

New travel advisory and alerts guidelines announced by Department of State

New changes to the U.S. Department of State's (DoS) Travel Advisory System will likely impact how UW–Madison students, faculty, and staff plan and prepare for university-affiliated travel to other nations.

The changes to the advisory system, which were announced in November and implemented in early January will break down risks to travelers into four advisory levels:

Level 1 - Exercise Normal Precautions

Level 2 - Exercise Increased Caution

Level 3 - Reconsider Travel

Level 4 – Do Not Travel

[View a color-coded map of current travel advisory levels.](#)

Each country will be assigned a travel advisory level that indicates potential risk to the traveler. In addition, specific regions or areas within a country may receive a different designation, using the associated language, such as “reconsider travel” or “do not travel.” The new system allows a traveler to further assess the travel risk in a specific location. For example, a country as a whole might have a travel advisory level 2, but a city or region within the country might be rated at level 3 using the language “Reconsider Travel.”

Any country or region receiving a travel advisory level of 2–4 will also have clear explanations for the rating. Such rationale could come from a variety of concerns—from a health epidemic or the effects of a natural disaster to the pervasive presence of crime or heightened risk of terrorism.

Changes to UW–Madison's travel policy

According to Ron Machoian, international safety and security director for UW–Madison, the university bases its own guidelines on those set by the DoS, as well as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The University International Travel Committee (UITC), which administers the university's travel policy, has recommended revisions that reflect the new DoS advisory system.

UW–Madison will now define a “travel warning” as locations that are under a DoS Level 3 or Level 4 advisory and/or a CDC Notice Warning Level 3; and those locations additionally identified by the provost, upon recommendation by the UITC, as representing significant health or safety risks for the university's travelers.

According to the international travel policy, students who wish to travel to any “travel warning” location under university-affiliation must receive a specific waiver to do so. *For employees, the final decision regarding travel to such areas lies with the employee and their respective employment supervisor.*

Since specific regions within a country can have an advisory level that varies from the overall country level, it will be crucial that travelers focus on specific locations where the travel will take place, and not solely on the destination country as a whole. Any travel through an area with an advisory level of 3 or 4 will require a waiver, regardless of overall country level.

“Regardless of whether a waiver is required for a given travel itinerary, the new advisory system has very strong and specific advice for all locations in terms of how to reduce risk and stay safe,” noted Dan Gold, the UITC co-chair and director of International Academic Programs. “For all travel, we strongly encourage everyone to read the new country specific pages in detail and the advice within”

The travel advisory levels are important resources to help assess risk and safety.

“UW–Madison’s international travel policy is intended to help our students and employees prepare for their travel abroad on university-affiliated programs and business, not unduly constrain travel that is consistent with our educational mission,” said Machoian. “Revisions to the policy accommodate recent changes to the Travel Advisory system with this spirit in mind.”

Travel Alerts streamlined

Along with the changes to the travel advisory levels, the DoS has also streamlined its bevy of security messages, emergency messages, security alerts, directed actions, and other terms into a single category, “Travel Alerts.”

Travel Alerts are issued by U.S. embassies and consulates abroad to provide travelers with key information on issues related to politics, security, weather, the environment, health, and crime. Travel Alerts can be found along with Travel Advisory information on country pages maintained by the DoS. These alerts will specify the type of alert in place, location of the event, recommended actions to take, and contact information for further assistance.

Travelers enrolled in the [Smart Traveler Enrollment Program \(STEP\)](#) for a particular country will receive these alerts via text to their mobile telephone or an e-mail address just as under the current messaging system.

UW–Madison offers a variety of resources for travelers preparing to go abroad. Information about the current [travel policy](#) and other critical information can be found on the university’s [International Safety and Security](#) website. Questions can also be directed to Ron Machoian at ronald.machoian@wisc.edu. The website and policy will post updates as new information is received from the DoS. The site also has information about the UW–Madison international travel policy and the related waiver process. As the newly revised Advisory system is implemented, it undoubtedly will evolve to meet dynamic needs. Alerts are also available through the State Department on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).