



PATIENT HANDOUT

Your IBD Travel Checklist

Practical preparation for flying, holidays and time away with Crohn's, colitis or another inflammatory bowel condition

Vance Medical Ltd provides general information and community support for people affected by gastrointestinal conditions. It is not medical advice and is not a substitute for the care of your own healthcare team. Nothing on this site should be used to diagnose or treat a health problem or disease. Always speak to your GP, pharmacist, dietitian or other qualified healthcare professional before making changes to your diet, medication or treatment, and with any questions about a medical condition. If you think you may have a medical emergency, call 999 or NHS 111 straight away.

Your IBD Travel Checklist

Practical preparation for flying, holidays and time away, for anyone living with Crohn's, colitis or another inflammatory bowel condition

A flare doesn't care that you're on holiday, and the things that make travel stressful with IBD (medication, toilets, food you can't control) are all things you can plan around. Most of what follows comes down to two habits: carry more than you think you'll need, and get the paperwork sorted before you leave, not at the airport.

This guide works alongside the tools already on your VanceHealthHub dashboard. The Health Record keeps your medication list, allergies and diagnosis details in one private place, ready to hand to a doctor abroad, or to turn into the travel letter this guide recommends.

AT A GLANCE

Quick-Reference Checklist

Before you travel	Packing your bag	On the journey
– Order extra medication – Get a doctor's letter – Check vaccines with your IBD team – Sort travel insurance – Apply for a free GHIC	– All medication in hand luggage – Cool bag if anything needs to stay cold – Can't Wait Card and RADAR key – Sharps bin and spare supplies	– Show your letter if asked at security – Ask about storing cold medication – Plan medication timing across time zones – Locate the toilets first

PACK MORE THAN YOU THINK

Medication: What to Pack and How to Carry It

Whatever you take, tablets, a self-injected biologic or an infusion-based treatment, the same two rules apply: pack enough for the whole trip plus a buffer for delays, and where possible, carry essential medication in your hand luggage.[1] Airport security allows medical liquids and injectables over the usual 100ml limit, but you'll need proof it's prescribed to you: your prescription, the pharmacy label, or a letter from your doctor.[2]

Cold-chain medicines

If your biologic needs to stay refrigerated, pack it in an insulated cool bag with gel packs, keep it out of direct sunlight, and never let it freeze. Check the patient information leaflet for what to do if it does.[1] Tell airport security and cabin crew you're carrying medical cooling equipment.

- Travelling for three months or more can mean needing a separate licence to bring your medicine into some countries, so check with the embassy of the country you're visiting well before you go.[1]
- Keep a photo of your letter and prescriptions on your phone as a backup.
- Pack medication in its original, labelled packaging.

PAPERWORK FIRST

Letters and Proving What You Need

A short letter from your GP or IBD team, listing your diagnosis, current medicines (including any injectable or infusion treatment) and any equipment you carry, such as a sharps bin or cooling pack, smooths almost every step of travelling: airport security, customs, and any pharmacy or hospital you need abroad.[1] Ask your surgery or IBD clinic for one a few weeks before you go; it's a routine request most teams are used to.

Your VanceHealthHub Health Record already holds your diagnosis, medication and allergy details in one place, a good starting point for what to ask your letter to cover.

CHECK BEFORE YOU BOOK

Vaccinations and Destination Health

Some travel vaccines are "live": they contain a weakened version of the organism they protect against, and aren't generally considered safe while you're on a biologic, an immunomodulator (such as azathioprine or methotrexate), or a course of steroids.[3] Yellow fever, the nasal-spray flu vaccine and oral typhoid are the ones most likely to affect travel plans. Check with your IBD team as soon as you know where you're going, ideally before you book: some vaccines need to be given weeks ahead of starting treatment, not after.[3]

Vaccine type	Usually fine while immunosuppressed?
Inactivated (injected flu, hepatitis A/B, most standard travel vaccines)	Usually yes: these don't contain live virus.[3]
Live (yellow fever, nasal-spray flu, oral typhoid)	Discuss with your IBD team first; often avoided while on treatment.[3]

DECLARE IT, DON'T RISK IT

Insurance and Healthcare Abroad

Standard travel insurance often excludes pre-existing conditions altogether, so always declare your Crohn's or colitis when you get a quote, even if it's been quiet for years: an undeclared condition can void the whole policy, not just an IBD-related claim.[4] A specialist provider or comparison broker can find cover that includes IBD.

If you're travelling in the EU, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway or Switzerland, a free GHIC (Global Health Insurance Card) gives you the same access to state healthcare as a local. Apply at gov.uk before you go.[5] A GHIC is not a replacement for travel insurance: it doesn't cover repatriation, private treatment, or much of what a flare away from home might need.

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

Toilet Access and Managing a Flare Away From Home

A Can't Wait Card explains your condition at a glance and has helped many Crohn's & Colitis UK members get faster access to a toilet in shops, cafes and restaurants; staff aren't obliged to let you through, but a widely recognised card helps.[6] A RADAR key opens the lock fitted to most disabled toilets across the UK, so you're not waiting for a member of staff; Crohn's & Colitis UK members can request one free.[6]

If you flare while away

Your letter and medication list are what a local pharmacist or doctor will need first. Keep your travel insurance's emergency line somewhere you can find quickly, not only saved to a phone that might run out of charge.

GLOSSARY

A Few Travel Terms Explained

Term	What it means
GHIC	Global Health Insurance Card: free UK card giving reciprocal state healthcare access in the EU, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland.[5]
Cold-chain medicine	A medicine, such as most biologics, that must stay within a set temperature range from manufacture to use.
Live vaccine	A vaccine containing a weakened live version of the organism it protects against, generally avoided during immunosuppressive treatment.[3]
Biologic	A medicine made from living cells, usually given by injection or infusion, used to control inflammation in IBD.
RADAR key	A standard key that opens the lock fitted to most UK disabled/accessible toilets.[6]

BEFORE YOU GO

More Support From VanceHealthHub

- **Health Record:** store medication, allergies, diet and diagnosis details in one private place, ready to become your travel letter
- **Gastro Health Self-Assessment:** a short questionnaire pointing you to relevant research, tools and recipes
- **Malnutrition Calculator:** track unintentional weight change to raise with a dietitian or GP
- **VANCE-Ai:** a starting point for questions between appointments, not a substitute for your care team
- **Gastro Health Explained & Clinical Data Reviews:** condition pages and referenced research summaries

None of these replace your GP, gastroenterologist or dietitian, and nothing on VanceHealthHub should be used to diagnose or treat a condition.

FURTHER SUPPORT

Other Organisations & References

Crohn's & Colitis UK · IBD Passport · Fit for Travel (NHS) · UK Civil Aviation Authority · British Insurance Brokers' Association · NHS 111 (non-emergency advice)

1. Crohn's & Colitis UK. Travelling with Crohn's or Colitis, ed 7, 2025.
2. UK Civil Aviation Authority. Safety advice on what to pack: medicines and medical equipment.
3. Crohn's & Colitis Foundation / AGA GI Patient Center. IBD vaccine recommendations.
4. Bladder & Bowel Community. Travel insurance and pre-existing conditions.
5. NHS / gov.uk. Global Health Insurance Card (GHIC).
6. Crohn's & Colitis UK. RADAR key and Can't Wait Card, membership benefits.

Medical disclaimer: general information only, not a substitute for advice from your own healthcare team. For a life-threatening emergency, call 999 or go to A&E. If you need urgent medical advice and it isn't an emergency, contact NHS 111.

© VanceHealthHub, Operated by Vance Medical Ltd · VANCE Health Hub