

COVID-19 Updates and Your Fulbright Visiting Scholar Status

The COVID-19 pandemic is affecting many higher education institutions in the United States. Your safety and well-being are the highest priority of your Fulbright sponsors, the U.S. Department of State, and IIE. This section includes some helpful resources and information for Fulbright Visiting Scholar Program participants. As the COVID-19 pandemic is an evolving situation, we will continue to provide updated information as it becomes available.

Resources

- For the most current information regarding COVID-19 and measures you can take to protect yourself, please visit the website of the U.S. [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC). The CDC recommends that you employ [everyday preventative actions](#) to avoid contracting or spreading an illness. If you or a family member is sick, you should avoid public gatherings and travel. If you are sick, contact your local healthcare provider for evaluation and treatment, and inform your IIE Advisor.
- [U.S. Department of State Travel Advisories and Health Alerts](#)
- For local resources, you should pay close attention to the local public health department in your state. For tips on how to prepare for a public health emergency, please visit [ready.gov](#).
- Accident and Sickness Program for Exchanges ([ASPE](#))
- [ASPE Assist](#) offers a 24-hour hotline for mental health consultation and advice if you feel at risk.

Frequently Asked Questions for Fulbright Visiting Scholars

Below please find the answers to questions you may have related to your Fulbright grant and COVID-19.

Travel During the Program

[Should I stay at my university or can I travel within the U.S. or to my home country?](#)

Since March 2020, the Fulbright Program has strongly recommended against any non-essential travel by Fulbright participants, both within the United States and internationally. Many U.S. states and foreign governments have adopted extraordinary measures to restrict movements across borders in an effort to contain the spread of COVID-19, and this situation continues to evolve. Therefore, conditions for future travel may become more challenging without notice,

including the reduced availability of air tickets, closed borders, and heightened requirements for COVID testing and/or quarantine. If your university has moved online for part or all of the semester, you should continue to engage virtually from your U.S. host campus community.

The Fulbright Program strongly encourages participants to remain in the U.S. at the host institution and in the host campus community throughout their exchange.

If I decide to travel against Fulbright recommendations, what steps should I take?

Unexpected changes may have an impact on your Fulbright Program, so if you choose to travel outside of your U.S. host campus community at any point in your program, please be aware of the following:

- Per J-visa regulations, you are required to be physically living in the United States and participating in your Fulbright Program in the community where your U.S. host institution is located, even if you are participating remotely.
- You will be responsible for the cost of any COVID testing required for travel. Note: See the [ASPE Benefit Guide](#) for explanation of benefits related to COVID testing.
- If you are unable to return to your U.S. host community to continue in your Fulbright Program activities, you may risk the continuation of your program or research due to loss of Fulbright funding, university funding, or J-visa sponsorship.
- You may be required to quarantine at your destination and/or upon return to your U.S. host community for up to 14 days in each location.
- Transportation, including flights, may be unexpectedly delayed or cancelled.
- You will be responsible for any additional costs incurred because your domestic or international travel is delayed or cancelled.

If you decide to travel against these recommendations, you must take the following actions prior to any travel:

- Report your international travel plans [via the Self-Service Portal]. This is a requirement of your J-1 visa.
- Review the Travel Information section of the website to confirm you fulfill all re-entry requirements.
- Stay updated on any changes to your U.S. host institution's academic calendar.
- Research the travel guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC); federal, state, and local government officials; host university officials; and airlines.
- Comply with all COVID-19 testing or quarantine requirements prior to travel to or transit through another country and upon return to your U.S. host community.
- You must notify your IIE Advisor if you are required to self-quarantine or experience delays in returning to your in-person academic program.

Note: The United States requires a National Interest Exception (NIE) annotation in a foreign passport for travelers arriving in the U.S. from, or transiting through, many countries around the world. For the latest list, please refer to: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/News/visas-news.html>

The above recommendations are in place to ensure the success of your Fulbright Program. If you have any questions about the above information, please contact your IIE Advisor.

[Is there any funding available if I decide to travel home?](#)

No, there is no additional Fulbright funding available for this travel. Note: Fulbright grant amounts may be adjusted for periods spent outside of the United States.

[If I have to cancel any previously planned travel, what should I do?](#)

If you had submitted a Travel Notification to the [Self-Service Portal](#) and your plans change, please email your [IIE Advisor](#) so we can update your record.

[My DS-2019 is not signed for travel, should I send it in for signature?](#)

The Fulbright program recommends against non-essential travel at this time. Many governments have put extraordinary measures in place to restrict movements across borders in an effort to contain the spread of the virus. Therefore, conditions for future travel may become more challenging without notice, including reduced air service and requirements for quarantine. If you decide to travel internationally, it is at your own risk as your travel may be disrupted or delayed.

If you feel that your international travel is essential and you are aware of the risks of international travel, please review the International Travel section on page 46 the [Visiting Scholar Guide](#) and take the steps outlined to report travel and receive a DS-2019 travel validation signature. If you feel you urgently need a travel validation signature on your DS-2019 form, please contact your IIE Advisor to arrange a DS-2019 signature.

[Are there J-1 visa delays at U.S. Embassies?](#)

Many U.S. embassies are operating on a modified schedule or have suspended non-immigrant visa services. You should check with the U.S. embassy in your home country for more information.

Note: The United States requires a National Interest Exception (NIE) annotation in a foreign passport for travelers arriving in the U.S. from, or transiting through, many countries around the world. For the latest list, please refer to: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/News/visas-news.html>

[What happens to my ASPE Health Benefits Plan if I travel outside the U.S.?](#)

Your ASPE health benefits are not valid outside the United States. Your ASPE benefits will resume upon your re-entry into the United States.

See *ASPE, COVID-19 Testing, and Vaccination* section for information on testing related to travel.

Final Departure

[My departure date is in the near future. What are my next steps for departure?](#)

You will receive departure instructions about four weeks prior to your exchange end date from your IIE Advisor. You should also review the At the End of your Grant Period section on page 57 of the [Visiting Scholar Guide](#) and follow the departure guidance provided. You should depart according to your program end date and within the 30-day grace period.

As you prepare for departure, it is critical you confirm and plan in advance for any mandatory COVID-19 testing and possible quarantine measures required by your airlines for departure and home country for entry. ASPE provides benefits of up to \$500 per Benefit Year for routine required tests in the United States, including for departure travel. See *ASPE, COVID-19 Testing, and Vaccination* section for information on testing required for final departure travel.

ASPE, COVID-19 Testing, and Vaccination

[Am I eligible to utilize ASPE Assist?](#)

ASPE Assist is a 24-hour hotline that offers mental health advice, crisis support, sexual assault response, violent crime response, advice and referral services when participants may feel at risk. You may use ASPE Assist while you are on program in the United States. Consult the [ASPE brochure](#) for full details and see the ASPE Assist contact information below.

ASPE Assist Contact Information:

Toll free: 1-833-963-1269

Worldwide: +44-20-3859-4463

Email: ASPEsupport@anvilgroup.com

[Are there ASPE benefits for participants with COVID symptoms?](#)

The Accident and Sickness Program for Exchanges (ASPE) covers you while you are on program in the United States. If you have COVID symptoms, you should contact a medical provider. Under the ASPE health benefits program, COVID symptoms are treated as any other illness. If recommended by a medical provider, ASPE should cover the cost of diagnostic COVID testing and any required treatment. Normal ASPE procedures must be followed as outlined in the ASPE Benefits Guide available here: <https://www.sevencorners.com/gov/usdos>. In some cases, diagnostic COVID testing and treatment may also be covered by host university insurance. ASPE does not cover dependents.

What should I do if I have possible COVID-19 exposure?

If you have come in contact with an individual with COVID-19, contact a medical provider. Even if you are asymptomatic, testing is recommended and may be required. In such cases, you are encouraged to utilize testing options provided through your host universities or local communities. Many cities, counties, and states have free or low-cost testing programs that Fulbrighters may utilize. If testing is mandated, and free testing is not available, you should contact your IIE Advisor as soon as possible. If limits have not been met, ASPE may provide reimbursement of such testing. See the ASPE Benefits Guide for additional information.

The cost of any testing required for dependents is the financial responsibility of the participant, including through the dependents' private insurance.

Does ASPE cover testing for participants without COVID Symptoms?

ASPE benefits include COVID-19 Routine Testing up to \$500 per Benefit Year. This includes tests required by the college or university for program admission and travel requirements, rendered only in the United States. Covered testing must be based on the current standard of care in the United States. Coverage is for a virus/antigen detection (diagnostic) test, as well as any office visit or administration costs associated with that testing. Co-pay does not apply under the routine testing benefit. Serological (antibody) tests are not covered as part of the routine testing benefit. See the [ASPE Benefit Guide](#) for additional details.

What is the Fulbright guidance for COVID testing related to travel to the United States to begin my program?

Before traveling to the United States, please determine any testing required for travel (by the airline, transit country, or your host institution). Any testing for you and your accompanying dependents prior to arrival in the United States is your logistical and financial responsibility. Reimbursement will not be provided.

Please visit the CDC Website for current information on COVID testing requirements for travelers arriving to the United States from overseas. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/international-travel-during-covid19.html>

What is the Fulbright guidance for testing upon arrival in the United States?

Before arriving in the United States, you must determine any testing and/or quarantine requirements for your host institution and community as well as any other area you may transit through prior to arriving in your host community. You should contact your host university to confirm any state, local, or host university requirements. Your host institution or community will most likely provide any COVID testing that is required for asymptomatic participants. ASPE provides benefits of up to \$500 per Benefit Year for routine required tests in the United States.

It is the Exchange Participant's responsibility to locate and schedule testing to ensure that they receive their results within the timeframe that is required for their travel or institution, as well as to submit claims for related out-of-pocket expenses within ASPE and Seven Corners procedures and timelines for processing claims. Additional benefits beyond the \$500 maximum will not be granted for COVID testing that is late, lost, or otherwise not in compliance for travel and/or institution admission.

See the [ASPE Benefit Guide](#) for additional details.

What is the Fulbright guidance for testing required for final departure?

As you prepare to depart the U.S. at the end of your Fulbright Program, it is critical that you confirm and schedule any mandatory COVID-19 testing required for departure from the United States, including for transit through a third country. You should also confirm any testing and/or quarantine restrictions needed upon arrival in your home country. Testing is often required within 48-96 hours before departure (requirements subject to change), but COVID testing may not be readily available in many areas of the United States, so schedule your testing accordingly. ASPE provides benefits of up to \$500 per Benefit Year for routine required tests in the United States, including for departure travel. Please plan your return travel and COVID testing, keeping in mind the ASPE COVID-19 temporary testing benefit and dates of coverage. The temporary benefit applies to Exchange Participants on program in their host countries, within the dates of their ASPE coverage eligibility, as listed on their ASPE Enrollment record.

It is the Exchange Participant's responsibility to locate and schedule testing to ensure that they receive their results within the timeframe that is required for their travel or institution, as well as to submit claims for related out-of-pocket expenses within ASPE and Seven Corners procedures and timelines for processing claims. Additional benefits beyond the \$500 maximum will not be granted for testing that is late, lost, or otherwise not in compliance for travel and/or institution admission.

See the [ASPE Benefit Guide](#) for additional details.

What is the Fulbright guidance for testing for non-essential travel?

At this time, domestic and international travel for non-essential reasons is strongly discouraged and any travel, other than at the end of a program, is at your own risk and expense. Testing required for optional travel for you and your accompanying dependents is your logistical and financial responsibility.

Am I eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccine in the United States?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) make [recommendations](#) to prioritize who should receive the COVID-19 vaccine in the United States. Then each state makes its own plan for distribution. Please consult your [state and local public health department](#) and your university health center to determine when you may be eligible to receive the vaccine in the United States.

I've heard that some U.S. universities are requiring a COVID-19 vaccine. Am I required to have one?

Universities and colleges in the U.S. determine medical and vaccination policies/requirements for their campus community. As institutions' plans for requiring COVID-19 vaccinations develop, your host institution will be the best source of information on medical and vaccination requirements -- including any requirement for a COVID-19 test, quarantine, or vaccine. Please continue to monitor information provided by your host institution prior to your arrival on campus to ensure you understand how to meet your institution's medical requirements.