

Students Guide to Risk Assessment for Electives

Life, travel abroad and workplaces carries a number of risks. Particularly when planning a medical elective students should take time to assess the risks for themselves, plan ahead to reduce them and have thought through how to mitigate the consequences when things go wrong. For the whole UK in 2011 there were 52 Needle stick injuries, 21 Assault/thefts, 6 RTAs, 6 Animal bites/stings, 4 Natural disasters and 1 Death. Also 98% of electives don't run into problems. This awareness is the students responsibility although we can help direct you to appropriate resources to minimise risks. Below is a checklist of risks to consider. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) has detailed risks updated for all countries and it is essential to carefully study advice for the country you intend to visit.ⁱ

Travel Guides and insurance providers are also helpful. Remember to allow 2 months to set up immunisations, anti-malarials etc. Students should be aware of risks from blood borne viruses and how to minimise them. For HIV the incidences in sub-Saharan Africa is particularly high, particularly in hospital environments and below are resources for identifying the prevalence in your destinationⁱⁱ. NHS Scotland have a travel advise websiteⁱⁱⁱ and Occupational Health or travel clinics can assist. Only Occupational Health can supply you with personal PEP packs to take if you are exposed to HIV currently £206.00^{iv}.

Medical Indemnity cover is provided by all the major companies free of charge to students who have registered with them. You need to advise them where you are going and they will provide a letter confirming cover. Only the MDU will cover USA.

Insurance is your responsibility. Electives are not typical holidays – so you need to check cover carefully. It is sensible to arrange insurance whenever you have to spend significant money, in case you need to cancel. There are a number of specialist providers who provide cover designed for electives. Consider if you need these covered: Medical equipment, Repatriation option following BBV exposure, Cancellation, 'Extreme' sports or activities

Remember to take a First aid kit^v

Appendix A Checklist for considering risks taken with permission from Responsible Electives
(University of Dundee)^{vi}

A Loss, Theft, Accidents and Illness

Loss of: Money/Passport/Air ticket
Detained by: Police/Immigration/Military
Illness: Minor/Inpatients/Surgery/Blood/Repatriation
Accidents: RTA/Sport/Activities

B Personal Health

Existing issues: Medication/First Aid
Infectious disease: Hygiene/Water
Sexual
Prophylaxis
Immunisations
Psychological

C Cultural Awareness

Clothing
People
Political
Religious
Legal

D Blood Bourne Virus

Prevalence
Clinical activity
PPE
PEP

E Civil Unrest and Natural Disasters

FCO status
Embassy/Consul

- **Mugging:** Is there a heightened risk of being mugged? What action do you propose to take to reduce this?
- **No-Go areas:** Which areas are high risk? Have you thought how you propose to handle this?
- **Pick-pockets:** Have you made arrangements to carry valuables well hidden E.g. in a pouch around the neck worn under the clothes, or in a money belt?
- **Public transportation:** When is public transportation safe or not safe? What are the alternative modes of transportation?
- **Beaches:** Have you a plan for keeping your valuables safe while you are on the beach, e.g. when swimming?
- **Curfew:** What actions do you propose to take if you are going out after dark?
- **Entrapment:** Do you know what entrapment is and how it can be avoided?
- **Drugs:** Do you know the local and international law relating to drugs including alcohol and the penalties of being caught in possession?
- **Terrorism:** Have you checked the Foreign Office advice? Do you know what to watch out for?
- **Sensitive buildings:** Are you aware that you must not carry cameras or even binoculars near to any airfields, government buildings, radio masts?
- **Road blocks:** Are there road blocks? Do you know what papers you are required to carry? Are you aware that you must be very polite to both police and military?

Appendix B Reducing the risk from blood borne viruses (BBV)

- Prevent avoidable exposure by following procedures regarding safe handling and disposal of needles.
- Wear protective eyewear, gloves and clothing as appropriate.
- Wash the site of exposure immediately with soap and water, without scrubbing.
- Free bleeding of puncture wounds should be encouraged.
- Exposed mucous membranes, including eyes, should be irrigated with copious amounts of water.
- The quality of the gloves matters – you might want to take some, which also would reduce the ‘burden’ for your host.
- Full PPE may be culturally inappropriate in many high risk areas.
- Wrap around DIY goggles in a belt pouch can work well, be ‘at hand’ and therefore get used.
- Potential BBV exposures are highly stressful events, even more so when away from home. When PEP is provided detailed guidance is given. Keep it handy and know what first steps to take– washing, arranging testing etc

HIV/ AIDS can be contracted through:

- unprotected sex with an infected person, who may not know they are infected
- the use of infected syringes, medical and dental instruments or anything else that punctures the skin, such as tattooing needles
- transfusions of HIV infected blood
- passing from an infected mother to her baby during pregnancy, childbirth or breast-feeding.
- It cannot be passed on through everyday social contact, insect bites or dirty food and crockery. Nor can it be passed on through kissing, coughing and sneezing.

Protecting yourself against HIV/AIDS

- ensure you use condoms with new sexual partners. It is advisable to pack your own as standards may differ from those in the UK or they may not readily be available
- don’t share needles and syringes
- be aware that some countries do not have the same medical standards as the UK. Equipment may not be adequately sterilised, nor blood screened for HIV and hepatitis B or C
- if you require self-administered injections, take an adequate supply of your own needles
- don’t have a tattoo, acupuncture treatment or body piercing unless you can be sure the equipment is sterile.
- Some countries have introduced HIV antibody testing for some visitors, or require an HIV antibody test certificate. Check with the relevant Embassy before you travel.
- If you need to take HIV/ AIDS related medications with you, check it’s legal in the country you’re visiting. It’s best to pack it in your hand luggage and take a letter from your GP with you.
- The relevant embassy and your local GP will provide you with more information.

ⁱ <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/travel-advice-by-country/>

ⁱⁱ http://www.unaids.org/globalreport/HIV_prevalence_map.htm

ⁱⁱⁱ [http://www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk/advice/advice-for-travellers/hiv-post-exposure-prophylaxis-\(pep\)-information-for-travellers.aspx](http://www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk/advice/advice-for-travellers/hiv-post-exposure-prophylaxis-(pep)-information-for-travellers.aspx)

^{iv} [http://www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk/advice/advice-for-travellers/hiv-post-exposure-prophylaxis-\(pep\)-information-for-travellers.aspx](http://www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk/advice/advice-for-travellers/hiv-post-exposure-prophylaxis-(pep)-information-for-travellers.aspx)

^v <http://www.traveldoctor.co.uk/firstaidkit.htm>

^{vi} www.responsibleelectives.org/

Please return this section to Fiona Petrie in the MBChB Office. Additional copies available on the elective website.

It is important we can be confident that students have understood the potential risks with undertaking an elective overseas. Please complete the section below to confirm that you have read and understood this advice.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____