

Expedition medicine

Author: Dr Mike Townend, MB, ChB (Hons), Diploma in Travel Medicine, Fellow of the Faculty of Travel Medicine of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons, Glasgow. Executive Committee Member of the British Travel Health Association and member of the International Society of Travel Medicine and the International Society for Mountain Medicine.

An expedition has been defined as an organised journey or voyage for a specific purpose, especially for exploration or for a scientific or military purpose.

Expeditions often take place in conditions that are demanding in terms of climate, terrain and the nature of the activities undertaken. They may involve a wide variety of health risks and other objective dangers. Their physically demanding nature and the remote and unfamiliar surroundings experienced may also make great psychological demands on their participants.

Medical care on expeditions demands a high degree of planning and organisation, and a structured approach is necessary.

Planning the medical care of an expedition will bring together many of the elements of travel medicine

Pre-expedition planning

The key elements of planning expedition medical care could be described as the who, what, where, when, how and why of the expedition: