

Policy on Medicine Supply for British Nationals Going Abroad

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Plan ahead

If you're taking medicines for a health condition, and you're planning on being away from home for a while, it's good to be prepared.

Complete a Travel Health Questionnaire and submit to your GP Practice Nurse at least eight weeks before you travel, especially if you're going abroad.

The Practice Nurse will be able to recommend if you need to have certain vaccinations which may consist of several doses. You may also be advised about any other precautions you should take when visiting specific countries – especially in regard to checking the various websites which advise about prevalent health issues.

Going abroad for less than three months

If you are away from the UK for less than three months you may be able to get free or reduced healthcare if you are visiting another country.

In EEA countries and Switzerland, this will be covered if you have an EHIC (European Health Insurance Card). However, many popular destinations outside the EEA don't have an agreement with the UK to provide healthcare, and not all costs such as transport back to the UK will be covered if there is an agreement. It is advisable to get your own travel insurance.

If you take a particular medicine, you should check that it is available in the country that you plan to live in. Local policy allows your GP in the UK to prescribe 56 days supply of your medication after which you will need to register with a local doctor in the country in which you are staying (or alternative arrangements depending on individual countries policy) to ensure continued supply. Some medicines may have a different brand name in other countries.

Can my GP prescribe extra medication to cover my trip?

If you need medication for a stable long-term health condition your GP may be able to supply you with a prescription to cover your holiday

It depends on several things. The majority of people will find that their normal repeat prescription supply period will be sufficient to cover their holiday period.

If your normal repeat prescription is due whilst you are away, your GP may be able to give you an early repeat prescription to ensure that you do not run out whilst you are away. However, this will depend on, for example:

- how long your GP thinks you'll continue to need your medication
- how often your treatment needs to be reviewed
- how long you will be away

Please be aware that this is at the discretion of the GP and will be applicable in a minority of cases.

Also where medication requires frequent monitoring, for example warfarin, it may not be appropriate for the GP to prescribe for such an extended period.

Going abroad for more than three months

The NHS accepts responsibility for supplying ongoing medication for temporary periods abroad of up to 3 months **for existing long term conditions**.

If you are no longer resident in the UK and are living abroad, the NHS normally won't pay for any treatment or services. This includes people who are in receipt of UK state retirement pensions.

No longer resident, means that you have left the country for more than three months.

Therefore, you will have to obtain healthcare cover in the country you are in, or get private medical insurance.

If you are going to live abroad for more than 3 months then all you are entitled to at NHS expense is a sufficient supply of your regular medication to get to the destination and find an alternative supply of that medication. You may feel it advisable to request a summary of your personal health record from your GP Practice giving details about your medicines and significant conditions.

Some people who live abroad may be eligible to receive free or reduced cost healthcare in other European Economic Area (EEA) countries and Switzerland. For example, if you are working for a UK employer, are in the armed forces or you are in education. To see if you are eligible, see the Department of Health website: Other circumstances affecting eligibility.

Travelling with your medication

If you are travelling outside the EU, you can contact the relevant country's embassy or high commission for advice about obtaining your medication before you go.

You will also need to find out whether there are any restrictions on taking your medicines in and out of the UK or the country you are visiting, as some medicines that are available over the counter in the UK may be controlled in other countries and vice versa.

For example, some prescribed medicines, such as Temazepam, contain controlled drugs, so the amount you can take abroad is limited. If you need to take more than the maximum allowance with you, you'll need a special license from the Home Office. See the HM Customs and Excise website to check the permitted allowances on various drugs. You can also contact the Home Office Drugs Branch on 020 7035 4848, or visit the [Home Office](#) website for advice.

Countries such as India, Pakistan and Turkey have very specific rules about medications that you can, or cannot, bring into the country. If you're unsure about taking your medication into a certain country, contact the appropriate embassy or high commission. The UK [Foreign and Commonwealth Office \(FCO\)](#) website provides the relevant contact details for every country.

If you are travelling abroad with your prescribed medicines, you should always ensure that they are in a correctly labelled container. If you are carrying needles or syringes in your luggage, it is a good idea to request a letter from your GP so that, if required, you can prove that the drugs are for medical use. This may help you avoid any problems at customs. Your GP is entitled to charge you for this service, but it could be worth it.

Countries that have agreements with the UK to provide healthcare

European Economic Area countries (EEA): Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus (Southern), Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Ireland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, UK, plus Iceland, Liechtenstein Norway and Switzerland.

Remember, each country's health system is different and might not include all the things you would expect to get free of charge from the NHS. This may mean that you have to make a patient contribution to the cost of your care. You may be able to seek reimbursement for this cost when you are back in the UK.