



Inter-hospital transfer information for patients and whānau

What is an inter-hospital transfer?

This is when you are transported from one hospital to another, usually in a fixed-wing plane, occasionally by helicopter if urgent, or by road in an ambulance (between Wairau and Nelson hospitals).

Why do I need an inter-hospital transfer?

Your specialist has referred you to another hospital to receive the specific treatment you need.

What is an air ambulance?

This is a specialised plane for transferring hospital patients. It has a stretcher, oxygen, a monitor so we can check your vital signs and other emergency equipment. The flight nurse can give you medications, pain relief or fluids during the flight if you need them, and monitor your observations.

How do I get to the airport?

You don't need to organise anything for the transfer, your flight nurse will arrange an ambulance to pick you up from your ward.

Your flight nurse will travel with you in the ambulance to the airport, in the plane, and then again in the ambulance at the destination airport out to the hospital you have been transferred to.

How many people will be on the plane? And can my support person/family member/whānau travel with me?

There will usually be one pilot and one flight nurse on each flight. We make every effort to take one support person with you, but sometimes this is not possible due to space/weight. Sometimes we take extra staff on a flight to keep you safe during transfer, and occasionally we will transport two patients together.

If my support person can't fly with me how do they get to where I will be?

We have a patient travel service who will make all the arrangements for a flight and accommodation for your support person. You and your support person will be asked to fill out a National Travel Assistance form prior to travel. You will be contacted when travel arrangements have been made.

How do we get back home?

If you need to be transferred back to a hospital, then a flight back with us, or sometimes another flight service will be arranged for you. If you are being discharged home then arrangements will be made by the patient travel team. You can contact the team Monday–Friday 8 am–4 pm on 03 546 1727 or by email: patient.travel@nmdhb.govt.nz After-hours, call 0800 281 222 (press 2).

Do I have to pay for my flight or ambulance?

No, the costs are all covered by the Health NZ Te Whatu Ora Nelson Marlborough. The commercial flight for your support person is also covered, and their accommodation paid up to a maximum of \$140 per night. They will need to pay for any costs over \$140 per night.

How do I get in and out of the plane?

If you are able to walk, we can assist you up the stairs. If you are not able to walk, we will bring the stretcher off the plane on a lifting platform, transfer you onto this in the hangar, and then lift you into the plane with the lifter platform which the pilot raises slowly with a foot lever.

Can I sit in a chair rather than lie on a stretcher?

If you are able to walk, are in very little or no pain, and are not needing close monitoring on the flight, you can sit in a chair.

How much luggage can I take?

We ask that luggage be kept to 1–2 medium-sized bags if possible. We can make exceptions in some circumstances, but the pilot will advise on the day. Please make sure the flight nurse is aware of any extra or bulky luggage required such as wheelchairs, as we need to know size/weight of these and if they can be packed down at all.

How long will it take to get to where I am going?

Flight times can vary due to weather, air traffic volumes, and the particular plane. Here are some typical flight times between airports:

- Nelson to Woodbourne: 20 mins
- Nelson to Wellington: 25 mins
- Nelson to Christchurch: 50 mins
- Nelson to Auckland: 1 hr 20 mins

For more accurate times ask the pilot or the flight nurse once you are on the plane.

What if we miss our flight time?

As you will be flying on an air ambulance, the plane leaves when we are ready to go. You will not miss your flight if there is a delay, eg waiting for paperwork, or the ambulance pick-up.

What safety information do I need to know?

Phones must be placed on flight mode prior to take-off, and no prohibited items are allowed in your luggage or on your person (eg matches, lighters or other dangerous goods). If in doubt, check with your flight nurse or pilot.

What is the plane like?

We have three planes; this is enough planes to allow a plane to be taken out of service for its regular maintenance check, without disrupting our service.

They look alike, with a seat for the flight nurse, a seat for a patient or support person or other crew, and a stretcher for the patient. They vary in the amount of room inside.

It's a small plane, will it be very bumpy?

Our pilots will try to keep the flight as comfortable as possible by flying around bad weather where they are able to do this. Sometimes it is not possible to avoid weather, so there may be some bumps. Your flight nurse will keep you informed of any expected turbulence. If you don't travel well, make sure you let your nurse on the ward know, and they can arrange for an anti-nausea medication to be given before your flight.