

Dialysis Away from Base (DAFB)

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Who is this guidance for?

A: This guidance is for patients living in England only (or registered with an English GP), who are receiving routine Haemodialysis or Peritoneal Dialysis. If you live outside England (or are registered with a GP outside England) then you will need to ask your renal team to find out how to organise your dialysis away from base. 'Base' refers to the place where a patient normally has their dialysis treatment.

Q: Is it easy to organise to have DAFB?

A: Whilst it does take some planning for DAFB to take place, your renal team will be able to help you with organising DAFB. There are some useful websites and telephone numbers at the end of this information sheet that will help.

It is best to give as much notice as possible before you plan to go away. This is usually a minimum of 4 weeks if you are within the UK and 3 months if travelling outside the UK. It is advisable to make sure that you have all the relevant travel documents needed for travelling abroad in plenty of time before arranging visits to other countries for example, a valid passport.

Q: Will I have to pay for my DAFB?

A: No, not in a National Health Service (NHS) unit in the UK, nor in those private units with which the NHS has made an agreement to pay. If the unit is a private unit within the UK you will need to check that they have an agreement with the NHS, and that the NHS will therefore pay. You will of course have to pay for your travel and accommodation costs.

Outside of the UK, the rules on whether you have to pay are different depending on where you are travelling:

- If you are visiting the European Union (EU) or European Economic Area (EEA), you can access dialysis using the European Health Insurance Card (EHIC). If your EHIC card has expired, you can apply for the GHIC, or 'Global Healthcare Insurance Card':

<https://www.ghic.org.uk/Internet/startApplication.do> . You will need to assure yourself of the arrangements for any particular country that you plan to travel through or stay in (please see the further information section for useful websites that can help you with this).

- The EU UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement does not cover Switzerland or the European Economic Area (EEA). The European Free Trade Agreement (EFTA) States are Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway. However, there is a plan to agree new arrangements on social security coordination with Switzerland and the EEA EFTA States that would further extend reciprocal healthcare cover. Further information is available here: <https://www.gov.uk/visit-eu-switzerland-norway-iceland-liechtenstein>
- Please be aware that in some countries, there may be a percentage payment system, which means that you may need to pay part of the cost of holiday haemodialysis. It is therefore important to check this before you confirm the booking for your stay.
- If the renal unit you will be using within the European Economic Area (EEA) / EU is not a state-provided renal unit you will need to pay for the dialysis treatment sessions yourself.
- Prior to the UK's exit from the EU, patients could apply for treatment from private treatment providers in the EU/EAA under the EU Directive Route (known as article 56), however this option ceased from January 2021 (following the UK's exit from the EU).
- There are several other countries with which the UK has a reciprocal healthcare agreement. Please check the following website link for these countries: <https://www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/healthcare-abroad/healthcare-when-travelling-abroad/travelling-outside-the-european-economic-area-eea/>. Treatment must be arranged in advance, at a state/government dialysis centre. Private treatment centres are not included within this agreement. In most cases, this will either be free or at a reduced cost. You will need to check before you confirm your booking if there are any additional charges for you.

- For haemodialysis outside the EEA or a country with a reciprocal healthcare agreement you will be expected to pay the full cost of the treatment. DAFB outside the EEA or reciprocal countries may not be regulated by a country's health policy, and you will need to make checks about the quality of the service. Before you book your dialysis you need to check, for example, the type of dialysis service provided, the number of doctors and nursing staff, machines, back up machines provided, and the experience of the renal team in providing dialysis. For some destinations it may be wise to take some of the products used in dialysis with you, for example saline bags, fistula needles and any medicines. This needs to be agreed with your usual renal unit.

Q: Can I have cruise-ship holiday dialysis?

A: Yes, subject to clinical approval. If the cruise (river or ocean going) is within the boundaries of, or the majority of the cruise ports of call are to an EEA country or a country with which the UK has a reciprocal agreement, then you can be reimbursed up to the cost of what your dialysis costs the NHS.

You will need to get approval from your renal team for the reimbursement before you go on your cruise, as they will refund you on your return. This will help you to know how much of the cost of the dialysis on the cruise will be paid to you as it may not cover the total cost of the dialysis. You will need to forward receipts and proof of payment when you return.

DAFB on a cruise ship is classed as being outside EEA or a reciprocal country and therefore may not be regulated by a country's health policy. You will need to make checks about the quality of the service before you book your dialysis on a cruise ship. You could check, for example, the type of dialysis service provided, number of staff, machines, provision of back up machines, and the experience of the renal team in providing dialysis etc. You also need to make sure that the cruise company has your clinical information and will also update your renal team on the dialysis treatment you received on your return.

You must have adequate travel insurance to cover you whilst on a cruise ship as NHS England will only pay up to the cost of the renal dialysis tariff and will not pay for any other health care costs.

For cruises outside these countries you will have to pay for the total cost of dialysis yourself.

Q: Will I get my usual transport to and from dialysis with DAFB?

A: You will need to check that there is transport available at the unit that you are planning to use for the times that you will be dialysing there. If you meet the eligibility criteria for having transport provided to and from dialysis sessions at your home unit, you may be able to receive this transport free of charge in the temporary location you're staying at, but this is in England only. Your renal team can help with finding out about the transport arrangements before you book your DAFB. Remember to cancel your transport to your 'base' dialysis centre while you are away.

Q: Can I dialyse at a private dialysis facility in England.

A: Yes, but only free of charge so long as that private facility has an agreement with NHS England. Your Renal unit will be able to help you to identify commissioned private providers in England.

Q: Can any dialysis patient go on holiday?

A: No. A decision has to be made about whether a patient is suitable to dialyse at another facility and whether they are clinically well enough to travel. For example, a patient with complex needs who normally receives haemodialysis at a main renal centre would not usually be able to dialyse at a nurse led satellite unit. You will be part of discussions around this and you will be able to ask any questions you have. It is advisable to wait until you have agreement from your dialysis team before making a booking.

Q: As a patient can I arrange dialysis away from base myself?

A : We advise patients to make use of their 'holiday coordinator' or named nurse when arranging DAFB. Freedom Dialysis, who provide help and information on DAFB outside the UK, may be able to offer some practical advice and find a slot within the UK through their 'swap' scheme www.dialysisfreedom.co.uk.

Q: What happens if I cannot get dialysis where I want it?

A: Unfortunately, dialysis capacity at some locations is scarce and you may have to consider looking at dialysis further away from your initial destination, so we advise booking as far in advance as possible.

Q: How often can I have DAFB?

A: There is unrestricted access to DAFB, subject to availability etc and as long as you are considered suitable and well enough to dialyse at another facility. The frequency and length of sessions of DAFB may be different from your normal routine and this is something you will need to understand before you confirm your DAFB.

Q: Will I be suspended from the transplant list if I go on holiday?

A: You may be suspended from the transplant list, while you are away, if you travel to a location outside the UK where getting back quickly enough to your Transplant Centre, will be a problem. This may also be the case in the UK, if the location is somewhere which is difficult getting back from quickly, such as the highlands of Scotland. You will need to speak to your renal team to find out if you will be suspended.

It is important that the donor co-ordinator is aware that you will be away and where you will be. If you have been away to a country that is deemed as high risk of blood borne viruses, such as hepatitis B, you may be suspended from the transplant list for 3 months after you return. It is really important that you update the transplant co-ordinator if your plans change and to confirm on your return that you are re-activated on the transplant list, following general health and infection control checks being completed.

Q: Are there any specific policies in place for infection control?

A: Yes. The Department of Health updated guidelines in 2010, with a specific mention of Blood Borne Viruses (BBV) and DAFB; and some units/regions have their own additional policies. These will only apply to United Kingdom (UK) and although other countries will have similar guidelines these may not be as strict as the UK guidelines. There is a particular risk of BBV in South East Asia, Africa and the Middle East. To find out more about this you will need to see your renal doctor or nurse.

Q: What should I do about medication?

A: It is advisable to plan what medications you will need to cover your stay and take those with you. If travelling by plane, you should consider putting your medications in your hand luggage and check with travel providers what their policies (if any) are on carrying/declaring medications and medical equipment. If you are able to carry a repeat prescription with you that should provide practical evidence.

Q: Do I need travel insurance?

A: Yes. It is very important that you have comprehensive travel and medical insurance to cover you whilst you are away from the UK. The potential charges that you would have to pay if you required any additional medical treatment whilst away could easily run into thousands of pounds. It is important to check the small print for any exclusions that may apply for health care abroad that is covered under the insurance policy. In light of possible passport issuing delays, you should ensure all relevant travel documents needed for travelling abroad are obtained or are up to date before arranging visits to other countries.

Q: Am I allowed to take the dialysis equipment I need on the plane with me?

A: By equipment this includes dialysis machines and also any dialysis products you may have given to use whilst you are away. Different airlines have different policies around this and your renal unit will be able to check the policies relating to transporting the things you need. The renal unit must also provide a letter with named items to be taken either into the hold or the cabin. The DAFB co-ordinator will be able to arrange this.

The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) or your travel agent can advise on what support is available to passengers who require mobility assistance www.caa.co.uk/passengers/prm/passengers-with-disabilities-and-reduced-mobility/.

Further information

It is recommended that when travelling you keep the contact details to hand at all times of your unit, your DAFB coordinator and the dialysis contact at your destination in case any queries arise.

Below are some useful websites and contact telephone numbers:

www.dialysisfreedom.co.uk

Tel. 01509 808668.

and

www.holidaydialysis.co.uk

Tel. 01509 815999,

(for details of holiday destinations with dialysis facilities).

National Kidney Federation.

(for general advice and information including travel insurance companies).

www.kidney.org.uk

'Helpline' 0800 169 09 36

Opening hours. 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday to Friday.

Global Dialysis

(for information and patient feedback on dialysis units around the world)

www.globaldialysis.com

Kidney Care UK

(for further information on reciprocal healthcare arrangements)

<https://www.kidney.org.uk/news/reciprocal-healthcare-for-dialysis-patients-from-1st-january-2021>