

HEALTHCARE ISSUES ABROAD

Adjusting to life in a new country means excitement, challenge, and the unexpected. No amount of preparation can guarantee a trouble-free transition. Since you are not a citizen of the host country, you are not usually given the same medical care benefits as its citizens. Arranging and paying for medical care is your responsibility, and you should determine the international coverage offered by your insurance company.

Study Abroad Health Information

Before you travel abroad, it is worthwhile to take a close look at the many factors that contribute to your physical and emotional well-being. A trip abroad will almost certainly affect your health, because so many factors of your daily health are related to your lifestyle and environment. Conversely, the state of your health will have a significant impact on the success and enjoyment of your trip.

Assess your health & health-related practices

Going abroad is not a magical "geographic cure" for concerns and problems at home. Both physical and emotional health issues will follow you wherever you go. In particular, if you are concerned about your use of alcohol and other controlled drugs or if you have an emotional health concern, you should address it honestly before making plans to travel. Contrary to many people's expectations, travel does not minimize these problems; in fact, it often exacerbates them to a crisis stage while you are away from home.

Identify your health needs

Be clear about your health needs when applying for a program and when making housing arrangements. Thoroughly and honestly describe allergies, disabilities, psychological treatments, dietary requirements, and medical needs so that adequate arrangements can be made. In addition, resources and services for people with disabilities vary widely by country and region - if you have a disability or special need, identify it and understand ahead of time exactly what accommodations can and cannot be made.

Remember to ask questions, such as:

- What illnesses are endemic to the region?
- What medications should you take to prevent these illnesses?
- What is the quality of water?
- What kind of insurance coverage do you need and how much?
- Do you need to take special precautions for any existing medical conditions? Discuss with your doctor.
- Will you have the necessary access to physicians and psychiatrists abroad?
- Will you have access to English-speaking physicians?
- What precautions are recommended for sexual or health practices?
- What are the customs, beliefs and laws in the host country concerning sexual behavior and the use of alcohol and drugs?
- What are the laws governing the importation of medications, medical supplies and contraceptives?

This information can be found in several places, including:

- Family physician
- Campus health service (<http://www.uhs.uga.edu>)
- Local Public Health Department
- Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (<http://www.cdc.gov>)



- State Department for Overseas Citizens Emergency Center (<http://www.state.gov>)
- Travelers with disabilities can get more information from Mobility International at: <http://www.miusa.org>.

See your health practitioners

ASU recommends that all students get a thorough physical examination before participating in study abroad. Discuss with your physician your intent to study abroad and get advice for managing your physical and emotional health while in another country. Discuss your health condition (allergies, disabilities, psychological treatment, dietary requirements and medical needs) with your physician, and seriously consider the appropriateness of your participation in study abroad in your chosen host country.

A visit to your family physician, gynecologist and dentist will insure that you are in good health before you leave and might prevent emergencies abroad. Update your health records, including eyeglass prescriptions and regular medications. If you are taking a prescription medication, check to be sure it is available in your host country as prescribed or, if not, carry a supply with you. If you self-inject prescribed medication, you may need to carry needles and syringes with you. You'll need a physician's prescription for medication and medical supplies you carry with you in order to pass through foreign customs. Take copies of all medical records, prescriptions in generic form, prescriptions for eyeglasses/contact lenses and pertinent information; carry these with you in a safe place. If you expect to need regular medical care abroad, take a letter of introduction from your physician at home, providing details of your medical conditions, care and specific needs. Try to identify medical resources before you leave.

Immunizations

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has an International Traveler's Hotline (404-332-4559) where, by punching in the country code of your host country, you can get recorded information on vaccinations, food and water, and current health problems. Their website can also be a valuable resource: <http://www.cdc.gov>

There are no required immunizations for most of Western Europe, Japan, Australia and Canada.

However, there are recommended vaccinations for almost all locations. The Hepatitis B vaccination is now recommended for all destinations. They may include Hepatitis A and/or B if you anticipate contact with blood or other bodily fluids or sexual contact with people from the host country. If you are going to South America, Africa, Eastern Europe, Southeast Asia, Russia or remote areas of your host country, consult the CDC Traveler's Hotline several months in advance of your departure as they may suggest vaccinations as early as six months in advance.

Visit Travel Health Online, a free on-line service, to review Destination Information including the health risks in your host country. <http://www.tripprep.com>

Pack a Medical Kit

Traveling with a medical kit may be a helpful tool. Useful items to pack include:

- Band-aids
- Disinfectant
- Antibacterial ointment
- Sunscreen
- Insect repellent (DEET recommended)

- Pain reliever
- Tweezers
- Anti-diarrhea medication

You may also include:

- Paper and pencil
- Small flashlight
- Small bottle of isopropyl alcohol
- Soap
- Scissors
- Adhesive bandages or gauze with tape
- Thermometer



Also be sure to pack:

- Regular medications
- Medicine for colds, allergies, motion sickness
- Extra pair of glasses/contact lens and copy of prescription. Pack enough lens cleaning solution for the entire trip.
- Contraceptives if you may need them
- Feminine hygiene products if you are traveling where they are not available
- Any other routine health and medical products you think you may need or brands that you like

Depending on the region, you may want to also include:

- Water purification tablets
- Salt tablets
- Skin moisturizers

Pack a supply of all medications you take regularly. Make sure your supply will be sufficient to last the entire trip, including any unexpected delays, as you may encounter trouble with customs if you try to have medicines sent once you are abroad. Keep medications in their original containers and bring along a copy of your prescription. To prevent problems if your luggage is lost or misrouted, pack medications in carry-on luggage. If you will not be able to bring a supply of medication to last the entire trip, bring a prescription with the generic or scientific name of the drug, as brand names are different in foreign countries. Check the expiration dates of all medications before you leave.

Always carry a wallet card or wear a necklace stating any conditions you have (like diabetes). Also, list any allergies to specific medications. You should also make sure that your program coordinator is aware of any special condition that you have that could manifest itself while you are abroad.

If you are leaving children behind, be sure to have a signed emergency treatment consent form on file with your hospital.

Sometimes the onset of an illness picked up during international travel does not occur until weeks or even months after returning home. Symptoms may not surface for as long as 180 days after some infections. Keep this in mind after you return.

Traveling to Tropics and Developing Countries

For those traveling closer to the equator, the sun may burn you faster than you are used to. Bring sunscreen and put it on at least half an hour before going into the sun. If you are in an area with serious insect-borne diseases, such as malaria or dengue fever, take appropriate precautions. Wear clothing that exposes as little skin as possible and apply insect repellent containing DEET (concentration 30 to 35%).

Be careful about drinking the water in developing countries, especially in rural areas. Frequently, water is not treated at all but is taken directly from the source, which may be polluted. If your program coordinator advises you not to drink the water, you should not even brush your teeth with the water. Do not use ice or eat vegetables washed in water but not cooked, like salads. Make sure that bottled water is brought to you in sealed bottles, or order sparkling water or soda water to be safe.

Diarrhea is a common affliction that usually strikes a couple of days after arrival in a new area of the world and seldom lasts longer than about five days. Diarrhea is nature's way of ridding the body of noxious agents; intestinal motility serves as the normal cleansing mechanism of the intestine. The most important way of coping with this disorder is to maintain adequate fluid intake to prevent dehydration. If diarrhea or other stomach upset continues, see a doctor. You may have acquired a parasite.

Medical Facilities/Services

Medical facilities and services will not be the same in every country. It is important to understand as much as possible about the facilities and services in your host country before you need them.

Tips:

- Be sure you get information in your program-specific orientation about medical facilities and services in your host city/country.

- You will need to understand where to go for common illnesses (i.e. cold, stomachache, flu, etc.) and where to go for emergencies.
- You will need to know how medical services are paid for (i.e. out-of-pocket by the student, host country or institution, insurance, etc.).
- Understand your insurance coverage before going abroad (does your insurance cover you in another country, what is covered, what is not, how to make claims, etc.).
- All ASU faculty-led programs utilize the University System of Georgia (USG) international insurance coverage provided by Cultural Insurance Services International (CISI), which is built into the program cost. Students may enroll in an additional insurance policy to cover important benefits, such as medical evacuation and repatriation of remains for students studying abroad. For complete coverage details, visit <http://www.asurams.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/CISI-Basic-Plan-Coverage.pdf>

Disabilities

Students interested in accommodation for their disability during a study abroad program should contact the **ASU Department of Counseling and Disability Services** and/or the host country Program Coordinator before going abroad. The earlier the request is made, the more measures ASU can take to arrange accommodations in the host country. Please note: "reasonable accommodations" provided on the ASU campus may differ or may not be available in the host country.

If you have not already registered with ASU Department of Counseling and Disability Services, contact campus **Student Disability Coordinator Velsenna King at 229-903-3611**. Set up an appointment to discuss services you might need while studying abroad and how to proceed.

Mental Health

Not all countries have mental health support services similar to what we are accustomed to in the U.S. Thus, students may not have access to mental health services in some countries. Whether students have utilized mental health services in the past or not, it is important for students to know if, what, and where those services are available in their host country.

Actions:

- All students should be prepared for cultural adjustment before studying abroad. Although advanced reading and preparation will not prevent students from experiencing cultural adjustment problems, it will prepare them for the symptoms, the cycle of adjustment, and some helpful advice for a successful adjustment.
- Students who are currently, or have utilized mental health services in the past, should contact the **ASU Department of Counseling and Disability Services Counseling Professional Jennifer King at 229-903-3614** before going abroad.
- The ASU Department of Counseling and Disability Services should be advised as to your needs in case a telephone consultation is required while abroad.
- Students who are currently involved with mental health services should seriously discuss the advisability of participating in study abroad and issues related to cultural adjustment with their mental health practitioner.

Concerns about AIDS and STD's

As The World Health Organization states: "AIDS is not spread by daily and routine activities such as sitting next to someone or shaking hands, or working with people. Nor is it spread by

insects or insect bites. AIDS is not spread by swimming pools, public transportation, food, cups, glasses, plates, toilets, water, air, touching or hugging, coughing or sneezing." This is as biologically true abroad as it is in your hometown.

The AIDS virus is actually not particularly contagious when compared to other infectious diseases, such as measles, herpes or tuberculosis. The AIDS virus is primarily transmitted through blood or semen.

Some countries now require incoming foreigners, including students, to take the HIV antibody test. This would usually be part of obtaining a visa. Check with the nearest embassy or consulate for your destination country about visa and HIV testing regulations.

Since AIDS knows no geographic boundaries, to avoid infection, you should employ appropriate preventive measures. If at all possible, avoid injections, dental procedures or skin-piercing procedures when in developing countries. If injected medications are necessary, insist that all needles, syringes, and IVs are of the individually wrapped, disposable variety. If you have a known medical condition that requires injections (for example, diabetes), you should bring along your own supply of needles and syringes. Make sure your supply is large enough to last the entire trip. To prevent confiscation in customs, be sure to bring along a letter from your doctor stating your medical need.

In developing countries, it is best to avoid blood transfusions. Unfortunately, this may not be possible if you are in a severe accident and are in dire need of blood. However, in many cases, a safe plasma expander may be used instead of blood products to stabilize trauma victims until an evacuation service can bring in safe supplies or transport the victim to safely equipped facilities.

Less urgent conditions, such as a need for a gamma globulin injection, should be discussed with officials at your embassy. They may have the supplies you need in the embassy infirmary.

Sexual contact: Due to the HIV/AIDS threat, the best advice is abstinence from any sexual activity (homosexual or heterosexual). If you do engage in sexual contact, it is imperative that you use latex condoms, although this does not entirely eliminate the risk of HIV/AIDS transmission, nor of other sexually transmitted diseases, and is only 80-90% effective in preventing pregnancy when used alone.

Diabetes

If you have diabetes, you should discuss with your physician any adjustments of insulin doses and timing that may be necessary, especially if you will be traveling east or west across several time zones.

Tip: Be careful with your insulin. Do not put it in the glove compartment or the trunk of a car, since insulin may deteriorate if it is either frozen or exposed to temperatures of 100°F or higher. The best way to transport insulin on international trips is to carry it with you in a specially designed insulin insulator pack, which is sold at most pharmacies. (For travel to hot climates, an accompanying cooler pack is also available.) Once you arrive at your destination, promptly refrigerate your insulin.

Alcohol and Drugs

Use and abuse of alcohol and drugs abroad increases the risk of accident and injury. Many study abroad accidents and injuries are related to the use and abuse of alcohol and drugs while abroad. Violating drug laws abroad may result in very serious consequences. In some countries,

being found guilty of violating drug laws can result in consequences as serious as death. Making poor choices can put your personal well-being at risk.

Many study abroad students will be leaving the U.S. where they may not be of legal drinking age and entering societies where they will be of legal age to consume beverage alcohol. Unfortunately, many of these students feel pressured to consume alcohol to fit in with the culture of the host country. It is important to note that there are other ways of assimilating into a culture without having to consume alcohol.

Remember that many cultures do not use and abuse alcohol in the way Americans do. Also remember that you are like an ambassador for Albany State University. Set a positive example. Behave in a way that is respectful of you, others' rights and well-being and encourage others to do the same.

Medical Insurance Coverage

If you are traveling on an ASU faculty-led study abroad program, ASU provides coverage through Cultural Insurance Services International (CISI). This is included in the cost of the program. Details for the basic coverage policy can be found on the International Education Study Abroad Student Resources page at <http://www.asurams.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/CISI-Basic-Plan-Coverage.pdf>

If you are traveling on a non-ASU program or a ASU exchange program, ASU does NOT automatically provide insurance coverage. You should check with the program you are studying with in order to see what coverage may be required and/or provided. The International Student Identity Card (ISIC) provides basic insurance coverage, including medical evacuation, hospital benefits, and a 24-hour toll-free emergency help line.

Check with any pre-existing policy that you may have for international coverage. Look into the policy payments and claim system. If you need to make a claim from overseas, expect to pay the medical facility directly and file for a refund from your insurance company. Be prepared with a means of payment accepted at your destination (credit card, emergency traveler's checks, ATM card, etc.). Save all receipts and treatment forms from the doctor, preferably translated into English. Many insurance policies ask individuals to pay the medical fees first and submit a claim form to the insurance provider afterwards.

For any inquiries about the ASU CISI coverage, please contact:

Cultural Insurance Services International (CISI) River Plaza
9 West Broad Street
Stamford, CT 06902-3788
800-303-8120 (toll-free within the United States)
Customer Service Email: cisiwebadmin@culturalinsurance.com
Enrollment Submission Email: enrollments@culturalinsurance.com
www.culturalinsurance.com