

# Update on Travel Insurance during COVID-19 – Questions from MROO Members

It is encouraging that the number of new coronavirus cases is on the downswing at the time of writing this article. All provinces are in various stages of re-opening with safeguards in place to allow for social distancing. In addition, there's good news on the health care side: doctor's offices and dental clinics are re-opening throughout Ontario.

One element of the lockdown that remains in place for Canadians are travel guidelines. Inter-provincial travel is still questionable, with some provinces limiting movement across their borders and within areas with high levels of active COVID-19 cases. Before travelling, check to see what rules are in place for your destination. It is important, if you do decide to travel during the pandemic, that you act wisely and are well informed about the risks in the location(s) where you are travelling. Be smart and stay safe.

Our hope is that over the summer you will be able to enjoy travel in all provinces without government restrictions; however, it is still too early to know when you will be able to travel outside of Canada safely. The U.S. is experiencing spikes in new cases of the coronavirus in many states, as each tries to reopen safely. Only time will tell when the Canadian-U.S. borders will be open for travel to all.

We have been getting questions from MROO members about out-of-country travel and how COVID-19 is still affecting travel insurance plans—and we would like to address some of your concerns.

Most companies, including MROO's travel provider Royal & Sun Alliance Insurance Company of Canada (RSA), are not offering individual travel insurance plans for purchase at this time. MROO members who purchased an individual travel plan (or top-up days through RSA) this year, and who returned home due to COVID-19 without using all of the travel days they purchased, were given a refund of premium for the days that were not used, provided they did not have a travel claim. We refunded 30% of 2020 premiums for individual travel to MROO policyholders due to COVID-19.

## When can I travel out-of-country and have coverage under my MROO annual travel plan?

Your MROO travel insurance plan will cover you while travelling outside of Canada once the government issued travel advisories (level 3 and 4) are lifted. Here's a summary of the various levels of travel advisories:

Level 1 - Exercise normal security precautions—there are no significant safety and security concerns. The overall safety and security situation is similar to that of Canada. You should take normal security precautions.

Level 2 - Exercise a high degree of caution—there are identifiable safety and security concerns or the safety and security situation could change with little notice. You should exercise a high degree of caution at all times, monitor local media and follow the instructions of local authorities.

Level 3 - Avoid non-essential travel

Level 4 - Avoid all travel—there is an extreme risk to your personal safety and security. You should not travel to this country, territory or region.

## **Important advice before travelling**

Travel Advice and Advisories provide Canadians with official information and advice from the Government of Canada on situations that may affect your safety and well-being abroad. Before you make your travel arrangements, you should check if there are any travel restrictions in place: <https://travel.gc.ca/travelling/advisories>.

## **What should I know now about out-of-country travel and my MROO annual travel plan coverage? (Note: a formal travel advisory limiting all non-essential travel outside of Canada is in effect at the time of writing this article.)**

- If you book future travel to a location which is currently under a relevant travel advisory (including cruises), you will not have medical coverage in these locations if the advisory is still in effect at the time of travel.
- If a travel advisory is issued after your departure, medical coverage for that location will be limited to a period of 10 days from the date of the travel advisory or formal notice was issued, or to a period that is reasonably necessary for you to safely evacuate the country, region or area.
- Because of the advisory to “Avoid all cruise ship travel,” beginning March 9, 2020, you will not have out-of-country medical coverage if you depart on a cruise until this advisory is lifted.

## **Will I get a refund of premium or be able to change my trip duration to fewer days because I am unable to use my MROO annual travel insurance plan?**

Unfortunately, no. Your plan renews annually every January 1 and the premium rates are established in advance. As per your policy terms, your benefits and your premium rates cannot change until your next policy renewal, which will be January 1, 2021.

If we determine at the January 1, 2021 renewal that the claims experience for your plan is better than expected due to members’ reduced travel in 2020, we will look at enhancing your plan for 2021 and/or offering a rate reduction. Your policy year runs from July 1 to June 30 annually, so COVID-19 has had a negative impact on claims in March and April while members were still travelling home to Ontario.

Your annual travel plan is designed as a group plan. The benefit of a group plan is the flexibility in your plan design such as choices in your annual trip duration not usually offered to retirees, and your rates which are typically less expensive than for an annual plan that is purchased on an individual basis. MROO’s travel rates are based on the number of people insured under the MROO umbrella for travel, the demographics of your group and your collective claims experience. Unlike others plans, your rates are not age banded and you have the advantage of renewing your policy for life no matter how your health changes over the years.

We have had several members ask about refunds for travel and health care benefits that they have not been able to use due to COVID-19. In order to keep the many benefits you have now, and stable rates or better rates going into 2021 and 2022, we are counting on you to keep your insurance in place and wait out this pandemic. We have had very few members terminate coverage; however, if you do wish to make this choice you will not be able to re-enroll in the MROO health and/or travel plan at a future date under our standard rules for eligibility.

## **What happens if I travel outside of Canada before the travel advisories are lifted?**

If you choose to travel despite the government travel advisories, be aware that commercial airspace closures and movement restrictions can occur without warning and could prevent your return to Canada. The Government of Canada is not planning additional facilitated flights to bring Canadians home during the COVID-19 pandemic. If you are outside of Canada:

- You may have difficulty obtaining essential products and services.
- You may face strict movement restrictions and quarantines.
- Your insurance will not cover your travel or medical expenses.
- The Canadian government may have limited capacity to offer you consular services.

## **Will my MROO annual travel plan cover me for the coronavirus when the current travel advisories have been lifted and I am able to travel again?**

We have been advised by RSA that they are not taking the same approach to coverage for the coronavirus as some other insurers. Your MROO annual travel plan will cover you for emergency medical care within Canada; out-of-country, it will cover the coronavirus the same as any other illness under the terms and conditions of your policy.

The six-month stability clause will apply for this illness the same as any other; if you have had the coronavirus anytime within the six month period before your date of travel, any conditions that can be related to the virus will not be covered.

## **How much would it cost if I was treated for coronavirus in the U.S. and I didn't have travel insurance for emergency medical care?**

Estimating the average costs for a coronavirus claim is not straightforward as there are many variables. Costs could go into the tens or hundreds of thousands of dollars. Here are some charges you will be faced with\*:

- The cost of testing and accompanying doctor visits which can be \$200 to \$500.
- An in-patient hospital stay for the common COVID -19 complication pneumonia could cost anywhere from \$10,000 to \$20,000+.
- Intensive treatment costs can be \$36,000 for use of a ventilator for less than 96 hours, and \$88,000+ for ventilator support 96 hours or more.

\*Guy Carpenter report, Estimating the Impact of COVID-19 on the U.S. Medical (Re)Insurance Market, April 2020

## **Can I chose any health facility outside of Canada for treatment and will my MROO annual travel insurance cover my emergency expenses? Will my medical charges be paid up front so I don't have to pay any costs out of pocket or get a bill after I return home?**

The first thing you need to do when you have a medical emergency is to call the number on your travel insurance wallet card, immediately. This is a reminder for all travelers, including MROO travel policyholders. For MROO policyholders insured with RSA, you need to contact Global Excel. They are available 24/7:

- Global Excel can direct you to a medical facility or doctor in your area of travel where your insurance is recognized or they will liaise with the administration on your behalf if you contact them at the time of your emergency.
- They will ensure that your covered expenses are paid directly to the hospital or medical facility, where possible.

If it is not reasonably possible for you to contact Global Excel before seeking treatment due to the nature of your emergency, you must have someone else call on your behalf or you must call as soon as medically possible. If you fail to notify Global Excel, your treatment may not be covered by your insurance plan. See your policy for details.

## **Important travel tip**

Even before you travel, please read your travel insurance policy and understand your coverage so you know what medical benefits you are insured for. No one wants any unexpected hospital bills when they return home. Better yet, take a copy of your travel policy with you; you can download it to your computer, phone or iPad.

MROO annual travel plan policyholders—if you have access to the internet where you will be travelling, you can access your policy 24/7 by visiting our V+ portal and using our online account management capabilities. Sign in at [mrooinsurance.ca](http://mrooinsurance.ca).

## **Why you should buy travel health insurance before you leave Ontario?**

OHIP does not pay your medical fees while you are outside Canada and it will not pay your bills when travelling to other provinces up front. Your provincial or territorial health plan may cover none, or only a small part, of the costs of your medical care.

Foreign hospitals can be very expensive and may require immediate cash payment. In some countries, hospitals and clinics will not treat you if you do not have enough travel insurance or money to pay your bills.

COVID-19 has certainly changed our lifestyles over recent months and we all hope this pandemic will subside so that we can get back to doing those things we enjoy most, like travel. In the meantime, we appreciate your patience in continuing your benefits with MROO and Victor and we hope that you will stay safe. Be well and if you need to speak to us about your MROO insurance please contact us at 1-800-363-7861 or email us at [mroo.ca@victorinsurance.com](mailto:mroo.ca@victorinsurance.com).