Legal Eye

May 1, 2005 By Catherine Hanssens

I’d like to visit Bali this summer. Can I enter as an HIVer? Will I have trouble bringing meds or getting refills? -Frequent Flyer

Dear Flyer,

Bali’s lack of official HIV restrictions is no guarantee that you won’t encounter problems. The Indonesian consulate general told *POZ*, “Of course people with HIV are restricted,” because they’re “taboo” and must be “separate from the public.” We were also told that if no one knows you’re positive, you’re safe—but HIV meds might prompt a review from a customs doctor—and your exclusion.

Before flying anywhere abroad, contact each country’s embassy; some bar HIV positive visitors, mostly for stays over 90 days, or for work or study. Most countries aren’t as restrictive as the U.S., which excludes noncitizens with HIV unless they’ve secured a waiver. If you lack American citizenship, think twice about leaving the U.S.—you may not get back in.

Never leave home without your prescription slips (documenting that the drugs are yours and legal) and a doctor’s note (without mention of HIV) confirming you’re noncontagious and fit for travel. Travel with all the meds you’ll need (ensure that your provider will ship emergency meds and that you’ll get them). Finally, check your insurance before packing; Medicare and many insurers don’t cover care abroad. Depending on your health, consider travel insurance for medical transport should you need to be flown home.

The U.S. State Department’s website offers helpful info on HIV travel restrictions and embassy numbers; see www.travel. state.gov/law/info/info_621.html. Immigration Equality is also an essential source of info and attorneys for HIV positive travelers and immigrants, at www.immigrationequality.org or 212.714.2904. Bon voyage—and don’t drink the water.

Catherine Hanssens, JD, founded the Center for HIV Law and Policy. Her column offers general guidance and shouldn’t subsitute for a lawyer’s counsel. Send your own legal queries to law@poz.com.

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