



# Medical

Medicines & Non-prescription Drugs

Dentistry

Optical

Pediatrics

Women's Health

Childbirth

Mental Health

Insurance

Further Information





## Medical

See the front of this book for emergency information

Medical facilities in Japan vary greatly in size, complexity and levels of care. Many clinics (*iin*) and hospitals (*byoin*) are defined by bed capacity and may be owned and operated by any Japanese medical practitioner. Small private hospitals may be equipped to perform surgery, specializing in pediatrics, ear-nose-throat, ophthalmology, obstetrics/gynecology and many others. These smaller hospitals and clinics, both specialized and general, can be found in most neighborhoods. (See Directory for a list of doctors recommended by Japanese and non-Japanese patients.)

Large public hospitals, such as Kobe General Hospital on Port Island, have highly specialized facilities and services. University hospitals, such as Kobe University Hospital, have specialized

care units and often the newest and best medical knowledge. Kobe Kaisei Hospital has a nice outpatient facility with multi-lingual volunteers.

All clinics and hospitals expect full payment (cash or credit) at the completion of each visit. Participants in the National Health Insurance (NHI) system must present their certificate. If you are enrolled in a foreign health insurance program and need special forms and receipts, tell the receptionist.

Most medical facilities do not take appointments, although sometimes appointments are available for second visits. Visitors to outpatient departments must wait to be called on a first-come, first-served basis. On your first visit to a clinic or hospital, you will be asked to register and given a card, which you present on each subsequent visit.

Medical histories are often not written. It is your responsibility to notify the doctor of any matters of concern. It may be useful to bring a personal history with you to help remember things when you are with the doctor. Due to the number of patients doctors see in a day, your time with the doctor may be brief. Be sure to have your questions and concerns ready.

Emergency patients are not accepted at all hospitals in Japan, and not all emergency departments accept every case. For example, a patient having a heart attack will be sent to a hospital with a cardiac emergency department or a patient with a broken collarbone will be sent to a hospital that has an emergency department with an orthopedic service. It is strongly recommended you identify the hospitals nearest you and note the services they provide. In the case of an emergency to which an ambulance is called, the dispatcher will decide the hospital best suited to the symptoms of the patient.

Eastern medical traditions (acupuncture, shiatsu massage, etc.) are readily accessible in Kobe. A popular option is Kanda Clinic in Okamoto. For those interested in alternative

### Useful Japanese Vocabulary: Medical

monshin 問診	consultation
kensa 検査	check-up/lab test
ketsueki kensa 血液検査	blood test
kenko hoken 健康保険	national health insurance
isha 医者	doctor
shouni-ka-i 小児科医	pediatrician
kyuu kyuu bako 救急箱	first aid kit

### Medicine

shohin-meï 商品名	brand name
ippan-meï 一般名	generic name
kusuri-ya 薬屋	pharmacy/drug store
shoho-sen yakkyoku 処方箋薬局	all inclusive pharmacy
yakkyoku 薬局	limited pharmacy

medicine, check the Directory - Oriental Medicine in the back of this book.

## Medicines & Non-prescription Drugs

If you plan to bring your own medicines and non-prescription drugs, check the ingredients and consider how much you will need, as import restrictions apply. Many common cold and flu medicines contain prohibited compounds such as codeine, ephedrine and methamphetamine. These include Tylenol Cold, Nyquil, Sudafed, Advil Cold & Sinus, and Vicks Inhaler.

You can bring prescription medicine into Japan with you, without special import procedures, if:

- 1) you bring it only for your own use
- 2) it is an oral or an external medicine, not an injection,
- 3) it is not a prohibited drug such as Methamphetamine,
- 4) it is not any especially controlled drug such as Narcotics,
- 5) and its quantity is up to one month's supply.

### **Note: The same ingredient restrictions apply to medicines imported via post.**

Pack with any medicines a copy of your prescription and a letter from your doctor stating their ingredients and purpose.

If you require medicines containing controlled substances or wish to bring a larger supply, allow **at least three weeks** to complete by mail the appropriate import procedures and various forms, which your doctor will have to sign. The Japanese Ministry of Health Labour and Welfare has a good FAQ on the process, copies of the forms and how to complete them at <http://kouseikyoku.mhlw.go.jp/>

### Overcoming the language barrier

Attending a hospital or clinic can be a daunting experience, however here are a few resources that may be helpful to you and medical staff.

Printable bi-lingual medical questionnaires prepared by the Kanagawa International Foundation [www.k-i-a.or.jp/medical/english/index.html](http://www.k-i-a.or.jp/medical/english/index.html) will help during diagnosis. Simply print the appropriate category form, check the boxes and hand in at the clinic.

The Association of Medical Doctors of Asia also offers three-way telephone translation of medical information in English and Spanish between 9:00 and 17:00, Monday to Friday (closed Saturday, Sunday and holidays). Portuguese and Chinese are also available though it's best to call in advance; Tel: 06-4395-0555.

[kantoshinetsu/gyomu/bu\\_ka/shido\\_kansa/documents/qa\\_bringmedicines\\_070618.pdf](http://kantoshinetsu/gyomu/bu_ka/shido_kansa/documents/qa_bringmedicines_070618.pdf). You must receive the approved import form (*yakkan shomei*) prior to your departure.

Japanese doctors regularly prescribe a mix of medicines rather than a single treatment, often dispensed in powdered form. The name of the medication is not usually given unless one asks specifically. It is appropriate and acceptable to ask the name and type of medication being given to you. Make a note of the information for your own records. Most Japanese-brand medicines, whether prescribed or over-the-counter, will be fairly similar to the generic label equivalent in your home country.

Unlike in most Western countries, prescriptions are generally dispensed at the hospital pharmacy or doctor's office rather than at a drugstore. The cost of the medication will be paid to the physician or hospital.



## Dentistry

Most dental clinics in Japan offer such general services as check-ups, fillings and cleanings. Some clinics provide specialized services such as crowns, capping, periodontics (gum disease treatment), endodontics (root canals, etc.), oral surgery and prosthodontics (implants and dentures).

Although the equipment, materials, treatment methods, and education are quite similar to those used in Western countries, there can be major differences in the actual practice of dentistry, which often arise from different philosophies of dental treatment and insurance coverage. Because of these differences, it is a good idea to discuss your expectations with your dentist before beginning any dental work. Make sure both of you agree on the procedure to be done, what materials will be used, whether or not anesthesia will be provided, how many visits will be required and what will and will not be covered by your insurance.

Although they are readily available and even domestically manufactured, many dentists do not use local anesthetics, except for larger cavities –

you may want to discuss this before any procedure. It is important to be sure your dentist understands your desires regarding anesthetics.

Pediatric dentistry consists of exams, cleaning, fillings, fluoride paint, and resin sealants (used to protect molars). Regular dental exams are conducted at all Japanese schools but problems are not treated, only reported to the parents, who must have their personal dentist provide the necessary treatment.

Although fluoride is not added to the water supply in Japan, supplements are generally not needed as toothpaste containing fluoride is widely available and twice-daily brushing provides an adequate dose. If you are concerned, most clinics, hospitals and public health centers offer a fluoride paint procedure for a small fee.

Braces are a particular problem for foreigners residing in Japan, mainly due to time factors. As a rule of thumb, if you do not expect to be in Japan for more than a year you should not consider starting treatment.

If you have any questions about the need for orthodontic treatment for your child, most dentists can at least tell you when it would be best to consult an orthodontist. Because most Japanese orthodontists use American methods, the treatment can be followed up with little problem in the United States. See the Directory for a list of English-speaking dentists and orthodontists.

### Useful Japanese Vocabulary: Dental

mushiba 虫歯	cavity
shiseki jokyo/sukeiringu 歯石除去	cleaning/scaling (prophylaxis)
hai-sha 歯医者	dentist
tsume-mono 詰め物	filling
fusso フッ素	fluoride
haguki 歯茎	gums
ha 歯	tooth
haita/shitsuu 歯痛	toothache
ekkusu-sen/rentogen エックス線/レントゲン	x-ray

## Emergency dental care

Emergency dental care is available at the Holiday Dental Clinic, open on Sundays and all national holidays between the hours of 10:00 and 15:00 (5-3-27 Yamamoto-dori, Chuo-ku Kobe). Call (in Japanese) for more information on 078-351-1722.

## Optical

Good eyecare is readily available in Japan. Opticians can be found in all the major shopping areas and in major department stores and often

sign language is enough to communicate what you need. “*Atarashi megane hoshii desu*” means “I’d like a new pair of glasses,” at which point the salesperson will check your current lenses and administer a quick eye test using modern equipment. Japanese optical skills and lens manufacturing is world-renowned for high quality and high prices.

Contact lenses are very popular in Japan. Many of the same brands sold in the West are available here, as well as all solutions.

## Pediatrics

For routine pediatric care, the only real differences in care are cultural and have more to do with office procedures than medical treatment.

Parents should arrive with the basic medical history and records for their children, if needed. They should have immunization records, which have been brought up to date before they left their home country. If there are any special medical problems, a complete medical record should indicate the history, treatments in the past as well as current treatments and medications (generic rather than brand names).

## Specialist emergency

In Suma to the west of the city, Hyogo-ken Children’s Hospital, is equipped for all situations. Kobe Children’s Primary Emergency Medical Center is now open in Nada near the Hyogo Emergency Medical Center (see Directory-Medical-Hospitals).

### Schedule of basic immunizations

Type	Applicable age	(Desirable timing)	Place	Availability	No. of injections
Triple vaccine stage I (pertussis, diph- theria, tetanus)	3 to 47 months old	12 to 24 months after birth	Authorized hos- pital or clinic	Any time	3 (at 3 to 8 week intervals)
Triple vaccine stage II (pertussis, diph- theria, tetanus)	12 to 17 months after stage I vaccination	Same as at left			1
Polio	3 to 47 months old	3 to 18 months after birth	Public Health Center	Twice a year (specified days in May and No- vember)	2
Measles※	12 to 71 months old	12 to 36 months after birth	Authorized hos- pital or clinic	Any time	1
Tuberculin test and BCG	3 to 47 months old	3 to 12 months after birth	Public Health Center (tuberculin test can be given by authorized hospital or clinic)	Days specified by the Public Health Center	1



### Immunizations

Immunizations in Japan are fairly similar to Western countries, except for diseases specific to a particular region. The local health office carries out immunizations throughout the year but they can also be done through your own doctor or at a hospital. Polio and tuberculosis immunizations are available only through the city health office, where mass immunizations are conducted twice a year for polio, usually in May and November, and six times a year for tuberculosis. Immunization certificates (sometimes in English) usually can be provided by the administering doctor, or for polio and tuberculosis, at your Ward office. There may be a charge. The schedule for immunizations is available at the Ward office, along with an English handbook explaining the different immunizations and preferred age for each. See previous page for the basic schedule of immunizations.

### Women's Health

Specialist private clinics abound in the Kobe area, offering services including contraceptives, family planning and mammograms. Specialist fertility treatment is also widely available.

Kobe Kaisei Hospital is highly recommended for any routine exams.

If visiting a hospital for treatment, note that you may be required to visit different departments for mammograms and pap smears.

A tip: at the front desk, say you have a problem you would like checked rather than asking for a routine test, as the two are priced quite differently.

### Childbirth

Giving birth anywhere but one's home country can seem quite scary. However, women planning to give birth in Japan should

have no hesitation. There are good facilities and practitioners who are familiar with Western practices and desires. Just remember to ask questions and be specific about what you expect.

Amniocentesis or prenatal diagnosis is not routine in Japan, but is available upon request. While active birth situations are not promoted in the average Japanese hospital, many obstetricians are very receptive and accommodating to the desires of Westerners.

When choosing a hospital to give birth, here are some things to consider:

- Do staff (specifically doctors/nurses) speak your language, or will an interpreter be required?
- What are the costs of pre-natal care and doctor visits?
- How is payment taken for the visits and care?
- Does the hospital or clinic have an intensive care unit? If not, what is the procedure if there is a complication during or after the birth? What are the hospital's capabilities and to which hospital might you or your baby be transferred to in an emergency? (Urgent situations and premature births can be handled at the Suma Hospital which is equipped for all birthing emergencies.)
- Are partners allowed into the delivery room? May they be present for a Caesarean section operation... even an unscheduled one? May they stay overnight?
- Can you give birth on a bed or blanket or in an unusual position instead of in stirrups? Can you move around freely during your labor?
- Will you be informed before a doctor decides to perform any procedures to move labor along?
- Are pain relief drugs available if you request them? Most hospitals do not offer epidurals, but they are readily available. Instead, they may offer a light sedative to relieve pain. A special anesthesiologist is not required as your obstetrician or the

hospital's own doctors can administer an epidural. Be sure to discuss specific pain medications available and the availability for persons to administer them.

- Will your doctor be available for your delivery or will it be the doctor on duty at the time?
- How long is a reasonable time to be in labor before a Caesarean section is done?

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## Pain reduction during childbirth

Pain reduction during childbirth is becoming more available in Japan. A few years ago it was hard to find, but hospitals and clinics offer a variety of pain reducing treatments – even epidurals are now offered. However, we recommend that you inquire about the options at the hospital or clinic where you wish to give birth as early as possible. Due to a recent lack of obstetricians in Japan some hospitals might not be able to accept you as a patient if you delay your decision, and some hospitals and clinics have restrictions concerning the administration of epidurals.

Some clinics only offer an epidural in combination with medically induced labor, which essentially means that you would have to schedule the time of your birth beforehand. Some clinics do not offer the treatment to women over 85 kilograms and some clinics do not have a certified anesthesiologist on call at all times, so these are all things that you need to inquire about in advance.

According to anesthesiologist Dr Masahiro Ide the following three clinics are the more experienced.

- Oka Ladies Clinic in Kita-ku offers epidurals to patients below 85kg.
- Matsuoka Clinic has experience with foreign patients, even if they do not have English speaking staff. Patients' BMI must be below 28 to receive an epidural.

## Stem cell storage

With the many advances in stem cell research it is not uncommon for parents to make the choice to have their baby's cord blood collected and stored for possible future use. You have only one opportunity to do this and while it may seem unnecessary, it provides some hope if your child or their sibling becomes terminally ill in the future.

Inform your obstetrician of your intentions early as many have never performed the procedure. The blood collection company should then send you and your doctor forms to sign and will send a representative to the doctor to go through the collection procedure.

After the birth, the blood collected will be assessed for storage viability, at which point you will be billed for storage. The collection and preservation for ten years is not inexpensive, costing around ¥200,000. Discounts are available for twins and subsequent children and an installment plan should be available.

Choose a company with a good reputation as there have been a few unscrupulous companies that have collected the money but not actually stored the cells. The Stem Cell Institute is one well-regarded company that has been in operation since 1999 and used by many foreigners in Kobe. They have offices in Osaka with English speaking staff and literature available.

Toll-free 0120-346-257.

[www.stemcell.co.jp](http://www.stemcell.co.jp)

## Circumcision

This is not a common practice and you'll need to make special arrangements with your Rabbi.



## Medical

- Akashi Medical Center requires that you register with the hospital before your 20<sup>th</sup> week in order to be able to be accepted as a patient.

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### Registrations of birth

When you first become pregnant, you need to register your pregnancy at the local Ward office. You will be given a mother and child handbook (*boshitechou*). An English version is available but may not contain the immunization vouchers needed if you intend to immunize your child here, so ask for both versions. This book will be used throughout your pregnancy and long after the birth to record information. Many mothers take their handbook to every doctor visit.

After the birth, you must register your baby within 14 days at the Ward office. You should also begin arranging for a passport, visa and re-entry permit.

You may be eligible for a monthly subsidy if you have Japanese health insurance. Babies born in Japan are covered under National health insurance until the age of one. Be sure to verify costs and what is covered by your health insurance and, if necessary, be prepared to pay the hospital bill upfront.

### Mental Health Services

Tokyo English Lifeline provides general telephone counseling nationwide and in various languages; Tel: 03-5774-0992. Their website [www.telljp.com](http://www.telljp.com) includes a database of other services by prefecture.

The International Counseling Centre (ICC) at Kobe Kaisei Hospital provides face-to-face confidential counseling and psychotherapy in English, Japanese and Spanish, though this can vary with staff changes. ICC has a sliding fee scale, to provide an opportunity for all members of the foreign community

to use its services. ICC offers treatment and/or information and referral for all types of emotional, psychiatric and daily living problems. Tel: 078-882-9020. A larger list of therapists serving Kansai is available at [www.imhjp.org](http://www.imhjp.org).

### Insurance (NHI)

Foreign residents permitted to stay in Japan for one year or more are obliged to enroll in the National Health Insurance (NHI) plan (*Kokumin Hoken*) under the following conditions:

1. Current address is registered in the Alien Registration section in the Ward where you live.
2. Immigration status is other than “temporary visitor.”
3. You do not belong to another health insurance program through your place of employment or as a dependent family member.
4. The Ward office is informed of any changes in residence, number of family members, and departure from Japan.

Premiums are based on income and can be expensive, so weigh carefully the merits of joining vs. buying private health insurance. Bear in mind that once you’ve enrolled in NHI withdrawing is not permitted as long as eligibility is valid. The easiest way to quit is to move from one Ward to another and not re-register. Remember also that most (but not all) physicians and dentists accept this insurance, and that it does not cover routine checkups or alternative health care.

Figures vary depending on where you live, but generally you can expect to pay about 30% of charges if you show your National Health Insurance card at the desk of the hospital or clinic. You can check specific details of the NHI plan at your Ward office.

## Co-payment percentages

Children under school age	20%
Schoolchildren and up	30%
Elderly aged 70–74	10% (may be 30%, depending on income)

NHI covers only basic dental care and does not include such things as porcelain crowns or preventive dental care, so you should expect to pay the full charge for checkups, cleaning, X-rays etc. If you are enrolled in National Health Insurance, you will receive a lump-sum childbirth/childrearing payment. To apply, you will need your National Health Insurance card and your Mother and Child Health Handbook, Birth Notification and other documentation. For details, please ask at the National Health Insurance and Pensions Desk at your local Ward office or branch office.

## Other Insurance Options

Other options include taking out regular private health insurance, either here or overseas, or getting a traveler's health policy. With the latter, your time in Japan is considered to be a trip, so premiums are rather cheap, but there is no coverage for medical treatment back in your home country. Also, for those on tourist visas who are ineligible for National Health Insurance, it is possible to get hospitalization coverage (illness or injury) as part of a death and dismemberment policy.

If you use a foreign insurance carrier, it is customary to pay medical bills out of pocket and then apply for reimbursement. Many hospitals, in such cases, ask for the full charge for any

## Be prepared

- Learn the two emergency telephone numbers (Fire/Ambulance: 119; Police: 110) and post them by the telephone in your home. You may also wish to post the number of a taxi company should you need a taxi in an emergency, as well as the numbers for 24-hour emergency hospitals and CHIC's emergency interpreters. (See Emergency Pages.)
- Learn the locations of all the 24-hour emergency hospitals in your area.
- Buy a first aid kit and a first aid book.
- Keep ¥20,000 or so handy to cover taxi fares and cash deposits at emergency hospitals.
- Get to know a friendly Japanese neighbor who could help you in an emergency.

## First aid kit (*kyu kyu bako*)

Good quality first aid kits are available from many pharmacies and department stores, but the labels and instructions will be in Japanese. Ask a Japanese friend to translate them for you, and write the English equivalent on each item. It is a good idea to keep a properly labeled first aid kit in your emergencies/disasters box. If you drive, consider putting a first aid kit in the car, as well.

procedure to be paid upon admission, and that the entire bill for hospitalization is paid in full before you are allowed to leave.

Many expatriate company employees have dental insurance which covers treatment worldwide, but dentists un-accustomed to treating foreigners may have difficulty in filling out the necessary forms, since, for example, the numbering system for teeth is different in the U.S. and Japan. Be sure to ask the dentist about preparing these forms before treatment is begun and remember to file them within the prescribed



## Medical

time limit (usually within 90 days of treatment). Also, expect to pay the dentist directly and have the insurance company reimburse you. (See Directory-Services-Insurance)

## Further Information

### Hyogo Living Guide

Hyogo International Association and Hyogo Prefecture provide a list of medical institutions in Hyogo Prefecture offering medical services in foreign languages, in cooperation with the Hyogo Medical Association. Please be advised that multilingual services may not be available at all times. It is, therefore, recommended that you call in advance.

[www.hyogo-ip.or.jp/hiaf/jp/medical/index.htm](http://www.hyogo-ip.or.jp/hiaf/jp/medical/index.htm)

### Medical Access: A Foreigner's Guide to Health Care in Kobe

A complete guide to medical care in Kobe is available in *Medical Access: A Foreigner's Guide to Health Care in Kobe*. This book was created to

help the international community understand the Japanese health care system. Its aim is to teach people how to work within the system. It is an intricate and thorough introduction to health care, and we recommend it highly. You can purchase this book at CHIC, Kaisei Hospital, and The Foreign Buyers' Club. ¥3,000.

### Japan Health Handbook

A compact, comprehensive guide to health care in Japan. Available in the foreign language section of bookstores and at the Foreign Buyers' Club. ¥2,520.

### First aid/family health books in English

The Foreign Buyers' Club carries the *Essential U.S.-Japan Drug Concordance* in its store on Rokko Island. FBC can also order just about any first aid or family health book you want. On the Internet, try [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) or [www.barnesandnoble.com](http://www.barnesandnoble.com).

## Useful Japanese Vocabulary: Hospitals

iin/kurinikku/shinryojo 医院/クリニック/診療所	clinic
chiiki byoin 地域病院	community hospital
sogo byoin 総合病院	general hospital
byoin 病院	hospital
kokuritsu byoin 国立病院	national hospital
hokenjo 保健所	public health center
daigaku byoin 大学病院	university hospital
kyu kyu sha 救急車	ambulance
kyu kyu byoin 救急病院	emergency hospital
san-in 産院	maternity hospital
josan-in 助産院	midwifery clinics
sanfujinka iin 産婦人科医院	community maternity clinic
kinkyu (jitai) 緊急 (事態)	emergency(ies)