

**MEDICAL EVACUATIONS FOR
EMPLOYEES WHO TRAVEL OVERSEAS:
WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW TO HELP SAVE LIVES**

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All-encompassing events like the catastrophic earthquake and tsunami in Japan, violent attacks in Libya, to the government overthrow and riots in Egypt can all put business travelers in danger of both injury and disease when traveling overseas. Even business trips to seemingly less dangerous locations are not without risk. On occasion, an emergency evacuation may be necessary.

Medical evacuations for those who have become ill or injured while overseas are often misunderstood. People have images of “MASH” type helicopters swooping down in the middle of a desert or high atop a snowy mountain peak to rescue those in need. But usually evacuations for medical emergencies are nothing like this. In reality, there are several types of medical rescues with helicopters frequently being the last transport of choice. And, the cost of just one evacuation can vary widely, from \$6,000 to \$250,000 or more, depending upon the aircraft and what kind of medical expertise and equipment are necessary.

For medical reasons, the expertise of a physician or medical specialist at the scene is critical. As is, the advice and guidance of a second physician, employed by the company providing the evacuation coverage and assistance services plan to your company.

Each type of evacuation is done individually with the health, comfort, and well-being of your traveling employees being the first consideration. The availability of a particular type of aircraft, location, terrain, expertise required and cost are also critical factors.

Given these high costs and the importance of rescuing employees as expeditiously as possible, in your role as a corporate human resources, risk or travel manager, you need to understand all you can about international medical evacuations before an emergency occurs.

Following are four different evacuation options:

COMMERCIAL FLIGHTS

Medical evacuation by commercial flights is the most common option, utilized about 75 percent of the time.

This form of transportation is for medically stable, alert, and conscious patients.

Evacuating one of your employees by commercial carrier usually means buying one business/first class, or even one or two extra coach seats. The extra seats and space will provide more comfort to the patient. For instance, if an employee has a broken extremity, he or she would need extra leg and/or arm room. Patients considered for commercial evacuation are not on an IV, are easily transferable via wheelchair, and are able to breathe on their own or with the use of supplemental oxygen.

A medical evacuation on a commercial airline often involves an escort for the patient. A medical escort such as a doctor, nurse, or paramedic is needed to assist with issues like monitoring oxygen and assisting with the dispensing of medications. However, a patient with a less emergent medical issue wouldn't necessarily require a medical escort but typically utilizes a non-medical escort. A non-medical escort could include a family member, friend, or co-worker to help the patient with simple tasks such as getting up or down from a seat, eating, luggage handling or going to the restroom.

AIR AMBULANCES

These are private jets that are outfitted as ambulances, as the name suggests. Generally used about 10 percent of the time for medical evacuations, these aircraft are usually a Lear 35 jet or a somewhat larger plane. They can accommodate a patient, two pilots, two to three medical personnel (doctors, nurses, paramedics, respiratory therapists, or other similar professional), and minimal luggage.

These planes are generally used for patients who are medically unstable. If you had an employee who has suffered cardiac or respiratory failure, is breathing through a respirator, has suffered a stroke or traumatic injury, is on an intravenous drip, or is unconscious, an air ambulance would be considered.

However, each decision must be made on a case-by-case basis. For instance, if an employee is unconscious after suffering a stroke or heart attack and is in a top-notch hospital in a developed place like London or Paris, it may be safer to continue the current course of care, rather than evacuate by air ambulance.

There's the flip side – again, the decision being location-dependent – where you would utilize an air ambulance for a less medically dire situation. For instance, if someone has suffered a broken leg and is in a very remote area without available commercial flights, evacuation via air ambulance may be the safest and quickest way to reach the required urgent care if an employee requires medical evacuation over a great distance, an air ambulance may not be the optimal choice. These aircraft can only travel about 1,500 miles before they need refueling. If traveling further, they would need to make multiple stops – which may not always be the best option for the patient.

LUFTHANSA PATIENT TRANSPORTATION COMPARTMENT

Lufthansa is the only airline in the world that operates an intensive care unit aboard some of its flights. Located on board regularly scheduled flights from Germany to 62 destinations across the Lufthansa network, the separate compartment of the plane provides a ventilator, EKG monitor, blood gas analyzer, and other equipment usually found in hospital ICUs. In addition to the patient, two to three medical personnel can be accommodated.

While this type of aircraft has more room than a small air ambulance and does not need to be refueled after just 1,500 miles, the patient also has to be in an area where the ICU flight is offered and there must be availability of the service on a particular flight. So basically, everyone has to be in the right place at the right time. At Travel Guard, we utilize this option infrequently due to these restrictions. For both this service as well as commercial evacuations, there needs to be sufficient time to locate and transport the appropriate medical personnel to accompany the patient. Again, all these factors should be considered when making individual medical evacuation decisions.

HELICOPTER

This form of medical transport is used less than one percent of the time, usually only in remote parts of Africa and Asia. It is only done if a patient is in a location that does not even have a roadway or patch of land which can accommodate a small air ambulance. Usually, a helicopter is chartered from a local pilot and the patient is flown to the nearest airport to board an air ambulance or commercial airplane. The helicopter will only fit the patient, pilot, and one medical person.

By understanding the different type of medical evacuations, you will know that your employees who may become ill or injured overseas will be getting the best possible care. In addition, understanding the different options available will also allow you to watch costs and make decisions that are financially sound.

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