

# TRAVELING WITH ALLERGIES/INTOLERANCES

## GENERAL INFORMATION

The Experiment understands that travel is inherently challenging for individuals managing allergies and intolerances, especially when trying to advocate for their needs in a foreign language. Many past Experimenters have successfully managed their food and environmental allergies and intolerances on program, and The Experiment is committed to partnering with Experimenters and families to support safe and healthy travel as far as is possible within the dynamics of international settings.

This guide provides context and framework for successful management of allergies and intolerances on an Experiment program. We have found that there are three keys to this success:

1. **Proactive communication**
2. **Thorough preparation**
3. **Clear expectations**

The guide is organized around these keys with the aim of building supportive and understanding partnerships between The Experiment, Experimenters, and families.



## PROACTIVE COMMUNICATION

### FROM US TO YOU

Experimenters and families often ask our admissions and medical team staff: “Can I travel on an Experiment program with my allergy(ies)/intolerance(s)?” The answer is always: “It depends.” We are committed to helping families make informed decisions about whether and how to travel with us, and that commitment begins with the information we provide to you. Successful management of allergies or intolerances on an Experiment program hinges upon several factors including:

- **Allergy and intolerance awareness in the program country** – Certain locations have greater or lesser degrees of awareness and safeguards for allergies and intolerances, particularly food related concerns. For every Experimenter traveling with allergies or intolerances, we work closely with our partner organizations in country to make arrangements and accommodations and to select and inform homestay families. These measures are most effective in countries where allergy and intolerance awareness is high.
- **Prevalence of food allergens in program country cuisine** – Certain ingredients are so universally present in the food of a country (e.g. fish in Japanese cuisine, peanuts in Chinese and SE Asian cuisines) that avoidance poses a major challenge. In such cases, we advise that the Experimenter consider another Experiment program location where their allergen(s) is/are less prevalent.

#### The Experiment

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- **Prevalence of environmental allergens in program country or context** – Similarly, certain program settings or activities may involve greater exposure to environmental allergens such as animal dander, stinging or biting insects, pollen, or pollution. If levels of environmental exposure would pose a risk to the Experimenter, we advise that they consider another Experiment program that will not involve significant exposure.
- **Experimenter’s independence and comfort advocating for their allergy(ies)/intolerance(s)** – Experiment programs are not and cannot be completely allergen-controlled zones as certain school and camp settings can be. An Experimenter must be capable of assessing the risks of allergen exposure in diverse settings, and they must be prepared to advocate for themselves in restaurant contexts. Experiment group leaders can provide support to the Experimenter, especially with communication in the language of the program country and access to alternative food options like groceries, but leaders are not in a position to vet every food decision the Experimenter will need to make over the course of the program.
- **Variety and complexity of the Experimenter’s allergies** – Multiple allergies/intolerances and interacting allergies and intolerances increase the complexity of management while traveling, especially in restaurant contexts where cross-contamination is a concern. For Experimenters traveling with multiple allergies/intolerances, establishing what safe foods you can eat in country and how to access those options are very important initial steps to managing your allergies/intolerances.
- **Degree of allergen exposure which triggers a severe reaction** – All Experiment programs involve travel to multiple locations via multiple modes of transportation. Given the dynamic nature of such travel and environments, we cannot adequately support the safety of individuals who have anaphylactic reactions to airborne exposure to a food or environmental allergen.

## FROM YOU TO US

You have the most thorough information not just about your specific allergies/intolerances, but about what it is like for you personally to live with these allergies/intolerances on a day-to-day basis. We ask you for a great deal of information about your allergies/intolerances and your experience managing them in your daily life so that we can work with you, with our program partners in-country, and with your Experiment group leaders to prepare and enact an appropriate allergy management plan.



- **Your Experiment Application** – Information you provide in the Homestay Information section of your application is used to place you with a homestay family who will be able to accommodate and support your allergies/intolerances. We will also cross reference the application with allergy information included in your health forms to make sure we have a complete picture of your needs and concerns.
- **Health Form Part I: Personal Health History** – This form is required to confirm your offer of admission to The Experiment. Please check relevant allergies in the Diagnoses and Symptoms table on the first page of this form, and complete Section B with specific details about your allergies/intolerances on the third page of this form.
- **Health Form Part II: Health Report and Examination** – This form is for your primary care provider to complete with specific details about your physical health, including your allergies.

- **Health Form Part IIIA: Supplemental Health Form** – This form is to be completed by your medical specialist as requested by our health team. If you work with an allergist, please have that provider complete a copy of this form.

## ON THE GROUND IN-COUNTRY

Proactive communication remains important throughout your time in your program country. Your Experiment group leaders will be your primary support resource, and you will need to communicate with them regularly regarding any allergy or intolerance needs or concerns that come up for you. As an example, group leaders will be able to help you access groceries and other alternative food sources if you let them know you have concerns about the food options available to you.

Likewise, communication with your host family when you are in your homestay will also be very important. The Experiment Medical Team works with The Experiment Programs Team to ensure that Experimenters traveling with allergies/intolerances are placed in safe and supportive homestays that can accommodate the Experimenters' needs. Your host family will be informed of your allergy/intolerance and made aware any specific needs you have communicated to us before you arrive at your homestay; once there you will need to communicate with them regarding any needs or concerns that arise.

*If at any time you feel unsafe about your allergies/intolerances in your homestay, reach out to your group leaders immediately.*



## THOROUGH PREPARATION

### THINGS YOU CAN DO

**Reference** The Experiment Country Allergy Guides to get a sense of what to expect in your program country. These guides offer an overview of allergy/intolerance awareness in-country, common allergens in cuisine, labelling regulations, and availability of replacement rescue medications. Please note that these guides are not meant to be exhaustive or definitive—they are based on The Experiment's experience of supporting allergy/intolerance management in our program countries and on research into others' traveling experiences. We encourage you to use the guides as a starting point for your own research and preparation.



**Research** ingredient names and terminology. In other languages, there may not be a single word translation for your allergen, and/or there may be an idiomatic way to talk about allergies/intolerances. For example, while in English we generally use the term “nuts” as a collective noun to refer to all different kinds of nuts, in French the term “noix” is given as the direct translation of “nuts” but also refers specifically to walnuts. Thus, it’s best to refer to specific nuts in French rather than relying on the collective term. Look into both spoken and written communication about your allergy/intolerance in your program country’s language.

**Practice** your program language with peers, teachers, your family, and your community. Specifically practice the terminology and phrases to communicate about your allergies and needs.

**Practice** advocating for your allergies in public dining settings like restaurants, especially if you have routinely had parental support for this.

**Prepare** a translated chef card and other materials (safe and unsafe food lists with pictures) to support your communication in-country. Be sure to make multiple copies so that you have spares as you travel. Please send us a copy of any materials you prepare—we will provide these to our partners in-country and to your group leaders as additional back-ups.

**Pack** a supply of back-up foods you can carry in the event that you cannot find safe options in restaurants. (e.g. bars, dried fruit, jerky, etc.) Make sure all food is sealed in original packaging for ease of declaration and clearance at customs.

**Pack** a few reusable containers and cutlery to pack grocery-based lunches or to take leftovers or second orders of safe foods to go.

**Collaborate** with your allergist (if applicable) or primary care provider to determine your current sensitivity to various allergens.

**Acquire and Pack** adequate and spare rescue medication for your trip. The amount required will depend on the availability of replacement rescue medications in country. The Experiment Food Allergy/Intolerance Wellness Plan includes a section to list your allergy-associated medications, and this section will provide information about medication requirements for your program country.

## THINGS WE DO

**Communicate** with in-country partners to arrange for allergy accommodations where possible.

**Communicate** with in-country partners to arrange for host families who can support allergy needs.

**Communicate** special meal requests and allergy concerns to airlines for international group flights. (Please note that not all airlines can guarantee availability of allergen-free in-flight meals.)



**Orient** group leaders to Experimenter's Allergy/Intolerance Wellness Plan so they are prepared to support you throughout your program.

**Collaborate** with BCBS Global Solutions to ensure access to local medical facilities in-country.

**Train** group leaders on rescue medications.

## CLEAR EXPECTATIONS

### WHAT SUCCESSFUL ALLERGY/INTOLERANCE MANAGEMENT ON PROGRAM LOOKS LIKE

#### **Flexible & Open Minded**

Even with a detailed management plan in place, the dynamics of international travel will always require flexibility and the willingness to consider new options. Successful Experimenters have embraced new foods that work for their allergy(ies)/intolerance(s) in their program country, and they have been creative about managing with limited safe-food options. Throughout the program, The Experiment Medical Team will work with you, your family, your group leaders, and our partners in-country to support your access to safe food options and decisions, and your flexibility will facilitate our efforts as well as your health and well-being on program.

#### **Collaborative**

Allergy/intolerance management on-program is a collaborative effort, and your closest collaboration while traveling will be with your group leaders. Group leaders are thoroughly briefed on all allergy/intolerance concerns and wellness plans before program, and they are prepared to support your needs and concerns with positive communication from you. If you develop an allergy/intolerance wellness plan, you will review your plan with your group leaders in the first 48 hrs. of program and determine the specifics of how your leaders will support you in the implementation of the plan.

#### **Prepared for Response**

Our top priority with any allergy/intolerance management plan is prevention of exposure and medical emergencies, but the measures put in place to accomplish such prevention are no substitute for preparedness should exposure occur. All Experimenters with food and environmental allergies with a risk of anaphylaxis are required to travel with an appropriate supply of rescue medications to ensure an adequate supply in the country to which they are traveling. Rescue medication should always be packed in carry-on luggage and easily accessible in the event of an emergency. When in-country, Experimenters must carry rescue medication with them at all times. The Experimenter should always ensure that at least one other person with them knows the location of their rescue medication in their bag in the event they need assistance retrieving the medication.

## SAFE TRAVELS!

The Experiment Medical Team is available to answer your questions and address your concerns about traveling with allergies or intolerances on your Experiment program. Please reach out to us at: [medicalteam@experiment.org](mailto:medicalteam@experiment.org)