

M1s: How to travel safely in your last free summer

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The summer following your first year of medical school is one of the final months-long periods that is unstructured during your professional life. In normal times, it's an opportunity to see sights and hit the beaches.

With light at the end of the tunnel for the COVID-19 pandemic in the U.S., what does the current travel landscape look like? How can it be done safely?

“One’s view of safety is always a personal thing, in terms of how much risk you are willing to take,” said Mike Hull, vice president of sales for AHI, a preferred travel provider of the AMA. “Vaccinations are going well. COVID cases are falling. All the things we want to see are happening. Just as important, the airlines, hotels have all put in steps to further reduce the risk even more, to make some forms of travel a safe and healthy thing.”

Hull offered some insight on travel options and restrictions for the coming summer season. The overarching piece of advice for any sort of traveler, however, is that your safest option is to get fully vaccinated before your trip.

The AMA has developed frequently-asked-questions documents on COVID-19 vaccination covering safety, allocation and distribution, administration and more. There are two FAQs, one designed to answer patients’ questions, and another to address physicians’ COVID-19 vaccine questions.

Domestic travel

Your medical school may have travel restrictions or mandated quarantine periods after traveling, so it's best to check with your institution to learn about their specific policies.

As far as going from one state to another, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is

recommending anyone traveling wait until they are fully vaccinated to do so. Airlines, for their part, are requiring masks and recent CDC guidance pertaining to loosening or lifting mask wearing in certain public domains doesn't apply to transportation.

Meanwhile, many hotels have changed cleaning protocols over the past year and a half. Some hotels have even begun putting a seal on guestroom doors to indicate they haven't been entered since their most recent cleaning.

"Airlines require masks for flight—they are taking the appropriate steps," Hull said. "The hotels are really emphasizing the cleaning regimens and social distancing. Those things are put in place to keep people safe and build the confidence of travelers."

Learn the six things doctors wish patients knew about flying during the pandemic.

International travel

The CDC is also recommending that Americans not travel internationally unless fully vaccinated. The agency also has a list of high-risk countries for travelers that puts the majority of the world in the riskiest category.

On the other side of the coin, many destinations, such as nations within the European Union, are likely to be open to fully vaccinated travelers.

"The U.S. for several months now has said that if you travel overseas you need to present a valid PCR test that is within 72 hours of your arrival back in the country," Hull said. "So travelers need to make sure they have an arrangement to get tested and be able to present that result when they reenter the country."

To even begin considering international travel, being fully immunized is a necessity.

"For international travel, we are strongly recommending that you get vaccinated," Hull said. "Vaccinated travelers have far fewer restrictions than those that are unvaccinated."

AHI is an international company providing personalized group travel. As things open back up, the company will pursue its goal of connect travelers with different people, places and cultures.