

# Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) Technical Assistance (TA) Center

STUDY ABROAD EMERGENCIES FACT SHEET

## Preparing for Study Abroad Emergencies for Higher Ed and K–12 Populations

Study abroad programs offer students from institutions of higher education (IHEs) and schools<sup>1</sup>—public and nonpublic—a unique opportunity to expand and enrich their education experience, and to develop skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in today’s global workforce. Demonstrating how popular these programs are, nearly 315,000 IHE students participated in study abroad programs for credit during the 2014–2015 academic year—the latest year data is available—which was an increase of 2.9 percent over the previous year.<sup>2</sup> While study abroad is the most common purpose of international travel for the higher ed and school communities, students, teachers, faculty, and staff members may also travel abroad for athletics, service learning, work, ministry, internships, research, conferences, tours, and other opportunities.



Similar to those being educated in the United States, individuals studying abroad may encounter emergency situations both small and large. However, the effects of relatively small emergencies, such as minor crime, vehicle collisions, or physical and mental/behavioral health issues, may be exacerbated in an international environment due to differences in language, culture, laws and standards,

the availability of local emergency resources, and the IHE’s or school’s inability to provide the same immediate support that could be provided in the United States.

Further, in addition to the fundamental responsibility of all IHEs and schools to provide students, faculty, and staff members with a safe and healthy learning environment, IHEs may have a legal obligation to report incidents that occur while students are traveling abroad, under the Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Crime Statistics Act (Clery Act). Also, due to the age of students traveling, schools typically have a greater responsibility to ensure the welfare of the students in their care.

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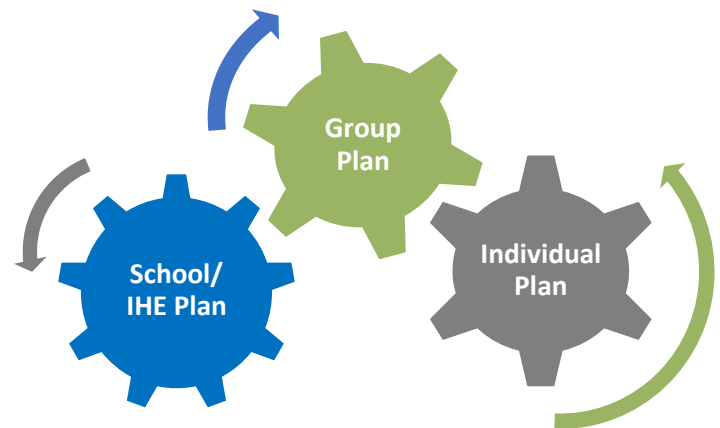
<sup>1</sup> *School* refers to all types, including private and public, and all grade levels for the purposes of this fact sheet.

<sup>2</sup> [Digest of Education Statistics](#), U.S. Department of Education.

Fortunately, preparing and planning for emergencies abroad does not have to be difficult. In developing emergency procedures for an international setting, planning teams may find many aspects are similar to their existing plans for emergencies in the United States. For example, IHEs or schools may already have identified what actions to take in an emergency that occurs when students are offsite at a field trip or an away sporting event that can be carried over, in part, to planning for study abroad emergencies. Planning teams can also turn to individuals with expertise and experience in international travel and federal government resources and guidance for help with their preparedness efforts.

### Integrating International Travel into Emergency Planning

To help prepare for emergencies abroad, IHEs and schools can create or support the development of three layers of emergency plans: (1) a Study Abroad Annex to the IHE's or school's EOP, which describes how the sponsoring entity will support study abroad programs in an emergency, including before, during, and after an incident; (2) a group plan that describes specific emergency protocols for groups that are abroad; and (3) individual plans, for individuals who will be on their own.



These efforts can be informed by several planning principles described in the [Guide for Developing High-Quality Emergency Operations Plans for Institutions of Higher Education \(IHE Guide\)](#) and the [Guide for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans \(School Guide\)](#). One of these principles is that “Planning considers all settings and all times.” In essence, IHEs and schools must account for incidents that may occur at any time at on- and off-campus locations, including international sites. Another is “Creating and revising a model emergency operations plan is done by following a collaborative process.” As IHEs and schools plan for emergencies abroad, they should seek the input of individuals who can provide valuable preparedness information such as the IHE or school emergency management specialist or risk manager, travel program directors and coordinators, legal counsel, school nurse or IHE physician, international studies director, law enforcement, insurance provider, and others.

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## 1) IHE/School Planning

The *IHE* and *School Guides* also recommend a six-step planning process to develop, review, or revise an EOP or components of one. When creating a Study Abroad Annex to the IHE or school EOP, the planning process could progress as follows.

With input from individuals who have expertise or experience in study abroad and emergencies

### SIX-STEP PLANNING PROCESS

- **Step 1:** Form a Collaborative Planning Team
- **Step 2:** Understand the Situation
- **Step 3:** Determine Goals and Objectives
- **Step 4:** Plan Development (Identifying Courses of Action)
- **Step 5:** Plan Preparation, Review, and Approval
- **Step 6:** Plan Implementation and Maintenance

(Step 1: Form a Collaborative Planning Team), the planning team would identify what hazards or threats may impact the host site or places the students or staff members will visit and prioritize them for inclusion in the annex (Step 2: Understand the Situation). Information may be obtained from site visits; risk assessments conducted by other IHEs and schools near the host site(s); federal departments or agencies, including the State Department and CDC; reports and data provided by embassies, consulates, and analysts; and other sources.

Goals can be created that identify desired outcomes for before, during, and after an event and objectives can be established that are specific and measurable actions to achieve those goals (Step 3: Determine Goals and Objectives). Courses of action are then developed to

accomplish those objectives (Step 4: Plan Development [Identifying Courses of Action]). After a draft of the annex is written and approved (Step 5: Plan Preparation, Review, and Approval), IHEs and schools can implement the activities described in the annex, including conducting training and exercises (Step 6: Plan Implementation and Maintenance). Training can be provided to group leaders/staff/chaperones and students. More information on the six-step planning process is available on the REMS TA Center's Website for [IHEs](#) and [schools](#).

As the planning team progresses through the planning process, and especially steps 3 and 4, the group may want to consider the following activities before a trip abroad to better prepare in case of an emergency, and during and after an emergency event.

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## Before a trip:

- **Know the destination** by researching the safety of the area and any current or emerging incidents of concern, as well as local laws, regulations, and cultural norms. Information can be sought from the following sources:
  - [Destination information](#) provided by the U.S. Department of State (State Department);
  - [Overseas Security and Advisory Council \(OSAC\)](#), which is a public-private partnership within the State Department. OSAC is a free security resource to U.S. organizations and provides security consultations, security reports, global security meetings, and connections with U.S. Mission security offices for assessments and consultations;
  - [Travel Health Notices](#) provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC);
  - Insurance providers; and
  - Other U.S. IHE and school programs near to the host site.
- **Enroll the trip in the [Smart Traveler Enrollment Program \(STEP\)](#)** from the State Department—for more information, see the [Key Resources](#) section below.
- **Know what healthcare is available in the area**, including the following:
  - What medicines can be taken into the host country and what are classed as illegal narcotics;
  - How to receive regular and emergency physical and mental/behavioral health help;
  - How to evacuate a person in a medical emergency; and
  - What are required or recommended vaccinations, by visiting the CDC's [Destinations](#) Web page.

Individual travelers should visit their doctor 4 to 6 weeks before travel to get appropriate immunizations and medicine. They should also get a letter from their doctor listing their medications and explaining why they are needed. The IHE/school should have permission to share traveler medical information in an emergency.
- **Screen host families** for students through home visits, background checks, and references.
- **Train staff and students** in what to do in an emergency. Staff members can be provided additional training, such as how to provide first aid and CPR, and local procedures for emergency medical attention.
- **Plan how to communicate** in an emergency:
  - Gather emergency contact information for the host site's local emergency services, local U.S. embassy or consulate, insurance company, vendors supporting travel and emergencies (e.g., for medical evacuations), and the IHE/school.
  - Identify how travelers will receive updates about threats or hazards in the area from the local government, IHE/school, U.S. government, host site, and others.

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- Provide wallet-sized emergency contact information cards (see the [individual plan](#) section below for more information).
- **Provide pre-departure orientation** for (1) students and (if appropriate) parents/guardians; and (2) and group leaders.
  - Student/family pre-departure orientations can include information on:
    - Climate: Unique aspects of the host country or region, including laws covering alcohol/drug use and driving. Also, when appropriate, security concerns such as local criminal activity and whether IHE travelers may be targeted for propriety information.
    - Conduct: Expectations for behavior, including the code of conduct.
    - Emergencies: What to do before, during, and after an incident.
  - Leader orientation
    - In addition to the information provided in study/family orientations, leaders can be instructed in more advanced topics, such as where to go locally for mental/behavioral health support and what to do if a student is detained by local law enforcement.
- **Make copies of important documents** (e.g., passport, visa) and store electronic copies online in a password-protected and secure storage for easy access.

### During an emergency event abroad:

- **Follow procedures described in emergency plans**, including the IHE's/school's EOP, group plan, and/or individual plan.
- **Monitor local emergency notifications** and warnings and alerts sent from the State Department and CDC, if a natural disaster or other large-scale event occurs.
- **Contact the local U.S. embassy or consulate for help**, if needed. Assistance provided depends on the nature of the emergency and the location, but ranges from directing to local resources to departure assistance.
- **Communicate with all stakeholders** regularly, as needed, including the sponsoring entity, local authorities, the local U.S. embassy or consulate, students, and their families.

### After an emergency event abroad:

- **Account for all students and staff members, and reunite them with their families** (if applicable). In some instances, the U.S. embassy or consulate may be able to help—a process that is facilitated by registering trips in advance with the State Department [STEP](#) program.
- **Provide recovery support**, considering all aspects of academics; physical and structural; business functions; and social, emotional, and behavioral recovery.



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- **Conduct an after-action report** that details what happened, what lessons were learned that could be applied to future travel, and make appropriate changes to the IHE/school EOP, group plan, and/or individual plan.

## 2) Group plan

As those traveling abroad will likely not be able to rely on the sponsoring IHE's or school's immediate help in an emergency as they would for an on-campus incident, the planning team may decide that a group emergency plan is required as they progress through the six-step planning process. Groups required to complete their own plan may be a host site(s), class of students, research site, or others. A plan template can be created and a completed plan can then be reviewed and approved by the sponsoring IHE or school. Information required in a group plan could include the following:

- Emergency contact information, for the sponsoring IHE or school, local U.S. embassy or consulate, host site, and others who could provide emergency assistance (e.g., a vendor that provides evacuation support);
- Site-specific information, such as places that are unsafe to travel to and where to go for medical treatment; and
- Emergency preparedness information, such as how the group would respond to threats or hazards at the site, where emergency supplies are stored, and meeting locations.

## 3) Individual plan

Individuals traveling on their own—especially those going to remote or high-risk areas—may also be required to complete their own individual emergency plan, which contains similar information to the group plan. For individuals who may require specialized medical treatment, who are allergic to certain medications, or who may have preexisting conditions, their plans should include information on how appropriate medication and medical support would be administered in an emergency. Again, these plans should be reviewed and approved by the sponsoring IHE or school.

Whether an individual will be in a group or traveling on his or her own, everybody should carry a quick-reference card for emergencies. This should include the following:

- Personal information, including passport number and parental/guardian information if appropriate
- Contacts:
  - U.S. embassy contact
  - Local contact
  - IHE/school emergency contact

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- Medical information:
  - Allergies
  - Medications
  - Medical conditions
  - Blood type
- Insurance provider/third party support

## Key Resources

Resources available to support planning for emergencies abroad include:

- [Travelers' Health Web Page, CDC.](#)  
Resources on this page are separated into those for travelers and clinicians. The page provides current health information by destination and travel health notices, and allows users to register via email to receive the latest updates from CDC's travelers' health.
- [Travel Web Page, State Department.](#)  
Individuals can access a variety of travel-related resources from this page, including:
  - [Country information Web page](#): This page offers individuals considering international travel information about the safety and security situation in a specific country, including entry and exit requirements, local laws and customs, health conditions, etc.
  - [Smart Traveler Enrollment Program \(STEP\)](#): This program is a free service that allows travelers to provide their travel information with the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate to help them locate the traveler in an emergency. Travelers, and future travelers, can also sign up to receive safety and security information via email regarding specific destinations abroad.
  - [Traveler's Checklist](#): Four steps to take before traveling abroad are provided in this checklist, including reading country information, getting the right documents, enrolling in [STEP](#), and having insurance.
- [Overseas Security and Advisory Council \(OSAC\) Website.](#)  
OSAC's Research and Information Support Center produces analysis on security incidents as they unfold around the world. Add OSAC to your emergency checklist to monitor security situations around the world.
- [Websites of U.S. Embassies, Consulates, and Diplomatic Missions, State Department.](#)  
Hyperlinks are provided on this page to U.S. embassies, consulates, and diplomatic missions abroad. Once a country is selected, contact information is provided that includes addresses and telephone numbers.