

Caring for patients visiting friends and relatives abroad

Tips for primary care providers



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Go Confidently.

Do you have VFR travellers in your practice?

Travellers visiting friends and relatives (VFRs) are persons who travel to their country of origin, usually a place with lower incomes, a different epidemiological landscape, and lack of access to quality healthcare. The spouse and children born in the country of residence are also considered VFR travellers.

As a primary care provider, you are likely the only point of contact for a VFR traveller. You may have a language or culture in common or have a long-standing relationship with the patient.

During the consultation

You may already be including travel health advice during consultations. Below are quick steps you can take to help your VFR traveller plan a healthy trip.

1. Ask if your patient is planning a trip

- Find out the purpose of travel – business, solo, or family trip.
- Listen for clues about travel. If a patient mentions a desire to visit family or take a trip between school terms, ask where.
- If travel is not planned, tell your patient to come for a consultation before their next trip.

2. Explain the need for travel health advice

- Discuss preventive travel health tips such as food and water safety, insect bite prevention, sun protection, and risk of road traffic and swimming injuries.
- If time or vaccine cost is an issue, learn how to prioritize vaccines based on the traveller's destination, itinerary, trip duration, age, previous vaccination, and current health status.

3. Offer to administer routine and travel vaccines

- If Yellow Fever vaccine or specialist advice is needed, refer the patient to an affordable travel clinic that provides discounted rates for families and is accessible by public transportation.
- Make time to do a full individual or family consultation for the travelling patient. Do not give travel advice informally. See resource: *The Pretravel Consultation* on the American Family Physician website at www.aafp.org/afp.

What you need to know

Compared to other travellers, VFR travellers are more likely to:

- Make last-minute travel plans
- Stay in local homes or go to remote areas
- Require medical care during or after a trip
- Not seek pre-travel health advice
- Decline vaccinations
- Believe they are immune to health risks like Malaria or Typhoid Fever
- Return with higher rates of preventable infectious diseases, including Typhoid Fever, Hepatitis A, Malaria, Dengue, and Tuberculosis

In your practice

1. Identify VFR travellers at risk.
2. Ask if your patient prefers health information in another language.
 - Give translated travel health information handouts
 - Use medically trained interpreters
3. Consider giving VFR travellers discounted fees for services not covered by health insurance.
4. Know travel medicine experts that you can contact in your area.
5. Employ multilingual staff to facilitate interactions with the patients you serve.
6. Encourage all staff in your practice to be informed about immigrant, refugee, and cross-cultural health issues.

Barriers to seeking travel health advice

Lack of awareness:

Travellers don't seek pre-travel health advice because they are not aware of the health risks that they may encounter abroad.

Beliefs:

Some travellers believe that they are immune to infectious diseases since they grew up in the host country. Others don't believe that vaccinations or medications like antimalarial drugs are beneficial.

Cost of vaccinations:

Travel vaccines are not covered by government health insurance and most private health plans.

Language and culture:

Some patients prefer to speak about medical concerns in their own language or with a practitioner that understands their culture.

Resources

- **Travel Health | PHAC**

Notices and travel health recommendations

www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/tmp-pmv

- **Statement on international travellers who intend to visit friends and relatives | CATMAT**

Backgrounder and advice for healthcare providers

www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/tmp-pmv/catmat-ccmtmv/friends-amis-eng.php

- **Vaccines411**

Find a local travel clinic by postal code

<https://vaccines411.ca/en>

- **International Travel and Health | WHO**

Travel health advisories and infectious diseases maps

www.who.int/ith/en/index.html

- **Yellow Book: Health Information for International Travel | CDC**

Tips for specific travellers

<https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/yellowbook/2020/table-of-contents>

- **Journal of Travel Medicine | ISTM**

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We used many sources to write our **Visiting Family & Friends**

Series. Contact us for a complete list.



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