
Travel Health Tips for Students Studying Abroad

Study-abroad programs offer students an exciting opportunity for learning and cultural exchange. Study-abroad programs are increasing in availability and geographic diversity; thus, students can expect to deal with cultures and environments that are very different from their own.



Students may be at increased risk of illness or injury due to these cultural and environmental differences, such as climate extremes, the presence of certain insects, inadequate sanitation, and poorly lit roads. Travel to developing regions of the world, especially for a period of several weeks or months, can be particularly challenging.

Few events can negatively impact the travel experience more than becoming sick or being injured while far away from home. To reduce health risks while studying abroad, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends the following general guidelines for students:

Before travel

- Be sure to check with a health-care provider to make sure you are up-to-date with all routine vaccinations (i.e., measles, mumps, rubella, tetanus, diphtheria, pertussis, hepatitis A and B, meningitis, influenza, and polio). Diseases such as measles and mumps remain common in many parts of the world, including some developed countries.
- See a health-care provider or a travel medicine specialist, ideally 4-6 weeks before travel, to get any additional vaccinations, medications, or information you may need to stay healthy abroad. If it is less than 4 weeks before travel, you should still see a health-care provider since there may be some vaccinations, medications, or prevention information that could be beneficial to you. The section of the CDC

Travelers' Health website entitled [Travel Medicine Clinics](#) has information about locating a travel medicine specialist or a travel clinic.

- It is especially important that you consult a health-care provider who specializes in travel medicine if you have a complicated travel itinerary (e.g., travel to rural areas of developing countries) or have a current medical condition that will need to be managed while abroad.
- Visit CDC's [Travelers' Health website](#) to educate yourself about any disease risks and preventive measures for the countries where you plan to study. If you are visiting a developing country, you are at greater risk for illness or injury than those who travel to developed countries (e.g., Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and Western Europe), where the health risks are similar to those found in the United States.
- Prepare a [travel health kit](#) that includes
 - an ample supply of your prescribed medications in their original, clearly labeled containers (copies of all prescriptions should be carried, including the generic names for medications, and a note from the prescribing physician on letterhead stationery for controlled substances and injectable medications);
 - an antidiarrheal medication;
 - alcohol-based hand gel (containing at least 60% alcohol);
 - an antibiotic for self-treatment of most causes of acute bacterial illness;
 - a thermometer;
 - insect repellent if you plan to study in or visit a tropical or subtropical area;
 - the name and telephone number of your primary health-care provider;
 - a copy of your vaccination record.
- Familiarize yourself with basic first aid so you can self-treat minor injuries.
- Learn how to swim if you are inexperienced and plan to participate in recreational water activities while abroad.
- Consider a health insurance plan or additional insurance that covers medical evacuation in case you become sick or injured, if your plan does not already offer this service. Information about medical

evacuation services is provided on the U.S. Department of State web page, [Medical Information for Americans Traveling Abroad](#)

- Identify in-country health-care resources in advance of your trip in case of a medical emergency. This is especially important if you have a pre-existing medical condition. The U.S. Department of State provides links to U.S. Embassy or Consulate websites for the country or countries you are visiting that can assist in locating [Doctors/Hospitals Abroad](#). Several private travel medicine organizations provide assistance in locating medical care abroad; see [Obtaining Health Care Abroad for the Ill Traveler](#) in *CDC Health Information for International Travel 2010*.
- Register with the U.S. Department of State's [Travel Registration website](#), so the U.S. Embassy or Consulate in your destination country knows of your whereabouts in the case of an emergency when it might be necessary for a consular officer to contact you. This registration is especially important if you plan to stay abroad for longer than one month, if you will be visiting a country that has an unstable political climate, or if there is a natural disaster, such as an earthquake or hurricane.

While residing abroad

To reduce your risk of illness

- In developing areas, boil your water or drink only bottled water or carbonated (bubbly) drinks from cans or bottles with intact seals. Do not drink tap water or fountain drinks or add ice to beverages. Avoid eating salads, fresh vegetables and fruits you cannot peel yourself, and unpasteurized dairy products.
- Eat only food that has been fully cooked and served hot, and avoid food from street vendors. If living with a host family, discuss any food allergies or dietary preferences in advance.
- Do not touch animals, including domestic pets, and especially do not touch monkeys, dogs, and cats, to avoid bites and serious diseases (such as rabies and plague). If you are bitten or scratched by any animal, get medical attention right away, and immediately clean the wound well with large amounts of soap and water and a povidone-iodine solution, such as Betadine®, if available.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially before meals and after going to the bathroom. If soap and water are not available and your hands are not visibly dirty, use an alcohol-based hand gel (containing at least 60% alcohol) to clean your hands. Cleaning your

hands often with soap and water removes potentially infectious material from your skin and helps prevent disease transmission.

- If visiting an area where there is risk of malaria, use insect repellent and a mosquito net for sleeping, wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants outdoors between dusk and dawn, and make sure to take your malaria prevention medication before, during, and after your trip, as directed.
- If you are visiting a country that has experienced an avian flu (bird flu) outbreak, avoid poultry farms, bird markets, and other places where live poultry is raised or kept. For more information, see the webpage Guidelines and Recommendations: Interim Guidance about Avian Influenza A (H5N1) for U.S. Citizens Living Abroad.
- Be aware that sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), including HIV/AIDS, are among the most common infections worldwide. The most reliable way to avoid transmission of sexually transmitted diseases is to abstain from sexual activity or to be in a long-term mutually monogamous relationship. For people whose sexual behaviors place them at risk for STDs, correct and consistent use of latex or polyurethane condoms when engaging in sexual activity can greatly reduce a person's risk of acquiring or transmitting STDs, including HIV infection. For more information see Sexually Transmitted Diseases.

For your safety

- Automobile accidents are the leading cause of preventable deaths in travelers. Wear your seat belt and follow the local customs and laws regarding pedestrian safety and vehicle speed. Remember to check on what side of the road people drive, because this may differ in the country or countries you will be visiting. Use helmets when riding bicycles and motorcycles.
- Remember not to drink alcoholic beverages and drive. The most important risk factor for road traffic injuries is the presence of alcohol in the blood of a driver or pedestrian who is injured.
- Be aware of the cultural impact of being involved in or causing an accident that includes injury to the local population. In unfamiliar or foreign environments, utilize a local driver. It is important to note the legal age for driving varies by country.
- Swim in well-maintained, chlorinated pools, and only if you are an experienced swimmer. Drowning is also a leading cause of death in travelers.

- If visiting an area which has risk of water-borne infections (i.e., [schistosomiasis](#)), do not swim in lakes or streams or other fresh bodies of water.
- When spending time outdoors, wear sunblock for protection from harmful effects of UV sun rays. This is especially important if you are visiting tropical areas or areas in high altitudes. See [Sunburn](#) and [Basic Information About Skin Cancer](#) for more information.
- To prevent infections such as HIV and hepatitis B, avoid receiving tattoos, body piercings, or injections.

After your return

On return from study abroad, if you are not feeling well or have been injured, get medical attention, including psychological support and counseling, if necessary.

- It is especially important for you to get health care if you have a fever, rash, cough or difficulty breathing, or any other unusual symptoms.

If you are returning from malaria-risk areas and become sick with a fever or flu-like illness, for up to 1 year after your return, get **immediate** medical attention and be sure to tell the doctor or health-care provider your travel history.

Resources from CDC

For more information about CDC health recommendations for travel to specific destinations, select the country you are visiting from the [Destinations page](#).

For more information about STDs and HIV, see [CDC's Sexually Transmitted Diseases webpage](#) and [Sexually Transmitted Diseases \(STDs\) in CDC Health Information for International Travel 2010](#).

Other Resources

[U.S. Department of State Study Abroad website \(HTML only version\)](#)

[2009 International Education Week website \(U.S. Departments of State and Education\)](#)

[U.S. Department of State Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs](#)

[U.S. Department of State for Youth](#)

[U.S. Department of Education's U.S. Network for Education Information](#)

[Institute of International Education](#)

- [Open Doors](#): Provides Data on Study Abroad Participation.

[Association for Safe International Road Travel](#): Provides resources and information about safe road travel for study abroad.

[Mobility International USA](#): Provides resources and support for students with special needs with an interest in study abroad.

[National Association of Foreign Student Advisers \(NAFSA\)](#)

This material was taken in part from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):

<http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/content/study-abroad.aspx>