

(14) Parents: Going on holiday

When planning your holiday speak to your child's doctor or epilepsy specialist nurse for further advice on what you may need to consider.

Holiday within the UK

If you travel within the UK you will not usually encounter any problems. You may want to consider how quickly you would be able to get help if your child had a seizure and needed emergency medical attention.

Travelling abroad

If you travel abroad find out what health services are available at your holiday destination. Also consider how easy it would be to get medical help bearing in mind any language barriers.

Take some extra medication in case of an unexpected delay. If you lose or run out of your child's anti-epileptic drugs you may not get the same kind or brand of medication. In addition, most travel insurances will not cover you for the loss of medication.

Have enough of your child's anti-epileptic drugs in your hand luggage to last for the duration of the journey and keep them in their original containers. Most people prefer to carry essential medication in their hand luggage.

Current airline security means that liquid medication can usually only be taken in bottles of no more than 100mls in hand luggage. If you want to carry larger quantities, you must get prior approval from the airport and airline. You will also need supporting documentation such as a letter from a doctor or a prescription.

If you need to get more of your child's medication while on holiday, contact a local doctor, pharmacist or hospital. It helps to know the exact name (generic and brand name) of your child's medication. If you have a prescription, it will be accepted within countries of the European Union, but you may not get the same kind of brand or drug.

If you have problems obtaining replacement or additional medication from local health services, contact your child's doctor in the UK for further advice.

Vaccinations

Vaccines are generally considered to be safe for people with epilepsy. If you are, however, planning to go to a country where malaria is present, seek further advice from your epilepsy specialist nurse or doctor. Some anti-epileptic drugs can interact with anti-malarial drugs making them less effective, and some anti-malarial drugs can also cause seizures in people with epilepsy.

Flying

Flying itself is not known to trigger a seizure. It is usually other factors associated with flying which can occasionally trigger a seizure. These include being excited, not sleeping well the night before, being on a long flight with irregular and disrupted sleep, or being dehydrated.

Your airline will want to know in advance of the possibility of your child having a seizure. This will allow the cabin crew to be prepared and assist appropriately.

Taking medication at correct time

Keeping two watches can help keep track of the correct time for your child's medication if you are travelling to a different time zone. One can be set to local time, the other to UK time to help you remember the correct time.

Medical experts generally recommend gradually changing the times for taking the drugs before leaving and returning home consistent with local times. Waking a child from sleep to take their drugs is usually not recommended as the disruption to sleep may sometimes trigger a seizure. Your child's doctor or epilepsy specialist nurse will be able to advise further.

Staying well on holiday

High temperatures and humid conditions can sometimes make seizures more likely. Drinking plenty of water to stay hydrated will help to counter this. When temperatures get very high, particularly during midday, consider staying indoors with your child.

Vomiting and diarrhoea can sometimes trigger a seizure because a child may not have enough of their drugs in their system. Being sick can also cause dehydration, low blood sugar and poor sleep, all of which can be seizure triggers. Rehydration sachets, available from a chemist, can help a child get over the effects of vomiting and diarrhoea quicker. Stay with your child, particularly if they cannot take their medication, just in case of a seizure. You will find more information on what to do if a child has been sick in our Parent's factsheet 'No 8 Anti-epileptic drugs'.

Travel insurance

Travel insurance can be expensive if your child's seizures are not well controlled. If your child's diagnosis has not been confirmed, it is possible that you will not get insurance cover because the risk is considered too high. Sometimes a letter from your child's specialist can help.

Insurance companies will assess the risk and will base their premiums on a child's epilepsy and the frequency and severity of seizures. The better your child's seizures are controlled, the more likely it is that you will find a competitive quote. It is lawful for insurance companies to charge higher premiums where there is an increased

risk, but they are not allowed to refuse insurance cover simply because of an epilepsy diagnosis.

Some insurance companies specialise in pre-existing medical conditions. These can be an alternative if you have difficulty finding adequate insurance cover. They tend to be more accommodating but also more expensive.

European Health Insurance Card

The European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) entitles you to reduced-cost or free emergency medical treatment while you stay in a European Economic Area (EEA) country or Switzerland. The medical treatment has to be unplanned, ie the result of sudden illness or an accident.

This card only covers medical treatment which is provided by the country you are travelling to. You should be treated on the same basis as someone who is insured and lives in that country. This means you may not get all the things which you would normally expect from the NHS and sometimes you may have to pay towards certain treatments. You may be able to recover some of these extra costs when you are back in the UK.

This card does not cover the cost of lost or stolen property, mountain rescue, or cost of repatriation. For more information on this card and how to apply for one, go to www.ehic.org.uk.

Brexit

As the UK is due to leave the EU, some of the information in this factsheet may no longer be correct after Brexit. As soon as we know what arrangements have been put in place for travelling to EU countries, we will update this factsheet.