

Department of Renal Medicine

Patient information

Holiday dialysis abroad

I'm planning to go on holiday abroad. Will the NHS pay costs related to my haemodialysis treatment?

Yes, provided you are a UK citizen traveling to a **state-run** haemodialysis unit within the European Economic Area, Switzerland or Australia.

Some countries ask for a fee called a co-payment and **you** will be responsible for this. This can be as much as 20% of the total cost of your haemodialysis treatment abroad. It cannot be refunded to you by the NHS.

What do I need to do to access state-run haemodialysis unit in the European Economic Area?

- You must hold a valid European Health Insurance Card.
- You need to identify a suitable state run haemodialysis unit and check that accept the European Health Insurance Card.
- Check if you need to pay any co-payment yourself.
- Notify the Renal Service Manager at St Georges Healthcare NHS Trust at least six weeks before you travel.

If you do not tell the Renal Service Manager at St Georges Healthcare NHS Trust before you travel **you will be responsible for the full cost** of your haemodialysis treatment abroad.

Can I travel to somewhere which does not except the European Health Insurance Card or is outside the European Economic Area?

Yes, but you must pay the full costs of your haemodialysis treatment while you are away.

Should I have holiday medical insurance?

Yes, we advise you to have this even for those who carry a European Health Insurance Card which will not provide cover should you need to fly home. The National Kidney Federation can advise kidney patients about companies that specialise in insurance cover for haemodialysis patients.

Are there any risks associated with haemodialysis outside the UK?

Yes, one particular risk is acquiring blood borne viruses such as Hepatitis B, C and to a lesser extent HIV. These viruses can result in a chronic infection causing a number of health problems.

Is the increased risk of getting a blood borne virus in all units abroad?

No. The Department of Health suggests that the risk is low in Northern Europe, the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Japan. Outside these areas there is a greater risk.

Can anything be done to lower this risk of blood borne virus infection?

Yes, discussing your trip with the nursing and medical staff can help you assess the risk of your chosen dialysis unit. You should not travel to units which:

- Re-use the dialysers / artificial kidneys on the side of the machines
- Do not have strict infection control procedures.

If necessary we will check your Hepatitis B immunity and immunisation, if needed, before you travel.

Does anything else put me at risk of infection with blood borne viruses?

Yes. The following can increase your risk of exposure to blood borne:

- dental treatment
- surgery
- blood transfusions
- hospital admissions
- high risk sexual activity
- the use of intravenous drugs.

If any of these apply to you please inform a member of staff on return.

Is there anything else I need to consider?

It is important you plan you travel around your dialysis days; you should not miss a dialysis treatment in order to travel. If you need to travel on a particular day then speak to your dialysis unit as they may be able to rearrange treatment to ensure you remain safe.

If you are flying it is important not to board the plane if you have symptoms related to too much water in your body. You could be more likely to have problems once you airborne.

These include:

- shortness of breath
- cough with white sputum
- marked swelling of the lower limbs

You also need to consider problems resulting from delays which might mean you miss your planned dialysis session at the unit abroad or back at home. Therefore, we advise you to book flights to occur shortly after your dialysis to lessen the risk of any problems.

What happens when I return from my holiday?

We will arrange for you to receive your treatment in isolation for at least six weeks. We will carry out blood tests for Hepatitis B, C and HIV.

If you prefer for us not to test for these please let us know but you will need to continue your treatment in isolation indefinitely. As there are treatments for many of these infections, we recommend that you are tested on return to prevent long term health problems. It is also very important to know about any blood borne viruses if you are on the kidney transplant list.

I'm on the kidney transplant list and travel abroad what happens?

Transplantation involves medicines which make you more vulnerable to infection. It is important to ensure that any viruses are controlled before transplantation.

While abroad you will be temporarily suspended from the kidney transplant list.

If you travel to the Indian subcontinent or Africa you will remain suspended for eight weeks until negative virology tests have been obtained.

For all other parts of the World unless other factors put you at risk you will usually be re-activated on the kidney transplant waiting list as soon as your virology tests are found to be negative.

Where can I get further information?

Nursing and Medical staff in the dialysis units can provide you with further information. Alternatively there are number of good resources freely available on the internet:

European Health Insurance card:

www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/Healthcareabroad/EHIC/Pages/Introduction.aspx

For advice about holiday insurance:

National Kidney Federation www.kidney.org.uk or tel. 0845 601 02 09

For more detailed information regarding the NHS funding of holiday dialysis and reducing the risk of infection see:

Guidance and Pathways for patients and healthcare professionals arranging dialysis overseas:

www.kidneycare.nhs.uk/Library/Overseas_Visitors_and_Holiday_Dialysis_March2011.pdf

Department of Health Good Practice Guidelines for Renal Dialysis/Transplantation units Oct 2010:

www.dh.gov.uk/prod_consum_dh/groups/dh_digitalassets/@dh/@en/@ps/documents/digitalasset/dh_122155.pdf

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