The safety and well-being of BCGS students, faculty, and staff is our top priority, so we are working with authorities on-site to take all precaution as necessary and follow all guidelines and regulations set out by Columbia University as our administrative home institution, the Freie Universität Berlin (FU) as our host institution, the State of Berlin, and the Federal Government of Germany. In order to ensure that the BCGS programs can be carried out safely and effectively for all parties involved, please find below information and links to resources about how COVID-19 might impact the upcoming study abroad experience so that you can remain informed as the situation evolves. Please note that these planning protocols as well as participation policies may be modified at any time prior to departure or while in-country.

1. Resources and Regulations

● Columbia University
  Center for Undergraduate Global Engagement (UGE)
  Spring 2022 Resources for Study Abroad, Travel Policy, and Recommendations: [https://global.undergrad.columbia.edu/article/spring-2022-resources-study-abroad](https://global.undergrad.columbia.edu/article/spring-2022-resources-study-abroad)

● Freie Universität Berlin

● State of Berlin
  Measures: [https://www.berlin.de/corona/en/measures/](https://www.berlin.de/corona/en/measures/)

● Federal Government of Germany
  Overviews: [https://www.zusammengegencorona.de/en/](https://www.zusammengegencorona.de/en/)
2. Travel, Arrival, and Orientation

- Students are responsible for purchasing their own flights. They should not purchase flights until they receive further guidance from their home school study abroad program adviser and the BCGS. All flights should involve flexible cancellation conditions, in light of international travel uncertainties associated with the pandemic. Furthermore, we recommend taking out travel cancellation insurance in view of current circumstances.

- Persons wishing to enter the Federal Republic of Germany who have at any time within the last 10 days prior to entry stayed in an area which is classified as a risk area at the time of their planned entry are required, prior to entry, to notify the competent authority via the travel portal of the following information (digital registration on entry) ordinance document:
  - Their personal information as required under section 2 no. 16 of the Protection against Infection Act
  - Their expected date of entry
  - The places where they will be staying for up to 10 days prior to and following entry
  - The means of transport used to enter the country and, where available, their seat number
  - Whether they are in possession of proof of vaccination
  - Whether they are in possession of proof of testing or proof of recovery
  - Whether they are showing typical indications of an infection with the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus

- Proof of vaccination or of recovery from Covid-19 can replace a negative test certificate and exempt you from quarantine on entry. Persons who, at any time within the last 10 days prior to entry, spent time in an area which is classified as a high-risk area or area of variants of concern at the time of their entry must, in addition, observe special obligations to register, furnish proof and self-isolate.

All travelers from high-risk areas, including the United States, except those with proof of vaccination or proof of recovery from COVID-19 in the last 6 months, must quarantine for 10 days. The quarantine can be ended with a negative test taken after 5 days. All travelers coming from a virus-variant area must quarantine for 14 days, even if they have been vaccinated. There is no possibility of ending quarantine early. https://de.usembassy.gov/covid-19-information/

- Crossing the border and entering Germany is subject to changing official regulations. Participants are responsible to be familiar with these, for example, any testing and quarantine protocols. Please check the following sites on travel regulations:
  - https://www.einreiseanmeldung.de/#/
● In case of a mandatory quarantine upon arrival or at any point during the semester, the affected participant(s) is/are expected to communicate clearly and frequently with program staff, so that effective logistical support can be rendered. Financial cost (extra rent, food, etc.) associated with any quarantine period is to be carried solely by the participant, not by the program.

● Travelers currently entering Germany from areas which are not high-incidence and not of variants of concern are exempted from testing and quarantine requirements, if recovered or fully vaccinated with a vaccine approved by the European Union and whose final required vaccination was at least 14 days prior. See also under number 4.

● If the on-site Orientation Days cannot be (fully) carried out due to quarantine complications, an online orientation will be substituted. This would also be applicable to the start of the pre-semester BCGS course “German Discourse and Culture.” See also under number 3.

3. Student Accommodation

● Students should not enter any legally binding lease contracts and should not pay any deposits before their home schools and the BCGS give final study abroad approvals!

● Due to the unpredictable nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, homestays are not options for students. They are strongly encouraged by the BCGS to apply to live in the pre-arranged apartments, noted below.

● Students residing at Neon Wood, The Student Hotel, or The Fizz will be subject to the pandemic- and hygiene-related policies and regulations in force at these locations, as communicated before and/or upon arrival. Please see the following websites:
  https://neonwood.com/community-covid-19faq/
  https://www.thestudenthotel.com/de/coronavirus/
  https://help.the-fizz.com/l/en/category/w5v60j16h7-corona-information

● BCGS students may also apply for dormitory living in single-occupancy rooms with shared bathrooms and shared kitchen facilities at dorms, please see details below. Students residing at dorms will be subject to the pandemic- and hygiene-related policies and regulations in force at these locations, as communicated before and/or upon arrival:
  o The Studentendorf Schlachtensee (Student Village, leases at least six months): Application via:
The Studierendenwerk Berlin (Dorm Halbauer Weg, leases at least six months, or Dorm Goerzallee, leases for at least 12 months)

Application via:
http://www.fubis.org/3_unterbr/wohnheim/werk/Coronaregeln-Werk.pdf

- If a participant needs to be placed in self-isolation/quarantine upon arrival or after the semester gets underway, appropriate arrangements will be made in accordance with the local health authorities (Gesundheitsämter) and the specific location where the student is living. Furthermore, the program will assist where possible. Of course, if a student were to be seriously sick, they need to be hospitalized.
  - **Academic continuity**: The program will ensure that all students in quarantine situations shall be able to continue and complete their academic work for the BCGS “German Discourse and Culture” course. As to the courses taken within the German university system, the student would have to negotiate alternative online assignments directly with each local university course instructor. The BCGS, however, would assist to follow up with university instructors as needed.
  - **Financial responsibilities**: If a participant is required to quarantine, this will normally be carried out at their chosen place of accommodation. In case that is not possible, the local health authorities will assist in setting up alternative quarantine arrangements but neither the health authorities nor the program will carry any financial responsibility. Students in quarantine are responsible for their own food expenses. BCGS will provide a list of grocery stores, restaurants, and pharmacies with delivery services. Furthermore, the program will cooperate with the Student Accommodation providers on any logistical arrangements in regard to deliveries of food and medical supplies.

4. **Daily Life in Berlin and Public Transportation**

- Pandemic-related policies and regulations in Berlin currently in effect (may) include: social distancing rules, wearing masks in public places (shops, public transportation, museums, etc.), personal hygiene directives, registration of personal data at restaurants, places of worship, etc. in order to facilitate contact-tracing, and so forth. Here are useful links for up-to-date information:
  - Official Berlin Website: https://www.berlin.de/en/
  - Measures: https://www.berlin.de/corona/en/measures/
  - Directives: https://www.berlin.de/corona/en/measures/directive/
  - Corona Testing Centers: https://www.berlin.de/corona/en/testing-facilities/
  - Vaccination: https://www.berlin.de/corona/en/vaccination/
  - Public Transportation: https://www.bvg.de/welcome
    - https://go.bvg.de/corona

- Please note that the pandemic causes restrictions with respect to events and activities involving
larger groups of people, such as sports games, concerts, club life, etc. Access to various cultural activities and events is curtailed, restricted, regulated via online tickets only, etc. The program expects all staff and participants to act responsibly and in accordance with clearly announced regulations and policies with respect to the pandemic, both on and off campus.

- **Exceptions from testing requirement and proof of a negative test for an infection with the coronavirus SARS-CoV-2**
  - **Vaccinated persons** who have been vaccinated with a vaccine approved by the European Union and whose final required vaccination was at least 14 days prior,
  - **Persons** who can show proof of a positive PCR test result for an infection with the coronavirus SARS-CoV-19 taken at least six months ago and who have received at least one vaccination against COVID-19 with a vaccine approved by the European Union, and
  - **Persons** who can show proof of a positive PCR test result for an infection with the coronavirus SARS-CoV-19 taken at least 28 days ago but no more than six months ago.

5. **Preparedness and General Rules On and Off Campus**

- **Vaccinations**: BCGS requires all students participating in the program to be fully vaccinated. This decision was made to ensure the health of students, staff and faculty on the program. Furthermore, the proof of vaccination will allow students to move around more freely. Students should consult with their home school advisers and/or the BCGS adviser for further information.

- BCGS strongly recommends to
  - **install “Corona-Warn-App”** on smart phone
    https://www.coronawarn.app/de/

- **FU requires students to**
  - **provide proof of a recent negative coronavirus test for in-person attendance**
    They should get tested at one of Berlin’s certified testing centers
    https://test-to-go.berlin
    https://www.berlin.de/corona/en/testing-facilities/#headline_1_5
    There is also a certified testing center on Freie Universität’s campus, where they can get tested
    https://www.covid-testzentrum.de/berlin-fu

  - **Exceptions:**
    Students who have had COVID-19 and recovered or who are fully vaccinated according to current legal provisions do not need to provide negative test results.

- **Students, faculty, and staff are required to**
  - **maintain a safe distance of at least 1.5 m (~5 feet)** to each other in enclosed spaces whenever possible
  - **use QR codes** to check in/out at your seats in classrooms
  - **wear a medical face mask** when around others in enclosed spaces: less than 1.5 m heavy duty surgical masks (FFP2, KN95, or N95) and more than 1.5 m regular surgical mask; faculty may be exempt from wearing a face mask during teaching, if they are able to maintain more than 1.5 m and the lowest of three Corona alert levels, i.e. Level 1, is active
  - **follow general personal hygiene** guidelines
- wash frequently hands with plenty of soap and water for at least 20 seconds
- use hand sanitizers (dispensers are accessible in all university facilities and bathrooms)
- cough and sneeze inside your elbow or handkerchief
- **air out rooms regularly** (classrooms 3 x per hour, offices 1 x per hour) to minimize airborne transmission via aerosols
- **wipe their BCGS workplaces with sanitizers** before as well as after use (sanitizers and disposable towels are available in each classroom and office)
- stay at home or leave campus immediately, if COVID-19 symptoms or exposure, e.g. raised or high temperature, persistent cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, loss of sense of taste and/or smell
- contact local practitioner or public health office by phone (Berlin Corona Hotline 030-90282828), if COVID-19 symptoms or exposure, health professionals arrange for coronavirus test, return to campus only after negative test result or implemented quarantine
- inform BCGS and FU of any confirmed or suspected COVID-19 infection to prevent further infections on campus
- students also inform Columbia Health via email at covidtesttrace@columbia.edu of any confirmed COVID-19 infection

- General cleaning is carried out by FU contracted specialized companies in full accordance with the applicable hygiene standards, bathrooms are cleaned daily. Frequently touched surfaces in BCGS classrooms, for example door knobs and tables, are cleaned and disinfected before each session by faculty and students.

- Signage, posters, and floor/ground markings in entrances, hallways, and bathrooms at the FU remind students, faculty, and staff to adhere to the Corona preparedness and response guidelines.

6. **Academic Policies**

- BCGS Academic Regulations remain in force throughout the program and semester, please see https://global.undergrad.columbia.edu/program/bcgs.

- Participants will have to bring their own laptops/PCs and arrange for internet access (available at all student accommodation mentioned under number 3) to be able to participate virtually and to continue and complete their academic work if need be. The program is under no obligation to provide either a laptop or PC or to arrange internet access.
• In case a student is not able to attend class due to COVID-19 diagnosis or exposure, BCGS faculty will be prepared to provide alternative (online) assignments as needed or to teach hybrid. This may not be the case with each local university instructor. The student would have to negotiate alternative (online) assignments directly with the respective instructor. Most FU faculty have been cooperative in the past, especially in circumstances that are out of the student’s control. BCGS would assist to follow up with university instructors as needed.

• During a general lockdown, FU and other Berlin universities will go remote and all courses will move online and use learning management platforms. However, these courses will not be as flexible as BCGS courses. BCGS cannot guarantee that the local university courses will follow a hybrid system as will the BCGS courses after a possible re-opening and shifting back to in-person teaching.

• If pandemic-related developments, such as a renewed lockdown, impact the program in its entirety, arrangements will be made for all students to complete the semester via online instruction. The program will make every effort to enable participants to remain in Berlin and complete the semester successfully on-site, most likely via online instruction. If the program goes virtual, this will not affect student visas. If the situation necessitates students’ departure from Berlin in order to return home, BCGS will render logistical and organizational assistance.

7. Field-trips in and around Berlin and Independent Travel

• **During the first six weeks of the program**, a field trip in and around Berlin is organized on a weekly basis. These trips are subject to the pandemic rules and conditions addressed under numbers 1, 4, and 5. Travel will take place by bus and/or train, subject to all pandemic-related measures that the companies running these busses or trains have put in place. The program will endeavor to carry out these excursions as planned but due to the unpredictable nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, they may be cancelled.

• **During the semester**, the program organizes a couple of cultural activities in and around Berlin instead of the regular multi-day excursion. These trips are subject to the rules and conditions addressed under numbers 1, 4, and 5. Travel will take place by bus and/or train, subject to all pandemic-related measures that the companies running these busses or trains have put in place. The program will endeavor to carry out these excursions as planned but due to the unpredictable nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, they may be cancelled.

• **Independent Travel**: Students will not be permitted to travel internationally. If travel within Germany remains permitted by local and national authorities, BCGS will not restrict students to travel nationally but will require them to follow local and national regulations. Furthermore, students must discuss their personal travel with the Resident Director (RD) with information about the trip such as itinerary and contact information prior to booking. This is necessary in case there is an emergency and the student needs to be contacted. The RD will also direct the student to ISOS and other resources to learn more about the local situation. The student would be required to update their travel in Columbia’s ISOS MyTrips at least two weeks in advance of their planned travel, including itinerary, lodging, and contact information. Independent travel should be limited to days during which there are no program activities planned. Missing class or class activities because of travel plans is not permitted.

8. Insurance and Local Healthcare System
Students are obliged to retain medical insurance coverage back home during the month of March / September and for potential travel outside of Germany during the entire time in Berlin. Beginning of April 1 / October 1, the official start of the German spring semester (Sommersemester) / fall semester (Wintersemester), each participant is enrolled in the German student health insurance (AOK) which provides comprehensive health insurance coverage, including COVID-19 treatment. For further info on AOK in German please see: https://www.aok.de/pk/nordost/inhalt/fuer-studierende-der-aok-studenten-service/. Academic year students are covered from October 2021 through July 2022 (at the latest through September 2022), fall semester students from October 2021 through February 2022 (at the latest until March 2022), and spring semester students from April through July 2022 (at the latest through September 2022). Please note that the local healthcare system is well developed and accessible to everybody who has health insurance coverage or pays directly. There are currently 45 hospitals in Berlin able to treat COVID-19 patients, https://en.berliner-krankenhausverzeichnis.de/app/search.

BCGS students normally register through Columbia's University Travel Review Committee system and are covered by Columbia’s International SOS (ISOS) as the 24/7 emergency assistance provider. Their worldwide helpdesks can assist with urgent medical issues, security and logistical questions, medical advice, or other concerns and situations that may arise. ISOS can be contacted by phone, online, or using the ISOS app (available in your mobile phone’s app store). Students should subscribe to their travel security alerts by setting up email alerts on their website: ISOS is not a health insurance, however, they also provide mental health support, up to five sessions, please see https://globaltravel.columbia.edu/content/what-international-sos-isos.

Each school may have their own emergency services coverage that covers their students. Students should check with their home school for details.

Students should check with their home school regarding health insurance coverage requirements for study abroad students.

The program enrolls all participants in a personal liability insurance policy https://www.protrip-world-liability.com/ beginning September 1, 2021 through February 28, 2022 (fall only students) or through July 31, 2022 (academic year students), and beginning March 1, 2022 through July 31, 2022 (spring only students).

9. BCGS Communications Protocol for Positive COVID-19 Cases

If a student tests positive:

- They must inform the BCGS Resident Director.
- The Resident Director informs Columbia University’s Center for Undergraduate Global Engagement (UGE).
- UGE informs student’s home school so they are aware of interruptions to the student’s participation in the program and to support student wellness during the isolation period.
- If the positive result came from a rapid antigen test, the student needs to contact a local practitioner or public health department of the district in which they live by phone (Berlin Corona Hotline 030-90282828) and request a PCR test at one of the certified testing centers to ensure that the results are accurate. If confirmed positive, the local public health authority will be informed and will take the necessary steps of contact tracing, testing, and quarantining.
In case the student was on campus for an in-person class or exam **within the last 48 hours of testing positive**, they also need to contact instructors or departments immediately. The departments will then also take steps to identify and notify the classmates and instructors who might have been exposed. The FU contact tracing takes place via the system [anwesen.de](http://anwesen.de) with check-in QR codes in classrooms. A respective contact list will be forwarded by the FU to the health authorities in Berlin-Steglitz as well as in the district of residence of the infected student.

The same procedure of identifying and notifying would take place, if the course or gathering were to take place at the BCGS center. Then, the BCGS would inform BCGS classmates about the fact there was an infected student, without mentioning the name. The local health authorities will test contact persons (classmates/roommates) via rapid antigen tests that are immediately available with an instant result.

The student is not allowed to conduct activity in person on campus and should quarantine themselves in accordance with state regulations. If students are fully vaccinated and boosted, as well as masked and socially distanced in class, they will likely not need to quarantine even if exposed but the decision is up to public health authorities. The student informs Columbia Health via email at covidtesttrace@columbia.edu of any confirmed COVID-19 infection.

The student can return to campus only after the end of quarantine and an additional 48 hours with no symptoms and negative test.