



# My Health in the EU

## Digital exchange of ePrescriptions and Patient Summaries

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The electronic cross-border health services are currently gradually rolled-out in the EU Member States. To check the latest state-of-play, please consult the overview of participating countries on: [ec.europa.eu/health/ehealth/digital\\_health\\_en](http://ec.europa.eu/health/ehealth/digital_health_en)

## General

### What are the electronic cross-border health services in Europe?

Mobility of people across the EU is increasing; this is why in 2011 the European institutions adopted a new Directive (2011/24/EU) which ensures the continuity of care for European citizens across borders. This gives Member States the possibility to exchange health data in a secure, efficient and interoperable way.

The following two electronic cross-border health services are currently progressively introduced in all European countries:

- **ePrescription (and eDispensation)** allows citizens in Europe to retrieve their medication in a pharmacy located in another European country, thanks to the online transfer of their electronic prescription from their country of affiliation (hereafter referred to as the country of residence) to their country of travel. Your country of residence is informed about the medicine you retrieve in the country of travel (eDispensation).
- **Patient Summary** provides information on important health related aspects such as your allergies, current medication, previous illness, surgeries, etc. It will form part of a larger collection of health data called European Health Record, whose implementation across Europe is planned at a later stage. The digital Patient Summary is meant to provide doctors with essential information in their own language concerning the patient, when the patient comes from another EU country and there may be a linguistic barrier. On a longer term, not only the basic medical information of the Patient Summary, but the full Health Record should become available across the EU.

The ePrescriptions and Patient Summaries can be exchanged between EU countries thanks to the new eHealth Digital Service Infrastructure, which connects the eHealth national services among them to exchange health data.

### Why do we need the electronic cross-border health services in Europe? What are their benefits for the European citizens?

Thanks to these services, any citizen in Europe will continue to benefit from healthcare under similar conditions as if they were in their own country, while travelling abroad in other countries of the EU. It will be possible for instance to obtain their medication in a pharmacy without having to bring the printed prescription and without being concerned about the language barrier.

At the same time, this allows doctors in the country of travel to access your basic and essential medical data through the Patient Summary, which may save lives in some critical cases. It will ease the quality of the consultation, by enabling doctors to know for instance if you are allergic to some medicines or what your recent medical history is.

## How does it work?

When European citizens are travelling from their country of residence to another European country (country of travel), for any purpose, they can retrieve their medication in a pharmacy without any printed prescription, merely relying on the cross-border exchange of ePrescription data between the two countries. The pharmacist in the country of travel will be able to view on their computer the ePrescription prepared by the patient's doctor in their country of residence and provide the prescribed medicine.

When a citizen travels from their country of residence to another country in Europe and finds themselves in the necessity of consulting a doctor in that country, doctors will be able to access the Patient Summary, which contains essential medical information related to the patient. This will help doctors to formulate an adequate treatment, avoid some possible risk (for instance in case of allergy) and overcome linguistic barriers. The Patient Summary will then be substituted at a later stage by the European Health Record which will contain more comprehensive health data.

In order to enable the services to fully operate, citizens will be informed on whether their health data are available for cross-border services before travelling. In some countries citizens might be required to explicitly give their authorization in order to have their health data made available abroad. In any case, making health data available for cross-border exchange is needed in order for pharmacists and doctors to access it from the country where the patient travels. Adequate IT infrastructure has been put in place at European and national level to allow this smooth exchange of data.

## In which country are the electronic cross-border health services already in place?

The services are progressively being established in 22 EU countries: Finland, Estonia, Czech Republic, Luxembourg, Portugal, Croatia, Malta, Cyprus, Greece, Belgium, Sweden, Austria, Italy, Hungary, Ireland, Poland, Germany, France, Spain, Slovenia, Lithuania, and the Netherlands.

At this moment, the following countries are already pioneering the services:

- **Finland** makes their ePrescriptions available abroad
- **Estonia** accepts ePrescriptions coming from another European country
- **Luxembourg** accepts Patient Summaries from another European country
- **Czech Republic** makes their Patient Summaries available abroad
- **Croatia** accepts ePrescriptions coming from another European country

Other countries will progressively join in 2019 and by 2021 it is expected that the 22 European countries listed above will have launched one of these or both services, which means that their patients can travel to any of the other countries and have digital access to their ePrescriptions and Patient Summaries.

### How are my personal data protected?

In electronic cross-border services your personal data will always be treated and protected in accordance with the existing EU legislation and with the current practices in your country of residence and the country of travel.

*In some **countries of residence***, the cross-border exchange of your health data might be allowed by law and doesn't require any action from your part. In other countries of residence, on the contrary, you need to actively give your consent, meaning that you will have to sign a document (similar to a Privacy statement). Depending on your country, you can do this by contacting your doctor or electronically, by connecting to a specific website/web portal set up by your national authority. Please note that in case your consent is required and you don't give it in your country of residence before your departure or through mobile portal while travelling, it will not be possible for the pharmacist or the doctor in the country of destination to access your health data.

*In your **country of travel*** you may also be asked to sign another document (similar to a Privacy statement) which allows the pharmacist or the doctor in that country to access your health data. It is important to know that your health data are being exchanged through a secured communication channel and can only be accessed by health professionals (doctors or pharmacists) who are clearly and securely identified and authorized to access your health data. High security measures are in place in order to make sure that your health data cannot be accessed by unauthorized persons.

### What do I have to do to have my health data available for cross-border exchange?

1. Depending on the member state, you may be required, before your departure, to check via your doctor or your national patients' portal if your health data are automatically available for electronic cross-border services or if you need to give your consent for that. If you have online access to your health data, please pay attention to the instructions you receive on how to give your consent electronically.
2. Make sure you have a document to clearly identify yourself (see question below).
3. If needed, give consent to allow the pharmacist/doctor to access your health data.

### Do I have access to the same health services in my country of travel as the citizens living there?

As an EU citizen, if you unexpectedly fall ill during a temporary stay abroad, you are entitled to any treatment that can't wait until you get home. You have the same rights to healthcare as people insured in the country you are in.

It is advisable to take your European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) with you on all trips abroad. This card is the physical proof that you are insured in an EU country and will simplify payment and reimbursement procedures. However, if you don't have your card or if it is not possible to use it, you may not be refused treatment. You may, however, have to pay for it upfront and claim reimbursement once back home.

## What document do I need to take with me when going to a pharmacy or consulting a doctor abroad?

When requesting your medicine in a pharmacy in the country of travel or if you consult a doctor there, you will need to clearly identify yourself. Each country has defined the type of identification document that the patient has to show to identify themselves when using the ePrescription. You need to check with your own national contact point for eHealth what identification document you need.

## I don't speak the pharmacist's language. How will the pharmacist get the right information from my doctor?

The pharmacists in your country of travel will get your ePrescription in their own language, together with an original copy of your ePrescription which is in your language. So, the prescription originally done by your doctor will be available in the pharmacist's system in both languages.

## How will I know how to take the medication?

The terms of use of your medicine (package leaflet) will be available in the language(s) of the country of travel and might be also available in other languages. Concerning the patient-specific guidance, it will be available in your own language and the pharmacist will explain to you in the best possible way how to take your medicine.

## Will I be reimbursed for my medication as I am at home, and how should I apply for that?

You will need to pay the full cost in the country of travel. You can request reimbursement from your insurer when you return to your country of residence (the country of prescription). Reimbursement will then be granted or not, depending on your national health insurance system. (\*)

## My prescription is quite ordinary. Why can't the pharmacy in my country of travel dispense the medicine?

Unfortunately, there is no absolute certainty that a specific prescription can be dispensed. The supply of medicines at a pharmacy in your country of travel may be more limited than in your country of residence, the pharmacy may not stock the medicine, and there is no available substitution. Furthermore, the medicine in question may not have a marketing authorisation in the country of travel. The pharmacist may also refuse to dispense a medication due to the substitution rules for medicinal products in the country of travel. A pharmacy dispenses the medication according to the legislation in its country.

## I was unable to obtain medicine from a pharmacy in my country of travel, but I need it urgently. What shall I do?

Please request a prescription from a doctor in the country of travel.

I am a European citizen who travelled to another European country and had an electronic prescription issued in the country of travel. Can I retrieve the prescribed medicine from my country of residence?

No, such a prescription cannot be dispensed in your country of residence using the cross border electronic services.

In case you received a paper copy of your prescription and provided the prescription includes the required information, the pharmacy from your country of residence should dispense your prescription.

Can I purchase medicines on behalf of someone else, for instance my child or my wife?

For acting on behalf of someone else, you must follow the applicable provisions of each country. This first depends on the national provisions implementing data protection legislation in each country, but also, depending on the country and your needs, you might be asked to provide additional documents as proof of authority to act on behalf of another person (e.g. proof of your identity, birth certificate if you are acting on behalf of a minor, power of attorney). Please consider there might be countries which do not allow acting on behalf of someone else in such situations.

## Doctors in the country of residence

Does every doctor in the country of travel automatically have access to the patient's health data? Do I need to indicate or inform that my patient is travelling?

Authorized doctors and pharmacists, according to the legislation in the countries of travel, can have access to the patient's health data only if the patient's health data is available for electronic cross border services. In some countries of residence, citizens are required to explicitly give their consent, whereas in other countries of residence, the electronic cross-border exchange of patient's health data might be allowed by law and does not require any action from the patient's part. In any case, pharmacists and doctors in the country of treatment can only access health data if it has been made available for electronic cross-border exchange by the country of residence.

In addition, in some countries of travel, doctors and pharmacists may have to ask the foreign patient to sign an additional Privacy statement, to enable them to comply with the law in their country and to be able to process patient's data.

Depending on the Member State, you should inform your patients about the possibility of making their health data available for electronic cross-border services when travelling, either through your own support or by accessing a national portal. It is not necessary to indicate if the patient will travel. National portals are different for each Member State; please check this accordingly, by referring to the information provided by your national contact point for eHealth on how to communicate about the availability of the electronic cross-border services. If you have not received any training, please contact your national contact point for eHealth.

## In what language do I have to write my ePrescription?

You will write your ePrescription in your own language. When the patient will ask for medicines in the country of travel, the pharmacist will receive the ePrescription both in the original language and in their own language. Translation is done automatically by the underlying digital infrastructure.

## What is the information available in the Patient Summary?

The Patient Summary can contain the following patient clinical data:

- Alerts and allergies;
- Medical history (vaccination, past problems, surgical procedures before the last six months);
- Current medical state (current problems, medical devices and implants, intake of medicines, treatment recommendations, surgical procedures within the last six months);
- Social history;
- Pregnancy history (if relevant);
- Physical findings;
- Diagnostic tests.

It is not mandatory that all this information exists. This means that there might be situations when only part of the information is available. For instance when the information was not available in the systems; the information could not be translated into other languages; there is no known information for that patient; etc.

Refer to the training provided by your national contact point for eHealth on how to read the information in the Patient Summary. If you have not received any training, please contact your national contact point for eHealth.

## Doctors in the country of travel

### How do I verify the patient's identity before accessing their Patient Summary?

Each country has defined the type of identification documents that the patient can show when asking for an electronic cross border service (Patient Summary or ePrescription). You need to check with your own national contact point for eHealth what identification document you have to ask to the patient.



## How do I access the Patient Summary of a foreign citizen?

Once you have identified yourself in the hospital information system and you checked the patient's identity, you will request to access the patient's data provided by the underlying digital infrastructure. If the data are not available for cross border services, the system will inform you.

Before accessing the Patient summary for the consultation, you must inform the patient on how their health data will be processed in the country of travel. Depending on your national privacy laws, you may have to ask the patient to sign a new Privacy statement.

If you are not able to access the Patient Summary, the system will give you an error message and inform you about the cause. One of the causes might be that the patient did not make their health data available before leaving their country of residence. You should advise the patient to contact their doctor when back in their country of residence and perform the consultation as usual.

## In what language will the patient's summary be accessible? What if it is in a language I do not speak and the patient quickly needs assistance?

When you access the Patient Summary through the hospital information system, you will receive it both in the patient's original language and in your own language. The underlying digital infrastructure does the translation automatically. There might be information missing from the Patient Summary, if it is not available in the country of residence or if it could not be translated.

In case, for any reasons, you cannot understand the information in the Patient Summary, you will perform the consultation as usual.

## What if the patient needs to visit an emergency service, but is not adequately treated because their data has not been updated? Who is liable?

In case of emergency, if the access to Patient Summary is not possible because patient data are not available (for instance the patient forgot to give their authorisation in their country before leaving), the emergency services will provide medical interventions at the best of their capacities even without this information. The Member State where the healthcare is provided is responsible in case harm arises from the healthcare the patient receives.

## How will the foreign patient pay for the health service received?

If an EU citizen receives necessary healthcare using the European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) the same conditions of fees and payment are applicable for the treatment as for insured domestic citizens. In case the EHIC or [S2 form](#) (prior authorisation form) are not possible to use, patients have to pay upfront and may claim reimbursement once back home. (\*)

## Pharmacists in the country of travel

### How do I control the patient's identity?

Each country has defined the type of identification document that the patient has to show to identify themselves when using the ePrescription. You need to check with your own national contact point for eHealth what identification document you are allowed to ask to the patient.

## How do I access the patient's data?

Once you have identified yourself in the pharmacy information system and you have also checked the patient's identity, you will request to access the patient's data provided by the underlying digital infrastructure. If the data are not available for electronic cross border exchange, the system will inform you.

Before accessing the ePrescription, you must inform the patient on how their health data will be processed in the country of travel. Depending on your national privacy laws, you may also have to ask the patient to sign a new Privacy statement.

If you are not able to access the ePrescription, the system will give you an error message and inform you about the cause. One of the causes might be that the patient did not make their health data available before leaving their country of residence. In this case, depending on the Member State, you should advise the patient to either access the national online portal to give permission or contact their doctor when back in their country of residence.

## What data do I have access to?

The data you can access related to the ePrescription are administrative data concerning the patient and the prescribing health professional, the authentication of the prescription, the identification of the prescribed medicine and information related to prescription, for instance patient characteristics which are necessary to be known.

## Can I contact the patient's doctor if I have questions?

The contact details of the prescribing doctor in the patient's country of residence are available in the ePrescription, so you can contact them in case of need.

## In which language do I have access to patient's data?

When you request the patient's ePrescription via your computer, you will receive it in the patient's language and in your language. The ePrescription is indeed automatically translated in your own language, by the underlying digital infrastructure. There might be information missing in case it could not be translated.

## In which language do I have to help the patient / give the information about the use of the medicine?

You will access the patient's ePrescription in your own language, together with an original copy of the ePrescription which is in the patient's language. You could check this copy as well, as it might contain useful information to help you in the dispensation process. However, you will have to explain the patient how to take their medicine in your language, or any another language you may know, in the best possible way. The terms of use of your medicine (package leaflet) are also sometimes available in many languages.

How is the reimbursement foreseen? Does the patient have to pay for the medication even though it is reimbursed in my country? What about if the medication is reimbursed in his/her country and not in my country?

Patients always need to pay the full cost of the requested medicine in the country of travel. They can request reimbursement from their insurer when they return to their country of residence (the country of prescription). Reimbursement may then be granted or not, depending on their national health insurance system. (\*)



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[ec.europa.eu/health/ehealth/digital\\_health\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/health/ehealth/digital_health_en)

*(\*) Please note that the above-mentioned information on reimbursement refers to the provisions in the Directive on Cross-Border Health Care (2011/24/EU). For information on the social security coordination (SSC), as laid down in Regulation (883/2004) on the provision of healthcare and reimbursement, please check: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=849#navItem-relatedTopics>*