

## HEALTH INFORMATION FOR MEXICO

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.

### **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.

### **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](#).

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

### **Insurance**

As a Center for Global Education and Experience student, you will be covered by Augsburg College's Foreign Travel Abroad insurance, administered by [Educational and Institutional Insurance Administrators](#). This plan includes travel, accident and sickness coverage. See [Benefits Summary and information card](#).

Should you require any medical care during your semester in Mexico, you should not have to pay for the care upfront, given our current medical insurance. You MAY have to pay for medicines and try to get reimbursed, although often students are given the medicines, as well.

The cost of labwork varies depending on what is needed. It could be as little as US \$5 but can cost more. The insurance tends not to pay for tests for stool samples (to see if you have parasites) but does tend to pay for other labwork. Please keep this in mind as you budget for the semester. Also, in the event that you do need medical attention, be sure to save all your receipts as they will be required for reimbursement.

We will explain how to call and set up a medical appointment through our medical insurance once you are in Cuernavaca. We trust that you will find it to be very user-friendly. You will be responsible for getting to and from any appointments. In the case of medical or other emergencies, you can contact the faculty or staff person who is on call.

### **Common Health Issues in Mexico**

Staff and students at the Center for Global Education and Experience in Cuernavaca have experienced a number of minor health problems. Most of these problems have been gastrointestinal and parasitic infections. Although we have not had any reported cases among students for over five years, the most serious problem in the past has been Typhoid Fever. Typhoid is caused by a type of Salmonella (*Salmonella-typhi*) which is endemic to Mexico and has been a particular problem in Cuernavaca over the past several years. Typhoid is transmitted through food and water that have been contaminated with infected human feces.

CGEE does everything in its power to protect staff and students from illness, including periodic tests of cooking personnel, bacteriological studies of the water and kitchens, constant vigilance of hygiene and sanitary conditions of the houses, and educational work with students and host families. Typhoid and other gastrointestinal infections can be prevented by being careful about what you eat and drink and practicing proper hygiene (which includes the regular washing of water bottles). In the event that you do become sick, however, there is competent and professional medical care available in Cuernavaca, and in most cases these diseases can be treated with common antibiotics.

## **HIV/AIDS**

Students should also be aware that the state of Morelos (where Cuernavaca is located) has the third-highest rate of HIV/AIDS infection in Mexico. If you plan on being sexually active while in Mexico, you should be aware of this and use protection to reduce the risk of HIV infection.

## **Dengue fever**

Dengue fever has recently been found in Morelos, mainly in the south and in rural areas, but also in Cuernavaca. No vaccine is available, but travelers can reduce their risk by applying insect repellent to both skin and clothing. The most effective repellents are those containing N,N-diethylmetatoluamide (DEET).

**Zika Virus:** On February 1, 2016, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared a public health emergency over the potential complications of Zika virus. WHO 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.

Note that Zika virus is primary 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.

CGEE Mexico follows the CDC/US Government recommendations and alerts and will provide updates as needed. A link the CDC alert can be found here which provides recommendations and precautions for travelers: <http://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2016/s0315-zika-virus-travel.html>

## **Other Health Concerns**

The altitude is high in both Cuernavaca (6,000 feet) and in Mexico City (7,300 feet). That, compounded with culture shock and the overall intensity of the program, may make you tire easily. In general, you should drink three times as much water as you normally do in order to avoid dehydration.

Also be aware that pollution in Mexico City is a problem year round, but it is especially acute during the dry season (October - May). If you have a history of respiratory illness, heart problems or allergies, you could experience complications while there. 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 can at times make anticipating this very difficult, although our field staff will keep you informed whenever possible. If your particular health condition makes this a concern, please be prepared to communicate your limitations to the academic coordinators.

## **Inoculations**

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

- **Typhoid**
- **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 six months, or be exposed through medical treatment.
- **Rabies**, if you might be exposed to wild or domestic animals through your work or recreation.
- As needed, booster doses for **tetanus-diphtheria and measles**.

Check with your doctor about the timing for all of the inoculations and their side-effects (e.g., typhoid and Hepatitis B inoculations require a series of shots or pills over several weeks or months; Hepatitis A inoculation requires a second inoculation 6-12 months after the first injection). You may find it helpful to call the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) (888/232-3228 or 404/639-2572) and listen to their extensive recorded information about health risks and precautions for international travelers, or visit the CDC web page at <http://www.cdc.gov>.

**Typhoid immunization is required.** We require students to have had a typhoid immunization within the last three years. The immunization must be completed at least two weeks before arriving in Mexico. Again, if you have already been immunized, inoculation must have occurred within the last three years. The Typhoid vaccine does not guarantee absolute protection from Typhoid since there are over 100 strains of the disease. It does, however, offer some protection, and doctors have noticed a lessening of the severity of symptoms and quicker recovery from Typhoid among those U.S. patients who had received the inoculation.

**Hepatitis A:** The Centers for Disease Control recommends that travelers to Mexico and Central America receive an immune globulin (IG) shot or Hepatitis A vaccine for protection against Hepatitis A. According to the CDC, travelers to Mexico and Central America are at high risk for Hepatitis A, especially if travel plans include visiting rural areas and extensive travel in the countryside 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. The immune globulin is a single dose shot. Because it offers only short-term protections, it should be administered shortly prior to travel. Our most recent information, however, says that immune globulin is in very short supply.

**Malaria:** Of the places you are going, the possibility of contracting malaria is fairly low. However, some travelers to Mexico and Central America have opted to take an anti-malaria prophylactic. According to the Centers for Disease Control, Primaquine is the preferred antimalarial drug in Mexico and El Salvador. Atovaquone/proguanil, chloroquine, doxycycline, and mefloquine are alternative choices.

### **Healthcare Providers**

The Center staff in Cuernavaca has done extensive research on health providers in the area and can give you recommendations for general care, gastroenterology, gynecology, ear, nose and throat, mental health, and homeopathy. In addition, the Center has established an on-going relationship with several specialists, some of whom are English speaking.

There are also several prestigious, well-equipped, modern hospitals only a 15 - 20 minute drive from the CGEE facilities. Program participants can receive quality out-patient or emergency care at these hospitals at a reasonable cost.

## **Alcohol and Drug Abuse**

As mentioned earlier, alcohol abuse is a serious health risk. 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 Cuernavaca. The *Grupo Delicias* AA/NA meetings are held every day at 7:30pm at St. Michael's Episcopal Church, Calle Minerva #1, Colonia Vista Hermosa (right around the corner from the Superama on Avenida Río Mayo). For information, feel free to contact English-speaking sponsor James Gregory at [gregoriopwc@yahoo.com](mailto:gregoriopwc@yahoo.com).

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. BEFORE departing for Mexico, please contact CGEEE-Mexico Site Director Ann Lutterman-Aguilar ([lutterma@augsborg.edu](mailto:lutterma@augsborg.edu)) so that the Mexico team can work with you to support your recovery. We also encourage you to "come out" to your peers so that they can be supportive of you.

There are also regular Al-Anon meetings in English on Tuesdays from 12:15-1:15pm at St. Michael's Episcopal Church, Calle Minerva #1, Colonia Vista Hermosa (right around the corner from the Superama on Avenida Río Mayo). There are Al-Anon meetings in Spanish at the same location on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays from 5:30-7:00pm.

In addition, there are on-line 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:

<http://www.usrecovery.info/Chat/AA.htm> and [http://xat.com/AAnonymous\\_Room?p-0&ss-0](http://xat.com/AAnonymous_Room?p-0&ss-0) for AA, and <http://www.12stepforums.net/alanon.html> for Al-Anon.

## **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 in Mexico. Some therapists are open to this, and that way you can continue to work with the person whom you already know. If, on the other hand, you want to see a psychologist or psychiatrist in Mexico, our insurance company works with one male psychiatrist and one female psychologist who speak English. You do not have to pay upfront – just for your cab rides. Previous students have been happy with them.

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 website: [http://www.dailystrength.org/component/option,com\\_comprofiler/task,ie\\_login/fb\\_login,1](http://www.dailystrength.org/component/option,com_comprofiler/task,ie_login/fb_login,1) Another is Healthful Chats at <http://www.healthfulchat.org/mental-health-chat-rooms.html> The latter 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.

### **Diarrhea, Cholera, Typhoid and Dysentery Prevention**

You will be given more information about this once you get to Mexico, but in general, you should follow certain rules for eating and drinking:

- Drink bottled or boiled water (available at the house and in your family stay), or bottled drinks, including soda or bottled juice.
- All meat and fish should be well cooked. Avoid salads and any kind of raw vegetables unless the greens/vegetables have been washed and then soaked in a disinfectant solution. (The cooks at Casa CEMAL disinfect the fresh fruits and vegetables they serve to you.)
- Be very careful about what you eat in restaurants, and don't eat food from street vendors. For example, fruit that you peel is the safest bet; drinks with ice can be bad if the ice is not made from bottled water, etc.

**Play it safe!** You will learn to eat and drink wisely once you're in Cuernavaca. At some point during the semester, you will undoubtedly have some stomach upset. Some students have opted to take an antibiotic to prevent diarrhea (two such options are bactrim, a sulfa drug, or doxycycline, a form of tetracycline). These only prevent certain types of diarrhea disease, so hygiene and avoidance measures remain important even if antibiotics are used. You may want to bring along a probiotic like acidophilus or lactobacillus and take a capsule daily as a preventative measure. Probiotics are available over the counter in health stores and pharmacies in the U.S. and Mexico. These suggestions, along with bananas, which are always on hand, are helpful. Note: drugs such as Lomotil, Paragoric, and Kaopectate are **not** recommended because they can be dangerous in the case of infectious diarrheas.