## **Travel Advisory Update – December 1, 2021**

With the COVID-19 pandemic worsening, **UNC Chapel Hill will generally not permit university-affiliated international travel for the remainder of 2021**. Given deteriorating circumstances, the University will grant exceptions to the prohibition on international travel only under extraordinary circumstances. This applies to both new requests and to previously approved travel through December 31, 2021.

For the remainder of 2021, new requests for an exception to the prohibition on international travel will not be considered except under truly extraordinary circumstances. In addition, previously approved University-affiliated international travel will not be allowed to proceed for the rest of 2021 absent a new approval under the elevated risk assessment and new criteria (“extraordinary circumstances”).

**Elevated risk of international travel**

The main driver of this elevated risk assessment is of course the emergence in November of a new COVID variant, labelled a “variant of concern” by the WHO and named Omicron. But even before the emergence of this new variant, the news from Europe was troubling, with cases rising, new lockdowns being imposed, and health care systems coming under renewed strain. When news of the Omicron variant broke, numerous countries, including the US, abruptly imposed entry bans on travelers who have been in southern Africa (and, in some cases, on all foreigners).

The risk of being caught in transit or behind an abruptly closed border has again gone up, and, while we await more conclusive data-driven assessments from scientists, there is early data to suggest that the new variant may be more transmissible than previous variants and may possibly have less protection from current vaccines. The concern remains that travelers who become ill with COVID-19 or another illness may not be able to access health care, at least not the level of care available in Chapel Hill.

*This policy will be evaluated in mid-December as the situation evolves and more information about the threat posed by Omicron becomes available.*