

Guidance for travel to United States from University insurers

In light of recent events, UK students considering studying in the United States must be aware of the U.S. immigration rules – particularly those related to visas and social media history.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has expanded its social media monitoring requirements. As a result, applicants for various immigration benefits, including student visas, are now required to provide their social media handles on several forms. Additionally, the State Department has launched the 'Catch and Revoke' initiative, utilising artificial intelligence to monitor social media posts of visa holders. If posts are flagged as supporting terrorism, extremist ideologies or even criticising the current administration, visas may be revoked, even if the posts were made years prior.

More than 1,000 student and academics have reportedly been detained or had their visa revoked based on historic social media activity relating to pro-Palestinian activism, some of which was alleged to be anti-Semitic.

Preparation

- Consider how essential the travel is and do a risk vs need assessment for each traveller ***see further guidance below specific to pregnant travellers***
- At the visa/ESTA application stage, be honest in your responses, particularly about countries you have visited in the past. It's better to highlight any issues early, before incurring travel costs
- Many visa revocations have been tied to students' involvement in pro-Palestine activism. Vet past public statements and academic work when assessing each individuals' travel risk
- Vet past infractions, including traffic violations. Any previous infractions present a risk of having your visa revoked or being turned away on arrival
- Higher risk travellers, for whom travel is not essential, should consider not travelling
- Check your passport and ensure it's valid for 6 months+ after the planned date of return
- Get a health check and gather evidence of all relevant immunisations

At the border

- Have (preferably paper) evidence of:
 - US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Declaration Form completed before arrival - <https://www.cbp.gov/document/forms/form-6059b-customs-declaration-english-fillable>
 - your accommodation for the duration of your stay
 - funds for the duration of your stay for both living expenses and tuition
 - vaccinations
 - prescriptions for medication
 - visas/ESTAs
 - the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) form (if relevant)
 - the Certificate of Eligibility for non-immigrant Student Status (Form I-20) (if relevant)
 - travel insurance and emergency assistance contact information

- enrolment letters/acceptance letters/documents showing the details of the study programme at the US college. My understanding is that the US college must be certified by the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP)
- contact information for the University in the UK and US
- complete list of publications
- Keep back-ups of all documents in the cloud and know your log-in details to access them
- Relax and be courteous
- Be prepared for a US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) official to ask searching questions and search your devices. They will be looking for signs of deception. Be honest
- You may be asked to hand over your devices. If so, you are obligated to offer them in a condition that will allow them to review the devices and their contents
- If any individual is specifically singled out and approached by an immigration officer (not a CBP officer) who already knows their name, they should remain calm and polite. However, remember they have the right to remain silent and request legal counsel. It's not recommended that they make official statements or sign anything without legal counsel present

Pregnant travellers to United States

There is currently a highly sensitive and precarious situation regarding reproductive rights in several southern and eastern states. While the termination of pregnancy is prohibited in these jurisdictions, local medical professionals are often reluctant to provide guidance, recommendations, or treatment due to concerns over potential legal repercussions.

This environment may create considerable uncertainty and distress for travellers, who may feel they are not receiving comprehensive information or care – particularly if pregnancy termination is not even presented as a potential option.

Given this context, the health and welfare of the traveller remains the foremost priority. Medical assistance providers will take all necessary steps to ensure appropriate care, including arranging transfer to another state for further evaluation and treatment or, consider full repatriation to the traveller's home country, subject to clinical suitability and the traveller's condition.

Accordingly, it's strongly recommended that institutions give careful consideration to the specific needs of pregnant individuals who may be planning to travel to affected states. Where possible, alternative travel arrangements should be explored in order to mitigate potential health risks and ensure access to comprehensive medical care.