



Royal College
of Nursing



Delivering travel health services

RCN guidance for nursing staff



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The following guidance has been devised by the Royal College of Nursing Travel Health Forum in response to requests from nurses responsible for delivering a travel health service to patients.

As an RCN member, you can access further information about travel health at:
[www.rcn.org.uk/members/yourspecialty/newsletter-plus/forum/index.php?f=travel health](http://www.rcn.org.uk/members/yourspecialty/newsletter-plus/forum/index.php?f=travel%20health)

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Who's involved in providing travel health services?

Travel medicine in the UK is a “nurse-led” specialty and the vast proportion of *general* travel health services are provided by practice nurses. Nurses also provide a good deal of the more *specialist* services from a variety of other settings including occupational health, the armed forces, schools, the NHS as well as private travel clinics and general practice.

Why the need for guidance?

Many nurses are asked to take on the principal role of providing the travel health service, for example by GPs in a general practice, when they feel ill prepared to do so. In addition, the health requirements of travellers are becoming much more diverse and complex, so those providing travel health services need to be better informed and up to date with best practice. Considering that the vast majority of travellers who seek health advice are “well”, it is the health advisers’ responsibility and duty to do what they can to help maintain the health of travellers while abroad and at the very least, to *do no harm* when providing travel health care, immunisations, chemoprophylaxis and other preventive measures.

What's involved?

Travel health (or ‘travel medicine’ as it is also called) is a new, rapidly expanding specialty which has been developed in response to the needs of travellers. The service provision available vary enormously, from the very basic to the highly specialist.

A *general* travel health service should include the following:

- comprehensive travel health *risk assessments* to allow for the planning of services such as health advice, immunisations and malaria prevention and prophylaxis

- provision of general travel health advice on numerous topics such as the prevention and treatment of travellers' diarrhoea, the prevention of mosquito bites, as well as HIV and blood-borne virus awareness in the travel context
- information and education on, together with the prescription, provision and administration of "routine" travel vaccines including those recommended specifically for travel purposes (for example, typhoid and hepatitis A) and updates of national schedule vaccines
- information and education on, together with the prescription and provision of malaria chemoprophylaxis.

A *more specialist* travel health service should include all of the above with the addition of some (or all) of the following:

- provision of more specialist advice such as the use of emergency standby malaria medication, post-exposure prophylaxis following blood-borne virus exposure (for medical electives, for example)
- specialist advice for travellers with underlying medical conditions or who are travelling during pregnancy. This will include the prescription, provision and administration of vaccines to individuals with special needs (for example those with underlying medical conditions, the immunocompromised, or those who have experienced previous adverse events following vaccination)
- provision of specialist advice for travellers with complicated itineraries which may also require the prescription, provision and administration of more "unusual" travel vaccines such as Japanese B encephalitis, rabies, tick-borne encephalitis vaccine and BCG
- the prescription, provision and administration of yellow fever vaccine
- the provision and vending of travel health related equipment such as water purification filters, insect repellents and mosquito nets and other products
- clinical education for health care professionals who wish to expand their own travel health services.

What's included in the guidance?

The RCN Travel Health Forum suggests that the following topics should be included:

1. Practitioner education
2. Utilisation of essential and other resources
3. Recommendations for, and measuring of, best practice.

1. Practitioner education

It is essential that practitioners stay updated and ensure that they are following best practice. Depending on your geographic location, travel medicine education in the UK can be sporadic and varied, although courses and conferences exist to suit most needs.

Those providing a *general* travel health service should:

- regularly (at least once per year) attend a local, national or international study day or conference to maintain PREP requirements and their personal portfolio
- obtain a travel medicine qualification, for example a “certificate” or “foundation” in travel medicine
- use recommended resources to keep up-to-date with changes such as disease outbreaks and world events (these are listed in Appendix 1)
- join the RCN Travel Health Forum and/or the British Travel Health Association.

Those providing a *more specialist* travel health service are recommended to also:

- obtain a postgraduate qualification (diploma or MSc) in travel medicine
- join the International Society of Travel Medicine

- contribute to the growing body of knowledge of travel medicine through participation in study days and seminars, discussion forums, online surveillance systems (such as “Listserve”) and become *active* in a travel health professional organisation such as the RCN Travel Health Forum.

The following travel health courses are currently available:

Short courses and study days

London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) www.lshtm.ac.uk

Medical Advisory Service for Travellers Abroad (MASTA) www.masta.org

National Travel Health Network and Centre (NaTHNaC) – currently only on Yellow Fever www.nathnac.org

TREC www.trectravelhealth.co.uk

Foundation and diploma by distance learning

Health Protection Scotland (HPS) and the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons Glasgow www.travelcourses.hps.scot.nhs.uk

Royal Free Hospital www.ucl.ac.uk

MSc by internet and distance learning

Royal Free Hospital www.ucl.ac.uk

The Academic Unit for Travel Medicine and Vaccines can be found at: www.rfc.ucl.ac.uk/departments/Travel-medicine/index.htm

For further information on travel health in general visit the RCN Travel Health Forum website at www.rcn.org.uk

2. Utilisation of essential and other resources

Travel medicine is a rapidly evolving specialty and as such it is essential that practitioners utilise recognised, reliable and up-to-date resources. Use of one of the online travel health websites is now considered necessary to achieve this and a list of these resources is provided in Appendix 1.

3. Recommendations for, and measuring of, best practice

General recommendations for best practice:

- always follow the NMC Code of Conduct
- be aware of and keep up-to-date with relevant issues
- apply evidence-based research to clinical practice and work to established protocols
- work independently to make clinical judgements and decisions
- work effectively as a team member
- maintain authentic records of advice and procedures
- provide accurate and consistent advice
- know where and when to access information or seek further advice
- know when to admit an inability to cope or lack of knowledge or skills
- know when and how to refer to a more specialist service.

Recommendations specific to travel health:

- understand the concept of risk assessment and know how to carry out risk assessment effectively
- learn about common travel-related illness, disease and other hazards
- learn about geography, especially for popular destinations
- be flexible and able to prioritise in situations where a patient's time or finances do not allow the optimum recommendations
- have a thorough understanding of the principles of vaccine storage, administration and theory
- have an excellent vaccine administration technique

- it would be unsafe to only allow 10 minutes for a new travel appointment. You should allow a 20 minute consultation appointment per person in order to exercise best practice. Travellers with more complex needs, for example, backpackers, will require a longer appointment time.

Measure best practice through:

- formal appraisal in the workplace by clinical manager, team leader or peers
- formal assessment and/or examination, for example a qualification in travel medicine
- undertaking regular practice audits.

Appendix 1

The list below is not exhaustive but is intended as a guide.

All practitioners providing a travel health service should use an up-to-date atlas and should have access to the following UK government agency and international documents.

Leese J and Lea G, editors (2001) *Health information for overseas travel*, London: HMSO (The Yellow Book). Please note, this book is out of date in sections but updated chapters will be available in the future at www.nathnac.org

Salisbury D and Begg NT, editors (1996) *Immunisation against infectious disease*, London: (HMSO) (The Green Book). Please note some new chapters for this book are currently available on www.dh.gov.uk and www.immunisation.nhs.uk. Copies of the new small edition of The Green Book relating to diphtheria, haemophilus influenzae type b, pertussis, polio and tetanus can be ordered from the NHS literature line 0800 555 777.

UK malaria prevention guidelines for British travellers
www.malaria-reference.co.uk

World Health Organisation (2005) *International travel and health*, Geneva: WHO. <http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2005/9241580364.pdf>

Recommended reading:

Chiodini J and Boyne L (2003) *The atlas of travel medicine and health*, Ontario: BC Decker Inc.

Cook G, Zumla A, editors (2003) *Manson's tropical diseases*, 21st edition, London: WB Saunders Co. Ltd.

Dawood R, editor (2002) *Travellers' health; how to stay healthy abroad*, 4th edition, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

DuPont H, Steffen R, editors (2001) *Textbook of travel medicine and health*, 2nd edition, Hamilton: BC Decker Inc.

Kassianos G (2001) *Immunization; childhood and travel health*, 4th edition, Oxford: Blackwell Science.

Keystone J, Kozarsky P, Freedman D et al. (2004) *Travel Medicine*, London: Mosby.

Lockie C, Walker E, Calvert L et al. (2000) *Travel medicine and migrant health*, Edinburgh: Churchill Livingstone.

Other information sources

Please note that advice on vaccines and malaria prophylaxis may vary between the UK and other countries, in which case always follow UK guidelines.

Essential sources:

Department of Health www.dh.gov.uk

Foreign & Commonwealth Office www.fco.gov.uk

Health Protection Agency UK – a DH affiliated organisation
www.hpa.org.uk (includes a link to the UK malaria guidelines and the HPA Malaria Reference Laboratory)

Health Protection Scotland – a Scottish national surveillance unit, home of TRAVAX, fitfortravel, the Weekly Report, and foundation and diploma in travel medicine courses www.show.scot.nhs.uk

Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation
www.advisorybodies.doh.gov.uk/jcvi/foi_classesofinformation.htm

National Travel Health Network and Centre (NaTHNaC) – a DH affiliated organisation providing guidance for health professionals advising those travelling overseas www.nathnac.org

World Health Organisation (WHO) www.who.int/en/

And WHO disease outbreak news www.who.int/csr/don/en/

Recommended sources:

British Mountaineering Council www.thebmc.co.uk/

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) – the lead federal agency in the USA for protecting the health and safety of people – at home and abroad www.cdc.gov

Health Advice for Travellers (online version of leaflet T6)

www.dh.gov.uk/PolicyAndGuidance/HealthAdviceForTravellers/fs/en

fitfortravel – a public access website provided by NHS Scotland and the Health Protection Scotland (HPS) www.fitfortravel.scot.nhs.uk/

Medicines Compendium – provides a searchable system for the SPCs and PILs for all licensed medicines in the UK www.medicines.org.uk/

Promed – the global electronic reporting system for outbreaks of emerging infectious diseases www.promedmail.org

TRAVAX (subscription only) – advice line, website and discussion forum for health professionals www.travax.scot.nhs.uk/

For further information about travel health see the RCN Travel Health Forum website at www.rcn.org.uk



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