## **Travel Advisory Update – December 15, 2021**

With the emergence of the highly transmissible Omicron variants and a series of abruptly implemented travel restrictions and flight cancellations, UNC Chapel Hill paused reviewing new requests for exceptions to the System Office prohibition on international travel. As we now have more information available to assess risk and determine whether an exception to the ban on international travel should be granted, **UNC Chapel Hill will resume reviewing requests for international travel that commences on January 1, 2022 or after.**

Because both the high number of cases (mostly Delta so far) in Europe and elsewhere and the emergence of Omicron increase the risk of international travel, UNC Chapel Hill will return to the **highly restrictive travel policy** that was in place for the bulk of calendar year 2021. In addition, travelers will be required to sign a revised release of liability document that includes the following language: “I acknowledge and understand that the University reserves the right to rescind any travel exception approval, or cancel or postpone travel in whole or in part . . ., which may adversely impact my ability to recover expenses associated with the travel.”

The resumed case-by-case review of international travel that begins January 1, 2022, or after will be based on the highly restrictive travel policy in place because of the elevated risks described below.

**Elevated risk of international travel**

The main driver of this elevated risk assessment is the emergence in November of a new highly transmissible COVID variant, labelled a “variant of concern” by the WHO and named Omicron. In addition, the situation in much of Europe (and some other countries) is also troubling, with cases rising, new lockdowns being imposed, and health care systems coming under renewed strain. When news of the Omicron variant broke, numerous countries, including the US, abruptly imposed entry bans on travelers who have been in southern Africa (and, in some cases, on all foreigners). These travel restrictions generally remain in place, and new travel restrictions continue to be announced as Omicron spreads, complicating the challenges of planning travel (and elevating the risk being stranded or caught behind a closed border or other new travel restriction.)

In the meantime, whether you are traveling or not, UNC’s infectious disease experts offer the following reminder:

**“The best way to protect yourself against COVID-19 including the Omicron variant is to be fully vaccinated (i.e., 2 doses of an mRNA vaccine (Pfizer or Moderna) or 1 dose of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine) PLUS a booster at least 2 weeks prior to international travel.” David Weber, MD**

*This policy will be evaluated by early January as the situation evolves and more information about the threat posed by Omicron becomes available.*