Independent International Travel
(Non-credit Undergraduates, Graduate Students & Employees)
COVID Considerations

The following guidelines are designed to help undergraduates, graduate students, and employees (faculty and staff) planning short- or long-term independent international travel to conduct research, attend a conference, guest lecture, give a performance as well as participate in an internship or athletic competition. Faculty advisers, program sponsors, and / or supervisors are also encouraged to discuss with the traveler whether or not the trip is feasible in light of one’s planned activities, risk tolerance, academic / employment responsibilities and finances. Undergraduates planning to participate in approved study abroad programs should work directly with the Global Learning Office on these issues. For university-affiliated group travel (three or more traveling on the same or similar itinerary), trip leaders should consult our checklist specific to Groups.

This document will be updated regularly to align with emerging best practices in COVID risk mitigation and exposure/infection management. Refer to COVID-19 Travel Considerations for additional links and resources.

These guidelines are divided into four sections:
- GeoBlue health insurance: COVID benefits and exclusions
- Destination specific questions to consider
- Travel planning tips
- Vaccines

GeoBlue International Insurance

GeoBlue health insurance is required for all travelers. Before working through these guidelines, review our GeoBlue for Students and GeoBlue for Employees benefits in full. Coverage related to COVID are highlighted below:

- Testing: Once abroad, symptomatic testing, tests prescribed by a doctor, or asymptomatic testing due to a close contact reporting positive are all covered directly or by reimbursement, if not covered by the local health authority
- Treatment: All healthcare expenses associated with a COVID diagnosis are covered directly or by reimbursement, if not covered by the local health authority
- Evacuation: COVID-related evacuations are covered, but must be deemed “medically necessary” by the treating authority (not one’s personal physician back home)
- See Travel Health for more information

GeoBlue does not cover the costs for:
- Asymptomatic quarantine or quarantine for mild illness
- Testing required for travel
Destination specific questions to consider

**Entry / Exit requirements & Consular Support**
1. Is the destination open to non-resident / non-citizen travelers?
2. If the destination requires proof of vaccination for entry, what vaccines are acceptable / not acceptable? What forms of proof are acceptable in locations requiring proof of vaccine (electronic, paper, copy, etc.)?
3. Can you get there / get back without engaging in an onerous, burdensome, or expensive visa application process?
4. Do you need to download and engage with an airline or host government app to share vaccination status, test results or other pre-departure requirements to gain entry to the country and / or other facilities, such as museums, grocery stores, restaurants, etc.?
5. What are the current airline and destination pre-departure COVID-testing requirements, including type of test and timing of test, regardless of vaccination status?
6. What requirements are necessary to re-enter the U.S. Identify the testing resources available to comply with airline or U.S. entry requirements, and note the cost for such tests.
7. What is the operational status of the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate, or the embassy or consulate of your citizenship, in all countries under consideration?
8. Does it make sense to register your trip and / or sign-up for alerts from the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate? (This messaging services is open to non-U.S. citizens. See Smart Traveler Enrollment Program.)

**Conduct a COVID Risk Assessment**
1. What is the current CDC COVID-19 level for your trip destination?
2. What is the vaccination rate of the destination? If under 30%, what is the projection for the travel time frame proposed? Use Reuter’s COVID Vaccination Tracker for best data.
3. What are the COVID-risk mitigation measures in place at the proposed destination(s)? Are these more or less strict than Northwestern / Illinois? How will you maintain compliance?
4. How will you be adequately cared for if you experienced a non-COVID health emergency?
5. Will you be participating in on-site activities that may increase risk (such as visiting elementary schools or health care settings)?
6. What resources will you monitor to stay abreast of local conditions?
7. Have you confirmed with local partner(s) or on-site contacts that you will be able to conduct activities as planned?

**Complications Associated with Positive Test Results**
1. What will you do if you test positive as part of your pre-departure requirements and is thus barred from boarding aircraft at the start of the trip? Will you delay departure / re-test or abandon the trip. Do you have appropriate funding to cover the cost of any delay?
2. What will you do if you test positive on arrival or during the trip, which will likely result in mandatory quarantine and follow-up testing? Are you prepared to pay for costs not covered by GeoBlue insurance?
3. How will you receive support, academic, social, medical, and logistical during quarantine?
4. Do you know how to engage GeoBlue if your symptoms become serious, and you need medical attention?
Financial Contingency Planning (including H&S Emergencies)

1. What financial resources are available from your sponsoring school, unit or department to cover a last-minute change-of-plans related to COVID?
2. Have you considered purchasing trip interruption or cancellation insurance?

Travel Planning Tips

Pre-departure planning
- Consider scheduling your return a few days in advance of classes starting on campus to accommodate any short-term delays associated with testing.
- Pack a few at-home self-test kits to use when testing sites are closed or appointments unavailable.
- The CDC recommends wearing an KN95 / N95 mask during travel. To obtain one from Northwestern, refer to the “access” section on the Face Coverings and Face Masks page.
- Make a photocopy of your vaccination card in case it is lost. Know how to replace the original, often possible by creating an account with your home state’s public health authority.
- Identify local food delivery apps (that accept foreign credit cards) in advance in case arrival quarantine is required.
- Arrange with a friend, family member or colleague to help provide “moral support” during quarantine.
- If traveling to a lower-resourced country, investigate the operational status of healthcare using the IHME COVID19 projections, especially the “hospital resource use” data. Consider delaying your trip if personal illness or injury could divert limited resources from members of the host community.
- If you test positive during the trip, you will need a letter (or proof) of recovery to return home. Ask a local contact for advice or enter “covid recovery letter (country)” in your search engine to obtain the most recent information. In many cases travelers need a verified positive test (not a home test) to determine their recovery period. If you are unable to verify the recover letter process through a local contact or online, email GeoBlue for assistance.

Insurance – Student Plan
- Consider adding 2-3 extra days of GeoBlue coverage in the case of a departure delay or have confirmed plans / process to extend coverage if you become ill at the end of the trip.
- If you get COVID and are required to stay longer to isolate, extend your GeoBlue coverage accordingly (student rate is $1.83/day). If you will engage in personal / leisure travel before or after your university-sponsored portion of your trip, you can tack on NU’s GeoBlue plan for up to a week before or after the trip. If traveling for longer, you should purchase a GeoBlue commercial product to fill any gaps.

Vaccines
In accordance with Northwestern’s COVID-10 Vaccination Requirement, with limited exceptions, students, faculty and staff are required to be vaccinated and obtain a booster before traveling abroad, if eligible.