

What Columbia Health Needs You To Know Before Traveling



Whether for academic, professional, or personal reasons, traveling can be a great experience to learn more about new places and cultures. Preparing to take care of yourself while traveling can help ensure that you stay healthy, no matter where you are.

This handout will explain what you need to know before your travels, what you can do to support yourself while you're away, and what to do after you return. Resources are provided at the end to help remind you during your travels.

Quick Reference Guide

Before you leave

While you're away

When you return

Recommended resources

 [Medical Services](#)

 [Health Promotion Appointment](#)

Before you leave

Schedule your vaccinations and pre-travel medical care

Make a Travel Health appointment with Medical Services

Schedule a Travel Health appointment with Medical Services at least six weeks before your trip.

A healthcare provider will help determine which vaccines and tests you need prior to leaving.

Vaccines you may already have

- Measles, mumps, rubella (MMR)
- Meningitis (MenACWY)
- Polio
- Flu
- COVID-19
- Pneumococcal
- Chickenpox
- Tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis (Tdap)
- Hepatitis A and B

Vaccines that aren't required or common (you may not have these)

- Yellow fever
- Typhoid
- Rabies
- Cholera

If needed, schedule additional medical appointments.

If you take any daily medications, be sure to meet with a healthcare provider to ensure you have enough refills and that the medications you're taking will be legal to carry into the country you're traveling to.

Some programs or locations may require a tuberculosis (TB) screening test before traveling.

Make plans with current providers for continuous care.

If you require routine medical, mental health, or other care, plan with providers how you will maintain your health while you're away and what care may be needed in the other country you're visiting.

Register with Disability Services (if needed)

Share your travel plans with Disability Services (DS) upon the acceptance or confirmation of travel plans.

If you're not already registered with DS and need accommodations while traveling, register with them at least 12 weeks before you leave.

The accommodations, procedures, policies, and deadlines may vary by program, and you may not be able to receive the same accommodations as you would while at Columbia University.

Register your trip

 Register your trip with [Columbia University Global Travel](#).

Submit all relevant documents such as flights, transportation, where you will be staying, itineraries, etc.



Gather health supplies for travel

Pack a first aid kit that includes items such as:

- Over-the-counter medications
- Motion sickness medication
- Decongestants and antihistamines
- Insect repellent (30-50% DEET)
- Hand sanitizer
- Bandages
- Hand soap
- Sunscreen and lip balm with SPF 15 or greater

Some additional items you may need:

- Extra glasses or contact lenses
- Condoms and birth control
- Over-the-counter or prescription allergy medication (if you know you have allergies)
- Menstrual products (tampons, pads, cups, etc.)



Prepare travel documents

- Prepare a paper record of all immunizations, medications and allergies.
- Keep the Yellow Immunization card with you.
- Bring paper copies of your passport, itinerary, medical history, embassy contact information of your home country.

Learn some of the cultural norms and customs of the places you'll be traveling

Read up on current events and laws

- Learn about the events that are currently happening in your host country.
- Understand what policies and laws are different from the United States.
- Reach out to the nearest consulate or embassy of your home country if you're in trouble, such as a lost passport, being a victim of a crime, etc.

Culture shock

Recognize that traveling to a new place may cause you to feel culture shock.

- These feelings may come in waves, where you transition from finding the place new and exciting, to noticing differences that you don't like, to then accepting those differences.
- You may experience culture shock upon returning home after you've adjusted to the places you've been.

Cultural humility and awareness

Learn about local customs, laws, and culture of the areas that you are visiting.

- Learn how different identities are expected to show up in spaces.
- In some locations, this may mean dressing more conservatively than is required at Columbia. Bring clothes that help you respect these customs.
- Respect the culture of the country and community, recognizing that there may be differences between your culture and the one you're visiting.
- Learn from locals - they're the experts in their own experiences!
- Be mindful what you share on social media. Consider how what you're sharing celebrates the culture or reinforces harmful stereotypes.

Substance use

Learn about laws and cultural norms around substance use.

- Consuming alcohol or other substances may be more or less culturally acceptable in other places.

Be mindful about substance use and possession.

- Substances in other countries may be different than in the U.S. They may be more or less potent, cut with another substance, etc.
- Penalties in other countries may be harsher for illegal substance use than they are in the U.S. What may be a minor offense in the U.S. may be punished by jail time in another country.

While you're away

Seek care early if you need help

- Reach out for help as soon as you're feeling sick or notice a change in your symptoms. Do not wait!
- For students on official Columbia-sponsored travel, reach out to Columbia International SOS (ISOS) if you need support finding a healthcare provider while traveling.
- For students on personal travel, check your health insurance benefits. Students who have paid the full-time Columbia Health and Related Services Fee or are on the Columbia Student Health Insurance Plan have access to a host of benefits (see Appendix).

Be thoughtful about food and drink choices



Food and drinks that are typically safe

- Food served at the intended temperature. Hot food is hot and cold food is cold.
- Dry or packaged food (if you're the one opening them)
- Bottled or canned drinks
- Hot drinks served hot (you can let it cool before drinking)
- Pasteurized milk
- Alcohol



Foods and drinks that may require extra caution

- Lukewarm food
- Raw foods that you can't wash and peel in disinfected water, such as cut up fruits, vegetables, salads, salsas, meats
- Street food
- Local wild game that isn't often consumed in the U.S. (sometimes called bushmeat)
- Drinks with tap water that hasn't been treated or disinfected

How to handle traveler's diarrhea

Where traveler's diarrhea comes from

- Occurs from consuming contaminated food or water. This is the most common travel-related illness.
- People at higher risk are those who are adventurous eaters, people who are immunocompromised or have chronic illnesses, or those who are in areas with poor sanitation or plumbing



How to treat traveler's diarrhea

Seek care from a medical professional if you have more than five episodes in 24 hours, have abdominal pain, vomiting, fever, or you see blood in your stool.

Mild diarrhea

- Less than five episodes in 24 hours
- Stay hydrated
- Maintain good hand hygiene
- Follow diet you can tolerate and drink clear liquids
- No medications recommended

Moderate diarrhea

- More than five episodes in 24 hours
- Stay hydrated - take electrolyte replacement
- Follow diet you can tolerate and drink clear liquids
- Take medicine to help stop diarrhea (Pepto-Bismol and Imodium are examples)
- Seek medical advice

Severe diarrhea

- More than five episodes in 24 hours with abdominal pain, vomiting, fever
- Stay hydrated - take electrolyte replacement
- Follow diet you can tolerate and drink clear liquids
- Take medicine to stop diarrhea (Pepto-Bismol, Imodium, etc.)
- Seek medical advice



Take precautions against insect bites

Prevent insect bites as much as possible

- Use 30-50% DEET insect repellent or Picaridin spray.
- Pre-treat your sleeping bag, netting, or tent with permethrin.
- Use netting around your sleeping area, especially if near open windows or outdoors.
- Wear long sleeves and pants when out.
- If you're in an area where malaria is common, take anti-malarial medication as prescribed by your healthcare provider to prevent infection.

Be familiar with the most common, local mosquito-borne and insect-borne illnesses and their symptoms.

If you experience any of these symptoms related to a mosquito-borne or insect-borne illness, seek care.

- Fever
- Chills
- Headache
- Rash
- Vomiting
- Fatigue
- Muscle aches
- Skin ulcers



Avoid touching animals

- Do not touch animals, even if they're considered domesticated.
- Illnesses spread by animals include rabies, herpes B, and avian flu (among others).
- If you're scratched or bitten by an animal, wash the area immediately with clean running water and soap for a total of 15 minutes.
- Apply pressure with a clean towel or gauze to control the bleeding.
- Seek medical care and treatment immediately.



Follow local laws

- You must follow the local laws of the place you're visiting even if they are different from those of your home country or the U.S.
- If you break the law, you can be arrested, fined, and/or face serious consequences in that country.

Be thoughtful about safety

Pay attention to your surroundings

- Travel with others when appropriate, especially at night.
- Be mindful about how much cash you carry, how you're dressed, and how you behave may make you stand out as a visitor.
- Follow the traffic laws where you are staying. For example, not all countries require drivers yield to pedestrians.

Consider STI and pregnancy prevention

Before leaving, consider what birth control, emergency contraceptive pills, and protection against STIs you should be bringing with you.

- Bring more than you think you'll need.
- Meet with any healthcare providers in advance if a prescription is required.

If you experience sexual assault or harassment while traveling, contact Sexual Violence Response.

- They can provide support for you while traveling to help you get connected with local resources.
- Contact the local embassy or consulate for help reporting and getting local law enforcement involved.

Consider safety of activities

Motorcycles

- If possible, avoid driving or riding motorized vehicles such as mopeds and motorcycles. Accidents with motorcycles or mopeds could lead to serious injury or death.
- If you have to ride a motorcycle or moped, be sure to follow all traffic laws and wear a helmet to protect your head.

Swimming and water sports

- Before swimming or going into the water, look for signs that may indicate whether or not it's a safe place to swim. A good indicator is where locals are doing it.
- If you're going on a boat, make sure life jackets are available. If it's a larger craft, check to see that it has lifeboats.

Take caution when participating in adventurous activities, such as bungee jumping, skydiving, etc., or activities that draw blood, such as body piercing and tattooing.

- Different countries may have different regulations around these activities, which may make it more or less safe to participate in.
- Some programs may not permit participants to engage in these types of activities.

Be mindful about substance use.

- Note the cultural norms and laws around substance use and be sure to follow them.
- If alcohol use is a culturally acceptable part of the culture, be sure to drink in moderation.

Maintain habits that keep you healthy at home

Keep moving



- During long flights, get up and move around in order to prevent blood clots and deep vein thrombosis.
- Be active throughout the day, but try to avoid exercise about three hours before bed time to allow for better sleep.

Practice good sleep hygiene



- To reduce the effects of jet lag, get plenty of rest and stay hydrated before traveling.
- Once you arrive, adjust to the local time zone as soon as possible.
- Stick to a sleep schedule, develop a relaxing bedtime routine, and avoid consuming alcohol, caffeine, or heavy meals that may disrupt your sleep.

Adapt to time norms in new country



- Your host country may have different time norms than you are used to.
- Build a time management plan based off of the norms in that country.

Build your support system



- Establish your personal support system while you're traveling.
- Note your best coping strategies and bring any tools they may require.



When you return

At your next visit, tell your health care providers where you have traveled and how long you were there.



Reach out for support from Columbia Health departments

- If you experienced gender, sexual, or power-based violence, reach out to Sexual Violence Response (SVR).
- If you experienced mental distress and would like to discuss it with a mental health provider, reach out to Counseling & Psychological Services (CPS).
- If you got sick, make an appointment with your primary care provider at Medical Services.
- If you sought health care while abroad and need support navigating insurance claims, reach out to the Student Health Insurance Office. They will be able to talk to you, even if you're not on the Columbia Plan.

Get a tuberculosis (TB) screening test

- If you were in a location where TB is common, get a TB screening test 3-4 months after returning from your trip.



Recommended resources

Medical care and health insurance resources

Students on official Columbia-sponsored travel needing emergency and evacuation assistance

- **Columbia International SOS**
 - Available 24/7 worldwide
 - Download the ISOS app
 - Columbia membership ID: 11BSGC000064

Students who have paid the full-time Health and Related Services Fee

- **Medical consultation** (no added cost): Email Cigna-Columbia@Teladochealth.com your full name, date of birth, phone number (including country code), location, preferred language(s) and a brief description of your symptoms. Our partner Teladoc will call you back to connect you with a doctor. Available 24/7.
- **Mental health support** (no added cost): [Schedule an appointment online](#) with WorkPlace Options and use “Columbia University” to log in.
 - URL: https://www.advantageengagement.com/1006/login_company_sap.php

Students on the Columbia University Student Health Insurance Plan/ Aetna Open Choice PPO

- **In-person medical care:** access any healthcare provider.
 - Keep all receipts and request an itemized bill.
 - [File a claim for reimbursement](#) upon return.
- **Emergency travel assistance:** coordinate through OnCall International
 - In the US: 866-525-1956
 - Outside the US: +1-603-328-1956 (collect calls accepted)
 - Includes:
 - Emergency Medical Evacuation to a major medical facility or home, as needed
 - Transportation to join a hospitalized family member
 - Return of minor children
 - Repatriation of mortal remains
 - Accidental death or dismemberment
- [View all your travel benefits](#)

Students on other health insurance plans

- **Please review your health insurance benefits and plan documents prior to your departure.**

Columbia Health Resources



Alice! Health Promotion

alice@columbia.edu
212-854-5453



Disability Services

disability@columbia.edu
212-854-2388



Medical Services

secure.health.columbia.edu
212-854-7426 (available 24/7)



Counseling & Psychological Services (CPS)

secure.health.columbia.edu
212-854-2878 (available 24/7)



Sexual Violence Response (SVR)

svresponse@columbia.edu
212-854-3500
Helpline: 212-854-4357 (available 24/7)



Student Health Insurance Team

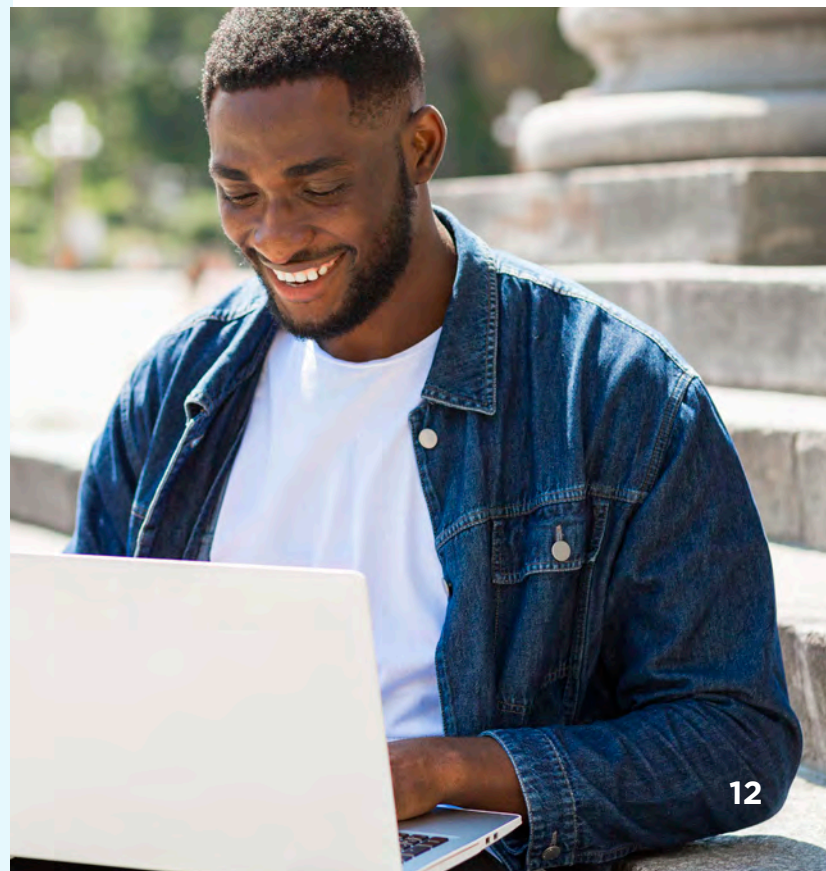
studentinsurance@columbia.edu
212-854-3286

Disability Resources

- Mobility International USA
- U.S. Department of Travel Affairs
- CDC Traveling with a Disability

Sexual Violence Resources

- SVR helpline available 24/7 (even when traveling internationally): 1-212-854-4357 (HELP)
- International Directory of Domestic Violence Agencies
- U.S. Department of State



Columbia Health Travel Checklist



Before you leave

- [Schedule your vaccinations and pre-travel medical care.](#)
- [Register with Disability Services \(if needed\).](#)
- [Register your trip.](#)
- [Prepare travel documents.](#)
- [Gather health supplies for travel.](#)
- [Establish secure communication practices.](#)
- [Learn some of the cultural norms and customs of the places you'll be traveling.](#)

While you're away

- [Seek care early if you need help](#)
- [Be thoughtful about food and drink choices](#)
- [How to handle traveler's diarrhea](#)
- [Take precautions against insect bites](#)
- [Avoid touching animals](#)
- [Follow local laws](#)
- [Be thoughtful about safety](#)
- [Maintain habits that keep you healthy at home.](#)

When you return

- [Update health care providers](#)
- [Reach out to support from Columbia Health departments](#)
- [Get a TB skin test \(if necessary\)](#)



[Back to Top](#)

