## **Travel Advisory Update – May 3, 2022**

As the System Office prohibition on University-affiliated international travel remains in effect, all University-affiliated travel continues to require an exception in order to proceed. This approval process manages both the risks of international travel and contributes to sound financial oversight.

With the recent CDC decision to remove more than 100 countries from its Level 4 “Do Not Travel” list, the risks of international travel seem to be subsiding, at least for this phase of the pandemic. In the past two weeks, U.S. embassies around the world have, in response to the CDC decision, revised Department of State (DOS) travel advisories. Many countries that were previously DOS Level 4 “Do Not Travel” are now DOS Level One or Level Two (the State Department indicates that travelers to Level Two destinations can proceed with travel but should “exercise caution”). As the University reviews compliant, risk-managed requests for travel to DOS Level One and DOS Level Two destinations, the highly restrictive policy in place for much of the pandemic is now being replaced by a much less restrictive policy for granting approvals.

Given studies demonstrating that receipt of 3 doses of an mRNA vaccine is highly effective in preventing hospitalization and severe disease from COVID-19 infection with Omicron variants, a statement that the prospective traveler is fully vaccinated and has received a booster dose of an mRNA vaccine is a critical element of an effective risk-management plan.

As the U.S. still requires that travelers show a negative COVID test before boarding a flight to the U.S., travelers face a relatively high likelihood of a delayed return to the U.S. and an extended stay abroad. An extended stay in commercial lodging can greatly increase the cost of the trip. Thus, a plan to cover this contingency—with, for example, family or friends who will provide lodging, or with funds (which can be personal or come from, for example, a commitment from your dean)—is also an essential element of an effective risk-management plan.

Note that travelers are required to sign a release of liability document that includes the following language: “I understand that I may face delays returning home (e.g., as a result of a positive COVID-19 test that prevents me from boarding a flight) and that the University is not responsible for costs associated with my prolonged stay abroad and delayed return travel.”

Travel will continue to be considered high risk to Level Three and Four countries, including those where COVID caseloads are high, and/or access to adequate health care is in doubt. Risk increases for short-term travel, particularly where the traveler lacks support on the ground. An exception may still be granted in higher risk cases if the traveler presents a sound and compelling risk mitigation plan, and the benefit of travel to UNC is clear and compelling.

*This policy will be evaluated regularly as the situation evolves.*