

Dialysis away from base (holiday dialysis)

This information is for Guy's and St Thomas' kidney patients who wish to have dialysis treatment away from their base unit or any other dialysis centre managed by Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust. If you have any questions, please speak to a doctor or nurse caring for you.

How can you arrange dialysis elsewhere?

The first step is to check with your kidney care team to make sure that you are fit enough to travel. You should do this about 2 months before you plan to travel.

Next, choose your destination and find out where the nearest dialysis unit is located. Nursing staff in your dialysis unit can advise you how to do this, but you will need to make contact with your unit of choice to see if they can accommodate you for dialysis on your preferred dates. Not all NHS dialysis units can accommodate extra patients for holidays, so you may need to try more than one centre.

When you have confirmed that your chosen unit can accommodate you, please ask them to contact the Guy's and St Thomas' dialysis unit so that we can forward them an infection control checklist. Once this has been completed we will forward them your clinical information (we will get your permission to do this). We advise you to check with your holiday dialysis unit to make sure that they have received your clinical information. You should also ask them to confirm your dialysis appointment days/times. You can ask for a named contact person at the unit, and if you are funding the treatment yourself, confirm the costs.

Dialysis in the UK

- At an NHS dialysis unit you may have an unlimited number of holiday dialysis sessions each year free of charge, providing the unit can accommodate you. You will, of course, need to pay for your own travel, insurance and accommodation costs.
- In a private (non-NHS) unit in the UK, you may have an unlimited number of dialysis sessions free of charge as long **as the private unit has an agreement with NHS England**. You should check this with the private unit before booking treatment with them.
- If you dialyse in a private unit that **does not have an agreement with the NHS** you will have to pay for the full cost of your dialysis treatment(s).
- If you usually have transport provided to and from dialysis at your Guy's and St Thomas' unit, you may be able to receive transport free of charge at your holiday unit, but this only applies in England. You will need to check with the holiday unit that there is transport available and ask them to book it for you.

Dialysis outside of the UK, but in the European economic area (EEA)

1. Dialysis in a state-provided unit:

The European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) allows you to access state-provided healthcare in all EEA countries.

Although the UK has left the Europe Union, the EHIC can still be used to access dialysis or other specialist treatments within the EU. The EHIC is being replaced by the GHIC (Global Health Insurance Card), but your existing EHIC will remain valid until its expiry date.

You can apply for a **free** GHIC online, **web:** www.ghic.org.uk. Please note that the GHIC is **not** an alternative to travel insurance. We advise you to discuss your insurance requirements with your insurance company and make sure your policy covers pre-existing conditions.

Please make sure when arranging dialysis abroad that the unit you choose will accept the EHIC/GHIC to cover the full cost of your dialysis treatment. You will have to meet any extra costs, such as administration, yourself. Some countries, such as France and Switzerland, ask for a contribution towards the costs of your dialysis. This is often referred to as a co-payment. Please always check if a co-payment is required as you will have to pay this cost.

More information can be found here,

web: www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/Healthcareabroad/Pages/Healthcareabroad.aspx or call the Overseas Healthcare Team, **tel:** 0191 218 1999.

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3. Dialysis in a private unit:

If the dialysis unit you will be using within the EEA is not a state-provided unit, you will need to pay for the dialysis treatment sessions yourself. If this is the case, you will need to apply before you go away for a partial or full refund from the Cross Border team of NHS England under a European directive known as Article 56,

web: www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/Healthcareabroad/plannedtreatment/Pages/Article56.aspx

You can expect to be refunded up to the cost of what the NHS pays for dialysis, but you will only receive this refund after you have been away. Applying before you go away will help you to understand the amount to be refunded, and it is likely that the amount will not cover the cost of the holiday dialysis. **This will mean that you will need to pay the excess costs, because the cost of the dialysis will probably be more than what the NHS pays for dialysis.** Make sure you keep all your original receipts and proofs of payment as you will need them when you come back in order to receive the refund.

Dialysis outside of the EEA

If you wish to travel to a non-EEA country, you will need to check if the country has a reciprocal healthcare agreement (they treat people from the UK, we treat people from their country) with the UK. This information is available on the NHS website,

web: www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/Healthcareabroad. If they do not have a reciprocal healthcare agreement, you will have to pay for the entire cost of your treatment(s) in that country.

Dialysis outside of EEA or reciprocal countries may not be regulated by a country's health policy, and you will need to make checks about the quality of the service. Before you book your dialysis you need to check, for example, the type of dialysis service provided, the number of doctor and nursing staff, machines, back-up machines provided, and the experience of the staff.

For some destinations it may be a good idea to take some of the disposable dialysis equipment with you. Please discuss this with us before you book your treatment.

Dialysis on a cruise ship

If the cruise is within the boundaries of, or the majority of the cruise ports of call are to an EEA country or a country with which the UK has a reciprocal agreement, then you can be reimbursed (paid back) up to the cost of an NHS dialysis treatment.

Before you go on your cruise you will need to get approval from your Guy's and St Thomas' kidney team for the reimbursement, and we will refund you on your return. This will help you to know how much of the cost of the dialysis on the cruise will be reimbursed to you as it may not cover the total cost of the dialysis. Make sure you keep all your original receipts and proofs of payment as you will need them when you come back in order to receive the refund.

Dialysis on a cruise ship is classed as being outside of EEA or a reciprocal country and so may not be regulated by a country's health policy. You will need to make checks about the quality of the service before you book your dialysis on a cruise ship. For example, the type of dialysis service provided, number of staff, machines, provision of back-up machines, and the experience of the staff in providing dialysis.

You must have adequate travel insurance to cover you while on a cruise ship, as NHS England will not pay for any other health care costs aside from the dialysis.

If the cruise is taking place **outside** of the EEA or to a country(s) with which the UK **does not** have a reciprocal agreement, you will have to pay for the total cost of dialysis.

Reducing infection risks

Although we will carry out checks on the holiday dialysis unit by asking them to fill in an infection control checklist, it is not possible to give complete assurance about the service and level of risk, particularly for units outside the UK.

Please ask for advice from your doctor about any vaccinations or medications you may need when travelling. It is a good idea to do this at least 6 weeks before you plan to travel.

Blood-borne infections, such as hepatitis B and hepatitis C, are more common in other parts of the world than in the UK. As a dialysis patient, you are more vulnerable to these infections, which can be life-threatening. More advice is available at **web:** www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk

If you are planning to travel to a country where blood-borne infections are common, for example, South East Asia, Africa and the Middle East, we can supply you with enough disposable equipment for 2 weeks of dialysis treatment, including dialysers and, if appropriate, blood lines for the dialysis machine. Please discuss your requirements with the nurse in charge of your dialysis unit.

If you have been to a country where blood-borne infections are common, as a precaution you will be required to dialyse in isolation for 2 months after your return. This is to safeguard other patients from the risk of infection. Your hepatitis B and C levels will be monitored every 2 weeks and if they are negative after 2 months, you can return to being dialysed as normal. This is Department of Health recommended practice.

Do you need travel insurance?

Yes. It is very important that you have comprehensive travel and medical insurance to cover you while you are away from the UK. The potential charges that you would have to pay if you need any extra medical treatment while away could easily run into thousands of pounds. It is important to check the small print for any exclusions that may apply for healthcare abroad that is covered under the insurance policy.

Will you be suspended from the transplant list if you go on holiday?

You may be suspended from the transplant list if you travel to a location outside the UK where getting back quickly enough will be a problem. If you have been to a country where blood-borne infections are common you will be suspended from the transplant list for 2 months as the transplant medications can be dangerous for people with recently acquired infections. If your hepatitis B and C levels are negative 2 months after returning to the UK, you will be re-activated on the transplant list.

What should you do about medications?

It is a good idea to take enough medications with you to cover your entire holiday period, and carry them in your hand luggage.

Will your current dialysis appointment day and time still be available for you when you return?

This will depend upon how long you are away for. Generally if you are away for over 1 month it is unlikely that we can save your 'slot'.

Please also note that if you are away for over 1 month we will have to hand over responsibility for your care to the clinical team at your holiday destination until you return.

Useful sources of information

NHS Website

For information about healthcare abroad.

web: www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/Healthcareabroad/Pages/Healthcareabroad.aspx

National Kidney Federation

For an introduction to holidays for kidney patients.

web: www.kidney.org.uk/help/holidays/holidays-tips/ **tel:** 0845 601 02 09

Kidney Care UK

For information about holiday grants. **web:** www.kidneycareuk.org **tel:** 01420 541424

Dialysis Freedom

For information about UK dialysis holidays. **web:** www.dialysisfreedom.co.uk

tel: 01509 808 668

Global Dialysis

For information about dialysis holidays abroad, **web:** www.globaldialysis.com

If you do not have access to the internet at home or at your local library please let us know.

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A list of sources is available on request