

# HEMODIALYSIS AND TRAVELLING

## FOR PATIENTS LIVING IN BRITISH COLUMBIA WHO WANT TO TRAVEL (IN OR OUTSIDE BC)

If you are having dialysis, it is still possible to travel. This is a step-by-step guide to help you plan your dialysis care away from home. Once you have made your dialysis arrangements (steps 1 to 3 on this checklist), your home hemodialysis unit will coordinate your treatment with the dialysis unit you choose.

Please **plan your travel well in advance**. Contact your preferred dialysis unit at least 3 months before you wish to travel (the further ahead, the better).

**DO NOT BOOK YOUR TRAVEL UNTIL THE VISITING DIALYSIS UNIT TELLS YOU IT IS OK.**

### **Here are the steps to follow:**

1. Check with your kidney doctor to make sure you are fit to travel. Usually this means that:
  - You are medically stable on hemodialysis
  - You have a functioning fistula, graft or permanent central line catheter with stable blood flows. Temporary accesses are not accepted.
  - Your medical and dialysis needs can be met at a visiting dialysis centre.
  
2. Once you decide where you want to travel, find a dialysis unit that is nearby. These websites are very useful in finding a dialysis unit:
  - Travel in BC:
    - [www.bcrenalagency.ca](http://www.bcrenalagency.ca); “Kidney Services” page provides contact information and a location finder.
  - Travel outside BC:
    - [www.globaldialysis.com](http://www.globaldialysis.com).
    - <http://kidney.ca/document.doc?id=359> (provides links about dialysis units, cruises and resorts that are set-up for people on hemodialysis)
  
3. Call the dialysis unit you want to visit to see if there is space on your desired dates. **DO NOT book your travel until the visiting dialysis unit tells you it is OK.** The visiting unit must make sure they have space and they can meet your medical and dialysis needs. It is recommended that you buy travel insurance (see point #12).
  
4. Ask about the cost of each treatment, dialysis and other medical appointments, tests or treatment.

Travel in Canada (except Quebec): Costs are covered through an agreement between provinces. Quebec is not part of this agreement.

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Travel outside Canada or to Quebec:

- You must pay the visiting dialysis unit upfront for the cost of your dialysis and medical appointments, tests or treatments. Ask ahead about the costs as they are different everywhere.
- Keep all your medical receipts, and if possible keep them in date order. Submit them with your reimbursement forms to Health Insurance BC (HIBC). Keep a copy for your records.
- HIBC will reimburse no more than the amount they pay for dialysis in BC. Call HIBC for current dialysis rates in BC (ph: 604-683-7151 or 1-800-663-7100). If the rate charged by the visiting unit is more than the current HIBC rate, you will have to pay the difference.
- If a physician attends to you and charges you in addition to your dialysis, HIBC reimburses a set amount.
- For more information, read the “Leaving BC” brochure on the HIBC website at [www.health.gov.bc.ca/msp/infoben/pdf/leaving-bc-brochure.pdf](http://www.health.gov.bc.ca/msp/infoben/pdf/leaving-bc-brochure.pdf). You can call HIBC at 604-683-7151 or 1-800-663-7100 outside the Lower Mainland.

Please talk with your social worker if paying for your dialysis upfront will be difficult. The Kidney Foundation of Canada BC & Yukon Branch has a temporary loan program that could help offset the costs, to a maximum of \$1,000. You must repay this loan by providing The Kidney Foundation with post-dated cheques dated no more than 4 months after your return from your travels. If travelling more than once per year, multiple \$1,000 loans could be available as long as the previous loan has been repaid.

- 5. Once you have contacted the visiting unit, the staff there will contact your home unit for medical documents. Your home unit will arrange for additional tests, if needed.
- 6. The visiting dialysis unit will review your medical documents. They will let you know if they can meet your medical and dialysis needs and if space is available. **ONCE THEY HAVE CONTACTED YOU, YOU MAY CONFIRM YOUR TRAVEL ARRANGEMENTS.**
- 7. Give your travel dates to the nurse-in-charge and the social worker at your home unit. Your home unit and the visiting unit will coordinate your last day of dialysis before your trip and also your return dialysis date.
- 8. Talk to your pharmacy to make sure you will have enough medication while you travel.

If you are a BC resident travelling **within** BC:

- You will need to bring medications that you take on your own with you. Note that:
  - Most injectable and intravenous medications will be provided by the visiting unit - check with the visiting unit to be sure.
  - If you use low molecular weight heparin, check with the visiting unit if you need to bring your own.
  - If you use EMLA or another cream to numb your skin prior to needling, bring it with you. If you have lidocaine or another local anesthetic injected under your skin, check with the visiting unit if you need to bring your own.

If you are a BC resident traveling **outside** BC:

- Bring all medications you will need with you. This includes injectable and intravenous

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medications such as erythropoiesis stimulating agents [e.g., erythropoietin (EPO) and darbepoetin (Aranesp)], iron and low molecular weight heparin.

- Erythropoiesis stimulating agents must be kept cool (2 to 8 degrees Celsius). Talk to your unit about the best way to keep the medication at the right temperature.
- If you use EMLA or another cream to numb your skin prior to needling, bring it with you. If you have lidocaine or another local anesthetic injected under your skin, check with the visiting unit if you need to bring your own.
- Ask your home dialysis unit to give you a letter so you can go through security with your syringes and medications (a standard letter is available at [www.bcrenalagency.ca](http://www.bcrenalagency.ca) for you to print and ask your kidney doctor to sign).

9. If you have special requirements, sensitivities or allergies to specific dialysis products, check with the visiting unit if you need to bring your own. Examples include:
- Dialyzers (you will need enough for each treatment plus a few spares)
  - Dialysis needles (you will need enough for each treatment plus a few spares)

10. If you are unable to speak English, plan to bring a translator to your visiting dialysis unit for the first run or two.

11. Please be flexible. **The visiting dialysis unit will make every effort to accommodate your request. But they may need to change the time or location of your treatment.** They must consider the needs of many patients. You will be notified in advance if any change is needed.

12. It is recommended that you buy travel insurance. Make sure your insurance covers medical evacuation. If you have a medical emergency and require health care outside B.C. or need to be transported back home, the financial costs may be extremely high.

13. If you are travelling outside of BC, here are a few important points about reimbursement:
- You have 90 days after each dialysis treatment to seek reimbursement. If a receipt for medical treatment is more than 90 days old, HIBC will not reimburse you for it.
  - If you are travelling for more than 3 months, coordinate with a family member to send your receipts to HIBC every 3 months. This will help you meet the HIBC 90-day deadline. The reimbursement form can be found online: [www.health.gov.bc.ca/exforms/msp/2814fil.pdf](http://www.health.gov.bc.ca/exforms/msp/2814fil.pdf).
  - It will take at least 2 to 3 months to receive a refund for your dialysis expenses. Be financially prepared to wait for the refund.

If you have questions, your social worker can help provide further information.

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The information in this pamphlet is provided for educational/information purposes, and to support discussion with your health care team about your medical condition and treatment. It does not constitute medical advice and should not substitute for advice given by your physician or other qualified health care professional.