

Queen Elizabeth Hospital Birmingham



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NHS Foundation Trust



Information on the risks of having haemodialysis abroad

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www.uhb.nhs.uk/patient-information-leaflets.htm

Introduction

This leaflet gives you information about some of the risks when dialysing abroad. It goes through some top tips when planning to dialyse abroad and explains the special checks and arrangements that may be taken when returning to your local dialysis unit.

Tips when considering going abroad

- Find out whom you need to talk to about dialysing abroad in your dialysis unit. Each dialysis unit has a link nurse who can provide more information about dialysing abroad
- Discuss the risks with your kidney doctor or dialysis nurse especially if you are visiting a high risk country (see 'what are the risks of dialysing abroad')
- Plan your trip in advance giving as much notice as possible to your dialysis unit, ideally 2-3 months. Some countries ask you to have special tests before you go (e.g chest x-ray) so it's important to plan well ahead
- Check with the nurses whether you are protected against hepatitis B; you may need a hepatitis B vaccine booster before you travel
- Ensure your dialysis arrangements are in place before you book and pay for your trip. The National Kidney Federation has a specific holiday section to help you find units, Global Dialysis provides independent information about dialysis units, holiday dialysis and dialysis travel and Dialysis Freedom also provide help with unit booking (see details at the end of the leaflet)
- Check your entitlement to free dialysis care abroad and whether there are any treatment costs to you (see the Department of Health website at www.dh.gov.uk/travellers). Your entitlement to medical care at reduced costs will be based on where you are travelling to. Further information can be obtained found on www.ehic.org.uk. Please note there may be different arrangements for cruise holidays even if they are within the European Union

- Ensure you take out the necessary travel insurance. It can be more difficult to get travel insurance when you have a long-term condition, so it is a good idea to start looking for travel insurance before you book your trip. Some insurance companies may ask for a 'fit to travel' letter from your kidney doctor that says you are well enough to travel. Specialist insurance companies often cover a wider range of people with long-term conditions but can be expensive. It may be worth shopping around. A list of helpful insurance companies is available on the National Kidney Federation website.
- You may need to take a letter which lists all the medicines you'll be taking on the plane, especially if you're diabetic or taking erythropoietin (EPO)
- Find out from your local dialysis unit how the special checks and arrangements will affect you on your return to the UK
- Transportation to dialysis when you are away from your home base, is not generally included. Check with the holiday dialysis facility in advance
- During the time you are away from home, you will be suspended from the transplant list. Please make sure you let the transplant co-ordinators know your travel arrangements.
- If you are planning on travelling to a 'high risk' area please contact one of the satellite dialysis co-ordinators (see contact details at the end of the leaflet)

The National Kidney Federation has also produced tips on holidays for kidney patients on their website

www.kidney.org.uk

What are the risks of dialysing abroad?

When receiving treatment at some dialysis centres abroad, in areas defined as 'high risk', there is an increased risk of developing infections of the blood such as hepatitis B, hepatitis C and HIV. These infections can cause serious illness such as liver disease or AIDS and can make your dialysis and transplantation more difficult when you return to the UK.

Countries defined as 'high risk' are countries in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, South America and the Middle East. Countries in the Indian subcontinent (for example India, Pakistan, Bangladesh) are considered very high risk. These countries are high risk areas because:

- Hepatitis B, hepatitis C and HIV infections are much more common
- Buildings and equipment are not always of the same standard as the UK
- Infection prevention and control practices are not as strict as in the UK and the risk of infections passing from one person to another is higher

Countries considered to be low risk are Australia, Japan, Western Europe, North America (including Canada) and New Zealand.

When travelling abroad for haemodialysis please watch hygiene practices to check they meet the expected standard.

What special arrangements and monitoring will be needed if I have dialysed in a high risk country?

On returning to the UK from a high risk country you will have your blood tested for hepatitis B, hepatitis C and HIV on your first dialysis session. Also swabs will be taken for MRSA. It is important that you let your dialysis nurse or doctor know if you've been ill, had any blood transfusions, surgery or dental treatment whilst abroad and if any dialysis lines, dialysers or needles were shared between you and any other patients.

- Extra blood tests to check for infections in your blood. These tests will be taken every 2 weeks for at least 3 months
- You will use a dialysis machine that is for your use only and will dialyse in a single isolation room for at least 3 months. If there isn't a free isolation room at your local dialysis unit when you return you will need to dialyse at another unit for the 3 months
- This may mean that you will have to change your dialysis days or times if there is no slot available for an isolated machine for you in your current slot
- You will remain suspended from the transplant list for at least 3 months

After 3 months one of the kidney doctors will look at your blood results again. If the blood results show you are free from infection you will be able to stop using your own dialysis machine and come out of the isolation room. The extra blood tests will be stopped and the doctors will decide when you can go back on the transplant list.

What if the results show that I have an infection?

If your blood tests show you have an infection you may need to continue to have your dialysis in a single isolation room. Your dialysis nurse and doctor will talk to you about the infection and how it affects your care, and you will be referred to a specialist doctor for treatment of the infection. You will not be able to go back onto the transplant list for some time whilst this infection is treated.

Having a kidney transplant abroad?

We strongly recommend that you do not go abroad to obtain a kidney as you are much more likely to die or suffer serious complications.

Common complications include:

- Death
- Life threatening infections
- Failure of the kidney transplant

If you are thinking about going abroad to obtain a kidney please talk to your kidney doctor and nurse.

Useful numbers

The satellite dialysis co-ordinator can be contacted between 08:00-16:00 Monday-Friday on either of the following numbers 0121 371 3002 or 0121 371 3013 or the on call renal team on 0121 627 2000.

Where can I find further sources of information?

Further information can be obtained from:

The National Kidney Federation www.kidney.org.uk

Global Dialysis website www.globaldialysis.com

Dialysis Freedom website www.dialysisfreedom.co.uk

Telephone number 01509 808668

For information about the European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) go onto their website www.ehic.org.uk

You can also contact them by telephone on 0300 3301350 or by post at the following address:

NHS Business Services Authority

European Health Insurance Card

EHIC applications

Bridge House

152 Pilgrim Street

Newcastle Upon Tyne

NE1 6SN

The NHS Choices website has more information about a wide range of health topics www.nhs.uk

References

Good practice guidelines for renal dialysis/transplantation units. Prevention and Control of Blood-borne Virus Infection, DH, September 2002.

The Health and Social Care Act 2008, Code of Practice for adult social care on the prevention and control of infections and related guidance, DH, December 2009.



The Trust provides free monthly health talks on a variety of medical conditions and treatments. For more information visit www.uhb.nhs.uk or call 0121 627 7803

Renal Unit
Queen Elizabeth Hospital Birmingham
Mindelsohn Way, Edgbaston
Birmingham, B15 2GW
Telephone: 0121 627 2000
