

HEALTH INFORMATION FOR CENTRAL AMERICA

Please be aware that this program is physically and emotionally demanding. For example: climatic changes; high temperature, and/or high humidity; change in altitude; exposure to unfamiliar bacteria due to change in diet; long days and intense schedules; and extended travel in cramped vehicles.

These factors, combined with potential strains from culture shock, living away from regular support groups of friends and families, and intensive interaction with other group members can affect your health in ways you do not anticipate, putting stress on the body and emotions which make you more susceptible to illness. We ask that you assess your physical and emotional health carefully.

We encourage you to be open with yourself and with us regarding your health and medical history. Giving prior consideration to how your travels might affect you can be very important in maintaining your health during the semester. Pre-existing or past conditions will not exclude you from participating in the program; rather, in discussing them now you are more likely to have a healthier and more rewarding study abroad experience.

Some helpful online resources:

- US Department of State web pages on services for American citizens abroad: www.travel.state.gov
- Centers for Disease Control: www.cdc.gov/travel
- World Health Organization: www.who.org
- International Society of Travel Medicine: www.istm.org
- Travel Health Online: www.tripprep.com
- HTH Worldwide: an insurance company that specializes in insurance for international travelers, offers advice on the issues you might encounter abroad in a series of short [Youtube videos](#).

There is other useful information available in the Resources Section of Global Gateway account. These resources are:

- Emotional Health & Study Abroad
- Wellness Plan for Study Abroad
- International Travel & Health Insurance
- Alcohol Abroad Awareness
- Helpful Videos for International Travel

See a Doctor before You Go

For recommended vaccinations and other health precautions you should take before departing for your destination, please check the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) at <http://www.cdc.gov/travel/>. Since we are not medical professionals, we cannot make recommendations that will be applicable to all individuals in all places, so you should make those decisions with a doctor. If you have ongoing health issues, it would be wise to check with your regular doctor about vaccines and other precautions.

It's important to schedule your appointment right away, if you haven't already. If you don't already have a regular family physician, google a list of travel clinics in your area.

Insurance

As a Center for Global Education student, you will be covered by Augsburg College's Foreign Travel Abroad insurance, underwritten by *Educational and Institutional Insurance Administrators*. This plan includes travel, accident and sickness coverage while you are outside of the U.S. Please note that it does not cover routine medical care, prescription drugs, or any expenses in the U.S. See also [Benefits Summary](#) and [Member Card](#). We highly recommend that you create a profile at this website before departing for your program so you can familiarize yourself with the site and all its resources, and even use it to prepare for departure.

In most cases, EIIA will have a relationship with the healthcare provider or facility, and will process the claim directly. However, in the event this is not the case, you may need to pay for the services up-front, and be reimbursed by the insurance company (see information on above link). To be safe, you should keep all receipts related to the injury/illness.

In the event that are hospitalized due to illness or injury and the provider/facility is not in our insurance company's network, you will need to have a **credit card** (not debit card) available **with at least \$1,000 credit available**. Hospitals in the region do not take debit cards, and may require a deposit of at least US\$1,000. (If your expenses do not total that amount your credit card would be refunded.)

Immunizations/Inoculations

As you begin to discuss health preparations with medical professionals and/or experienced travelers to the region, you will likely find varying and even conflicting information about how to best prepare yourself. We encourage you to call the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at 877-394-8747 and listen to their extensive recording on health risks and precautions.

The CDC recommend the following inoculations for travelers to Mexico and Central America:

- Hepatitis A or immune globulin (IG).
- Hepatitis B, if you might be exposed to blood (for example, health-care workers), have sexual contact with the local population, stay longer than 6 months, or be exposed through medical treatment.
- Malaria, if you are traveling to a malaria-risk area in this region.
- Rabies, if you might be exposed to wild or domestic animals through your work or recreation.
- Typhoid, particularly if you are visiting developing countries in this region.
- As needed, booster doses for tetanus-diphtheria and measles.

Hepatitis A: The Centers for Disease control recommend that travelers to Central America receive an immune globulin (IG) shot or Hepatitis A vaccine for protection against Hepatitis A. According to the CDC, travelers to Central America are at high risk for Hepatitis A, especially if travel plans include visiting rural areas and extensive travel in the countryside, frequent close contact with local persons, or eating in settings of poor sanitation. A study has shown that many cases of travel-related hepatitis A occur in travelers to developing countries with “standard” itineraries, accommodations, and food consumption behaviors. Hepatitis A vaccine is preferred for persons who plan to travel repeatedly or reside for long periods of time in intermediate or high-risk areas. Immune globulin is recommended for persons of all ages who desire only short-term protection.

The vaccine requires a series of injections, the first of which must take place at least four weeks prior to travel, and the second at least six months after the first. The immune globulin is a single dose shot. Because it offers only short-term protection (3-5 months), it should be administered shortly prior to travel.

Malaria: Some travelers to Central America have opted to take a prophylactic medication for malaria. Consult with an international travel clinic or with your doctor about which medicines are prescribed currently. Of the places you are going, the possibility of contracting malaria would be the highest in Nicaragua. You may choose to take this prophylactic for the full semester or just the time you under the greatest risk of exposure. Prophylactic malaria medication can be very expensive and is taken daily a week before, during and after your travel so protecting yourself for the entire semester could be costly. Once again, consult with your doctor. Since no prophylactic will be 100% effective, you should come prepared to avoid mosquito bites with a repellent that includes DEET and with long pants and long-sleeved shirts to wear at dawn and dusk.

Primaquine is the preferred antimalarial drug in Nicaragua. Atovaquone/proguanil, chloroquine, doxycycline, and mefloquine are alternative choices. Again, discuss the options with your health care professional and decide which malarial protection makes the most sense for you. Please note that it is important to disclose all health problems, including mental health issues, to your doctor so that he/she will not prescribe a malaria prophylaxis that is contraindicated for you.

Typhoid: Typhoid fever is transmitted through food and water contaminated with infected human feces, and it is prevented by being careful with what you eat and drink and by proper hygiene. You can get typhoid even though you have been vaccinated though inoculation usually lessens the severity of the disease if contracted.

Dengue Fever

Dengue fever is present in all three countries you will visit. No vaccine is available, but travelers can reduce their risk of acquiring dengue by remaining in well-screened or air-conditioned areas when possible, wearing clothing that adequately covers the arms and legs, and applying insect repellent to both skin and clothing. The most effective repellents are those containing N,N-diethylmetatoluamide (DEET).

HIV/AIDS

Both HIV and AIDS are underreported in the region although all the ministries of health acknowledge that it is a growing concern. Students need to be aware of the increase in cases in the region and take the necessary precautions during their travels in Central America. Students should consult the [Centers for Disease Control webpage](#) for more information.

Tuberculosis

While Tuberculosis is present in Nicaragua, the CDC does not list it as a significant threat when traveling to Central America. However, exposure to the illness is not uncommon, and several students have tested positive for exposure. Doctors in Nicaragua advise that this is no cause to be alarmed, as the test indicates only exposure and does not mean the illness has been contracted.

Yellow Fever Vaccination Requirements

U.S. citizens traveling to Nicaragua should be aware that travelers entering Nicaragua **after travel to certain countries** will be required to show proof of yellow fever vaccination to be granted entry to the country.

Who Must Comply with the Vaccination Requirement: travelers who have visited places designated by the World Health Organization (WHO) as [places with the potential for active transmission of yellow fever](#) less than 11 days prior to entry into Nicaragua.

The vaccination must have been given at least 10 days prior to entry to the WHO-designated country.

Proof of Vaccination: All travelers impacted by this requirement must show an International Certificate of Vaccination

A World Health Organization (WHO) card (a “yellow card”) showing proof of immunization is often used by travelers, and can generally be acquired either from primary care providers or immunization/travel clinics.

WHO-Designated Countries: The WHO-designated countries currently include Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, French Guyana, Guyana, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, Venezuela, among others. The United States is not listed as a country with the potential for active transmission of yellow fever.

Exceptions to Yellow Fever Vaccination Requirement:

- travel to the affected country occurred more than ten days before and the traveler does not show symptoms of yellow fever. (Symptoms of yellow fever include sudden onset of fever, chills, severe headache, back pain, general body aches, nausea and vomiting, fatigue, and weakness.)
- travelers who passed through a WHO-designated country in transit only (defined as making an air connection, spending less than 12 hours in the country and never leaving the airport).

Additional information about yellow fever is available from the [CDC](#) and the [WHO](#).

Zika Virus

Note that Zika virus is primarily spread to people through mosquito bites. Currently, there is no vaccine to prevent or medicine to treat Zika. Zika causes a relatively mild illness, and the most common symptoms of Zika are fever, rash, joint pain, or red eyes; four in five people who acquire Zika infection may have no symptoms. The World Health Organization has not issued any trade or travel restrictions to the affected areas; however, WHO advises that women who are pregnant or planning to become pregnant should take extra care to protect themselves from mosquito bites.

Health Care Providers

CGEE staff in Central America have extensive experience with health care providers in the area, and can offer you reliable recommendations for general care.

Medical/Emergency Expenses

In the event that you become ill or are injured, and require hospitalization, you may need to have a **credit card** (not debit card) available **with at least \$1,000 credit available** (if the facility does not work with our insurer). Hospitals in the region do not take debit cards, and may require a deposit of at least US\$600. (If your expenses do not total that amount your credit card would be refunded.)

Diarrhea, Cholera, Typhoid and Dysentery Prevention

You will be given more information on this once you arrive in the region, but in general, you should follow certain rules for eating and drinking:

- Drink plenty of bottled, filtered or boiled water (available at the guest houses). Bottled drinks, including soda water, are also safe. Host families have been instructed to provide bottled or boiled water.
- All meat, fish, vegetables should be well cleaned and cooked. Avoid all uncooked vegetables and fruits unless you wash and peel them yourself. If you are served uncooked fruits or vegetables, ask if they have been washed with disinfectant.
- It is not advisable to buy food or beverages from street vendors. Sidewalk cafes should have kitchens that are far off and closed to the street since street dust can contaminate food. Avoid ice unless you are sure it is made from purified water.
- Check to make sure that milk is boiled or pasteurized and that cheese is pasteurized. Brand-name ice cream is generally safe though homemade ice cream sold on the street is not.
- Wash your hands regularly especially when coming in from the street, after using the restroom, and before you eat anything.

Play it safe! You will learn to eat and drink wisely once you're in Central America. Even exercising caution, at some point during the semester, you may have diarrhea or other intestinal problems. Some students take an antibiotic such as bactrim, a sulfa drug, or doxycycline, a form of tetracycline, to prevent diarrhea.

If symptoms occur, we encourage students to see a doctor and take antibiotics as directed, **for the full cycle of treatment**, unless severe side-effects occur. Hygiene and precaution remain important even if antibiotics are used. Once again consult with your physician.

You should consider bringing along some Pepto Bismol tablets and herbal teas. Also, you may want to bring acidophilus and take a tablet/capsule before eating or drinking anything. It is available in health stores and pharmacies in the U.S. Note: drugs such as Lomotil, Paragoric, Immodium and Kaopectate are not recommended since they can be dangerous in cases of infectious diarrheas, and they can intensify dehydration. In addition, if your doctor has given you a prescription for any antibiotics or other medication for diarrhea, be sure that you know how it should be taken and always take it as directed.

Other Health Concerns

Since so much travel will be done overland on mountainous roads and in boats, we encourage you to bring Dramamine or some equivalent if you are prone to motion sickness.

While strenuous walking is not a regular part of the program, there could be an occasion when this is necessary to reach a certain location. Varying road conditions may at times make anticipating this impossible, although our staff will keep you informed whenever possible. If your particular health condition makes this a concern, please be prepared to communicate your limitations to your program coordinators.