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# Dialysis away from home

Patient Information



Working together for better patient information

Everyone with kidney disease should be able to live life to the full. Holidays and respite breaks can help to reduce stress and improve mental wellbeing. However if you or your child need dialysis, there are certain things to consider when organising a holiday or any kind of travelling

This leaflet provides advice on having dialysis away from your normal location, whether that's at home or at a different hospital.



## What do I need to think about before I go away?

If you are planning a holiday or travelling for work or pleasure, the first thing to do is speak to your kidney team so that they can help plan your treatment while you are away. Try to give them as much notice as possible - ideally at least 4 weeks for travel within the UK and 3 months for travel abroad. Dialysis units near to popular holiday resorts can get busy in the peak season so the more notice you can give the better.

## What about travel insurance?

**Travel insurance is vital.** Most standard policies do not cover chronic kidney disease and it is likely that your insurance costs will be higher than someone who does not have a long-term health condition. You may need a letter from your kidney team confirming that you / your child are well enough to travel.

It is really important to shop around and consider using specialist insurance companies. Remember to read the small print to make sure that you or your child would be covered for emergency treatment abroad or if you need to cancel your trip because of ill health.

Even if the people you are travelling with do not have a medical condition it is worth insuring them on the same policy as yours. This means that they will also be covered if you need to change plans because of your health. This may not be the case if you have different policies with different providers.

Don't put off buying insurance until the last minute. Arrange it as soon as you have booked your travel so that you are covered in case you need to cancel. Remember to take your insurance documents with you in case you do need to make a claim when you are away.





## Will I have to pay for dialysis abroad?

**If you have haemodialysis, this may take place in a dialysis unit or there may be dialysis facilities within all-inclusive resorts.** Dialysis in a state-run haemodialysis unit can also be arranged for free in many European countries and in countries that have a reciprocal agreement with the UK, including parts of Australia and New Zealand. For a full list see the NHS Choices website at: [www.nhs.uk/nhsengland/healthcareabroad/countryguide/noneeacountries/Pages/Non-EEACountries.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/nhsengland/healthcareabroad/countryguide/noneeacountries/Pages/Non-EEACountries.aspx)

**In order to access a state-run haemodialysis unit in the European Economic Area (EEA; the European Union plus other countries such as Switzerland):**

- Tell your kidney team as soon as possible that you intend to travel. If you do not let them know then you will likely be responsible for the full cost of your haemodialysis treatment abroad.
- Make sure you hold a valid European Health Insurance Card (EHIC). The EHIC is available free of charge at [www.ehic.org.uk/Internet/startApplication.do](http://www.ehic.org.uk/Internet/startApplication.do) or you can request one by calling **0300 330 1350**.
- Identify a suitable unit and check that they accept the EHIC. Your kidney team may be able to help you with this.

Some EEA countries will 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 and the NHS will not be able to refund this cost.

If you travel to a country which does not accept the EHIC or is outside the EEA you may have to pay the full costs of your haemodialysis treatment while you are away.

## Can we travel abroad if on the transplant list?

You will need to let the transplant coordinators at your unit know that you are going abroad so that they can temporarily remove you / your child from the list until you return. You will not lose any time points while you are off the list.

If you travel to the Indian subcontinent or Africa you / your child will remain suspended for eight weeks after you have returned until virology tests have confirmed that you have not become infected with a virus such as hepatitis or HIV.

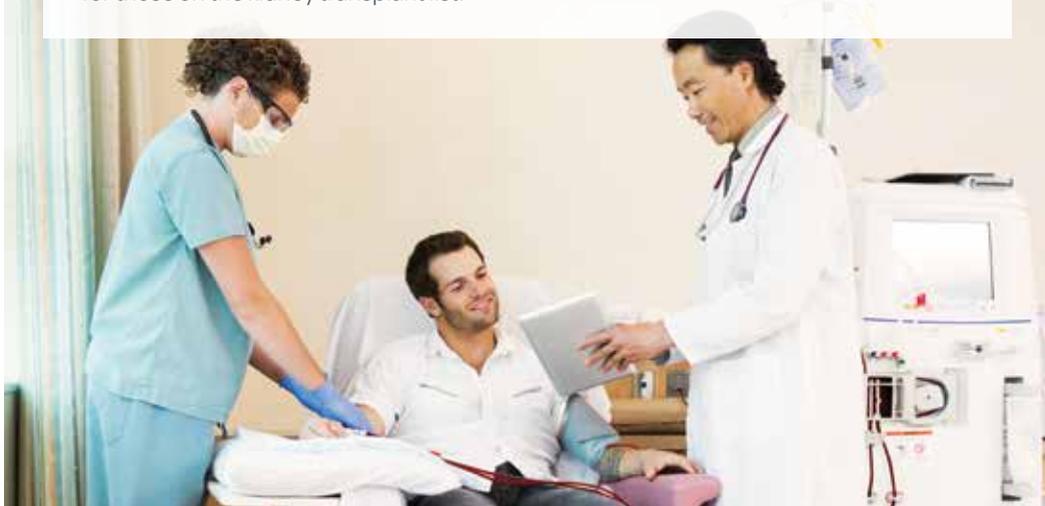
For all other parts of the world, unless other factors put you at risk, you / your child will usually be reactivated on the kidney transplant waiting list as soon as virology tests are found to be negative.

## Are there any risks to travelling abroad while on dialysis?

There is a risk of acquiring blood-borne viruses such as hepatitis B, hepatitis C and, to a lesser extent, HIV whilst travelling abroad. The Department of Health suggests that the risk is low in:

- Northern Europe
- The United States
- Canada
- Australia
- New Zealand
- Japan

Your kidney team can check your hepatitis B immunity and arrange a vaccination if needed before you travel. Risks do not mean you cannot go to these places but you will need to find out what changes may need to be made to your dialysis on your return home. For example, you / your child may have to temporarily receive your haemodialysis in isolation or have a change of slot to be dialysed at the end of the day, as the kidney team carry out blood tests any infections. This is particularly important for those on the kidney transplant list.



## Can I fly if I am on dialysis?

**Yes, but it is important to plan flights around dialysis days.** Yes, but it is important to plan flights around dialysis days. You / your child 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 the session.

Make sure that you take enough medications with you to cover your stay, including EPO injections. If possible, take more medication than you need in case you get delayed. It is a good idea to carry your repeat prescription with you with details of your prescribed medications.

You should put your medications in your hand luggage and check your travel provider's policies on carrying/declaring medications and medical equipment such as a peritoneal dialysis machine. You may need a letter from your hospital to support this.

If you are flying within the EEA you will not be charged for carrying your dialysis equipment with you. If you are flying outside the EEA you will need to check in advance as airlines have different policies and they may charge you.

### **The following services should be available at all European airports:**

- Facilities to summon assistance at designated arrival points, such as at terminal entrances, at transport interchanges and in car parks
- Assistance to reach check-in
- Help with registration at check-in
- Assistance with moving through the airport, including to toilets if required
- Help with getting on and off the plane
- Free carriage of medical equipment and up to two items of mobility equipment
- A briefing for you and any escort or companion on emergency procedures and the layout of the cabin
- Help with stowing and retrieving baggage on the plane
- Assistance with moving to the toilet on the plane (some planes will have an on-board wheelchair)
- Someone to meet you off the plane and help you reach connecting flights or get to the next part of your journey

It is important not to board the plane if you or your child has symptoms related to too much water in your body as you could get worse once you are airborne and treatment would be difficult.

### **Such symptoms include:**

- Shortness of breath
- Cough with white sputum
- Marked swelling of the lower limbs.

## Can I go on a cruise if I am dialysis?

**Yes, subject to approval from your kidney team.** You may have to pay some of the costs of treatment yourself. If the cruise (river or ocean going) is within the boundaries of an EEA country, or a country with which the UK has a reciprocal agreement, then you should be reimbursed some of the costs of treatment by the NHS. You will need to get approval from your kidney team before you go so that the costs can be refunded to you on your return. Make sure you keep receipts and proof of payment.

For cruises outside of the EEA, you will have to pay for the total cost of dialysis yourself.

## What if I am on peritoneal dialysis?

**If you / your child have peritoneal dialysis, the fluid can be delivered to your destination.** Speak to your unit or the company that supplies your fluid to arrange this. You will need to confirm with your destination that they are happy to receive a clinical supplies delivery on your behalf. This should be arranged to arrive 2 days before you arrive at your destination.

Remember to pack a plug adapter for the right voltage at your destination so that you can plug in your machine.

Make sure you check with your kidney unit regarding insurance cover for a portable machine. Travel insurance companies often don't insure dialysis machines but these should be covered under your household contents insurance. Make sure you check this well in advance of travel.

## What about diet?

**An important part of many holidays is enjoying food and drink that you don't usually have at home.** If you / your child have been advised to follow certain dietary guidance, ask to speak to your kidney dietitian about what you may need to consider while away.

It's also recommended that you follow standard health advice when it comes to food and drink in countries where sanitation is poor. This includes:

- Use bottled water for drinking and brushing your teeth
- Avoid ice in drinks
- Avoid any food that will have been washed in tap water such as salads or uncooked fruit and vegetables

## What about travel within the UK?

People receiving Haemodialysis can dialyse at most units within the UK and you should be able to book accommodation at locations near to these. Kidney Care UK's Dialysis Freedom scheme provides access to dialysis away from home via the UK Dialysis Swap Scheme. The idea is to use the space created when patients go abroad, along with any existing holiday dialysis places. If you would like to book a UK holiday and are looking for help in finding a dialysis slot at a nearby hospital go to [www.dialysisfreedom.co.uk](http://www.dialysisfreedom.co.uk)

Unfortunately dialysis capacity at some locations is scarce and you may have to consider dialysis further away from your initial destination. It is therefore important to book as far in advance as possible. If the unit you will be using is some distance from where you are staying, you will need to check that there is transport available for the times that you will be dialysing there.

If you meet the eligibility criteria for having transport at your home unit, you may be able to receive this transport free of charge but this is in England only. Your kidney team can help with finding out about transport arrangements before you book your holiday.

## Where can I find out more information?

- NHS Choices – Cover your healthcare abroad:  
[www.nhs.uk/nhsengland/Healthcareabroad/pages/Healthcareabroad.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/nhsengland/Healthcareabroad/pages/Healthcareabroad.aspx)
- Dialysis Freedom: [www.dialysisfreedom.co.uk](http://www.dialysisfreedom.co.uk)



 [www.kidneycareuk.org](http://www.kidneycareuk.org)

 01420 541424

 Kidney Care UK,  
3 The Windmills,  
St Mary's Close,  
Turk Street,  
Alton GU34 1EF

 [kidneycareuk.org](https://www.facebook.com/kidneycareuk)

 [@kidneycareuk](https://twitter.com/kidneycareuk)



 [www.renal.org](http://www.renal.org)

 0117 4148152

 The Renal Association  
C/O UK Renal Registry,  
Learning and Research Building,  
Southmead Hospital,  
Bristol BS10 5NB

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