

Travel safe

*Reducing the risk of getting
a blood-borne infection
when you're abroad*



Keeping safe abroad

Blood-borne infections such as HIV, hepatitis B and hepatitis C are more common in many parts of the world than in the UK. Some countries do not have the same standards of medical and dental hygiene that we have here. Tattooing and body piercing studios abroad may also not operate to the same hygiene standards as in this country.

This leaflet provides information and advice to help you avoid the risks of blood-borne infection abroad.

HIV, hepatitis B and hepatitis C

HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus), the virus that causes AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome), hepatitis B and hepatitis C, which can cause serious liver damage (cirrhosis and primary liver cancer), are all blood-borne viruses.

Avoiding the risks of infection

HIV, hepatitis B and hepatitis C can be passed on through unprotected sex with an infected person or by contact with infected blood.

Unprotected sex

If you have sex with someone other than your usual partner, always use a condom. Condoms, used properly, protect against HIV, hepatitis B, hepatitis C and other sexually transmitted infections.

It is a good idea to take a supply of condoms with you when you travel, if you think you may need them. Those bought in the UK should have the British Standard Kitemark or the European Standard CE mark.

Medical or dental treatment

If you do need medical or dental treatment while you are abroad:

- make sure that any medical equipment is sterilised or is taken from a sealed pack;
- only have medical treatment if it is essential – doctors and dentists in some countries may give injections or blood transfusions when they are not really needed. So make sure that a transfusion or injection is absolutely essential if offered;

- if you need a blood transfusion, ask for screened blood;
- make sure that your travelling companions have read this leaflet or are, at least, aware of your wishes.

Tattoo, ear or body piercing

If you have a tattoo, ear or body piercing, semi-permanent make-up, acupuncture or electrolysis on holiday, try and make sure that the needles are sterile or are taken from a sealed pack.

Sharing needles

Don't inject non-prescribed drugs. If you do inject, never share any equipment for drug preparation or injection.

Carrying a medical kit

Depending on where you are going, you may want to take an emergency medical travel kit. The kits are widely available, including from pharmacies and specialist travel clinics.

The kits contain sterilised medical equipment, such as syringes and needles. If you are going to a remote area, you could also think about taking an intravenous giving set and blood substitute solution. Your doctor will be able to advise you.



Checklist – what to do before you go

- ✓ Before your trip, try to check out the potential health risks for the country you're going to. These will vary depending on what parts of the country you'll be visiting, the time of year, and what kind of accommodation you'll be staying in.
- ✓ Talk to your doctor about immunisations, antimalarial treatment and avoiding food-borne and water borne infections.
- ✓ There is a vaccine to protect against hepatitis B. Your doctor will be able to advise whether you need it.
- ✓ Consider having a dental check up if you have not had one recently. This will avoid the need for treatment abroad.

The National Travel Health Network and Centre

www.nathnac.org

Department of Health – health advice for travellers and information on European Health Insurance Cards

www.dh.gov.uk/travellers

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

www.fco.gov.uk/travel

www.gogapyear.com

