

Accessing Treatments Outside of Canada

In certain cases, people may choose to travel abroad for treatments for a number of reasons, including:

- The treatment they are currently using is ineffective in managing their disease
- The treatment or procedure offered abroad may be more readily available or accompanied by coordinated care which reduces wait times
- The treatment or procedure is not approved or available in Canada
- The treatment or procedure is available in Canada, but wait times are too long or the cost of the treatment is too high
- The treatment or procedure is considered experimental, meaning it is only available in [clinical trials](#)

We are aware that conventional, complementary, or alternative and experimental treatments are offered abroad, but do not maintain a list of clinics or treatment facilities. It is important to note that not all countries share the same regulatory standards that apply to the Canadian medical system. People are encouraged to maintain open and ongoing discussions with their MS healthcare team when considering travelling abroad for treatment to ensure that they are able to make informed decision about their health and the management of their MS.

Each person experiences MS differently, and faces a different set of challenges. It's important to be aware of those challenges and weigh both the benefits and risks when considering any treatment, including travelling abroad for a medical procedure or to obtain a treatment that is unavailable, inaccessible or too expensive in Canada. Gathering as much information as possible will enable you to make well-informed decisions for you, and your loved ones.

When making the decision to travel abroad for medical treatments or procedures, there are some key considerations to be aware of both before you go, and when you return. Below are questions that may help guide discussions with your healthcare team and loved ones before travelling abroad for treatment. Some of the questions may not be answered right away, but it is important to keep them in mind and be as informed as possible about the treatment and its short and long-term impacts.

Safety

- What safety risks are associated with the procedure or treatment?
- Will I have access to aftercare while I am still in the country?
- Will I be treated if I experience a complication due to the procedure or treatment? Are there any safety risks associated with aftercare treatment?
- What are the standards of care and conditions of the facility or clinic offering the procedure or treatment? (I.e. appropriate equipment for the particular treatment or procedure, sterilized equipment, clean facility, bedding and dressings, regulated facility.)
- Who is the health care professional providing the treatment or procedure? Does he or she have the necessary credentials and expertise?

- How long after the procedure or treatment is it safe to travel? (i.e. am I at an increased risk for a blood clot or other serious complication?)
- Should I seek legal representation before going abroad and do I need to sign a liability waiver? If so, what should I look for that may stand out? (The responsibility of the patient, the overseas medical centre, and the local physician).
- If there is a complication due to negligence on the part of the physician during the procedure or treatment, do I have any rights to take legal action?

Cost

- How much will the treatment or procedure cost?
- How much will aftercare cost?
- How much will travel and accommodations cost?
- How much will additional required medications cost while abroad (different to those you must take with you from Canada)?
- Will I need to translate my medical records to a different language? If so, how much will that cost?
- How much will it cost for my partner or caregiver to travel with me?
- Will I need a translator, if so, how do I hire one and how much will it cost? Will I need to pay for their travel and/or accommodation?
- How much will travel and medical insurance cost? What kind of medical insurance is needed if I am specifically traveling to get medical care, rather than getting it only for an emergency?
- How much will it cost to have vaccinations or obtain other preventive medications required prior to travel (i.e. hepatitis A&B, malaria etc.)?

Standard of care

- How do I know what level of care I will receive abroad; during the procedure and aftercare?
- What level of care will I receive when I am back home?
- Will physicians (abroad and in Canada) be equipped to manage aftercare following the procedure/treatment I am having?
- Will the health care professional abroad provide information for my Canadian health care team about my treatment and potential complications and aftercare?

Vaccinations & other preventive medications

- Have I consulted the [Travel Health Notices](#), and do I require vaccination for the country that is providing the treatment or procedure?
- Is the required vaccination safe to take for someone with MS? (live vs. inactive)

- Will the required vaccine interact or interfere with a drug I am already taking for my MS?
- Do I need an appointment with a travel medical practitioner?

Travelling with medications

- Are there immigration laws related to bringing medications in to/out of the country I am travelling to?
- Is a medical note required to travel with medications in to/out of Canada?
- Do my medications require refrigeration?
- Do I have enough medication to last the duration of the trip?
- If I run out of medication, is there somewhere I can obtain more while on my trip?
- If I was prescribed a medication abroad, will I be able to get it from my family doctor if I run out? (i.e. is it available in Canada)

Travelling long distances

- Will I require wheelchair or other assistance due to my MS?
- How long following the procedure/treatment must I remain in the country?
- What kind of health insurance coverage do I need?

Immigration laws and visas

- Does the country I am travelling to require a travel visa? If so, what is the wait time for the visa application to be processed?
- What is the cost of the visa and how long is it valid?
- If I have to return to the country at a later date and the visa is no longer valid, will I be able to apply for another visa?

Communication and credibility

- What language do the medical and support staff speak at the facility offering the treatment or procedure?
- How do I locate and contact a credible medical tourism broker?
- How do I check the credibility of an overseas medical centre?
- Has the treatment or procedure being offered abroad been approved by a government-regulated body (such as Health Canada)?

Additional questions for the treatment facility

- What medical information will you need from me?
- What are the credentials and experience of the individuals who will be performing the procedure/treatment? How many procedures/treatments have been completed to date?
- Are the physician's members of a college of physicians that require adherence to a code of ethics?
- Are there any testimonials?
- How much is the cost of the procedure/treatment, as well as any necessary aftercare, relative to other centres?
- What benefits can I expect from the procedure/treatment?
- What are the risks of the procedure/treatment?
- What, if any, are the post-procedure/treatment complications associated with this procedure/treatment?
- What kind of aftercare can I expect to receive from you? What kind of aftercare will I need to arrange in my home community?
- What documentation will you provide me for my health care team at home? Will I be allowed to obtain and leave with a copy of my medical records from the facility/clinic?
- Will you speak to my health care professionals at home if needed?
- If there are any post-procedure/treatment complications, will you perform additional procedures, and if so what are the costs associated with the additional procedures?

Additional resources: [Canadian Medical Protective Association](#), [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), [Government of Canada](#)