International Travel Guidance
Updated June 15, 2022

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

In April, the Department of State (DOS) decoupled its travel advisories from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) Travel Health Notices (THNs). Since then, the DOS has revised the advisory levels of many countries that were previously Level 4: Do Not Travel. Now, 70% of the countries tracked are now Level 1: Exercise Normal Precautions or Level 2: Exercise Increased Caution. As such, the highly restrictive travel policy in place for much of the pandemic has begun to be replaced by a much less restrictive policy where many requests for travel to DOS Level 1 and Level 2 destinations are being approved when the University deems the risk is being well-mitigated.

Given studies demonstrating that receipt of three 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 and is considered in the evaluation of the travel exception request. Guidance from the CDC states that you are “up to date with your COVID-19 vaccines when you have received all doses in the primary series and all boosters recommended for you, when eligible.”

Effective June 12, 2022, the CDC rescinded the order requiring air passengers traveling from a foreign country to the United States to show a negative COVID-19 viral test or documentation of recovery from COVID-19 before they board their flight. Note, CDC’s Order requiring proof of vaccination for noncitizen nonimmigrants to travel to the United States remains in effect.

Fully vaccinated and boosted individuals may still be at risk of contracting COVID-19, thus travelers should be prepared for a delayed return to the U.S. and an extended stay abroad if they become ill immediately prior to their return to the U.S. Travelers are advised to have a contingency plan for a possible extended stay abroad and the resulting additional expense for flight changes, lodging and incidentals, as both are essential elements of an effective risk management plan. Note that travelers are required to sign an assumption of risk and release of liability document that includes the following language: “I understand that I may face delays returning home 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 countries with a DOS advisory Level 3: Reconsider Travel and 4: Do Not Travel, 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.