



SPAHA

SCOTTISH PAEDIATRIC AND ADULT HAEMOGLOBINOPATHIES NETWORK

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A travel guide for adults with sickle cell disease

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Most people with sickle cell can travel abroad safely provided they take appropriate action to reduce the chances of becoming unwell on holiday. This leaflet provides advice on the important steps to take to ensure your travel plans go smoothly.

Pre travel arrangements

Am I well enough to go?

Your sickle cell team are keen to support you travelling wherever possible. There are however certain situations where travel may not be recommended, or plans may need adapted.

For example, if:

- you have recently been in hospital with a crisis, particularly a chest crisis.
- you have problems with breathing or need oxygen that may make flying a concern.
- you have urgent upcoming investigations.
- you need regular transfusion or blood tests but are planning to be away when these are due.

It is not possible to include definitive rules within this leaflet so please discuss planned trips with your sickle cell team.

Booking your holiday

When planning or booking a holiday or trip abroad we recommend that you use a member of the Association of British Travel Agents (ABTA). Doing so is less likely to leave you stranded if there are problems with the flights or accommodation.

Make sure that you have travel insurance which provides cover for what you may need, for example:

- last minute cancellation due to ill-health associated with a pre-existing condition.
- full medical cover.
- medical transfer to home in the event of an emergency.

Remember that travelling against medical advice makes your child's insurance invalid.

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Please take time to find out about the medical facilities available in the country you are visiting and know where the nearest treatment centre or hospital is. You can find this by contacting the Sickle Cell Society for an up-to-date directory ([Sickle Cell Society website](#)).

Travel immunisations and anti-malaria measures

Don't forget to seek medical advice about travel immunisations and anti-malaria medication at least six weeks in advance of any planned travel. Your local travel clinic should be able to provide advice about the medications and or vaccinations needed for the place you are planning to visit.

Please remember to take anti-malaria medication if advised to do so and follow all guidance for when to stop this medication on your return home. When on holiday, it can be helpful to use a mosquito net at night. Nets treated with insect repellent are the most effective. Ask for one at your local chemist before you travel.

Packing

Your doctor or nurse may provide a letter to carry with you which explains your diagnosis, the centre where you receive treatment, and the name of any prescribed drugs. If applicable, ensure that this letter states you are taking controlled drugs such as morphine.

Ensure you pack your medication, for example, painkillers, penicillin, hydroxycarbamide and folic acid in your **hand luggage** as it is less likely to go missing. Medication should be in its original packaging and clearly labelled.

During the flight

When flying (especially six hours or more) make sure that you:

- wear warm, loose clothing, or use a blanket to prevent chilling as the plane may be quite cool.
- drink plenty of fluids while travelling. Avoid or limit alcohol intake as excessive alcohol could result in dehydration.
- move your limbs or take frequent walks up and down the aisle to prevent joint stiffness and help with circulation. If you have had a blood clot before and are not on blood thinners, talk to your haematology team.

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Things to remember when you reach your destination

If you're visiting a hot climate, you'll need to take more fluids to keep hydrated.

Take extra care with drinking water in some countries. Only drink water from a reliable source. Use bottled water if you're unsure of the water source.

And finally, have a great time.

Further Information

Scottish Paediatric and Adult Haemoglobinopathies Network (SPAH) through the website: spah.scot.nhs.uk

If you require an alternative format, please contact nss.equalitydiversity@nhs.scot, telephone: 0131 275 600

British Sign Language, please contact Scotland BSL: [Contact Scotland \(contactscotland-bsl.org\)](http://contactscotland-bsl.org)