

Health Advice for Working Overseas



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Planning to work abroad:

Many employees and students regularly travel abroad on University business. Ill health can disrupt plans and cause considerable distress. It is essential that a risk assessment has been made prior to departure and you ensure that you know the health risks you will be facing and the accessibility to reliable healthcare facilities. The majority of health problems in travellers are avoidable if time is taken to prepare for the trip. As prevention is important, this leaflet aims to advise on specific measures that can be taken to prevent ill health abroad.

For further guidance: [Safety Services and Occupational Health Service](#) and [University Health and Wellbeing](#) web sites

Immunisations:

Travellers should reduce their risk of illnesses by ensuring their immunisation status is current and relevant to the country being visited. Not all immunisations offer 100% protection, and avoidance of contaminated food and water and insect bites are crucial. You should consult your GP or Travel Clinic at least 8 weeks before departure for advice on immunisations.

Malaria:

It is a widespread disease in tropical and subtropical countries which is serious and can be fatal. When planning to travel to or through a country with a malaria risk, contact your GP/Travel Clinic for advice. Ensure all prevention methods are adopted: bite avoidance, anti-malarial medication compliance and ensure prompt medical attention if symptoms develop. You are advised to carry a course of emergency malaria treatment if travelling to high risk areas or if remote from reliable healthcare facilities.

Pre-existing Health Problems:

Travellers with health problems which need regular/intermittent treatment should take an adequate supply on the trip and for possible delays. Access to medication/treatment may not always be possible in the country that is being visited. Seek medical advice from your GP prior to departure. It is advisable to inform a fellow traveller of your health conditions in case of emergency.

Accidents:

Accidents abroad are an underestimated hazard. More travellers die from accidents than any other cause, and most accidents are avoidable. Do not expose yourself to avoidable risks that you would not expose yourself to in your normal environment e.g. riding without crash helmet, not wearing a seat belt, swimming or driving while under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Be vigilant about your personal safety.

Travel Insurance:

The University has in place an insurance policy which provides cover to staff and students travelling on University business. Costs of health care abroad however can be very high and you can make sure all your requirements are covered by accessing the University's policy. It is essential to complete a [Travel Insurance Notification Form](#) at least **5 days before travel**. Travellers must receive and carry with them the email with the details of travel insurance. <http://mis.strath.ac.uk/Finance/university/insurance/contents>.

All British residents are entitled to free emergency treatment in all European Community countries on production of a valid **European Health Insurance Card (EHIC)**. www.ehic.org.uk

Travellers Diarrhoea:

This is the most common illness to affect travellers. It usually settles down after 2-3 days, but can cause significant illness, and can easily spread from one person to another. Prevention is most important. To assist you, follow these simple guidelines:

- Don't drink tap water or use it to brush your teeth in countries with poor sanitation. Use filtered, treated or bottled water instead.
- Wash hands immediately after using the toilet and before preparing/eating food.
- All food should be treated as suspect unless you know it has been freshly and thoroughly cooked and served piping hot.



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- Avoid salads, shellfish, unpasteurised dairy products, warm buffet foods, ice and foods left exposed to flies.
- Dehydration is a risk, fluids should be increased to satisfy thirst, and produce normal straw coloured urine, if urine is darker than normal it indicates dehydration and fluids should be increased.
- Sealed bottled water, soft drinks, and drinks made with boiled water are usually safe. Milk and dairy products should be avoided.

HIV/Hepatitis B/ Hepatitis C:

These blood borne diseases spread by:

- Receiving un-screened blood or blood products
- Sharing/re-using un-sterile hypodermic needles
- Engaging in unsafe sexual behaviour.

It is advisable to:

- Take a **Medical Emergency Kit**, available from the Occupational Health Service.
- Purchase a dental kit from a chemist.
- Do not have tattoos or ear piercing carried out abroad.
- If you anticipate having sex abroad, pack a supply of condoms.
- Intravenous infusion of blood or other fluid should only be administered if it has been screened or if it is absolutely essential to preserve life.

Rabies

Do not touch any animals. If you are bitten, scratched, or licked over any skin lesion wash the wound with soap or detergent and if possible, apply alcohol. Seek medical attention immediately. Rabies risk areas are Africa, Asia and South America. Vaccination is advised prior to travel for high risk areas.

Sunburn:

Avoid sunburn. Over exposure can cause dehydration, heat stroke, blisters, long term damage to the skin and cancer.

- Stay out of the sun between the hours of 11am – 3pm.
- Protect exposed skin with sunscreen lotion SPF 15 or higher, re-apply regularly and cover up, with lightweight natural fibre clothing, sunglasses and a wide brimmed hat.
- Increase fluid intake and do not drink alcohol during the day.

Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT):

The risk of developing DVT may be increased and be associated with any form of long distance travel when passengers are immobile for long periods in the seated position.

Symptoms of DVT include pain and swelling in the legs below the area where a blood clot is forming, as well as redness and warmth of the skin. It is possible, however, to have DVT without any symptoms.

To prevent DVT, exercise your calf and leg muscles regularly, drink plenty of water, do not drink too much alcohol and do not take sleeping tablets.

Those in a high-risk category should seek medical advice before flying. In the days after a flight if you have extreme swelling or pain in your legs, chest pain or shortness of breath, contact a doctor immediately.

http://www.strath.ac.uk/media/ps/safetyservices/campusonly/guidancenotes/media_33024_en.pdf

First Aid kits:

Travellers should consider taking the following items:

- Pain relief tablets e.g. Paracetamol

- Calamine lotion or Hydrocortisone cream 1% for stings and burns
- Plasters, cotton wool and antiseptic wipes
- Travel sickness tablets.
- Indigestion remedies
- Antiseptic hand gels
- Condoms (if likely to need)
- Sunscreen lotion SPF 15+
- Cold sore treatment if susceptible
- Water sterilising tablets / iodine

For those working in areas where reliable medical care is not available **Emergency Medication Kits** can be ordered from the Occupational Health Service in advance of travel. These contain a range of medication that may not be readily available abroad to treat common illnesses. For further guidance access Health and Wellbeing web pages

Support for Staff while working overseas:

Working overseas can be a stressful experience; we acknowledge that situations which might usually be coped with the support of friends and family may seem altogether more daunting when you are removed from your usual environment. Ensure you have emergency contact numbers before travelling and leave contacts with your University department before departure.

Further support from Employee Counselling Service

Tel: 0800 435 768 (calls will be charged at international rate) or MIND <http://www.mind.org.uk/>; Samaritans <http://www.samaritans.org/>

Useful Contact Information

Fit for Travel: <http://www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk>

Foreign and Commonwealth Office:
<http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/>

Health Protection Scotland:
<http://www.hps.scot.nhs.uk/travel/index.aspx>