



SMA Travel Guide

The Spinal Muscular Atrophy (SMA) Travel Guide is a tool created by Hoffmann-La Roche Limited (Roche Canada) in partnership with Roche's SMA Patient/Caregiver Council. This tool is meant to help people living with SMA as well as their caregivers and families in planning to travel in Canada by car, plane or train. It also offers helpful tips and resources for more information.

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TRAVEL BY CAR

Travelling by a car is often the easiest way to travel for someone living with SMA. People with all types of SMA can travel in a car with modifications and support.

When you travel by car, it allows you and your family to have control of the trip and planning. Families have control in their travel route, the time of day, the length of travel, meals, breaks and medical treatment.



It's recommended to plan rest breaks or washroom breaks based on availability of accessible washroom facilities. Companion washroom facilities are the most spacious, and accessible washroom facilities can be considered as another option. It's important to note that these can be tight for space if a caregiver, wheelchair and change table are being used.

Travelling by car also lessens the risk of infection and helps maintain good hygiene since you are not sitting in a shared public space (such as on a train or plane). This can be helpful to people that may be immunocompromised (where their immune system may be weaker) and at more risk of infection.

There are certain types of equipment, modifications and support that will help make your travel plans easier. Consider either renting or buying an accessible van. This allows for a power wheelchair on board, or other medical equipment such as ramps or chair lifts. Vans with side ramps are preferred in terms of space and accessibility. Consider having one caregiver sit next to the passenger to help them.

Remember to travel with a power charger that keeps all your electronics and medical equipment charged.

For some families a car bed may be necessary. This allows for children with Type 1 SMA to lie down safely while driving.

Infant car seats are also an option, however this requires the child to pass a breathing test, and have the ability to sit upright for an extended period.

Speak to your healthcare team about what car supports/equipment are needed for you and your family to travel safely.

Make sure to park your car or van in a way that gives you space for ramps/wheelchair access if needed.

TIPS FOR CAR TRAVEL:

- Practise safe driving as a person on board requires special care
- Have your car insurance and vehicle ownership details handy
- Plan your travel route and research accessible stops/restrooms along the way. This includes knowing where gas stations are located
- Pack all necessary medical equipment and medications
- Research emergency/hospitals on route
- Pack an emergency kit



TRAVEL BY PLANE

Travelling by airplane with SMA is manageable with advance coordination and help from the airline. Check the airline's medical support or accessibility services, and inform them about specific requirements and submit the necessary paperwork. Call the airline in advance to ensure all necessary support is provided and staff are well informed of your needs. Wheelchairs are provided at the airport, however your personal chair needs to be checked in, and there are on-boarding wheelchairs available (by request). It is a good idea to request priority boarding, so you have time and help to board the aircraft. Reach the gate early for early boarding or alternatively, you may request to be the last one to board the aircraft.

TIPS FOR AIR TRAVEL:

- Remove fragile parts of your wheelchair, and bring them as carry-on luggage to avoid any damage
- Remove or disconnect wheelchair batteries
- Pack your power chair charger
- Book your trip well in advance and ensure airline staff are aware of accessibility needs
- Pack allen keys, extra screws and tools with screwdrivers to help with wheelchair assembly or repairs
- Pack a neck cushion for comfort
- Don't forget to bring essential medical supplies or medications on board with you
- Use restroom facilities prior to departing and limit how much you drink while you are on the plane

SEATING AND ASSISTANCE

When you are looking to pick your seat, try to book an aisle seat at the front of the plane. There are aisle chairs that can help transfer someone to their seat, and you can ask for this if needed. Tell the airline how you would like to be transferred in advance. You can ask for help moving to and from the washroom, but you can't get help inside the washroom. Airline staff also provide support in storing/retrieving luggage during takeoff and landing.

EQUIPMENT/MEDICAL SUPPLIES

Tell the airline about your equipment, wheelchair and medical supplies.

If your wheelchair can fit underneath the plane, it will not be folded. If it cannot be folded, tell the crew on how to fold your wheelchair without breaking it. Tape instructions on your wheelchair for how to fold, store and re-assemble. Carry your wheelchair manual with you to help if needed.

TRAVELLING WITH A CAREGIVER

If your condition requires a support person/caregiver to assist you while on board, then the combination fare (the fare for you and the caregiver) is free with certain airlines. Make sure you understand the one fare policy for travel within Canada. Some examples of airlines that provide this include: Air Canada, Air Canada Jazz and WestJet. Please call the airline well in advance, and request this prior to booking travel. You may need to provide medical documentation.

[Click Here to learn more.](#)



AIRLINE ACCESSIBILITY/SPECIAL NEEDS SERVICES

- [Air Canada](#)
 - Call the Medical Desk for accessibility needs well advance
 - Phone # 1-800-667-4732
 - [Power wheelchair Air Form](#) (complete two copies)
- [WestJet](#)
- [Flair](#)
- [Fly Swoop](#)

TRAVELLING WITH A SERVICE DOG

TRAVELLING WITHIN CANADA

- National regulations require most major air, rail, marine and bus carriers to accept a service dog for on board transportation, free of charge. In some circumstances, Canadian carriers must also provide seating without charging additional fares or any other fees.
- [The Canadian Transportation Agency's Guide to travelling with a service animal](#)

RESOURCES AND LINKS TO ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

It is important to know your transportation rights as a disabled individual.

[Click here to learn more](#)

TRAVELLING OUTSIDE OF CANADA

- The laws around travelling outside of Canada will vary depending on the country being visited, so be sure to always check the country's laws that you will be visiting.
- Additional fees may be required to accommodate a service dog depending on the airline/carriers.



TRAVEL BY RAIL

A person living with SMA can travel across the country or within provinces comfortably with Via Rail Canada. There are some things you need to consider when booking your travel. It is important to remember that adapted services vary from region to region, along with stations.

Below are some tips when considering rail travel:

- Book your trip well in advance and request accessible seating.
- Wheelchair accessible stations have devices for lifting wheelchairs and/or the passenger from the station platform to the train door.

Fully accessible services means:

- Boarding/deboarding via a wheelchair lift
- Moving from the train vestibule to the mobility aid space or accessible cabin
- Entering and exiting the washroom
- Accessing the toilet and vanity
- Turning and exiting via the train vestibule



VIA TRAIN ACCESSIBILITY

All VIA trains are accessible to travelers with mobility needs. Staff can help support you and your mobility aid for on-boarding, during your trip, or deboarding the train. Trains are accessible to those in wheelchairs. However, wheelchairs larger than 26 inches will not fit. There are loaner wheelchairs that are used for boarding, deboarding or accessing washrooms. Please note that scooters with four wheels can only be stored in the baggage cars.

[Click here to learn more about what the dimensions for mobility aids.](#)

All washrooms are accessible with grab bars and can only accommodate narrow wheelchairs.

VIA Mobility Aids:

If you do not keep your mobility aid during travel and it happens to get damaged, broken, or lost during transport. VIA Rail will either provide a temporary replacement, reimburse you for expenses, or arrange for repair.

Dining with VIA:

On VIA's transcontinental trains, travelers who are unable to go to the dining car or snack counters can request to have their meals served at their seat.

Additional information:

There are some VIA sleeping cars that can accommodate passengers traveling on stretchers, provided a minimum of 48 hours' notice. It's best to check in advance which trains accommodate this.

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Extra seat space with VIA:

If you need more seat space due to a disability, you may reserve two side-by-side seats at no additional cost. Below are the steps to take if you need extra seat space:

- VIA Rail may require up to 96 hours advance notice for requests requiring a medical certificate. Contact the customer center well in advance of your departure.
- Please download the [Confidential Medical Certificate for Passengers Requiring a Support Person](#) and have it completed by your doctor.
- Once completed, the form must be submitted by email to: support_person@viarail.ca or by fax (506-859-3943) for approval.

VIA Train stations:

At train stations, wheelchair lifts are not required at Montréal, Ottawa and Québec City stations, where the platforms are level with the train doors.

All other wheelchair accessible stations have devices used to lift the wheelchair and/or the passenger from the station platform to the train door. These lifts can safely handle a maximum weight of 272 kg (600 lbs.) and mobility aids up to 56 in. (142 cm) long.

Train stations are equipped with accessible features, infrastructure, and services that vary greatly from one station to the next. For example, some provide direct access to elevators or suitable public transportation. To learn more about the accessibility services available in our stations, including adapted public transportation, use Via Rails [Find a Station tool](#).



