Announcement

Health considerations and guidance

This announcement aims to complement national recommendations and provide a general overview of considerations and guidance for patients with thalassaemia, sickle cell disease (SCD) and other rare anaemias who are travelling to Malaysia for the TIF International Conference.

It is important thus to consult with your treating doctor who will be able to provide personalized information for your condition.

BEFORE TRAVELLING

Medical Consultation: Prior to travelling, consult with your treating physician who is familiar with your health condition as early as possible. They can assess your overall health, provide necessary medical advice, and guide you regarding the suitability of travel.

If you have SCD and have had a severe crises within 2 weeks of the trip, you should NOT travel.

If you are unwell, and particularly if you have fever (high temperature) the day before or on the day of travel, consult with your doctor to advise if it is safe for you to travel.

Blood Transfusions: If you require regular blood transfusions as part of your management, ask your doctor to create a transfusion schedule that can help avoid emergencies during your trip. This includes the transfusion upon your return, not just the transfusion before departure.

Medication and Medical Records: Ensure that you have an adequate supply of necessary medications for the duration of your trip, including any backup medications in case of loss or delays. Carry your medical records (including your most recent in-patient medical information), pharmaceutical drug prescriptions in case you need to seek medical assistance as well as the contact details of your doctor(s) in case you are asked to provide them to the attending doctor in the host country.
Vaccinations: Stay up to date with routine vaccinations recommended for patients with thalassaemia, SCD and other rare anaemias, including those for Hepatitis B and A.

Consult with your treating doctor to determine if there are any **specific additional vaccinations** you need to take.

Your treating doctor will also advise if there are any contraindicated vaccinations or pharmaceutical drugs that you must not receive based on your medical records and the medications you are currently taking.

Travel Insurance: Consider obtaining travel insurance (wherever possible) that covers at least medical emergencies. Thalassaemia, SCD or other rare anaemia patients may have specific requirements, so review the policy carefully and ensure it covers any potential complications or hospitalizations related to your condition.

Travel medical kit: In addition to your prescription medications (see above), you should pack a basic travel medical kit with essential over-the-counter medications and supplies. This may include (but not limited to) pain relievers (for headaches etc), antihistamines (for allergies or motion sickness), anti-diarrheal medications (for gastrointestinal issues), insect repellent (DEET), sunscreen, allergy medications, adhesive bandages (for small cuts or scrapes) and antiseptic wipes.

**DURING AIR TRAVEL**

- Make sure that all your medicines are packed in your hand-luggage.

- Protect yourself from respiratory transmitted diseases (e.g. flu) by wearing a mask in the airplane, airports and other crowded areas.

- Thalassemia and SCD patients may have an increased risk of developing deep vein thrombosis (DVT) due to prolonged periods of inactivity during air travel. To minimize this risk, stay hydrated, move around and stretch your legs regularly during the flight, and consider (upon your doctors’ advice) wearing compression stockings.

- Inform relevant authorities (e.g. airline etc) if you need to travel with prescribed medications, which may include antibiotics and strong painkillers such as opiates, or that may require refrigeration.

- SCD patients who will require oxygen during their flight, should inform the airline to make necessary arrangements.

  ! On long flights (more than 6 hours) make sure that you:

    - Walk around at least every 30 minutes
    - Stay well-hydrated (drink water and avoid alcohol)
    - Wear warm clothing / use a blanket to avoid chilling
    - Wear flight socks to reduce the risk of thrombosis (upon your doctors’ advice)
It is prudent to carry packed snacks for the flight as provision of on-board food and refreshments vary among airlines.

WHILE IN MALAYSIA

Hydration: Stay well-hydrated to prevent dehydration, which can also occur due to diarrhoea (common among travellers abroad). Dehydration can exacerbate thalassemia-related symptoms and trigger crises in SCD patients. Carry water and hydrating beverages with you.

SCD patients in particular should carry oral rehydration salt sachets to avoid triggering a crisis.

Diet: Maintain a balanced diet to support your overall health. Exercise caution with food whose ingredients you are not familiar with; adventures in exploring new food tastes may not be very safe as your digestive system may have an unwanted reaction.

Most diseases that affect travellers are transmitted through water and food, and some are transmitted by insects (e.g. mosquitoes).

Prevention can be achieved through simple measures:

- Avoid raw fruits and vegetables, salads, undercooked or inadequately cooked beef or pork, fish, and seafood.
- Avoid unpasteurized milk, and local dairy products.
- Use bottled water for drinking and preparing coffee and tea.
- Soft drinks in sealed bottles are considered safe.
- Avoid ice cubes in drinks.
- Swimming in fresh (non-chlorinated) water is dangerous (see CDC site here).
- Do not buy anything from street vendors and food that is exposed.
- Brush your teeth with bottled water.
- For the prevention of insect-borne diseases, wear appropriate clothing (closed-toe shoes, long sleeves).
- Avoid strong perfumes and colourful clothing that attract insects.
- Use insect repellents. Use mosquito nets at night.
- Malaria prophylaxis pills (consult your treating physician prior to travelling).

Always buy and drink sealed bottled mineral water

! Get advice and treatment urgently if you develop fever or notice blood in the stools or if you are bitten (by insects or other animals).

Emergency contacts will be provided in the Information Pack to be sent prior to the Conference

Read TIF’s Travel Guidance here for more extensive information.