

FOREIGN TRAVEL

Introduction

More and more organisations require their employees to travel abroad. It is essential that employers have risk assessed the destination and the activities that their employees undertake, and that management systems and support services are in place in order to ensure that these employees have the same level of health and safety provision as their colleagues based in the UK.

The number of employees now travelling outside the UK exceeds 60 million a year and this number is rising annually. There has also been a shift in business travel towards non-European destinations, with many more employees travelling to Africa, the Middle East, India, South East Asia and of increasing importance China. Many of these environments are less developed economically, socially and from a healthcare perspective than Western Europe. In addition, employees face significant changes in climate, temperature, humidity, the challenge of time zones and different cultures.

Since the events of September the 11th in the United States, there has been a significant effort and emphasis on security when travelling. However the health, safety and welfare of employees both physically and psychologically is also essential. The hazards of foreign travel and the risks associated with these hazards have to be risk assessed in the same way as any other work-related activity. Main factors to be considered in such a risk assessment are as follows:-

1. The destination.
2. The type and quality of accommodation.
3. The age and sex of the employees travelling.
4. The work activities required.
5. The health history of the employees, including any medication that has to be taken with them.
6. The experience of an organisation's employees with regards to foreign travel and previous issues.
7. The ability of the organisation's employees to access the appropriate medical services and the quality of these services.
8. The duration of stay.
9. The type of transport that will be used to travel to the destination and type of transport that will be required while working within a particular country.
10. The lifestyle and potential behaviour of employees when living and travelling abroad.
11. The immunisation status of the employees.
12. The appropriate insurance cover.
13. An individual employee's fitness to fly.
14. The environment in which the employee will be working, in particular the diseases and infections to which they may be at risk.

It is important to have a foreign travel policy to support any employees who are travelling abroad. Such a policy must include the provision for risk assessments and education, in addition to providing equipment such as travel kits, immunisation programmes, pre-travel medical screening, dental screening and post-travel medical assessments and debriefing sessions.

First Aid Travel Kit

A suitably stocked first aid travel kit is an essential item when travelling. Many organisations do not think to provide their employees with one. Problems such as travel sickness, diarrhoea, thrush or sunburn frequently strike and can incapacitate employees when working abroad. A little advanced planning will allow many minor health problems to be dealt with quickly, safely and easily.

Education

Educating employees with regards to the use of water and other drinks, how to avoid food poisoning in risky areas and how to prepare food is essential to maintain their health and safety while working in challenging environments. Further advice, particularly with regards to the avoidance of insect bites and maintaining defences against infectious diseases, are essential and can be lifesaving.

Managing the health, safety and welfare of employees working abroad, particularly working in challenging environments, is much more than just buying them a cheap air ticket. If you have groups of employees in this situation we at Preventative Healthcare have a significant amount of experience and can assist you in developing protocols, policies, risk assessment tools and health assessment programmes to maintain the health and welfare of your staff.

Further travel advice is available in the form of an employee advice sheet, which you can download from our website at www.phcohealth.com. Other useful websites include “Health Information for Overseas Travel” at the Department of Health www.v-stationery-office.co.uk/doh/hinfo. This is probably the best UK website of its kind. An alternative website, which is less comprehensive and therefore less time consuming, is the Scottish equivalent at www.fitfortravel.scot.nhs.uk.

The Centre for Disease Control in the United States provides up-to-the minute advice on travel precautions primarily aimed at US and Canadian citizens. This can be accessed at www.cdc.gov/travel.

NEW CLINIC

PHC now has a clinic in Colchester, Essex

If you would like one of your employees seen at our new clinic in Colchester, please contact your PHC Contract Support Administrator who will make the necessary arrangements. If you are unsure who your PHC Contract Support Administrator is just contact us via our main switchboard and they will put you through.