

March 19, 2020

U.S. State Department Issues Unprecedented Global Travel Advisory

The U.S. State Department has issued a Level 4 travel advisory for all travel outside the United States (available [here](#)). Level 4 (Do Not Travel) is the highest category of travel advisory, and to date¹ has been directed at travel to specific countries. On March 15, the State Department had issued a global Level 3 (Reconsider Travel) advisory due to the spread of the coronavirus.

The advisory announced today advises U.S. citizens not to travel abroad and advises U.S. citizens abroad who reside in the United States to return to the United States, if they can. In particular, the advisory states:

The Department of State advises U.S. citizens to avoid all international travel due to the global impact of COVID-19. In countries where commercial departure options remain available, U.S. citizens who live in the United States should arrange for immediate return to the United States, unless they are prepared to remain abroad for an indefinite period. U.S. citizens who live abroad should avoid all international travel. Many countries are experiencing COVID-19 outbreaks and implementing travel restrictions and mandatory quarantines, closing borders, and prohibiting non-citizens from entry with little advance notice. Airlines have cancelled many international flights and several cruise operators have suspended operations or cancelled trips. If you choose to travel internationally, your travel plans may be severely disrupted, and you may be forced to remain outside of the United States for an indefinite timeframe.

The State Department has authorized the departure of U.S. personnel from diplomatic and consular posts for reasons related to the coronavirus. As a result, the ability of U.S. embassies and consulates to provide services to U.S. citizens may be limited. Moreover, U.S. embassies and consulates have suspended routine consular services, although U.S. citizen services remain available to the extent resources permit. U.S. citizens abroad should check the websites of the U.S. embassy in their current location for further information on the services available (see State Department country-specific information (including websites for its embassies), available [here](#)). Additional information from the State Department is available [here](#).

¹ There are 16 countries previously covered by Level 4 advisories, including Iran, Libya, North Korea, Syria and Yemen and, more recently, China.

The State Department also announced that it will only accept applications for U.S. passports from those with life-or-death emergencies who will travel within 72 hours (see State Department update on its operations, available [here](#)).

Today's State Department announcement is the latest in a series of steps taken by the U.S. government in response to the coronavirus. Level 4 advisories were issued in respect of travel to various countries due to the coronavirus, beginning February 2. A ban on travel by foreign nationals from China was announced on January 31. The travel ban was extended to foreign nationals travelling from Iran on February 29, and was further extended to cover travel from Schengen area countries on March 11. Ireland and the United Kingdom were added to the list on March 14. While U.S. citizens and a limited number of categories of other travelers who have been in affected area are exempt from these travel bans, those who are able to travel/return to the United States are subject to screening procedures at 13 airports and self-quarantine (see our prior alerts, available [here](#) and [here](#)).

An increasing number of countries around the world are closing their borders (affecting entry by road, rail, air and sea) to non-citizens, restricting air travel to and from certain destinations or closing airports. In the Schengen area, an increasing number of countries (each of which is legally entitled to act on its own, in this respect) are reintroducing temporary border controls for travelers from other countries in the Schengen area (see European Commission list, available [here](#)). Today's State Department announcement will likely add to the confusion regarding international travel, particularly for citizens of all nationalities who are stranded abroad (whether because they were visiting, or residing, in another country). It is critically important to keep in mind that while advisories are just that, countries can restrict (and, in fact, are restricting) entry of non-citizens, and even if the borders are open, the means of transit may not be.

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This memorandum is not intended to provide legal advice, and no legal or business decision should be based on its content. Questions concerning issues addressed in this memorandum should be directed to:

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