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](http://www.travel.state.gov)
- Centers for Disease Control: [www.cdc.gov/travel](http://www.cdc.gov/travel)
- World Health Organization: [www.who.org](http://www.who.org)
- International Society of Travel Medicine: [www.istm.org](http://www.istm.org)
- Travel Health Online: [www.tripprep.com](http://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](http://www.youtube.com).

There is other useful information available in the Resources Section of [Global Gateway](http://globalgateway.com) 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

Updated 7/10/2019
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
Medical Insurance: As a Center for Global Education student, you will be covered by Augsburg University’s Foreign Travel Abroad insurance. This plan includes travel, accident and sickness coverage.

For Emergency Assistance call (worldwide) at +1-240-330-1551 (Group ID C2EII, activation code 150424).

For more information, see:
• EIIA Webpage
• General Program Information
• FAQ
• Member Card

Please note that this insurance does not cover pre-existing conditions.

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.

CGEE strongly recommends that all program participants receive immunization for 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.

**Other immunizations/inoculations to consider, based on CDC recommendations:**
- Some travelers to Central America opt to take a prophylactic medication for Malaria. Consult with an international travel clinic or with your doctor about which medicines are prescribed currently. 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.

  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 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.

- As needed, booster doses for tetanus-diphtheria and measles.

**Other Infectious Diseases in the Region**
- 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.

- 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.

**Alcohol and Drug Abuse**
Alcohol abuse is a serious health risk, and studies show that U.S students tend to drink more when studying abroad. Therefore, while those of you who are over 18 are allowed to drink, as per local laws, we encourage you to develop a social life that does not depend upon alcohol. Some of you may be in recovery from drug or alcohol addictions, and others of you may decide that you need to seek out a recovery program while in Central America.
If you are an alcoholic or drug addict, we would like to suggest that you let staff know so that we can support you in your recovery process. There is a place to indicate this on the Health Information questionnaire in your Global Gateway Portal.

There are online Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and Al-Anon groups and meetings that you can attend via the Internet. For example, past students have participated in the following: Recovery Chat, AA and Al-Anon.

Some former students recommend the online app Sober Grid, which is open to people in recovery from alcohol and other drug addictions. It is not solely 12-Step based, although many members are in AA, NA, and Smart Recovery, etc.

**Mental Health**
If you are seeing a therapist or psychiatrist at home, be sure to inquire as to whether or not it is feasible for you to have online sessions via Skype or another format while you are abroad. Some therapists are open to this, and that way you can continue to work with the person whom you already know.

If not, online counseling available for all students on Augsburg CGEE programs, through the Morneau Shepell International Student Support Program. This is not only for use in an emergency, or once you are abroad. You can take advantage of the services if you have any issues prior to departure, set up ongoing sessions if you think you will need the services of a therapist while you are abroad, and at any time you just need to talk to someone before, during or after the semester. In fact, we are told that predeparture counseling is one of the most common points of contact.

We highly recommend that you download the MySSP app on your phone, become familiar with the services and delivery options, and set up your profile. This last step is vital to easy access in the future.

- [App Store for iOS devices](#)
- [Google Play for Android](#)

**Basic features of My SSP**

- **FREE and fully confidential mental health and wellbeing support available to students 24/7/365**
- **Not just a crisis support line**! The My SSP early intervention model helps students address any day-to-day challenges before they become a bigger issue
- **Access to clinical counselors that have experience working with students and speak multiple languages**
- **Effective and convenient ways for students to access support via telephone, chat, video, mobile app or web**
- **Those in need can access support by:**
  - downloading the free [My SSP App](#) (available from the App store/ Google Play),
  - calling [1.866.743.7732](#) (From outside North America: 001.416.380.6578)
  - visiting [http://us.myissp.com](http://us.myissp.com)

Updated 7/10/2019
Download and spend some time on the My SSP App!

The My SSP App is available in Arabic, Korean, simplified Chinese, Spanish, French and English

Go to Profile, turn push notifications on, select language, update profile details, and select school
(Select Augsburg University)

Once you have completed your profile and read the disclaimers, you can start a chat with an advisor!
Past students have also taken advantage of online chat groups and online support group meetings a variety of issues, including anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues. One website that has many different online support groups and chats on a variety of issues is the Daily Strength. Another is Healthful Chats, which hosts a wide variety of chatrooms and support groups for issues such as anxiety bipolar disorder, body dysmorphic disorder, depression, eating disorders, gender identity, OCD, and PTSD.

The inclusion of these sites here is not intended as an endorsement but rather a way to share some of the resources available and to make you aware of the plethora of resources on the worldwide web. If you find other resources that you like better, please let us know, and we will include them in future versions of this guide.

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.