

Safe Travel for Trainee Intern Students on their Elective

An Information sheet

General

When you travel abroad on your elective, the odds are you will have a safe and incident-free trip. You can, however, experience personal and professional “occupational” risks/hazards (physical, infectious and psychological) as well as the more general unexpected difficulties of any foreign travel. The Faculty have prepared the following travel guidelines to help you prepare your elective, avoid serious difficulties during your time abroad and have a safe and wonderful experience.

All students planning an overseas elective should contact the elective module convenor at least 2 months in advance to discuss travel-health needs and when and how they plan to access the necessary vaccinations, antimalarials and medical kits.

The Medical Council of New Zealand

The Medical Council of New Zealand (MCNZ) is particularly concerned about the health of medical students and young doctors. They have a policy on transmissible major viral infections (see useful websites).

You are reminded that the most effective means of preventing Hepatitis B Virus (HBV), Hepatitis C Virus (HCV) and Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) transmission in health care settings is by strict adherence to standard (universal) precautions and established infection control practices. These decrease the opportunity of direct exposure to blood and body fluids for both health care workers and patients. Exposure-prone procedures are characterised by the potential for direct contact between the skin (usually finger or thumb of the student) and sharp surgical instruments or needles in body cavities or in poorly visualised or confined body sites including the mouth. Screening for HBV (hepatitis B virus) and vaccination against HBV is strongly advised. If you believe you have been at risk of contracting human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) you should be aware of your serological status. In summary, all medical students who may have been exposed to HBV, HCV (hepatitis C virus) and HIV through personal risk behaviour, exposure to blood products or occupational accidents should seek testing in order to know their own serological status.

University of Otago Policy

Hepatitis B: Most medical students will have been vaccinated for Hepatitis B as part of the NZ Immunisation Programme. In addition, all medical students are screened for Hepatitis B infection and immunity in third year and vaccination recommended if they are not immune. So, you should already be covered for Hepatitis B for your elective.

Students planning to undertake an elective in a country with high HIV prevalence will need to discuss this risk more fully with the TI Elective Module Convenor. In some instances elective students will be provided with emergency HIV post exposure medication to take with them.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade provides advice on security risks in several destinations. This advice is based on information from a number of sources. It reflects risks, and their assessment of what these might mean for New Zealanders. Their assessment may also take account of the actions local authorities are taking to minimise the risk, and the Ministry's ability to provide you with assistance. This is to assist you to make informed decisions about travel destinations. Your travel insurance may be affected by the issuing of a strong travel warning. Before setting out, assess your risk.

The ministry has a three-level system:

1. *Extreme risk – No travel advised.*

This applies to areas where there is conflict, warfare or civil disturbance. The Government may not be able to assist you if you are detained, injured, or otherwise prevented from leaving these areas. There may be little warning of airport closures.

2. *High risk – Defer non-essential travel*

High risk means we may have specific indications of possible threatened action.

Note: Electives will not be approved to areas with an "Extreme risk" advisory and highly unlikely to be approved to an area with a "High risk" advisory.

3. *Some risk – Be cautious*

"Some risk" means a heightened but generalised threat of terrorism. You should be especially alert and vigilant. Avoid large gathering places (shopping malls, public events). In non-Western destinations avoid places identified with Western interests.

Before you leave New Zealand

A. General

1. Check your passport has at least 6 months' validity. Take a copy of the personal details page of your passport with you and leave a copy at home with a family member.
2. Find details on the Foreign Representatives to New Zealand in the country plan to visit

Staff at Embassies can do the following: give advice; help with a lost or stolen passport; help you contact relatives/ friends (e.g. to request emergency funds, if ill or injured, or following a death overseas); provide a list of English-speaking lawyers (if detained or arrested); help during civil unrest and natural disasters.

If you are travelling on a passport of another country, that country may have different travel advisories for their citizens. You need to familiarize yourself with this country's embassies/consulates rather than New Zealand ones, although it is possible New Zealand would help out given you will have a current New Zealand study visa.

B. Insurance

Before setting out, you should contact your travel insurer to check whether or not you will be covered by your insurance policy if you are travelling to a high risk destination. Take out comprehensive medical insurance including cover for hospitalisation and medical repatriation. Make sure it covers your personal circumstances, both for pre-existing conditions and the activities you plan to undertake.

(Note: Marsh Insurers provide an insurance package “Studentsafe-University Offshore” specifically designed for medical elective students, including needle stick injuries. Contact 0800486044 or Mr Ken Albrecht (04)8192439 email: ken.b.albrecht@marsh.com for further information)

Minimise undertaking activities with risks associated, and take particular care around traffic. Take precautions to avoid being a target of crime.

If you have no insurance, you are expected to pay any medical costs yourself. This includes costs involved in returning to New Zealand (e.g. special flights, a medical escort). Some hospitals may be reluctant to provide treatment if payment is not guaranteed.

Medical students on elective should have **both** travel insurance (covering personal accident/injury, loss/theft of items, travel disruption) **and** professional (medical) indemnity insurance (contact your medical indemnity insurer to ensure that you have cover for your elective).

C. Visit the Ministry’s Health and travel website

This website provides general tips, and links to sources of official advice. Personal health advice is not provided. Sources of generic travel health risks and recommendations can be found on the websites of the World Health Organisation; the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; and the New Zealand Ministry of Health.

Before you go

1. At least eight weeks before setting out seek travel health advice for your particular circumstances from a medical practitioner who has some expertise in travel medicine, or from specialised travel clinics. Find out if any vaccinations or other medical precautions are recommended or required for the areas you are travelling to.
2. A routine dental check-up is recommended.
3. Find out about health and safety risks for the area you are visiting (e.g. is malaria present?).
4. Check resources for information on the standard of hygiene, sanitation, medical care and water quality in the areas you are visiting.
5. Prepare a medical kit for all destinations. It should include basic medicines to treat common ailments, and first-aid items including special personal medical items needed by you or your family. Ask your doctor for advice.

6. Some categories of prescription medicines should be carried together with a medical certificate, signed by a doctor. This may be necessary to show to Customs officials.

Whilst overseas

If you need to leave the country because of either medical or safety concerns please let your School of Medicine know.

A. If you suffer illness or injury overseas

You should:

1. Contact your insurance company immediately
2. Let your family, friends or employer know
3. Contact the nearest New Zealand Embassy (if you need further assistance)
4. Obtain a full medical report for your insurance company (and, if appropriate for an ACC claim on return).

B. If you find yourself in financial difficulties overseas

You should:

1. Contact the issuing bank to notify lost or stolen credit cards and travellers cheques. Most main banks have a website with advice and international free phone numbers
2. Ask your credit card company if they can advance funds temporarily
3. Arrange a funds transfer through your bank
4. Ask family or friends to transfer money to you.

C. If your passport has been lost or stolen overseas

You should:

1. Obtain a police report
2. Decide whether to apply for a replacement passport or an Emergency Travel Document.

D. What can you do if arrested?

You should:

1. Find a lawyer or contact family. Ask the authorities to contact the nearest New Zealand Embassy, High Commission or Consulate (you have the right under international law to this, but it is up to you to claim it). The New Zealand Embassy, High Commission or Consulate can also assist you if you need help arranging for family to transfer funds to you.
2. Not sign any statement or document without seeking legal advice, especially if it is in a language you do not understand.

Helpful Addresses

Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade

195 Lambton Quay, Wellington, New Zealand

Or Private Bag 18 901

Wellington

New Zealand

Telephone: +64 4 439 8000

Fax: +64 4 472 9596

Website:

<http://www.mfat.govt.nz/>

<http://www.safetravel.govt.nz/services/services.shtml>

International Office, University of Otago

PO Box 56

Dunedin 9054

New Zealand

Telephone: + 64 3 479 8344

Fax: +64 3 479 8367

Website:

<http://www.otago.ac.nz/international>

Useful Websites

World Health Organisation: <http://www.who.int/>

United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <http://www.cdc.gov/>

New Zealand Ministry of Health: <http://www.health.govt.nz/>

Medical Council of New Zealand: <http://www.mcnz.org.nz/>

References

1. <http://www.otago.ac.nz/international>
2. <http://www.safetravel.govt.nz/services/services.shtml>

EA Shipton

Chair: ICEC Year 6