

Guidance on prescribing for overseas travel

This document attempts to clarify the national guidance on which vaccines and drugs may be prescribed on the NHS and those that should be prescribed privately.

Provision of travel advice

NHS patients are entitled to receive advice on recommended immunisations and malaria prophylaxis free of charge. Travel advice represents appropriate health promotion for patients wishing to travel abroad and is therefore classed as an essential service within the General Medical Services (GMS) contract.

Practices should ensure that when travel advice is given it is current and based on expertly sourced information. Reliable information can be obtained from the National Travel Health Network and Centre (NaTHNaC) Launchpad for health professionals www.travelhealthpro.org.uk

Practices should complete a pre-travel risk assessment for individual patients before confirming which immunisations are required.

Vaccinations for travel

The GP contract includes the provision of vaccines and immunisations. If a practice has opted out of this provision they should ensure that the CCG is aware. Any practice who opts out of the provision of vaccines and immunisations cannot administer travel vaccines.

Vaccinations available at NHS expense

Some travel vaccines are available at NHS expense (see table 1) and patients must not be charged a fee for these. These are available via two different routes:

- The vaccine is purchased by the practice, administered at the practice and a 'personally administered' payment is claimed via NHSBSA; OR
- The vaccine is prescribed on FP10 for the patient to collect from a community pharmacy then the patient brings the vaccine to the practice for administration. Note: the patient will have to pay the usual prescription charge at the pharmacy unless they are exempt. The practice must not claim for 'personal administration' in this situation

Note: When vaccines are prescribed at NHS expense prescribers have a responsibility to supply the most cost effective option.

Vaccinations not available at NHS expense

The practice may levy a charge for travel vaccines that are not available at NHS expense. Typically private charges can include the cost of the vaccines/fee for writing a private prescription and a charge for the administration. Additional charges could be raised where post vaccination serological testing or certification is required. Levels of charges should be determined by individual practices and these should be made available to patients in the form of a leaflet or via the practice website.

Malaria Prophylaxis

Malaria prophylaxis medicines are not available at NHS expense. Patients should be advised that chloroquine and proguanil are available to be purchased over the counter from community pharmacies. If a prescription only medicine is required for malaria prophylaxis then these should be prescribed privately and the practice may charge for the provision of the private prescription.

Prescription only medicines required for travel 'just in case'

Where there is no pre-existing condition a patient is not entitled to medicines at NHS expense. Requests for prescription only medicines that are required for travel 'just in case' of illnesses contracted, for example antibiotics or oral rehydration sachets, should be treated as a private transaction. The practice may charge for the provision of a private prescription.

Prescription only medicines required for existing long term conditions

When a patient travels abroad, provision of medicines for the treatment of existing long term conditions may be provided at NHS expense for up to 3 months. If a patient is travelling abroad for longer than 3 months they are expected to arrange for an alternative supply of medicine at their destination.

GMS regulations state that patients should be removed from the practice list where notification has been received that the patient intends to be outside of the UK for more than 3 months. De-registration should occur from either the date of departure or the date upon which the NHS England Area Team receives the notification of departure – whichever is later.

For travel within Europe, patients should be advised to carry a European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) at all times to entitle them to receive reduced cost or free medical treatment. Patients should be advised to check specific entitlements prior to travel.

Taking Controlled Drugs Abroad

Patients travelling abroad for less than 3 months and carrying less than 3 months' supply of controlled drugs do not require a personal import or export licence to enter or leave the United Kingdom. However the Home Office does recommend that patients carry a letter, which is issued by the prescribing doctor or drug worker, containing the following information:

- Patient's name, address and date of birth
- The outward and return dates of travel
- The country being visited
- A list of the controlled drugs being carried, including the prescribed dosages and total quantities

There is no allowance in the GMS contract to reimburse GPs for providing this service. It is at the discretion of the practice whether they charge the patient for this service.

Patients should be advised that controlled drugs should be:

- Carried in the original packaging
- Carried in hand luggage (restrictions may apply to liquid medicines)
- Carried with a letter from the prescribing doctor
- Carried with a valid personal import/export licence

Patients should confirm with their airline carrier the permitted quantities of medicines allowed to be carried in hand luggage, in advance of travel.

Personal import or export licences

A personal import or export licence is required for patients with controlled drugs who are travelling for 3 calendar months or are carrying more than 3 months' supply.

The application form for the personal export license can be downloaded from:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/personal-import-export-licence-application-form

This form can be completed by the patient but must be accompanied by a letter from the prescribing doctor or drug worker which details the information specified above. The application needs to be submitted at least 10 working days in advance of the date of travel.

The personal licence has no legal standing outside of the UK and is intended to assist travellers passing through UK Customs with their prescribed controlled drugs.

It is important the patients liaise with the appropriate embassy/consulate/high commission at the country of destination (and any countries that they will be travelling through) to check the relevant policy on the importation of controlled drugs.

Prevention of Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT) during long distance travel

Travellers at an increased risk of DVT are advised to consider the use of compression stockings which may reduce the risk. There are various socks and stockings commercially available to prevent oedema and DVT during travel. These are of a different compression level to elastic hosiery listed in the Drug Tariff, and are not available at NHS expense.

GPs should not prescribe flight socks/stockings for this purpose on a NHS prescription.

It should be noted that there is a lack of robust evidence specifically around the use of Low Molecular Weight Heparins (LMWHs) for the prevention of travel related DVT. Where the GP has clinical concerns around risk factors for either clotting or bleeding then the opinion of a haematologist should be sought. Further information can be found on the Dorset Formulary, www.dorsetformulary.nhs.uk.

Aspirin prophylaxis is not indicated in the prevention of DVT as there is no evidence to support this indication.

Table 1

Vaccination	Available at NHS expense in Dorset?	Notes
Cholera	Yes	Vaccine is not indicated for most travellers
Diphtheria/Tetanus/Polio	Yes	Stock centrally funded that is obtained from Immform as part of the childhood immunisation programme must not be used for the purposes of travel.
Hepatitis A	Yes	
Hepatitis A/Typhoid combined	Yes	The booster dose is not aligned so consider separate vaccines
Typhoid	Yes	
Bacillus Calmette-Guerin (BCG)	No	Referral to a respiratory clinic is recommended for tuberculin testing and follow up for all patients requesting vaccination.
Hepatitis B	No*	For the purposes of travel, this vaccine should be provided on a private prescription.
Hepatitis A/B combined	No**	For the purposes of travel the separate components should be prescribed.
Japanese Encephalitis	No	
Meningitis ACWY (Men ACWY)	No	Stock centrally funded that is obtained from Immform as part of the childhood immunisation programme must not be used for the purposes of travel.
Rabies	No	For post exposure: rabies is a notifiable disease and practices should contact the Health Protection Agency for advice and vaccine provision. Bat handlers – obtain vaccines from Public Health England.
Tick-borne encephalitis	No	
Yellow Fever	No	Yellow fever vaccinations must only be administered at designated Yellow Fever Vaccination Centres. www.nathnac.org/yellowfevercentres.aspx

Adapted from Travel Vaccines (DROP-List) 2.0, PrescQIPP NHS

*this does not apply to patients who have a pre-existing medical condition that puts them at a higher risk of requiring medical procedures abroad. In these circumstances the hepatitis B vaccination should be provided at NHS expense – **this is considered to be necessary only in exceptional cases.**

the combined hepatitis A/B vaccine should only be provided at NHS expense if there is a clinical indication that prevents the patient from receiving the separate hepatitis A and B vaccines - **this is considered to be necessary only in exceptional cases.

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