

Studying Abroad and Your Physical, Mental and Sexual Health

Physical Health

Think about the environment you will be living in while abroad and find out if there are any health precautions you can take before you leave. Find out if it is safe to drink the water, if it is safe to eat all types of food, see your doctor/personal practitioner, Student Health Services and Counseling Services with any questions or concerns.

Medication Checklist:

- You will need to take enough medication or necessary prescriptions with you to last the duration of your time abroad. Medication sent by mail from the United States will be confiscated by the host country's Customs Service.
- Student should take copies of prescriptions if they need to be refilled or replaced if lost. In some countries, replacements/substitutes can be found in the local pharmacy or chemist.
- Keep medication(s) in your carry-on luggage, clearly identified by the label or prescription in the original packaging.
- Remember that the effect and effectiveness of medications can change with changes in stress, diet, and climate.
- Maintain your medication schedule—even if it is inconvenient while in transit.
- Some drugs available by prescription in the U.S. are illegal in other countries. Check the U.S. Department of State for the country(ies) you intend to visit. travel.state.gov

Mental Health

Students will encounter challenges and stressors when studying abroad such as leaving friends and family, experiencing cultural differences, and possible recurrence of pre-existing conditions. Situations entailing a high level of stress can cause unusually strong emotional reactions and can interfere with students' effective functioning abroad. Such reactions are normal responses to abnormal situations and are to be expected under the circumstances.

If you have any existing mental health condition (including anxiety, ADHD, depression, etc.), these issues will not go away when you go abroad and may actually intensify. It is important to plan ahead and think about the challenges you will be faced with while abroad.

- Plan ahead. What challenges do you expect to face while you are away?
- Research if your medication(s) are legal in the country you are going to, what you need to know about transporting and/or obtaining your medications, and how to maintain your medication schedule while abroad.
- Check what professional resources are available in your host country. Many study abroad programs can help you identify local resources such as professional counselors who speak English and enable you to obtain treatment abroad.
- Disclose information directly with your study abroad advisors so that we can give you support and guidance to continue your experience abroad if psychological concerns arise. Study abroad can be stressful and exacerbate such problems. If there are any medical issues that concern you, it is important that program staff know about these issues before the student leaves home.
- Practice good self-care while abroad including adequate rest, healthy diet, exercise and moderate use of alcohol if you drink.

Sexual Health Abroad

If you are sexually active while you are abroad, please be aware that laws, cultural norms and risks related to sexual activity may vary widely, and it is important, therefore, to consider the context of your individual situation and assume a greater degree of caution.

Please also note that some means of safe sex and contraception may be more difficult to obtain abroad, or the quality may vary (as in the case of condoms), so you may want to take an adequate supply with you. (Use a latex condom correctly every time you have sex. Bring condoms from the United States, since those in other countries may not be up to US quality standards) Access to reproductive health services can vary widely as well.

If you have any questions or need information about these matters before or during your program, please do not hesitate to ask your Faculty Program Leader, program coordinator/administrator, and health professionals at Student Health Services.

Safe Sex

Sexually transmitted infectious diseases (STDs or STIs), such as chlamydia, gonorrhea, hepatitis B, herpes, human papillomavirus (HPV), Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and syphilis continue to pose serious health risks in virtually every country. The HIV virus, which is responsible for AIDS, is not only transmitted sexually but also through contaminated hypodermic needles and infected blood supplies.

Please exercise all precautions, including the use of condoms, to prevent contraction of sexually transmitted diseases. Both men and women who are planning to be sexually active should carry condoms. Remember that many STDs do not exhibit obvious symptoms or only do so at certain stages, which means they can be transmitted without either partner's knowledge.

Also remember that information related to sexual activities, transmitted diseases, diagnosis and means of transmission varies widely. Individuals may not fully understand how transmission of diseases occurs, may be unfamiliar with signs of infection or may not even know that such diseases exist. Again, always consider the context of your situation and assume an appropriate degree of caution.

For information on sexually-transmitted diseases and prevention, visit the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) sites on [STDs](#) and [HIV/AIDs](#).

Sexual Harassment

While harassment issues may be difficult to identify in different cultures, a useful rule of thumb is to assume that sexual harassment consists of any unwanted sexual advances and/or behaviors no matter what the form (verbal, visual, written, physical, etc.) or the context (in a residence, school, workplace, bar, etc.). Trust your judgment and intuition. If a situation makes you uncomfortable, it needs to be addressed. Seek immediate help from your Faculty Program Leader or any onsite coordinator/administrator.

Sexual Violence

Sexual violence includes any unwanted sexual act that is attempted or committed without a person's consent. Sexual assault can be committed by a partner, date, spouse, classmate, instructor, friend, acquaintance, family member, stranger, etc. Consent requires mutual agreement, can be revoked at any time, and cannot be given if incapacitated by drugs or alcohol, if there is force or threat of force, or intimidation. Please remember that sexual violence is never the fault of the victim.

All participants are urged to follow the guidelines below to help reduce the risk of sexual assault as well as ensure their general safety while traveling abroad:

- Before departing, read about the cultural norms, expectations, social customs and practices – especially those related to dating and romantic customs – of the host country. Understanding these norms does NOT mean you should accept unwanted sexual contact. Instead it is meant to educate yourself about gender relations, verbal or body language and social cues around dating, which may be considerably different from the United States.
- Understanding cultural norms helps to understand unfamiliar behavior and also to be aware of people who are not respecting your boundaries.
- Regardless of the country, culture norms or context, it is ALWAYS ok to say no to unwanted advances.
- NEVER walk home alone at night and NEVER allow any of your classmates to do so. This applies to both men and women and is crucial to reduce risk for a wide variety of threats – pickpocketing, physical assault, kidnapping, accidents, etc. – and not just sexual assault.
- Drink responsibly and be aware of your surroundings at all times. If you choose to drink, designate someone in your group to be a designated non-drinker. Have a cell phone on you at all times, keep it charged, and keep important phone numbers saved in your phone.
- Watch your drink at all times, and do not accept drinks from strangers. It is possible for someone to slip something into your drink.
- If you notice a concerning interaction or sense a friend is being coerced or in danger, intervene. Introduce yourself, make yourself present, and offer a way out of the situation. Remember that people can't give consent if they are drunk or incapacitated.
- Never accompany a stranger anywhere, and be wary of strangers who claim they are in need of help.
- Trust your gut.

The US embassy in your destination country (<http://www.usembassy.gov/>) can help you locate medical services and will notify your family and friends in the event of an emergency. When selecting a doctor, make sure that he or she can speak your language

Please contact Student Health Services and Counseling Services with any questions before you leave to study abroad.

Health Services: 978-665-3643 or 978-665-3216

Counseling Services: 978-665-3152