

Travellers' Information Guide On-Line



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The content of this information bulletin is provided for general information only and is accurate as of the date of issue (see above). The information is subject to further updates or revisions without notice.

Taking Medication to the United States

The following general information is provided to assist members travelling to the United States who take prescription and/or over-the-counter (OTC) non-prescription medication that was legally purchased in Canada.

First and foremost, please note that individual U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officers have the discretion to allow – or not allow – foreign-obtained medication into the United States, regardless if it is for your own personal use or not. It is a discretionary decision.

Prescription medication, for your own personal use, may be allowed provided the quantity you bring does not reasonably exceed what you would normally take for the number of days you will be in the United States (e.g. a three-month supply if you will be in the U.S. for three months). An extra one week's supply – in the event that you are unavoidably delayed in returning to Canada on your original planned travel-home date – would also generally be allowed. In some cases, however, even if you are planning to be in the United States for more than three months, CBP may impose a three-month maximum on the amount of medication you can bring with you.

All medication you bring must be in its original pharmacy-issued packaging with dispensary label intact that shows your name and other pertinent information such as the drug's name, dosage and DIN (drug identification number). Do not consolidate medication in larger single containers to save space or likewise transfer medication into store-purchased "week at a glance" pill dispensers before you travel.

If flying, always carry your medication in your carry-on luggage in the event your check luggage is temporarily lost by the airline.

It is important to remember that some medication that can be purchased over-the-counter in Canada is in fact restricted to prescription-only status in the United States or other countries. For this reason, it is advisable to carry a physician's note explaining your medical condition(s) and your daily medication routine (prescription and non-prescription), as over-the-counter medication will not have a pharmacy dispensary label attached that is issued in your name.

In the case of injectable medication – such as insulin for diabetes – it is important to have a physician's note explaining your condition and the reason for you to be legitimately carrying syringes. Without a note, there could be a misunderstanding that they are for illegal drug use. If flying to your destination, check with the airline in advance of travelling as to any security restriction with regard to carrying syringes (in any quantity) on board an aircraft.

Some medication (e.g. pain killers or cough syrups containing codeine), even though legally prescribed in Canada, are limited by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), to 50 dosage units regardless of your medical condition or the time you will be in the United States.

If you have any questions as to whether a specific medication may be brought into the United States, please contact the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), Division of Import Operations and Policy, at (301) 443-6553.

If you have any questions regarding the importation of a controlled substance into the United States, please contact the Drug Enforcement Administration, Office of Diversion Control, International Drug Unit, at (202) 307-2414.

Lastly, if you are prescribed a drug while outside Canada, remember that only a 90-day supply can be brought back into Canada, for personal use. If the drug is a narcotic or controlled substance, then only the lesser of a 30-day supply or one course can be brought back. These must be declared to the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) officer when arriving in Canada.

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