

Travel health refresher



The most frequently asked travel related questions on the Practice Nurse Forums right now are around the practice of travel health. These Q&As cover the basics and we will be running a more comprehensive article in the near future

Who can undertake travel health and is training required?

The documents in *Resources* stipulate Registered Nurses can undertake travel health care so the newer qualification of Nursing Associates can also work in this field. However, all those new to the field of practice should undertake a minimum of two days training in the subject with a curriculum described in the Faculty of Travel Medicine (FTM) publication and then receive mentorship in their practice until deemed competent to undertake travel health consultations on their own. The FTM also provides a competency assessment tool for travel health practitioners. It would be unlawful at the present time for Nursing Associates to administer any travel vaccines under Patient Group Directions, so a system would need to be worked out using, for example, a Patient Specific Direction.

Do we have to provide a travel health service in primary care?

If you work in England the answer is yes. Prior to the 2020 GP contract, a surgery could opt out of travel, but travel health is now part of the core contract and a service must be provided. The CQC outlines that this includes the pre-travel risk assessment; travel health advice including malaria prevention; advising which vaccines are available on the NHS (cholera, hepatitis A, polio and typhoid) and directing travellers to another provider for advice on non-NHS vaccines, as necessary. A recent blog outlining details of this issue is found at <https://janechiodini.blogspot.com/2021/11/providing-travel-service-in-primary-care.html>. In Scotland, travel has been removed from the GP Contract and care is not provided in this setting in many Health Boards but arrangements differ between areas.

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Can a GP surgery give the private travel vaccines?

A GP surgery may choose to provide the private vaccines of hepatitis B, Japanese encephalitis, meningitis ACWY, rabies, tick borne encephalitis and yellow fever for pre travel, but this is their choice. Travellers can be charged for the vaccines, but additional insurance will be required by those administering them. The Clinical Negligence Scheme for General Practice (CNSGP) would not cover this. Note, if rabies vaccine post travel as part of post exposure treatment is required, then a GP surgery must provide it within the GP contract.

How long should a travel consultation last?

The RCN advises a minimum of 20 minutes with more complex travellers requiring longer. This advice is supported by the FTM. The consultation requires many elements and it would be impossible to advise a traveller in less time than this. Travel health practice is complex. Ensure you study the resources to support these statements.

How often should you undertake an update?

The RCN states ideally updates should be annual but appreciates that a General

Practice Nurse has many fields of practice to keep up to date with. However, the practitioner is professionally accountable for their actions under the Code. You can subscribe to automated updates sent out by email from bodies such as NaTHNaC and TRAVAX to alert you to important changes.

CONCLUSION

General practices are very busy and overwhelmed with workload at times. Many consider travel health to be unimportant, but the public health risks of disease and the speed with which infections can now be spread by modern travel can present a significant risk, as we saw from the rapid developments in the early days of COVID-19. Therefore, travel health is vitally important in terms of preventive care. Practices need to be creative in helping travellers to travel safely, but travellers also need to take responsibility for some self-directed research and planning their trip, and seek advice within a reasonable timeframe.

RESOURCES

Royal College of Nursing (2018) Competencies: travel health nursing: career and competence development, London: RCN. <https://www.rcn.org.uk/professional-development/publications/pdf-006506>
Chiodini et al. (2020) Good Practice Guidance for Providing a Travel Health Service. Faculty of Travel Medicine of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow <https://rcpsg.ac.uk/travel-medicine/good-practice-guidance-for-providing-a-travel-health-service>
CQC: GP mythbuster 107: Pre-travel health services <https://www.cqc.org.uk/guidance-providers/gps/gp-mythbuster-107-pre-travel-health-services>