



**SPAHA**

SCOTTISH PAEDIATRIC AND ADULT HAEMOGLOBINOPATHIES NETWORK

# **Scottish Paediatric and Adult Haemoglobinopathies Network**

**A travel guide for parents or  
carers of a child with sickle cell  
disease**

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### **A travel guide for parents or carers of a child with sickle cell disease**

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

#### **Pre travel arrangements**

##### **Is your child well enough to go?**

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

For example, if:

- your child has recently been in hospital with a crisis, particularly a chest crisis.
- your child has problems with breathing or needs oxygen that may make flying a concern.
- your child has urgent upcoming investigations.
- your child needs regular transfusion or blood tests but you 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 your child 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 and your child 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 provide your child with anti-malaria medication if advised to do so and follow all guidance for when to stop this medication on their 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 child's doctor or nurse may provide a letter to carry with you which explains your child's diagnosis, the centre where they receive treatment, and the name of any prescribed drugs. If applicable, ensure that this letter states your child is taking controlled drugs such as morphine.

It may be necessary that your child requires extra oxygen. Usually this is only needed if your child has chest problems or is on home oxygen. Please discuss with your haematology doctor or nurse before travelling.

Ensure you pack your child's 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 your child:

- wears warm, loose clothing or uses a blanket to prevent chilling as the plane may be quite cool.
- drinks plenty of fluids while travelling.

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- moves their limbs or takes frequent walks up and down the aisle to prevent joint stiffness and help with circulation.

### **Things to remember when you reach your destination**

If you're visiting a hot climate your child will need to take more fluids to keep hydrated.

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

### **Bottle fed babies**

Bottled water is not generally recommended for making up babies' feeds, as it is not sterile and may contain too much salt (sodium) or sulphate. It is best to use clean tap water which has been boiled and cooled, just as you would do at home.

If clean tap water is not available and you have to use bottled water to make up a feed, check the label to make sure the sodium (also written as Na) level is less than 200 milligrams (mg) per litre, and the sulphate (also written as SO or SO<sub>4</sub>) content is less than 250mg per litre.

Remember that bottled water is not usually sterile so it will still need to be boiled and cooled before you prepare the feed.

**And finally, have a great time.**

### **Further Information**

Scottish Paediatric and Adult Haemoglobinopathies Network (SPA<sub>H</sub>) through the website: [spah.scot.nhs.uk](http://spah.scot.nhs.uk)

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

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