
Partners Office for International Professionals and Students

Memorandum

To: Partners Hospital Staffers

From: Claire Ayer, Director

Date: 4/6/2017

Information Security for Traveling Foreign Nationals and U.S. Citizens

Several of the U.S. government's new immigration-related enforcement priorities focus on travelers' electronic devices and the information contained therein. In response, PIPS has compiled resources to help both foreign nationals and U.S. citizens navigate this new environment to safely cross U.S. borders.

CBP May Access Your Data and Social Media

U.S. laws permit U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) to inspect, search and detain any person or item at a U.S. border crossing. That authorization even extends to your electronic devices and social media accounts. Recent reports suggest that these screenings are becoming more frequent for U.S. citizens and foreign visitors, so please keep the following details in mind when crossing into or out of the United States:

- CBP officers may inspect, search, and temporarily detain your electronic devices, including mobile telephones, tablets, and laptop computers.
- Unless there are security or criminal issues, you will be allowed to observe officers' inspection.
- You must cooperate with CBP officers. That includes logging in or providing password information upon request.
- Please communicate the presence of any privileged or sensitive material on your device. Sensitive information such as medical records will be handled in accordance with the relevant federal regulations.

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- Invoking privilege or requesting a sensitive review has practical implications. If this may become necessary, enter the U.S. during normal business hours, expect delays, and carry a copy of this [CBP Directive](#).

Tougher Screening at U.S. Consulates

Visa applicants can also expect heightened scrutiny and longer delays at U.S. consulates. In mid-March 2017, U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson instructed consular staff to [broadly increase scrutiny of visa applicants](#). The populations targeted for extra scrutiny remain unclear because that decision is left to security officers at each embassy, but all visa applicants could see slower processing times as a result. Like CBP officers, consular officers may request social media information as part of their investigation.

Partners Data

This extra scrutiny of data increases the risk of releasing our patients' and participants' most closely-guarded information. PIPS therefore highly recommends following experts' advice before traveling:

- The MGH Research Compliance Office and Information Security Office have prepared an Information Security Advisory to assist members of the Partners community who are traveling with mobile computing devices. [Please click here to view the Information Security Advisory.](#)
- The U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), noting that "the willingness of U.S. scientists and scholars to engage in academic exchange make U.S. travelers particularly vulnerable [to monitoring]," has released information advice that is largely applicable to foreign nationals as well. [Please click here for additional security advice from the FBI.](#)

Limited Access to Your Own Devices

On March 21, 2017, the U.S. Transportation Security Administration (TSA) notified airlines that all travelers flying through or from [ten airports](#) in the Middle East and North Africa Region must place electronic devices larger than a cell phone in their checked bags.

- All passengers flying [through and from these locations](#) will have to place electronic devices that are larger than a cell phone/smart phone in their checked bags regardless of the passenger's citizenship.

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- TSA recommends passengers transferring at one of the 10 designated airports place any large personal electronic devices in their checked bags upon check-in at their originating airport.
 - Passengers may need more time transiting through the affected airports due to the additional security searches and procedures.

For more information on these security enhancements, please contact your air carrier or visit the [DHS website](#).

Other Travel Advice:

- Enroll in [Partners TravelSafe](#)
- Review PIPS' earlier [Travel Tips](#) and [FAQs](#)
- Carry up-to-date visa documents
- Carry last couple of pay statements to show continuous employment
- Answer questions honestly
- Do not argue with Inspectors
- Check DHS website for travelers
- Expect longer visa processing time at U.S. consulates