

Travel Health Operational Standard

Objective

Travelling abroad on Open University business is a necessary part of the job for many employees. Travellers may be at risk from hazards they encounter. Risk assessment will identify the seriousness, level of the risks, and necessary control measures.

Scope

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 requires that employers carry out a suitable and sufficient assessment of the risks that employees are exposed to whilst they are at work. Where significant risk is identified the employer must record and keep the findings. This record should represent an effective statement of hazards and risks of the travel, which will be the basis of the control measures to protect health and safety.

Responsibilities

Heads of Units should satisfy themselves that risks to health and safety arising from travel on Open University business are properly assessed and controlled so far as is reasonably practicable. This will include risk assessment of the activity proposed and personal safety risks within the country(s) visited. The travel advice section of the government's Foreign Travel Advice website at <http://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice> for up to date advice and travel alerts.

Unit Safety Coordinators (USCs) should ensure that risk assessments are compiled by persons competent to do so and that a register of assessments is maintained. Some assessments may be completed by users if they have received appropriate training, or by the Departmental Safety Advisor (DSA).

Travellers should consider the possible health hazards involved with their journey and obtain the necessary pre-travel health advice and vaccinations from Occupational Health.

Pre-Travel Health

Individuals should contact Occupational Health or their own GP if they have any queries regarding their fitness to travel. Employees with any serious medical conditions must notify the airline at the time of booking.

Open University insurance would be invalidated where someone is travelling against medical advice. Health complaints that could prevent someone from flying include some respiratory, cardiovascular and neurological conditions.

Individuals who are taking regular medication should ensure that they take sufficient for the duration of the trip. Medication should be kept in the hand luggage at all times. This includes any anti-malarial drugs that have been supplied for the trip.

The Occupational Health will supply a sterile emergency medical supplies kit, on a loan basis, to any individual who is visiting a country where there would be any risk of contracting diseases from contaminated needles. A compact first aid kit can be loaned to anyone who is visiting an area that will take them away from immediate emergency care.

Vaccinations/ Malaria Prevention

Please note that this section is currently under review to reflect recent changes – please refer to the vaccination approval process and vaccination request form

In-Flight Health

Research is continuing over the possible links between air travel and deep vein thrombosis (DVT). However, DVT is particularly associated with long periods of immobility for any reason and can also be associated with some medical conditions such as heart failure, pregnancy, injury and surgery. Many of these conditions are associated with changes to the clotting factors in the blood that increase the tendency for thrombosis.

Any member of staff who has a health condition that might be affected by flying is advised to seek advice from Occupational Health or their own General Practitioner.

Research is continuing in this area, but there are some sensible precautions to take if you are travelling by airplane.

- Regular stretching and mobility exercise should be encouraged and walking around the cabin wherever practicable. This should be at least hourly.
- Avoiding sitting with legs crossed as it reduces the flow of blood up the legs.
- If there is a stopover walking around in the airport lounge rather than sitting down will provide some exercise.
- Drinking plenty of water during the flight helps to avoid dehydration. The air in aircraft cabins is kept dry to protect the equipment; this can lead to significant dehydration on a long flight. While water will be offered, it can be worthwhile taking a personal bottle of water (where permitted).
- Avoidance of alcohol, cola, tea and coffee, they all add to the dehydration effects of the travel.
- Wear loose fitting comfortable clothes and avoid tight socks.
- Some authorities recommend aspirin to prevent DVT. Aspirin in this country is not licensed for this purpose and the research is not conclusive. It is thought the anti-adhesive effect of the aspirin on blood platelets may reduce the risk of thrombosis. If you decide to take aspirin as a preventive start the day before travel and continue for three days afterwards. The dose suggested is one quarter or a half of a 300mg tablet. While this is a very low dose aspirin should not be taken by anyone who has been advised against it. It should not be taken by anyone with gastro-intestinal ulceration and only with medical advice for asthmatics, and allergic disease.

Insurance

To ensure travel insurance is in place for your trip please click on the link <http://intranet.open.ac.uk/travel-insurance> to register.

The policy provides cover for work periods and incidental days involved in the travel. The Open University standard business travel insurance would not apply to specific holiday time that is added to a trip or for hazardous activities such as climbing or diving.

Health Problems Following Return

Any individual who experiences symptoms such as fever, severe diarrhoea, jaundice, urinary or genital disorders or skin problems in the few weeks following travel should seek medical advice.

Any items loaned from Occupational Health should be returned as soon as possible.