

Carrying Medicines Internationally

If you are travelling across country borders and you need to take medicines you should start to think about whether you need to make any special arrangements at least two months in advance.

There are several questions you need to consider when carrying medicines over international borders, such as 'Are the medicines I need to take legal in the country I am travelling to?', 'Do my medicines require any special storage requirements?', 'How large a supply can I get from my Doctor in my home country?', and 'Are my medicines available in the country I am visiting?'

Legality

Restrictions on the import of medicines vary between countries. Some countries, such as the UAE, have very strict rules about what can be brought in, restricting medicines as seemingly innocuous as cold remedies and Hormone Replacement Therapy.

You must be particularly careful if you want to carry medicines called 'controlled drugs' e.g. morphine (MST, Sevredol, Oramorph), temazepam and methylphenidate (Ritalin, Concerta). Medicines may be classed as controlled drugs in the country you intend to visit, but not in your home country. Always check. Without the correct documentation possession of such medicines could constitute a criminal offence, and land you in serious trouble.

Always seek advice from the embassy or high commission of the country you wish to visit well before you need to travel to find out what special precautions you need to take to carry your medicines legally. To find the contact details for foreign embassies in the UK, go to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office website <http://www.gov.uk/fco> click on the 'Travel Advice' tab and you can then click on 'Find a foreign embassy in the UK'. You may be required to apply to the country you wish to visit for prior authorisation to bring your medicines into the country.

Storage

Do you know the best way to store your medication? Does it have any special requirements? Most tablets have to be stored below 25-30° c. Certain eye drops or creams may need to be kept refrigerated. Read the leaflet inside the box or consult your pharmacist for more information. Storing medication incorrectly may affect the shelf life, stability, effectiveness and even safety of your medicines.

Taking insulin abroad will require more specialist handling. Insulin needs to be kept refrigerated until opened, when it can usually be stored at room temperature (bearing in mind that the product information will be based on the room temperature of your home country which may differ quite substantially from the room temperature at your destination). Insulin must never be allowed to freeze. Think about how you will keep your insulin cool for the entire journey. Frio® wallets will keep insulin between 18-26° c for 45 hours. They can then be reactivated to keep the insulin cool for subsequent periods. Frio® wallets can be bought in some pharmacies or online from www.friouk.com. More storage information can be found by contacting the manufacturer of your insulin.

Check the expiry dates of your medicines before you travel. Will they expire before you return home? Are the storage conditions likely to affect them? Ask your pharmacist for medicines with the longest expiry date possible, explaining your situation.

Do you have a sufficient supply? Is your medicine available where you are going?

We recommend that you consult your local doctor at least two months before you plan to travel to sort out your medication, in case special arrangements need be made. If you need regular medication for a stable long-term condition, your doctor may prescribe medication in advance.

If you have had a consultation with an InterHealth Clinician, and you are serving on a long term mission, we may be able to help you with the supply of your medication. You would need to complete a 'Request for Private Prescription Medication' form and a fee is payable, as well as the cost of the medicines. We may request that you undergo any required monitoring tests locally before we are happy to prescribe the medication for you. Under no circumstances can we provide controlled drugs and we are unable to send items which must be kept refrigerated. It is your own responsibility to find out how you will maintain the supply of your medication while abroad. InterHealth cannot take responsibility for this, but we can be consulted for advice.

It can be useful to find out if your medication is available in the country you plan to travel to, but you must be sure that the supply is reputable and reliable. Counterfeit (fake) medicines are a growing problem throughout the world. The World Health Organisation estimates many countries in Africa have areas where more than 30% of the medicines on sale can be counterfeit. A fair estimate of counterfeit medicines in developing countries is between 10% and 30%. Counterfeit medicines can appear identical to the real thing but can be very dangerous and/or completely ineffective. If at all possible source your medication before you travel.

Guidance

- You should always carry your medicines in their correctly labelled containers, accompanied by a copy of the prescription, including the generic names of the medicines. Make a note of the name of the manufacturer of your medicines. Check whether the country you are visiting requires you to carry a letter from your doctor explaining what your medicines are and what they are for.
- If your medicines are controlled drugs you should always carry a letter from your doctor explaining what your medicines are and what they are for. Don't forget to check whether there are any special requirements for carrying controlled drugs into the country you plan to visit.
- If you are travelling with controlled drugs in or out of the certain countries, including the UK, you will need a personal import or export licence if you are carrying more than a three month supply. If you are in any doubt about your medicines you should declare them at customs.
- Carry some spare medication in your hold luggage in case you lose your hand luggage.
- Consider carrying some extra medication with you. If you are diabetic you may find that your insulin requirements change in response to a new climate or different foods etc.

- If you buy medicines abroad, make sure they are from a reputable pharmacy and always ask for a receipt. Good clinics may be able to direct you to a reliable pharmacy.
- When returning home check that any medicines you have obtained abroad are legal in your home country.
- Make sure that your travel insurance covers any pre-existing medical conditions and that it will repatriate you home in the event of an emergency.
- Before embarking on your trip you must find out how you are going to maintain your supply of medication. This is your responsibility.

Further Guidance and Information

More information can be found in: 'The Traveller's Good Health Guide', Ted Lankester; 3rd Edition 2006

Copyright © InterHealth

While InterHealth endeavours to ensure that the information published in this guidance note is correct, InterHealth does not warrant the accuracy and completeness of the material in this guidance note. The information in this guidance note is for information only and should not be used for self diagnosis or self treatment. Readers are always encouraged to seek medical help from a doctor or other competent professional health adviser.

Committed to the health and wellbeing of those making the world a better, fairer and healthier place.

InterHealth Worldwide, International Health Centre 63 - 67 Newington Causeway, London, SE1 6BD
+44 (0) 20 7902 9000 info@interhealth.org.uk www.interhealth.org.uk

©InterHealth Worldwide. A company limited by guarantee, registered in England and Wales. Registered company number 4986035. Registered charity number 1103935.