

Advice on Medical Kits

Anyone going offshore should be prepared to handle medical emergencies on board, as we could be weeks from a hospital. Paul took an Offshore Emergency Medicine course taught by the folks at Wilderness Medical Associates International (www.wildmed.com). We have benefited greatly from that training, and it gives us more confidence to travel further afield (afloat?). We have included here some tips about what we keep and where we've acquired it, and have included a copy of our medkit spreadsheets that show our stock and instructions at any given time (we update the document as necessary, and print it to keep with the kit).

Books we keep for reference:

- *Wilderness and Rescue Medicine* by Jeffrey E. Isaac, PA-C and David E. Johnson, MD
- *A Comprehensive Guide to Marine Medicine* by Eric A Weiss, MD and Michael Jacobs, MD
- *Where There is No Doctor* and *Where There is No Dentist* by David Werner and Carol Thuman

When assembling your medkit:

- ✓ Read the books, and get advice from a travel doctor specific to where you're going in the next couple years. Use the accumulated advice to build a comprehensive list of what to pack, and what immunizations to get before you leave.
- ✓ When your list is ready, start stocking medications
 - Look up the actual active ingredient (and amount of it) in any medications so you can identify generic brands accurately. Google and WebMD are your friends. Start a spreadsheet like ours where you can document that ingredient and it's instructions.
 - Many medications can be bought without a prescription outside the U.S. (Mexico is fairly easy for this), and many can be acquired through mail services. Enjoy the treasure hunt! At moments of frustration, remember how much money you're saving. You can get almost everything we have in our kit for less than \$2,000 in Mexico. The equivalent in the US, mostly because of the cost of the medications, would probably cost over \$10,000.
 - Explain to doctors that you will be sailing offshore, and show them your list, and they will usually write you prescriptions when needed. Your travel doctor should be able to help with this.
 - Doctors in all countries are hesitant to write prescriptions for pain killers, so you want to ask a doctor where you have a documented history of not abusing painkillers or asking for unnecessary prescriptions.
 - We find it helpful for each crew members to ask for prescriptions separately, as doctors may only write one run of a medication and we need to stock for each crew member.
- ✓ Assemble your medkit using ziplocks and plastic boxes to keep like items together, and label them clearly ("antibiotics", "painkillers", "syringes", etc). Try to make it easy for someone in a panic to find what they need quickly.
- ✓ We carry several sizes of syringes for different uses. In some parts of the world you're expected to bring your own syringe to the doctor to have medications administered.
- ✓ We keep most of our medkit together in a big Pelican Case, so we can grab it and take it to the scene of an accident if necessary. We keep extra saline stocked elsewhere on the boat, with one in the medkit to start with.
- ✓ We do keep a small grab kit with a pressure bandage, epi-pen and airway where it's easy to hand. We also keep burn ointment and lots of band-aids near the galley.

Your kit doesn't necessarily need everything in our lists. They're offered as examples only. We did not find all of this in Mexico. These items are in addition to the things you would normally have in your medicine cabinet: band-aids, Neosporin/bacitracin, ibuprofen, aspirin, cough syrup, throat lozenges, allergy medications, etc. You should also have a dental kit, as dental problems can become serious medical problems offshore.