Sending Students Abroad

January 26, 2022
The world under Covid
Should I stay or should I go?
Deciding whether to send students

MIT Policy

1. MIT Covid-19 Travel Policy

MIT-related student (undergraduate AND graduate) travel to CDC Level 4 countries requires either program approval or an exception for essential travel.

POLICY CHANGED AS OF 1/26—APPROVAL NO LONGER REQUIRED

2. MIT High-Risk Travel Policy

MIT-related student (undergraduate AND graduate) travel to DoS Level 3 and 4 countries requires a high-risk travel waiver.
Deciding whether to send students

MISTI criteria: student safety relative to Boston

• Current 14-day average of Covid cases per 100,000 people in the area you wish to send students. Should be no more than 25% higher than the rate in Middlesex County.
• Stable or decreasing positivity rate over the last 14 days in the area you wish to send students, not to exceed 5% positivity
• Medical care equivalent to or exceeding that available in the Boston area in the event of a serious case or other illness requiring hospitalization
• Local vaccination rates. Should be the same or higher than in Middlesex County.
• Capacity of the host organization to provide support in the event of a serious case
• Host organization Covid protocols
Deciding whether to send students

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Is it feasible?

Covid-related laws, guidelines and restrictions abroad

• 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 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?
• Is a “Covid Pass” required to conduct daily life in the country? Is it possible for our students to obtain a “Covid Pass”? Are there any related costs and, if so, how will those be covered?
• Travel to some locations might be unfeasible for unvaccinated students.
What's the plan?
Resources for MIT student travel during Covid-19

Deciding whether to offer a program

MIT policy and MISTI practices

Any MIT program wishing to send MIT students (undergraduate and graduate) to countries under a CDC Covid Level 4 warning are required per MIT policy to complete a program approval application.

Individual student travelers not affiliated with programs who wish to travel to countries under a CDC Covid Level 4 warning must submit a request for an exception for travel deemed essential.

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.
Quarantine

What are the protocols?

• What are the quarantine requirements upon entry? In case of symptoms/exposure?
• How much does it cost, and who will cover the cost?
• Where does the quarantine take place and under what conditions?
• How will 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.
In case of a positive test

Plan in advance

- Identify alternative lodging in case traveler can no longer stay with their host family/roommates.
- Identify nearby hospitals in case treatment is required.
- Explore alternate arrangements for student to be able to continue program.
- Communicate to students that they must let you know immediately upon receiving a Covid-19 diagnosis; develop a plan to check in with students regularly.
- If diagnosis comes at the end of the trip, students/trip leaders must be prepared to remain in the country longer than planned. Additional lodging must be arranged and airline tickets must be changed, involving additional costs.
International students

Special considerations

- Some international students, depending on their citizenship, might not be able to enter some countries due to Covid restrictions.
- Some Embassies/Consulates are issuing visas on a delayed timeline or not at all.
- International students needing visas to travel might also need a new U.S. student entry visa to return to the U.S.
- U.S. visa status for international students may be impacted if a student needs to stay longer due to testing positive to Covid-19.
- 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.
- International students have an ISO Advisor assigned to them based on their academic level or program (https://iso.mit.edu/about-iso/student-advisors-by-program/).
I wonder if there are guidelines we should follow?
Covid travel guidelines

Communicate to students before travel and ensure compliance

• Students must register travel at travel.mit.edu (in fact, ALL TRAVELERS must).
• Students must sign MIT Travel Risk Acknowledgment at travel.mit.edu.
• Students may not make side trips to locations not permitted by MIT travel policy; consider prohibiting students from side trips altogether.
• Students must be prepared for possible program cancellation before or during the trip.
• Students should register travel plans with the STEP program of the U.S. Department of State if they are U.S. citizens. (If not a U.S. citizen students can also enroll to receive messages and register with their local consulate or embassy upon arrival in country.)
• Students must be willing to follow local Covid-19 protocols, such as quarantining or testing.
• Students must comply with all local laws.
And in general...

Staying healthy while abroad

• Students should make an appointment at the MIT Travel Clinic or another healthcare provider six to eight weeks before travel, to make sure they are current with all routine vaccinations and to get any additional vaccinations or information you may need including advice on food and water safety and allergies as well as getting advice on traveling during COVID-19.

• If students are taking any medications and/or undergoing any type of therapy, students must make an appointment with their medical and/or mental health provider(s) prior to trip. Appointment is to establish a plan to continue taking any medications and/or continue therapy while abroad. Not all medications are legal abroad.

• All MIT students have access to a travel health insurance while traveling abroad on an MIT trip (Cigna managed through ISOS).
Managing Personal Security

- Prepare: Be aware of the threats in the countries students are travelling to; advise students to stay aware of threats and act accordingly (e.g., pickpockets in public transport).
- Keep a low profile: Students should never walk distracted; avoid overt signs of wealth; practice common sense at ATMs; avoid protests.
- Avoid driving: Consider prohibiting students from driving while abroad.
- Communicate: Students should keep cell phone fully charged and a hard copy of contacts.
And in general...

**Identity abroad**

- While planning travel abroad, students should consider the various facets of their identity and how those may impact their time in a new culture, new country, and new community.
- For students with disabilities, accommodations that they may not need at home may be necessary in the host country.
- While abroad, students may face different interpretations of their race, ethnicity, and other characteristics that are quite different from what they are used to in the U.S.
- In some countries, LGBTQ+ communities are not openly embraced and welcomed.
- Contact misti-dei@mit.edu for more information and advice.
And in general...

In case of emergency

• MIT has contracted with International SOS (ISOS), a travel assistance company, to provide emergency medical, security, and natural disaster evacuation and other support services to faculty, staff, and students who are traveling abroad on MIT business 24/7 by calling or using the chat function.

• International SOS can get travelers the help they need, from assisting with medical providers, lost passports to evacuating travelers from the country.

• Students should download the ISOS app: https://www.internationalsos.com/assistance-app and call ISOS in case of emergency: +1-215-942-8478.

• ISOS will notify MIT’s Program Manager, International Safety and Security, who can provide follow-up assistance.
What is required?

• What vaccine is required by the host country to enter and to access public life, the host organization?

• What type and timing of test is required to enter the host country or return to the United States; where is this test available, how much does it cost, and who will cover the costs?

• What type of test is required if the student is experiencing symptoms or has been identified as a close contact? Where is this test available, how much does it cost, and who will cover the costs?

Testing and vaccination

I wish there were an app for that
MISTI Health and Safety training

Robust health and safety resources for students

• MISTI Health and Safety Guidelines for Students
• Student-friendly app version: [https://mistitraining.goodbarber.com](https://mistitraining.goodbarber.com) (password: misti)
• Articles, country-specific info and MISTI Health and Safety Quiz
• In-person and/or virtual training sessions by country
MISTI Prep and Training

Country-specific resources for navigating other cultures

- Travel and logistics
- Intercultural communication
- Workplace expectations
- Values, norms and behaviors
- History, geopolitics and religion

In-person and virtual sessions and reflective practices
Africa
Arab World
Australia and New Zealand
Belgium
Brazil
Chile, Peru, Uruguay
China
Denmark
France
Germany
India
Israel

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Any questions?