

IPO Updates on Omicron Variant & COVID Booster Shot

December 1, 2021

With the end of the Fall semester rapidly approaching, we hope that the stress of exams and final papers is tempered by the growing excitement for your upcoming education abroad program. Please review the information below and make sure to share it with your parents, family, and/or support network to keep them updated.

The International Programs Office continues to monitor new information on the Omicron variant as it becomes available. [Here is the WHO brief about the Omicron Variant](#). We went through this scenario when the Delta variant first emerged last summer. We know that the Omicron variant is being studied and analyzed, and more will be known about how this variant differs from Delta, and other variants, in the coming weeks.

At this time we have no plans to suspend Wintersession or Spring 2022 programs. We have carefully screened and vetted the programs and, as has been discussed during pre-departure orientation, IPO remains confident in the ability of our partners and host universities to successfully operate safely.

The possibility of your program or host university deciding to modify, delay, suspend, or cancel your program remains. This decision may be based on factors like local case rates, travel restrictions, quarantine requirements, or even border closures. It is our hope that as more concrete information on the new variant becomes available, the potential for such an outcome becomes far less likely.

Should your program be canceled before UMass add/drop ends on Monday, January 31, we will work with you to get back on track for a Spring semester here in Amherst. In the event that your program is canceled, any refunds will be determined by your program, not by UMass. Please refer to the [COVID-19 Acknowledgement Form](#) you signed for more on the academic and financial impact due to a cancellation. We strongly encourage you to share this link with your parents, family, and/or support network.

In the meantime, here are some actions you can take as you prepare for your upcoming education abroad program:

1. **Get a COVID-19 booster.** Eligibility for booster/additional dose shots has been extended to all adults. Booster shots are now readily available, and you can explore options using [vaxfinder.mass.gov](#). The UMass vaccine clinic may have some availability on a walk-in basis as they receive cancellations. Shots are more readily available at local pharmacies and vaccine clinics throughout the valley.
 - **All students on UMass IPO education abroad programs must be in compliance with UMass COVID-19 policies.** In accordance with the [recent update to UMass COVID-19 policies](#), **all students will be required to receive a COVID-19 vaccine booster shot.** Refer to the [UMass COVID-19 Information page](#) for more information.

2. **Confirm the important dates and deadlines for your program.** In particular, check on your program's payment deadlines and refund schedule. Additionally, pay close attention to messages from your program about their response to the new variant and any updates they may have about your program.
3. **If you have not yet committed to your program,** please do so right away. If you have concerns about taking this important step, please contact your Education Abroad Advisor.

Remember that IPO is here to support you. You can contact us by emailing abroad@umass.edu or by contacting your Education Abroad Advisor directly. For questions about health, safety, the impact of COVID on study abroad, or other topics, [Zoom with Mark Eckman](#), Director of Education Abroad, Thursdays, 8:30-9:30PM. For questions about health, safety, or security, insurance, mental health resources, COVID, or other topics, [Zoom with Andrea Drake](#), Director of International Health, Safety, and Security, every Tuesday, 11AM-12PM. Parents and family members of participants are encouraged to drop in with any questions or concerns they may have.

We wish you all safe travels!

Mark Eckman
Director of Education Abroad

Andrea Drake
Director of International Health, Safety, and Security