

Medical Preparation When Traveling



Guarding your health away from home is important, so we've put together a list of things to do to minimize risks to your health. Many of these recommendations are provided by GeoBlue's international community of physicians. If you have a medical condition, particularly one that requires regular treatment or medication, please contact us prior to your departure. We'll provide the resources you need to manage your health while you're away.

Learn about the specific health risks in your destination and obtain vaccinations from a qualified physician

- Be aware of the risks associated with your host country. Is the water safe to drink? Do malaria and yellow fever occur?
- Remember that some vaccines require time to take effect or need multiple injections over a few months prior to your departure
- Confirm that your standard vaccines (i.e., diphtheria/tetanus) are up to date

Visit your primary care physician and dentist and obtain all medical histories/records

- Ask whether any routine tests can be performed prior to departure
- Bring copies of your medical records detailing medical history, current medical conditions and treatment plans
- Obtain duplicates of important test results and bring two copies of everything
- Consider storing your personal medical history on the web via an online service

Select an English-speaking, qualified physician in your destination

- Review as much physician information as possible, including medical education, board certification status, special interests
- Make sure the physician is on the medical staff at a major hospital
- If you are being treated for a chronic or serious medical condition, consider arranging an appointment to review your condition and treatment plan in advance
- Ask how the doctor can be reached after hours
- If your current program does not allow cashless access to doctors, bring cash on the first visit, and be sure to obtain a receipt to submit with your insurance claim for reimbursement upon return to the U.S.

Check availability and translate the names of medications you use

- Check to see if your medications are available in your host country and translate the names of the medications you use
- Learn the generic names, which may be familiar to physicians and pharmacists if the brand name is not
- If you require injections (i.e. allergy, insulin), get a letter from your doctor describing the shot's components and administration instructions

Pack medications, a first aid kit and a reference book about common medical conditions and their treatment

- Carry an adequate supply of your medications (at least three months) in case there is a delay in finding an equivalent supply
- Bring extra prescription glasses and contacts and their prescriptions
- Bring an extensive first aid kit that includes: bandages, splints, tweezers, over-the-counter medications, vitamins, analgesics, decongestants, antacids, contact lens solution, sunscreen, bug repellent, contraceptives
- If you have severe allergies, bring injectable epinephrine for unexpected allergic reactions
- Leave all medications in their original bottles and include a physician's letter of explanation in your medical records

Master the local medical lingo

- Learn or have available key medical phrases
- Be familiar with the medical, not simply the lay term for your key medical conditions

Understand the healthcare system in the destination country

- Be knowledgeable about your foreign health care system. What hospitals are preferred for routine care, trauma or emergencies? What are the differences between private and public hospitals regarding quality of care and availability of services?
- Learn not only the emergency telephone numbers for ambulance, fire, poison control and other such resources, but also whether these numbers, and the ambulance system are reliable
- Have a basic knowledge about pharmacies – hours of operation, product reliability and staff trustworthiness
- Prescriptions you receive in your destination may not be labeled with directions. Take care to make sure you are clear on the instructions

Develop a contingency plan for serious illness

- Know how to get out of the country as quickly as possible in case a better medical facility is needed
- Have an evacuation plan, which can be shared with friends and family, both at home and abroad. What is the preferred hospital in your home country for transfer? How can a transfer be arranged? What host country facility or regional referral center is preferred if transport home is medically unwise?

Prepare for the psychological aspects of life abroad, including culture adjustment and culture shock

- Quickly gain an appreciation for your host country's language, culture, and history while retaining a positive outlook
- To deal with culture shock, hone your coping skills. (i.e., knowing and liking yourself, having a sense of competence, having friends and continuing activities you enjoy)
- Keep in touch with friends and family at home
- Exercise to enjoy improved mood and better sleep
- Because an overseas experience can worsen or even precipitate mental illness, do not hesitate to seek the advice of a mental health professional or primary care physician

Recognize that despite significant variations in the delivery of healthcare services, the U.S. way is not the only effective way

- Many travelers abroad are pleasantly surprised by their experiences with foreign physicians
- It is common in some countries for medical doctors to make house calls and answer their own telephones

Evaluate your health insurance benefits**Does your plan...**

- Provide emergency evacuation and international medical assistance services?
- Cover the cost of emergency evacuation?
- Arrange direct payment to overseas hospitals that may otherwise require payment up-front?
- Waive any pre-certification rules for medical procedures performed abroad?
- Cover services for chronic and other non-emergency conditions while abroad?
- Apply co-payments and deductibles for care abroad?
- Cover prescription drugs purchased abroad?
- Cover psychological counseling abroad?

Questions?**Contact GeoBlue Customer Service**

Toll free within the U.S.: 1.844.268.2686

Outside the U.S.: +1.610.263.2847

customerservice@geo-blue.com