

COVID-19 and Travel for Work - Advice for Travel Health Practitioners

COVID-19 and the response to COVID-19 is severely limiting international travel; however, many people still need to travel internationally for their work.

- This puts them at risk for COVID-19 and risk of transmitting SARS-CoV-2 to others.
- They are likely to be subjected to measures to reduce the spread of SARS-CoV-2.
- Health issues that were prevalent, and a risk to travellers prior to the pandemic, continue to be present.
- Health services may be less available and accessible in the time of COVID-19 resulting in difficulties in diagnosing and treating these other conditions, as well as COVID-19.

The landscape is changing all the time, and it is not possible to give enough guidance for all situations in which persons who travel for work may find themselves. We provide a framework for the travel adviser to discuss the risks and requirements with the traveller.

Preventive measures should be recommended for all travellers. Being vaccinated, avoiding crowded places, social distancing, wearing masks, and hand sanitisation, avoiding frequently touched surfaces are central to prevention of SAR-CoV-2 infection and spread of infection.

At a time where COVID-19 is a top concern for employers and employees, it is imperative that other travel related and non-travel related risks are remembered in preparation for a business trip. Unfortunately, COVID-19 has become central and often these other risks are overlooked.

Employers need to take all reasonably possible measures to assure the health and safety of their employee also when travelling for work. This includes:

- Assessment of risk and providing (for) pre-travel health counselling on mitigating measures that the employee needs to take.
- Strongly recommend immunisation for COVID-19.
- Given the pace of change, the employees themselves also have a direct responsibility.
- They need to make sure they keep informed of the changing risks during their itinerary and act accordingly.
- If necessary, they will need to consult with their employer or travel health counsellor.

Some issues to consider for the travel health practitioner

- Travel is more complex and takes longer due to additional risk mitigation measures imposed by transportation or countries requiring COVID-19 tests, immunisation or quarantine.
- A digital 'passport' may be required to document immunisation status, history of past infection, serology results and recent COVID-19 PCR or antigen test results.
- Underlying medical conditions need to be considered for the country itself, and its innate risks, as well as increased risk for more severe disease if they were to contract SARS CoV-2. (<https://alama.org.uk/covid-19-medical-risk-assessment/> can be used as guidance for persons not vaccinated)
- Vaccination status and willingness to be vaccinated.
- The mode of travel itself or the conditions at the destination may place people at higher risk of exposure to COVID-19.

- Travellers may not be able to transfer or return because of COVID-19 related measures leading to longer trips than anticipated.
- Travellers may be placed in quarantine or in isolation for a variety of reasons:
 - Quarantine may be required when entering a country
 - Further testing may be required on arrival and different tests may give different results, leading to isolation due to an unanticipated positive test
 - PCR tests may stay positive for a prolonged period after a person has recovered and is no longer infectious. This may lead to needless isolation.
 - Travellers may come into contact with a COVID-19 case during their trip or stay and may need to be quarantined.
 - Travelers may have been infected in their country of origin and develop an apparent infection when in the country they visit and need treatment or isolation.
- Extended trips due to quarantine, isolation or delays may lead to insufficient supply of medication for existing conditions or as prevention. This should be planned for.
- Isolation and quarantine conditions may pose additional health risks or be uncomfortable.
- Health care for COVID-19 as well as for other medical issues in the destination country may be less accessible, especially emergency and ICU care.
- Evacuations are more difficult to execute, because of travel restrictions countries or airlines impose, especially on persons with COVID-19 or a positive PCR test.

Measures to discuss with the traveller

- Travellers need to inform themselves of all the COVID-19 measures needed for the trip and for entry into the destination country, including requirements for stopovers, and ensure these are taken. Consideration should be given to requirements of the return trip as well.

They may include:

- having proof of a negative PCR and or negative antigen rapid test
 - having proof of negative serology IgG or IgM
 - proof of vaccination against SARS-CoV-2
 - quarantine on arrival or testing on arrival
 - travel insurance including COVID-19 cover
- In case of underlying conditions that may lead to severe COVID-19 or have a higher risk of needing medical care while on the trip or stay abroad, advise to consider cancelling or postponing.
 - Travellers need to ensure enough medication or medical supplies for a prolonged stay.
 - All COVID-19 related personal preventive measures always need to be taken. Including distancing, wearing facemasks/facial coverings in public spaces, hygiene, avoiding crowds, staying home or in the hotel when ill with respiratory symptoms, etc.
 - All normal travel-related and non-travel related preventive health measures need to be followed and emphasized. This is especially true for malaria prophylaxis, vaccinations, and self-treatment of common infections and conditions as it is more important than usual to avoid getting sick or needing medical care.
 - Ensure that travel insurance covers costs of COVID-19 related care and evacuation. This may be more difficult to access or be very expensive.
 - Travellers needs to inform themselves on what possibilities there are for advanced care in the destination or what possibilities there are for medical evacuation, bearing in mind that

these may not be readily available at the time when they are needed. Their insurance or the travel health provider may be able to help with this.

- The traveller should be forewarned that COVID-19 testing and quarantine rules and requirements might abruptly change during their intended travel

Some resources for updated COVID-19 country entry requirements include

- Origin and Destination Country's embassy/consulate website or those of the ministries of foreign affairs of health
- [IATA COVID-19 Travel Regulations Map](#)
- www.travax.com
- Official airline websites for the airlines used during travelling
- <https://gowork.ges.deloitte/>
- <https://www.smarttraveller.gov.au/>