

Think Covid

The coronavirus pandemic has had a huge impact on international travel. It is important to understand the Covid regulations for each country to be visited and for re-entering the UK. As these regulations change frequently, you must check the current advice at www.gov.uk/guidance/travel-abroad-from-england-during-coronavirus-covid-19

Avoid travelling to countries where there is a high incidence of Covid-19. For current levels of infection, see <https://covid19.who.int/>.

Ensure that you are fully vaccinated against Covid-19 (unless your medical team has advised otherwise). Many people with an immunodeficiency have a limited response to the vaccine but do achieve some benefit.

Be aware of social distancing. Try to avoid crowded places, such as markets and nightclubs. Stay outdoors or in well-ventilated locations and take extra care on public transport. Wear a mask where possible and wash or sanitise your hands frequently.

If you become ill overseas and suspect you may have Covid-19, seek medical advice urgently. It should be possible to arrange a Covid test. If the test result is positive, contact your medical team at home and ask for advice. If you require hospital treatment overseas, your usual medical team may be able to liaise with the doctors who are treating you.

When abroad

Follow the usual measures to stay free from infection, and remember to wash your hands frequently. Visit www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk/home for travel advice by country. Here are our tips:

Food: Be careful with buffets abroad, be it salad or other foods. These foods have generally been uncovered for a certain amount of time and therefore can contain bacteria, especially meat that has been under a heat lamp. Unpeeled fruit and vegetables, salads, raw shellfish, ice-cream and ice cubes, underdone meat and uncooked, cold or reheated foods may be contaminated. Avoid buying food and ice-cream from street sellers.

Water: Tap water abroad may cause illness due to bacteria and different mineral content. Therefore, it is advisable to drink only bottled water when abroad. Make sure that you buy bottled water from a reputable seller, and check the seal has not been broken. If you are not sure, carbonated water is less likely to be bottled tap water, and its alkaline pH helps kill bacteria.

Swimming: Avoid swimming in polluted seas or lakes. This can be a cause of dysentery and respiratory infections, as well as ear, nose and throat infections. Enquire how clean the sea and lakes are. Swimming pool water may also pose a health risk, so ask how often it is monitored for bugs and cleaned.

About Immunodeficiency UK

Immunodeficiency UK is a national organisation supporting individuals and families affected by primary and secondary immunodeficiency.

We are the UK national member of the International Patient Organisation for Primary Immunodeficiencies (IPOPI), an association of national patient organisations dedicated to improving awareness, access to early diagnosis and optimal treatments for patients worldwide.

Our website at www.immunodeficiencyuk.org provides useful information on a range of conditions and topics, and explains the work we do to ensure the voice of primary and secondary immunodeficiency patients is heard.

If we can be of any help, please contact us at hello@immunodeficiencyuk.org or on **0800 987 8986**, where you can leave a message. Visit www.immunodeficiencyuk.org for further information.

Support us by becoming a member of Immunodeficiency UK. It's free and easy to do via our website at www.immunodeficiencyuk.org/register/ or just get in touch with us. Members get monthly newsletters.

Immunodeficiency UK is reliant on voluntary donations. To make a donation, please go to www.immunodeficiencyuk.org/donate

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Supporting families affected by primary and secondary immunodeficiency

Going on holiday

Going on holiday

This leaflet provides information to help you plan your holiday when you are affected by a primary or secondary immunodeficiency. It gives tips for making your holiday memorable for all the right reasons.

You may also find our leaflet **Insurance matters** useful, because it lists travel insurance companies that are willing to insure those affected by an immunodeficiency.

www.immunodeficiencyuk.org
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Supporting families affected by primary and secondary immunodeficiency

Planning ahead

Just because you have an immunodeficiency, it doesn't mean you should stop doing what you enjoy, and that includes going on holiday. Planning ahead will help to ensure that everything goes smoothly and you can enjoy your holiday to the full.

The essentials: It has become harder to make travel plans since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic but, if possible, talk to your immunology/medical health team at least three months before you travel. Tell them where you are going and for how long. They will advise you on what vaccinations you might need, anti-malarial medicines, the medication you should take with you to keep you healthy and how to access emergency treatment while you are away. If you are on immunoglobulin therapy, they may also suggest you reschedule any infusions, to make sure you are in good health for travelling.

Remember: Your medical team will know which vaccinations you might need. Take their advice, otherwise you could end up paying for vaccinations that are not necessary owing to your particular immunodeficiency and its treatment.

Many patients cannot receive 'live' vaccines, so be sure to check what is required before you book your holiday. Make sure your travel clinic is aware of your condition and that the 'killed' version of any vaccine must be used.

Primary and some secondary immunodeficiency patients must never be given the yellow fever vaccine as it is not available as a killed vaccine.

If, because of your immunodeficiency, you cannot have a recommended vaccination for the country you are visiting, carry a letter from your doctor explaining why, otherwise border control may not let you in.

Carry a letter explaining your condition: Ask your doctor to write you a letter explaining your condition, which you can present to any medical staff you may need to see while on holiday. Ensure this letter also contains clear information on all medication you will have with you, as well as all medical equipment you need to carry if you are on immunoglobulin therapy. This is essential for airport security and any medical problems you have while abroad. Have the letter in English and consider getting it translated into the language of the country you are visiting.

Think medicines: It is recommended that you take a course of medicines, such as antibiotics, with you. Speak to your doctor and get your prescription in plenty of time. If you take a liquid oral suspension, make sure you discuss this with the pharmacist and explain that you do not want the prescription made up. You will need to ensure a clean supply of sterile water if and when you do need to make up your medicine while away.

Pack the amount of medication you will need for your holiday, plus some extra in case you are delayed when travelling home. Carry your medicines, such as immunoglobulin and antibiotics, in your hand luggage just in case your hold baggage is lost. Keep everything in its original packaging with the prescription labels visible for airport security. Also take an extra copy of your prescription with you as it will be invaluable if you lose your medication or end up in a hospital.

Remember, some medicines, such as benzodiazepines, strong painkillers, such as diamorphine, and some medicines that contain hormones, such as anabolic steroids, come under 'controlled medicines' laws. A personal licence is needed to take these medicines abroad. You must apply for this licence at least 10 working days before you travel, and your GP will need to provide a letter supporting your application.

For more information on taking controlled medicines abroad, visit www.nhs.uk/chq/Pages/2593.aspx

Pack a first aid kit: Take a small first aid kit with you that contains antiseptic cream and wipes, water sterilisation tablets, insect repellent and a packet of plasters and dressings. In some countries there is a lack of sterile equipment. It is worth taking your own supply of sterile needles and syringes for use by doctors in an emergency. Ask your health team for their advice.

Travelling to Europe: The previous European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) has been largely replaced by the Global Health Insurance Card (GHIC). If you have a current EHIC, then it will remain valid until the expiry date on the card. For further details and to apply for a free GHIC, visit www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/healthcare-abroad/apply-for-a-free-uk-global-health-insurance-card-ghic/ Avoid other web sites as they will charge you. You need a GHIC/EHIC in addition to insurance to receive free emergency care in EU countries.

Insurance: NEVER travel without the appropriate travel insurance, and take the insurance policy with you. Ensure your insurance is up to date and that there have been no changes to your condition to now make your policy void.

Please see our leaflet on insurance for companies that cover people with immunodeficiency.

Contact details: Carry on you the details of your doctors and nurses at home, as well as the 24-hour emergency helpline for your travel insurance company. Visit www.dh.gov.uk/travellers for more information.

Do some research: Establish where a main hospital is located in relation to where you are staying. Immunodeficiency UK can help in providing details of a specialist in the country you are visiting in case of an emergency.

Longer breaks: If you are planning a break longer than three weeks, then you may need to arrange infusions and medicines in the country you are staying in. Talk to your immunology team about this.

