

To our medical students:

We've received many questions about how to handle travel over the upcoming winter break. We want to provide more concrete guidance based on new recommendations from state/local health authorities, as well as our university and clinical partners. We hope this will help you better make decisions for what you want and need to do.

First of all, let us remind you that this is a confusing and difficult time, and the situation is in constant flux. Guidelines are changing regularly, and anything we say here may end up being altered in the coming weeks. We strongly encourage all students to continually check e-mail and other sources of information to stay abreast of the situation.

Secondly, remember that the CDC, state, county, and local authorities all strongly recommend NOT travelling, to protect the safety of you and those you care about or work with. It's clear that there's no absolutely safe way to travel, and it increases risk for everyone. Most faculty, and millions of Americans, have cancelled or changed their holiday travel plans because of the pandemic.

On the other hand, we know that there are reasons many students feel the need to travel--the strong sense of loneliness and isolation being away from loved ones, pressure from family to return home, and more. IF you choose to travel, there are the things you need to keep in mind:

Check out CDC guidelines, which include a discussion of risk and decision-making, as well as how to travel safely if you do. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/travel-during-covid19.html>

The main authority for what you need to do is the Pennsylvania Department of Health. <https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/disease/coronavirus/Pages/Travelers.aspx>

All students who are leaving should shelter-in-place as long as they can, but at least 10-14 days, prior to departure. This means staying home (except for essential supplies, exercise, medical). The goal here is to minimize risk to those you are travelling to see. If you are planning to leave 12/18, you should be sheltering in place **now**. MS3-4s are doing clinical work, but that is deemed essential and is an exception--you should limit other activities.

<https://www.coronavirus.pitt.edu/healthy-community/shelter-place>

<https://www.cnn.com/2020/03/17/us/shelter-in-place-coronavirus-trnd/index.html>

Pre-travel testing doesn't help that much (unless you're positive). A positive test clearly indicates that you cannot travel. A negative test, however, doesn't mean everything is safe, because you could turn positive the next day. Exposures during travel may also not be reflected in travel testing. Depending on when an exposure occurs, you could test negative if it is too soon and potentially still expose others a few days later. This is also true for the people you may be visiting over the holidays.

If you do travel, remember to follow all mitigation efforts, such as mask wearing, social distancing, hand hygiene, etc. You may be visiting with individuals that are medically vulnerable or of older age, and you should consider continuing these around them, especially if you are not able to effectively shelter in place or have potential exposures during travel.

MS1-2s who are returning to Pitt campus activities:

- must have a negative Covid test taken within 72 hours prior to re-entry to PA (as per state)
- must quarantine locally for 14 days before returning to campus activities (Scaife, WISER, research labs, etc.)

Pitt has a stricter view of things, which we support. The negative Covid test prior to return actually tells us little about your infectivity--it's a snapshot, and many people with negative tests later turn positive. Quarantine is the only safe approach. We've cancelled or reschedule all in-person activities to allow for this quarantine.

MS1-2s who are going to be working in clinical settings in January (e.g., APE/CE) would need to follow the MS3-4 guidelines below.

MS3-4s who are returning to clinical rotations:

Requirements from PA and from our local clinical affiliates must BOTH be followed:

State Requirements	UPMC/VA Requirements
must have a negative Covid test taken within 72 hours before return to PA OR must quarantine for 10 days (OR 7 days if a negative test taken on or after day 5 of quarantine)	allowed to return to work immediately as long as you are well and had no significant, unprotected exposures during your travel if you had a significant exposure, you must contact Student Health for further instructions, and notify Drs. Gonzaga and Buranosky--but otherwise stay home!

Remember, because you are considered “essential workers,” neither UPMC nor the VA require a quarantine or testing for MS3-4s to return to clinical rotations. But the state requires one or the other, and for students who need to start rotations Jan 4, the test is the easier way (otherwise you'd need to return 12/25).

In terms of international travel, CDC strongly recommends avoiding all travel to most countries. Otherwise, the above guidance would essentially be the same. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/map-and-travel-notice.html>

If a student has trouble with this, or gets exposed/sick, we will do everything we can to shift them to virtual learning or reschedule rotations as needed.

For testing, you should think ahead about what your options are for local testing wherever you go. Upon return to the Pittsburgh area, you can use these resources to find testing if you wish:

- PA Public
Testing: <https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/disease/coronavirus/Pages/Public%20Testing.aspx>
- ACHD Public Testing: <https://alleghenycounty.us/Health-Department/Resources/COVID-19/McKeesport-Testing-Site.aspx>
- Test
Locator <https://alcogis.maps.arcgis.com/apps/Nearby/index.html?appid=472bad5ba19f4247a094d55e712195c8>
- All PA Testing
sites: <https://pema.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=1a4c139769d646839e1549bcb6a668f1>

There are likely to be many individual questions about your specific situations. Please ask and we'll do our best to answer. Questions can be addressed to any of us, but particularly:

- MS1-2s/LOA/MSTP: Dr. Alda Gonzaga gonzaga@upmc.edu
- MS3-4s/Clinical: Dr. Raquel Buranosky buranoskyr@upmc.edu

Your friendly deans--Drs. Rosenstock, Gonzaga, Buranosky, Lance-Jones, Pettigrew, Reis, and Thompson