for which they need the medication. It may be worthwhile having this translated into the language of the country visited.

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Patient information leaflets are available on the NHS choices website, for example:

[NHS choices "Can my GP prescribe extra medication to cover my holiday?"](#)

[NHS choices "Can I take my medicine abroad?"](#)

[NHS choices: Healthcare abroad](#)