

Resources for MIT student travel during Covid-19

Deciding whether to offer a program

MIT policy and MISTI practices

Per MIT Covid Travel Policy, travel to countries with CDC Covid risk level 4 is no longer restricted and does not require an exception for students and programs. However, undergraduate and graduate student travelers should check the Department of State (DOS) website for the overall risk rating of their destination. (This rating takes into account a wider variety of factors including crime, terrorism, civil unrest, and natural disasters, along with other non-Covid health risks).

Students traveling to countries at a DOS level 3 or 4 — high or very high risk for reasons other than Covid-19 — must apply for a high-risk travel exception.

For anyone making decisions about whether to offer or pursue student travel, regardless of CDC Covid levels, the following criteria may be useful to consider:

1. Current 14-day average rate of Covid cases per 100,000 people in the area you wish to send students. Ideally, the rate is no more than 25% higher than the [rate in Middlesex County](#).
2. Stable or decreasing positivity rate over the last 14 days in the area you wish to send students, not to exceed 5% positivity.
3. Local medical care equivalent to or exceeding that available in the Boston area in the event of a serious Covid case.
4. Local vaccination rates that are the [same or higher than in Middlesex County](#).
5. Capacity of the host organization to provide support in the event of a serious case.
6. Host organization Covid protocols.

[Our World in Data](#) and the [New York Times](#) tracker are good sources of data regarding Covid illness and vaccination rates around the world.

Location-specific reports are also available via MIT's subscription to [ISOS](#) (MIT membership number 11BSGC000066).

Program feasibility

Even if travel is allowable under MIT policy, it is important to consider Covid-related limitations in the host country that may make the program or trip difficult or impossible to execute.

Considerations include:

- Is a visa required for entry to the country? If so, is the country currently issuing visas in a timely manner?
- Are flights to/from the country operating on a regular schedule? Are they affordable? Is it possible to purchase direct flights to minimize the chance of becoming stranded in case of flight cancellation?
- Is the host organization willing and able to host students? Are they operating in-person or remotely? Are you able to identify a local contact who can help provide or point to resources in case of need?
- Is adequate lodging available? Is it safe and affordable? If housing is shared, what are the policies related to quarantine in case of Covid exposure or diagnosis?

International students and visas

While travel for U.S. citizens may be feasible to some locations, international students may encounter additional difficulties:

- Some foreign Embassies/Consulates are issuing visas on a delayed timeline or not at all.
- Some international students, depending on their citizenship, might not be able to enter some countries due to Covid restrictions.
- International students needing visas to travel might also need a new U.S. student entry visa to return to the U.S.
- Visa processing at U.S. Embassies/Consulates abroad is unpredictable and can take many weeks (and even months) to get the visa issued after a visa interview.
- U.S. visa status for international students may be impacted if a student needs to stay longer due to testing positive to Covid-19.

Encourage international students to be in touch with their [ISO Advisor](#) to discuss any concerns.

Planning checklist for student travel during Covid

1. Testing and vaccination

- Is vaccination required by the airline and/or host country to enter the country? Which vaccine is required, and is the CDC card accepted?
- Is a negative Covid test required by the airline and/or host country to enter the host country? Which type of test is accepted, where is it available, how much does it cost, and who will cover the cost? How recent does the test need to be, and will the student be able to make it to the host destination in time considering layovers?
 - If students are near campus prior to departure, testing MIT's PCR testing might be a viable option depending on airline and country. The student can print results directly from the Covid Pass app, but turnaround in the time required is not guaranteed.
- Does the host country require a "Covid Pass" or "Green Pass" to enter public places or use public or private transportation? How does a foreign citizen obtain this pass? What is the plan if the student cannot obtain the pass?
- Is a negative Covid test required if the student is experiencing symptoms or has been identified as a close contact of someone with Covid? Which type of test is accepted, where is it available, how much does it cost, and who will cover the cost? Even if such testing is not required, let students know it is highly encouraged.
- What are the quarantine, vaccine or testing [requirements](#) for returning back to the U.S. (or their destination) and to the [MIT campus](#)? Who will cover any related costs?

2. Quarantine

- What are the host country's quarantine requirements upon entry? In case of symptoms/exposure?
- How much does it cost, and who will cover the cost? (see insurance section for information on Quarantine Benefit)
- Where does the quarantine take place and in what conditions?
- How will the student be transported to and from the quarantine location, and who will cover the cost?
- Will the student be able to continue the program while quarantined?
- Communicate to students that they must let you know immediately upon being informed they must quarantine; develop a plan to check in with students regularly.

3. Positive Covid-19 test

- Identify nearby medical facilities in case treatment is required.
- Identify alternative lodging in case a student can no longer stay with their host family/roommates.
- Explore alternate arrangements for the student to be able to continue the program.
- Communicate to students that they must let you, ISOS and their host know immediately upon receiving a Covid-19 diagnosis; develop a plan to check in with students regularly.

4. Student responsibilities

- Students must register travel at travel.mit.edu.
- Students must sign MIT Travel Risk Acknowledgment at travel.mit.edu.
- Students may not make side trips to locations not permitted by the MIT Travel Policy without advance approval.
- Students must be prepared for possible program cancellation before or during the trip.
- Students must be willing to follow local Covid-related protocols, such as quarantining or testing.
- Students must comply with all local laws.
- Students must be aware that travel to some locations might be unfeasible for unvaccinated students. Unvaccinated students are encouraged to let program staff know so that they may better plan.

ISOS and student travel health Insurance (Cigna)

All MIT students on MIT-related travel are covered by ISOS travel assistance and Cigna student travel health insurance. If a student becomes ill, the student should notify ISOS, their MIT program staff and their host. ISOS will notify MIT Medical of any student illness. If a student tests positive for Covid-19, ISOS will activate monitoring of symptoms until no further assistance is required.

What is covered:

- Medical appointments as recommended by ISOS
- Referrals
- Covid-19 testing if deemed medically necessary and ordered by a doctor
- Required hospitalization
- Quarantine benefit:
 - Coverage up to \$285 a day for lodging, for up to 14 days (does not include food or transportation)
 - Programs need to pay up front and submit a claim
 - A student can benefit from this once every 12 months

What is not covered:

- Evacuation for students who test positive for Covid-19 (in most situations, students must recover in-country)
- Testing costs (if not referred by a doctor)
- Transportation/logistics/food related to quarantine
- Testing costs to return to the US or any other country

MIT's ISOS membership number is 11BSGC000066. More information on Cigna health insurance can be found on the [MIT Insurance website](#).

ISOS resources for program staff

Thanks to MIT's subscription to [ISOS](#), MIT staff can access location-specific travel safety and Covid information that is useful in planning for student travel. MIT's membership number is 11BSGC000066.

Need additional help? Contact us!

- [Todd Holmes](#), International Safety and Security Manager
- One of [MISTI's 17 country program managers](#)