

# Planning for a trip when you have sickle cell disease

## Sickle Cell and Thalassaemia

Information for Patients

Produced: August 2023

Review: August 2026

Leaflet number: 1432 Version:1

### Introduction

**This is a guide for people with sickle cell disease planning trips abroad.** Having sickle cell disease should not stop you from travelling abroad. It means that some extra planning is in order to be able to travel safely.

### Planning your trip

#### Anti-malaria & vaccines

Having sickle cell **does not** stop you from catching malaria. So it is important that, if you are going to an area where malaria is common, you take anti-malaria prophylaxis and use bug-nets and bug-sprays.

Make sure you arrange any vaccines that are needed where you are travelling to. Many of these are not covered on the NHS, but check with your GP or local pharmacy and see what travel services are available.

#### Flights and insurance

It is very important that you buy travel insurance, in case you need to get treatment whilst abroad. Medical treatment abroad without insurance can be very expensive. This is more so if you need an air ambulance back to the UK for treatment.

Some insurance companies need proof that you are fit to fly, which will need you to speak with your haematologist or your GP.

If you have had a serious crisis within 2 weeks of going away, we advise that you **do not fly**.

---

**Health information and support is available at [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)  
or call 111 for non-emergency medical advice**

Visit [www.leicestershospitals.nhs.uk](http://www.leicestershospitals.nhs.uk) for maps and information about visiting Leicester's Hospitals  
To give feedback about this information sheet, contact [InformationForPatients@uhl-tr.nhs.uk](mailto:InformationForPatients@uhl-tr.nhs.uk)

## Travelling against medical advice can void your insurance

When booking flights you should also tell the airline of your condition. For some patients we may recommend flying with oxygen (especially if you have had crises that have affected your lungs). Some airlines charge for this service and it needs to be planned well in advance. If this includes you, talk about it with your haematologist. Also check with the airline whether they have any limits on what medications they will let you enter the flight with.

### Key points

- Tell your haematologist as well as your doctor as soon as possible about your plans. This will let us figure out whether you are well enough to go and give you a letter stating your treatment to take with.
- You are up to date with your regular vaccinations
- In case you need medical care whilst travelling, know where to find the closest hospital or clinic.
- Make sure you have enough medication for the entire trip.

## The journey

### Flight

Travel with your medications in your hand-luggage with the letter you were given by your doctor stating your treatment or medications. This is more important for those who take opiate painkillers such as morphine.

The high altitude and cold, dry cabin can affect your sickle cell. So here are a few tips to help reduce the impact:

- Drink enough water
- Stay warm – airplanes can be cold, so travel with warm clothing or ask for blankets on the flight.
- Move around the cabin – do not stay seated for too long. Having sickle increases your risk of developing clots so it is important to keep the blood flowing.
- Avoid alcohol during the flight because this can both dehydrate you and cause you to stay seated for too long.

If you have any of the following during or after your flight, ask for medical help quickly.

- Pain, swelling or redness in your legs or calves
- Chest pain
- Shortness of breath

## Whilst you are away

### Other illness

People who travel often suffer from feeling sick and with diarrhea. Take some oral rehydration sachets, such as Dioralyte, with you to make sure you stay hydrated. You can get these from most pharmacies and supermarkets. To try to avoid going through a pain crisis, you need medical help quickly if you are not able to swallow any liquids.

### A crisis

While we hope that everything goes smoothly, you need to be ready in case anything goes wrong while you are away:

- Ask for medical help quickly.
- Tell your insurance company as soon as possible – healthcare outside of the UK can be very expensive, so getting your insurance company to help will be 1 less thing to worry about.

We wish you all the best! If you have any queries, call your specialist nurse or haematologist.

## Contact details

### Haemoglobinopathy Clinical Nurse Specialist:

Office phone number: 0116 258 6081

Mobile: 07950 891 490

### Leicester's Hospitals (UHL) switchboard:

Telephone: 0300 303 1573

Leicester Royal Infirmary

Infirmary Square, Leicester LE1 5WW

اگر آپ کو یہ معلومات کسی اور زبان میں درکار ہیں، تو براہ کرم مندرجہ ذیل نمبر پر ٹیلی فون کریں۔  
على هذه المعلومات بلغة أخرى، الرجاء الاتصال على رقم الهاتف الذي يظهر في الأسفل  
જો તમને અન્ય ભાષામાં આ માહિતી જોઈતી હોય, તો નીચે આપેલ નંબર પર કૃપા કરી ટેલિફોન કરો

ਜੇ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿੱਚ ਚਾਹੁੰਦੇ ਹੋ, ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਹੇਠਾਂ ਦਿੱਤੇ ਗਏ ਨੰਬਰ 'ਤੇ ਟੈਲੀਫੋਨ ਕਰੋ।

Aby uzyskać informacje w innym języku, proszę zadzwonić pod podany niżej numer telefonu

If you would like this information in another language or format such as EasyRead or Braille, please telephone 0116 250 2959 or email [equality@uhl-tr.nhs.uk](mailto:equality@uhl-tr.nhs.uk)



LEICESTER'S  
RESEARCH

★ Leicester's Hospitals is a research active trust so you may find research happening on your ward or in your clinic. To find out about the benefits of research and become involved yourself, speak to your clinician or nurse, call 0116 258 8351 or visit [www.leicestersresearch.nhs.uk/patient-and-public-involvement](http://www.leicestersresearch.nhs.uk/patient-and-public-involvement)