

Packing Personal Medications and Supplies

Traveler Summary

Key Points

- When traveling by airplane, carry all medications in hand luggage (i.e., not in checked luggage).
- Carry a medical summary on a physician's letterhead stationery listing all medications, including instructions, reason for use, and generic and trade names. The summary should include all allergies. Wear a medical alert tag or bracelet.
- Medications should be in pharmacy-labeled containers and/or original packaging. Ask the pharmacy for a reprint of the label if a smaller container needs to be used.
- A number of countries have very strict laws about importing medications. Research importation restrictions prior to travel if bringing certain medications. Medications commonly restricted include, but are not limited to, controlled substances, injected medications, HIV drugs, and some over-the-counter (OTC) cold medications. Failure to secure importation certificates can result in arrest and detention. Visit <https://www.incb.org/incb/en/travellers/index.html> for more information. Never hide medications in luggage.
- Avoid carrying medications in amounts above reasonable personal-use quantities (example: over 30 days' supply) because doing so may invite questioning and detention by border control officers.
- Carry a medical kit with first aid supplies, including items such as antacid, diarrhea medications, OTC pain medications, hydrocortisone cream, antifungal and antibiotic creams/ointments, a variety of bandages, oral rehydration solution, and any other items preferred.
- Carry a supply of high-quality disposable face masks (e.g., KN95 or KF94) and an OTC COVID-19 Rapid Antigen Test.

Pretravel Planning

Before departure, those who need to carry medication while traveling should plan how best to clear customs with their medication and what to do should they run out of or lose their medication. In addition, travelers should:

- Understand that although liquid medications are not restricted to 3.4 ounces, they may be subject to further screening and inspection.
- Carry medical alert information, preferably a medical alert wristband or tags listing any medical conditions (e.g., diabetes) and/or allergies.
- Make a list of all medications and their generic names should it be necessary to replace any of the medications during travel. Ask the pharmacist to create a Personal Medication Record, which lists the drug, dosage form, regimen, and purpose (see *Obtaining Medications Abroad*).
- Research drug importation restrictions for their destination(s).
- Carry slightly more medication than is needed for the trip, but not an excessive amount.

Carrying Medications through Customs

Although medications in amounts clearly related to personal use for the expected duration of the trip (up to 30 days) are rarely inspected or questioned, customs officials can be suspicious of medications. Bringing in even personal medication supplies is considered importation of drugs. Reduce the likelihood of difficulty by following these recommendations:

- Keep medications in their original, labeled, pharmacy packaging when possible. The pharmacy can reprint a label if necessary.
- Keep medications in carry-on luggage instead of checked luggage in case checked luggage is lost or delayed or customs requires an explanation or documentation of need.
- Avoid using pill boxes in transit. Although they are helpful as reminders for taking medications, using them makes it difficult for customs officials to determine what the medications are. Pill boxes should be packed empty and then filled at the destination.
- For certain medications, such as controlled substances and HIV medications, it may be prudent to obtain and carry a letter from the prescribing physician on letterhead stationery, appropriately signed and dated, stating medical necessity.
- If intending to travel with a controlled drug for personal use, it would be prudent to review medication regulations on the International Narcotics Control Board website as well as official government sites. Addresses and excerpted national statutes for most countries can be found at <http://www.incb.org/incb/en/travellers/index.html>. Rules on amphetamine-based

medications used for attention-deficit disorders should always be checked before travel. Embassies are generally poor sources of information but may be the only option.

- If using injectable medications, such as insulin or heparin, obtain and carry at all times a physician-signed letter explaining the need to carry needles and syringes. Carry only the necessary number of syringes for the trip.
- Review specific country information to verify known, consistently enforced medication entry restrictions. This may apply to OTC medication as well as prescribed medication.
- Medical personnel supporting expeditions, aid missions, or other teams should ascertain pertinent import and customs duty regulations ahead of time by contacting the relevant foreign embassy.
- Supplies of medications that are beyond the amount needed for personal use of the traveler going through customs will almost always lead to delay or detention on arrival. Furthermore, travelers who have forgotten medication at home cannot have a later-arriving family member or friend bring in the medication (the traveler's name and the name on the prescription label must match).
- When departing foreign airports, travelers should keep their luggage with them at all times to avoid the surreptitious placement of illegal drugs in the luggage for unknowing transport.

Personal Medical Kits

Before departure, travelers should consider what OTC medications and supplies will be needed. When traveling to another country, it is best to assume that brands, active ingredients, dosages, and so forth may vary or may not be available at all. Because prescription products must be dispensed and labeled appropriately for personal use and may have different storage requirements than OTC supplies, they are not usually contained in a travel kit. First aid kits are useful to maintain domestically and may also be used while traveling abroad. Before selecting any of the following items, individual circumstances and itinerary should be carefully considered.

Travelers on expeditions or to remote areas without access to medical care should purchase a prepackaged adventure travel kit suitable to the complexity and remoteness of their situation.

For All Travelers

First aid items

- Alcohol swabs in individual packets and liquid disinfectant solution
- Antibiotic and antifungal ointments, creams, or powder
- Adhesive bandages or gauze and tape, including butterfly-shaped skin closure strips and glue, and hemostatic gauze.
- Blister pads and moleskin
- Hydrocortisone cream (topical cream for itching, bites, and skin irritation) or sting-relief spray
- Aloe gel for sunburn
- Tweezers for splinter/tick removal
- Bandage rolls (Ace wraps) for sprains and strains
- Oral rehydration solution (preferably rice-based) for diarrhea or dehydration
- Digital thermometer
- Lubricating eye drops for sore/dry eyes
- Dental first-aid kit

Medications

- Antacids (e.g., ranitidine, omeprazole, calcium carbonate)
- Antihistamine (e.g., diphenhydramine) for allergic reactions
- Antidiarrheal medication (e.g., loperamide, bismuth subsalicylate)
- Laxative/stool softener (e.g., siccusate)
- Cough (e.g., dextromethorphan) and nasal congestion (e.g., pseudoephedrine) remedies and throat lozenges
- Pain relievers/fever reducers (e.g., acetaminophen, ibuprofen)
- Motion sickness medication (e.g., dimenhydrinate, meclizine)