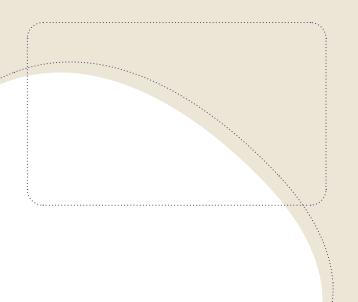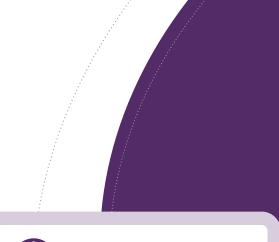People with an absent or dysfunctional spleen have an increased risk of developing severe infections such as pneumonia, septicaemia (blood poisoning) and meningitis.

If you or your child has an absent or dysfunctional spleen, please complete the details on this card and ensure it is carried by the person affected at all times so that paramedics and other health professionals are aware of your condition, should you or your child be taken ill.

Travel health advice:
travelhealthpro.org.uk

Information on the spleen:
www.nhs.uk/conditions/spleen-problems-and-spleen-removal/

NHS

Information

for patients with an absent or dysfunctional spleen

This leaflet is for patients who do not have a spleen or who have a spleen that doesn't work

Splenectomy is an operation to remove the spleen. Doctors may commonly perform a splenectomy because the spleen:

- has been damaged in a serious accident
- has been damaged by disease
- contains a growth or tumour
- has become overactive

Other terms used such as:

Splenic dysfunction – when the spleen does not work properly

Asplenia – absent or no spleen

What does the spleen do?

The spleen helps the body fight against bacterial infections.

If you do not have a spleen you will still be able to cope with most infections, but in some cases serious infection such as sepsis may develop quickly.

The risk of this happening is higher in children than in adults without a spleen but it is still very small.

What should I do if I do not have a spleen?

Remind your doctor and dentist that you do not have a spleen.

Carry a card or wear an identifying bracelet or necklace to alert other people in an emergency.

Make sure you have received all your routine immunisations (talk to your doctor or practice nurse, or visit **www.nhs.uk**); there are some extra immunisations people with asplenia or splenic dysfunction should have. In particular, you should ensure you have received the following vaccinations to help prevent infections to which you are particularly vulnerable:

- pneumococcal vaccine (PPV23) every 5 years
- meningococcal ACWY vaccine
- meningococcal B vaccine
- influenza (every year)

Other important information

- you may be recommended to take antibiotics every day to protect you from getting serious infections. This is essential in the first few years after your operation and some children and adults may need to take antibiotics for longer. Tell your doctor if you have been unable to take the antibiotics for any reason

- alternatively, you may be given a course of antibiotics to keep at home in case you become ill and there is a delay in seeing your doctor

- contact your doctor immediately if you are ill. Most illnesses will be minor and can be dealt with as usual but sometimes a fever, sore throat, severe headache or abdominal pain may be the beginning of something more serious. Early diagnosis and treatment are essential and may be life saving

- get treatment urgently for any bites, such as animal bites or insect bites, and take any antibiotics you are given to prevent infection

- if you are regularly involved in outdoor pursuits such as trekking or camping you may be more susceptible to other infections, such as those transmitted by ticks or mosquitoes. You can help protect yourself by wearing clothing to cover exposed skin, especially long trousers to cover the legs. If you become ill, seek medical advice promptly

- talk to your doctor or travel clinic before travelling abroad as extra vaccinations and special precautions may be necessary. Individuals without a spleen are at risk of severe malaria which is transmitted by mosquitoes

- it may also be wise to carry a course of antibiotics with you so speak to your doctor before travel