

Road and air transfer between Wairau and Nelson hospitals

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.

How do I get to the other hospital?

You don't need to worry about any of the organising for the transfer, your road or flight nurse will arrange an ambulance to pick you up from the ward you are in. Your road or flight nurse will travel with you in the ambulance out to the airport, or over the hill to Nelson. If you are going in the plane, a flight nurse will be with you from pick up at the hospital, throughout the flight and then again in the ambulance at Nelson (or the hospital you have been transferred to).

What is an air ambulance?

This is a specialised plane set up specifically for transferring patients from hospital to hospital. It has a stretcher, oxygen, a monitor so we can check your vital signs, and other emergency equipment. A flight nurse will travel with you from hospital to hospital, ensuring your safety whilst in transit. The flight nurse can give you medications, pain relief or fluids during the flight if you need them, and monitor your observations.

If travelling by road, the ambulance is specialised for patient transfer and is set up very similar to the plane with monitoring, and other medical equipment. You will have a road nurse who will travel with you from hospital to hospital to assist you with any needs or care you require en route.

Can my support person/ family member/whānau travel with me?

For patients who are transferring to Nelson Hospital for a procedure, who are likely to be discharged home directly (that is, they do not need to be transferred back to Wairau Hospital first), we encourage family to travel by car. This is so that they have the ability to drive you back home, as we do not fly or drive patients home who are discharged from Nelson Hospital.

It is different if you were to be transferred to a hospital outside of the Nelson Marlborough Health region; in this case travel is usually organised for you and the National Travel Assistance Scheme is available to help with costs.

Is there any accommodation available for my support person?

Altrusa House is located on the Nelson Hospital campus approximately 300m from the main entrance which offers a limited number of rooms. It cannot be pre-booked, as it is intended to accommodate support people of patients with an acute or accident-related illness. Accommodation at Altrusa can only be arranged on arrival through the information desk receptionist at the main entrance 8am to 4pm Monday to Friday, or after-hours through the telephone operator (located at the main entrance). It is \$30/night for a single room or \$40/night for a twin. Only one room per family. If there is no vacancy, motels are available on Waimea Road, or the Holiday Park on Vanguard Street.

Do I have to pay for my flight or ambulance ride?

No, the costs are all covered by the DHB as part of your ongoing care. You will need to make your own way back home if you are discharged from Nelson Hospital.

How do I get in and out of the ambulance or plane?

If you are able to walk, we can assist you up the stairs to the ambulance or plane and you can sit in a chair. If you are not able to walk, we will bring the stretcher from the ambulance to you, and you will travel on the stretcher. If going by plane, we would then transfer you to the plane stretcher which would be on a lifting platform, and then lift you into the plane with the lifter which the pilot raises slowly with a foot lever.

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 driver/pilot will also advise on the day. Please make sure your nurse knows if you need to take extra luggage or bulky luggage such as wheelchairs, as we need to know the 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?

Road transfer from Wairau Hospital to Nelson Hospital is approximately 2.5 hours.

Flight transfer is approximately 20 mins from Woodbourne to Nelson. Times can vary due to weather, air traffic volumes, and the particular plane. For more accurate times ask the pilot or the flight nurse once you are on the plane.

What if we are delayed? Will we miss our flight or appointment?

Your ambulance or flight will leave when you are ready; we are not bound to a schedule. We try to get you to hospitals on time for appointments, but this is not always possible; your flight nurse will keep in contact with departments who are expecting you, and appointment time changes will be made if needed.

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

Generally, if you are able walk, you will be able to sit in a chair on both the ambulance and the plane. If you are not able to walk, it is much safer for you to be on the stretcher. You can sit on the stretcher with the backrest up for your comfort.

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? What if I get motion sickness on the plane or the ambulance?

Our drivers and pilots try to keep the transfer as comfortable as possible. Sometimes it is not possible to avoid weather or bumps. Your flight nurse will keep you informed of any expected turbulence. If you don't travel well, make sure you let your nurse know, and they can arrange for an anti-nausea medication to be given before your transfer. Your road or flight nurse will have anti-nausea medication and sick bags on hand if you feel you need something en route.