

February 2017

## **Student Risk Assessment Inventory List: GHANA**

Safety Is Everyone's Responsibility – Know Before You Go

### **INTRODUCTION**

You and your family have a role to play in minimizing potential dangers and UCEAP expects you to participate actively in minimizing your risks while abroad. *Please share this list with your family and design a personal safety plan for your time abroad.* This review of risks is limited in scope and reflects UCEAP's current information. Circumstances may change over time.

- UCEAP cannot guarantee the safety of participants or ensure that risk will not, at times, be significantly greater than on a UC campus.
- UCEAP cannot monitor the daily personal decisions, choices, and activities of individual participants any more than is the case on the home campus.
- Students are responsible for gathering information about possible risks, and to make final decisions about participation on UCEAP.

There are many different ways by which individuals judge the safety of places and/or activities. This is a partial list that identifies some of the common hazards associated with particular activities or the environment while studying and living in Ghana (e.g., extreme heat or cold, endemic disease, transportation, crime, violence, political instability, lack of electricity, lack of water, etc.). Consider these hazards and take preventive measures.

Voluntary risks are those associated with activities that students may decide to undertake (e.g., driving a car, swimming, riding a motorcycle, smoking, taking public transportation, abusing drugs/alcohol, etc.).

Involuntary risks are those associated with activities that happen to students that are out of their control (e.g., acts of nature such as fires, floods, tornados, etc., and exposure to contaminants, etc.)

*The following resources were used for this report:* RAINN, United States Department of State, World Health Organization (WHO), University of Ghana, U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), U.K. Foreign and Commonwealth Office, UCEAP Annual Reports, iJET International Intelligent Risk Systems, Inc., Interpol, Shoreline Travax, World Bank, and other university reports and websites.

### Vaccine-Preventable Diseases

CDC vaccine recommendations are based on the best available risk information. **The level of risk for vaccine-preventable diseases can change at any time. Make an appointment with a Travel Health Specialist.**

## [US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Health Information for Travelers to Ghana](#)

**NOTE:** All UCEAP students are required to complete the online UCEAP Online Travel Course and strongly encouraged to follow through about vaccine recommendations with a travel health professional. **The UCEAP travel insurance does not cover the cost of recommended vaccinations.**

### Meningitis

Meningococcal disease is an acute bacterial infection characterized by sudden onset with fever, intense headache, nausea, vomiting, stiff neck, and, frequently, a rash with pink spots. Sporadic cases and outbreaks of meningococcal disease occur throughout the world. In the sub-Saharan African “meningitis belt,” which extends from Mali to Ethiopia, peaks of meningococcal disease occur regularly during the dry season (December through June).

### Risk Assessment

- Ghana is a country in the meningitis belt.
- You may be at risk for meningococcal disease, especially during the dry season and if they will have prolonged contact with local populations.
- You could get sick, temporarily or permanently.
- Meningococcal disease is potentially fatal and should always be viewed as a medical emergency.
- The following increase the risk of meningitis: Poor overall health, having a birth defect of the skull, a head injury, or brain surgery, having other infections such as upper respiratory infections, Lyme disease, etc., having cochlear implant; having had meningitis in the past; having impaired immune system.

### Risk Mitigation

- All UCEAP students are required to complete the online UCEAP Travel Health Course and strongly encouraged to follow through about vaccine recommendations with a travel health professional.
- A dose of meningitis vaccine is recommended for people traveling to countries in the “meningitis belt” during the dry season (December through June).
- Even if you have received this vaccine in the past, you may need a booster dose, usually every 5 years.
- Avoid close human contact in crowded areas, or with individuals who may be ill.
- Reduce exposure to germs with frequent hand washing with soap and water.
- If you suspect you have been exposed to meningococcal disease while in Ghana, communicate this to a doctor or nurse especially if you feel seriously ill or have a fever.

### Malaria

Prevention requires **A, B, C** and **D**: **A**wareness of risk. **B**ite avoidance. **C**hemoprophylaxis (anti-malarial medication). **D**agnosis made promptly with early treatment of an infected case.

### Risk Assessment

- Malaria is prevalent in Ghana.
- You could get critically sick, temporarily or permanently.

- Medical complications are a possibility.
- The trip could be cut short because of the possibility of a medical evacuation.
- There is potentially high risk if prophylaxis is not adhered to and personal protective measures are not observed.
- Some students stop malaria prophylaxis because they are afraid of long-term adverse effects, conflicting advice, side effects, etc.
- Drugs purchased overseas may not be manufactured according to United States standards and may not be effective. They also may be dangerous, contain counterfeit medications or contaminants, or be combinations of drugs that are not safe to use.
- UCEAP students have become seriously ill with malaria due to ineffective adherence to anti-malarial medication and lack of follow up with effective personal protective measures.
- No vaccine is currently available.
- No method can protect completely against the risk for contracting malaria.

### **Risk Mitigation**

- **Anti-malarial medications** and **bug bite avoidance** are central components in preventing malaria.
- Prevention of malaria is a complex issue and requires expert advice from travel medicine specialists. Recommendations for prevention of malaria must be individualized. *The UCEAP travel insurance covers anti-malarials if filled and purchased within 14 days from the official start of the program as published by UCEAP.*
- Visit a doctor (ideally 6-8 weeks) before your trip to get medicines you may need.
- Attend pre-departure Travel Health Clinics on your campus Student Health Center to understand about the health risks of this disease, get necessary medication, and learn how diseases are transmitted.
- Spray insecticide on walls to kill adult mosquitoes that come inside.
- If you are not staying in well-screened or air-conditioned rooms, use a pyrethroid-containing flying-insect spray in living and sleeping areas during evening and nighttime hours.
- Understand behaviors to minimize exposure to mosquitoes (e.g. stay indoors during active biting times, always stay in screened accommodations), barrier clothing (cover as much skin as possible: wear long sleeves, long trousers, socks, shoes/boots and hat. Avoid sandals, and tuck shirts into pants and pant legs into socks.), insecticide-impregnated bed nets, spraying of residence with insecticide, and application of effective insect DEET-containing repellent.
- Take an appropriate antimalarial drug regimen exactly as prescribed and carefully following anti-mosquito measures.
- You sign a mandatory Malaria Prophylaxis Agreement form as required by the University of Ghana agreeing to treat yourself with anti-malarial medication to participate in the program.
- For the best protection against malaria, it is important to continue taking the medication as recommended after leaving the malaria-risk area as indicated by your prescribing doctor. Otherwise, malaria can develop.

### **Parasitic Infection**

#### **Risk Assessment**

- All freshwater in southern and sub-Saharan Africa—including the great lakes and rivers as well as smaller bodies of water—is considered to be at risk for schistosomiasis (SHIS-toe-SO-my-uh-sis); a disease caused by parasitic worms.
- In terms of impact this disease is second only to malaria as the most devastating parasitic disease.

- The parasites that cause schistosomiasis live in certain types of freshwater snails. The infectious form of the parasite emerges from the snail, contaminating the water. You can become infected when your skin comes in contact with contaminated freshwater.
- Schistosoma parasites can penetrate the skin of persons who are wading, swimming, bathing, or washing in contaminated water. Within several weeks, worms grow inside the blood vessels of the body and produce eggs. Some of these eggs travel to the bladder or intestines and are passed into the urine or stool.
- Occasionally, eggs may be deposited in the brain or spinal cord, leading to seizures or paralysis.
- Although schistosomiasis is not found in the United States, more than 200 million people are infected worldwide.
- If you live in or travel to areas where schistosomiasis occurs and your skin comes in contact with freshwater from canals, rivers, streams, ponds, or lakes, you are at risk of getting schistosomiasis. No vaccine is available.
- No drugs for preventing infection are available. Safe and effective medication is available for treatment of both urinary and intestinal schistosomiasis.
- Untreated piped water coming directly from freshwater sources may contain cercariae larvae.

### **Risk Mitigation**

- Avoid swimming or wading in freshwater when you are in Ghana and other countries in which schistosomiasis occurs.
- Drink safe water. Because there is no way to make sure that water coming directly from canals, lakes, rivers, streams or springs is safe, you should either boil water for 1 minute or filter water before drinking it. Boiling water for at least 1 minute will kill any harmful parasites, bacteria, or viruses present. Iodine treatment alone WILL NOT GUARANTEE that water is safe and free of all parasites.
- Do not bathe in water unless it has been treated with chlorine or filtered with fine-mesh filters. Bath water should be heated for 5 minutes at 150°F. Water held in a storage tank for at least 48 hours should be safe for showering.
- If you accidentally come into contact with fresh water, vigorous towel drying after a very brief water exposure may help to prevent the Schistosoma parasite from penetrating the skin. DO NOT rely on vigorous towel drying to prevent schistosomiasis.

### **Rabies**

Rabies is found on all continents except Antarctica and is endemic in most African countries. Rabies is a preventable and acute viral disease of the central nervous system, most often transmitted through the bite of a rabid animal.

### **Risk Assessment**

- People usually get rabies from the bite of a rabid animal. It is also possible, but quite rare, that people may get rabies if infectious material from a rabid animal, such as saliva, gets directly into their eyes, nose, mouth, or a wound.
- The risk of rabies in an encounter with an animal and the precautions necessary to prevent rabies are the same as they are in the United States.
- Transmission is through the bite and virus-containing saliva of an infected host.
- Rabies occurs in more than 150 countries.
- Dogs are the source of the majority of human rabies deaths.
- Infection causes thousands of deaths every year, mostly in Asia and Africa.
- No tests are available to diagnose rabies infection in humans before the onset of clinical disease.

### **Risk Mitigation**

- Consult with a health care professional during your pre-departure travel consultation.

- Consider getting a rabies vaccine particularly if your activities will put you in contact with animals. Budget for out-of-pocket costs for vaccines. If you have campus health insurance coverage, the vaccine may be covered while you are eligible. Consult with your campus insurance office immediately if you have campus insurance and are within eligibility. UCEAP travel insurance does not cover vaccines.
- It is always prudent to avoid approaching any wild or domestic animals.
- Avoid all contact with animals, especially stray dogs and cats.
- Immediate wound cleansing with soap and water after contact with a suspect rabid animal can be life-saving. Flush and wash the wound for a minimum of 15 minutes. Povidone iodine or other substances that kill the rabies virus may also be used at the doctor's office. Seek medical attention immediately to determine if medication or anti-rabies vaccine is needed. Immediate local treatment will substantially reduce the risk of rabies.
- Treat any bite from a potentially rabid animal as a medical emergency.

## INSECT PRECAUTIONS

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Immunizations and medications may afford protection against some travel-related diseases transmitted by insects such as yellow fever and malaria, but there are many other serious diseases transmitted by insects that require careful avoidance and use of protective measures. If you will be visiting rural areas or engaging in camping, hiking or adventure travel, you are at higher risk of exposure to mosquitoes, ticks, mites, fleas and other disease-carrying insects, but even urban visitors need to take precautions to avoid insect exposure in some areas.

### Risk Mitigation

Know the disease risks in the area of travel, the insect that transmits the disease and times of highest activity. Examples:

- Dengue fever is transmitted by mosquitoes active during the day and usually present in urban areas.
- Sand flies transmit leishmaniasis and are commonly active in forested areas from dusk to dawn.
- Mosquitoes that transmit malaria are active from dusk to dawn.
- Cover as much skin as possible: wear long sleeves, long trousers, socks, shoes/boots and avoid sandals, and tuck shirts into pants and pant legs into socks.
- Perform body tick checks at the end of the day when traveling in areas with tick-borne diseases.
- Sleep in protected areas with screens or air conditioning or use a permethrin-impregnated sleeping bed net. Ensure there are no tears in the netting and that it is tucked in securely around the bed area. Check and eliminate any mosquitoes from inside rooms and sleeping areas prior to retiring. This is especially important in areas with malaria.
- Insecticide sprays may be used to clear rooms of mosquitoes. Coils should be only used outdoors; avoid using coils that contain DDT. Be aware that many foreign-produced repellents and insecticides are extremely toxic.
- Use an insect repellent that contains DEET (around 35%) on exposed areas of skin and on clothing. Avoid eyes and inhalation of the spray. DEET formulations as high as 50 percent are recommended for both adults and children older than 2 months of age. Repellent products that do not contain DEET are not likely to offer the same degree of protection from mosquito bites as products containing DEET. Other types of repellents have not necessarily been as thoroughly studied as DEET and may not be safer for use on children. The recommendations for DEET use in pregnant women do not differ from those for non-pregnant adults.
- Repellents containing permethrin can be sprayed on clothing, bed nets and camping gear. This is an effective repellent for mosquitoes, ticks and other insects. Permethrin remains effective even with repeated washings.
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### Risk Assessment

- A high risk of traveler's diarrhea exists throughout the country, including in deluxe accommodations in major cities. Food and beverage precautions are essential to reduce the likelihood of illness. Diarrhea may be accompanied by nausea, vomiting, and/or fever. Immunocompromised individuals, including those with HIV/AIDS are particularly susceptible to foodborne diseases.
- Tap water and ice in Ghana may be contaminated.
- Cholera and other potentially life-threatening food and water borne illnesses are present. Seek medical advice if you run high fever, have blood or mucus in your stool, or experience any of the cholera related symptoms.

### Risk Mitigation

- Avoid becoming dehydrated. Drink only boiled, treated or bottled water, weak tea, soups or other safe fluids. Avoid any drinks that tend to remove more water from the body, including coffee, overly sweetened drinks, some medicinal teas and alcohol.
- Consult with your doctor or travel clinic specialist pre-departure about medications you can take for self-treatment.
- Pharmacies stock oral rehydration packets at a reasonable price.
- Wash your hands often and always before handling and consuming foods. Use alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available. It's a good idea to always keep some with you when you travel.
- Make sure your food has been thoroughly cooked and remains steaming hot. Avoid cooked foods that are no longer piping hot.
- Eat in well-established, clean restaurants and eat only well-cooked food that is served hot.
- Avoid raw vegetables and salads as they may be contaminated.
- Avoid buffets. Cooked foods that have been left at room temperature are a major risk for foodborne illness.
- Avoid uncooked food, apart from fruits and vegetables that can be peeled or shelled. Do not eat raw or undercooked meat or fish. Some types of fish may contain poisonous biotoxins even when cooked. Barracuda in particular should never be eaten. Other fish that may contain toxins include red snapper, grouper, amberjack, and sea bass.
- Avoid buying food from street vendors. According to the World Health Organization, the hygienic aspects of food vending are a major concern for local food control officers in Accra.
- Do not drink tap water unless it has been boiled, filtered, or chemically disinfected.
- Do not drink unbottled beverages or drinks with ice. Bottled water is the safer choice for drinking water but always check the seal to ensure it has not been tampered with local water supplies are limited and contaminated with raw sewage, pesticides, and industrial waste.
- Avoid unpasteurized milk and any products that might have been made from unpasteurized milk, such as ice cream.
- Brush your teeth with purified or bottled water.

## HEAT AND SUN-RELATED ILLNESSES

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### Risk Assessment

Dehydration and heat stroke are two very common heat-related diseases that can be life-threatening if left untreated. When a person becomes so sick with fever, diarrhea, or vomiting, or if an individual is overexposed to the sun and not drinking enough water, dehydration occurs. This is caused when the body loses water content and essential body salts, such as sodium, potassium, calcium bicarbonate, and phosphate.

Expect excessive sweating in Ghana. This increases susceptibility to dehydration, especially the chronic type. Chronic dehydration makes you feel weak, tired, and lightheaded and increases your risk of developing kidney stones.

### Risk Mitigation

- Increase your daily fluid intake to compensate. At least 2 liters of fluids each day are essential.
- Recognize the symptoms of heat exhaustion: nausea, abdominal pain, dizziness, headache, confusion, poor coordination, and thirst. Stop activity, move into a cool room, elevate feet and legs, and sip fluids, to gradually return the body to a normal temperature.
- Contact the Study Center Director and/or staff and seek medical attention for any of these marked symptoms, or those persisting beyond a few minutes.
- Eat and drink regularly, wear loose and lightweight clothing, and limit physical activity during high temperatures.
- If you are outside for many hours in heat, eat salty snacks and drink water to stay hydrated and replace salt lost through sweating.

## HIV/AIDS

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### Risk Assessment

- HIV/AIDS is a problem in Ghana and in all of West Africa. Ghanaian authorities have been working hard to stabilize the prevalence of HIV. Transmission is the same as anywhere else: sexual contact or shared blood or contaminated medical equipment.
- The HIV rate in Ghana is 1.6%. According to the HIV Sentinel Survey-Ghana Aids Commission, 2014. Estimates are at 50% for commercial sex workers.
- There is no vaccine to prevent HIV infection.
- There is no cure for AIDS.

### Risk Mitigation

- Do not risk exposure through new sexual contacts. If you cannot abstain, condoms can provide some protection. Condoms are available at many local pharmacies. Women can use a female condom.
- Avoid any behavior that allows HIV-infected fluids – blood, semen, vaginal secretions – into your body.
- Don't impair your judgment with drugs or alcohol.
- Tell your sexual partner if you have HIV.
- If you have unprotected sex, consult the Study Center for post exposure treatment options.

## MEDICAL FACILITIES

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Medical services in Ghana are provided by the central government, local institutions, missionary institutions (private-non-profit agencies), and a relatively small number of private-for-profit practitioners.

### Risk Assessment

- Medical facilities are plentiful in Accra and Kumasi and limited elsewhere in the country.
- Most doctors and hospitals will expect payment in cash. Local hospitals/doctors do not bill US insurance companies. Medical facilities may be below international standards, outside of Accra.

- Emergency facilities are extremely limited. In the event of a serious illness or accident, medical evacuation to a destination with suitable facilities would be necessary.
- Ambulance service is basic or unavailable in Ghana. Several hospitals in Accra operate ambulance services, but the service can provide transportation and only the most basic of medical care.
- You can get seriously sick and require hospitalization.
- Medical supplies (including staff) may be short.
- As water and electricity supply in Accra are erratic, the hospital may be affected by water and electricity shortages.
- Health facilities are directly affected by shortages of electricity which render equipment nonfunctional and make it difficult to keep vaccines, samples, and medications at the appropriate temperature.
- Congested roads and limited fleets affect the status of ambulance services.
- There are differing cultural expectations in Ghana. The role of family and friends is stronger and depended upon in the hospital system. For example, bringing meals and comfort items such as fresh water and clean clothes is considered the role of the family and friends.

### Risk Mitigation

- The UCEAP travel insurance adequately covers emergency medical evacuation, as authorized by a doctor, from Ghana to the U.S. or to a country with suitable facilities.
- The UCEAP Study Center Resident Director and staff in Ghana are your main point contacts and are well informed on all medical services available. They will support and guide you to seek care.
- The U.S. Embassy has a list of medical services providers available on their website. [http://photos.state.gov/libraries/ghana/231771/PDFs/list\\_of\\_medical\\_providers\\_jul06\\_2012.pdf](http://photos.state.gov/libraries/ghana/231771/PDFs/list_of_medical_providers_jul06_2012.pdf). The Study Center also has a list of medical providers they will provide you.
- Be prepared for the inevitable cultural differences in medical services.
- If you will need a particular type of medical care, find out in advance whether such care is available, and budget accordingly, as **payment will be required upfront**. You can submit claims for consideration through the UCEAP travel insurance plan following treatment.
- Laws governing availability of medications vary widely. Prescription medications are often not available in the needed formulations or strengths. If you take prescription medication, bring an adequate supply through the end of your stay, provided the medication is legal in Ghana.
- The Korle Bu Teaching Hospital is located just west of Accra's Ring Road and is the best-known hospital in Ghana. With the university at Kumasi, it serves to educate Ghanaian doctors.
- If you have diabetes, or other chronic conditions, consult carefully with a physician in the U.S. before departure. For example, some medical devices, such as insulin pumps, may not be available. If you require these devices, take extras. In addition, certain formulations of drugs, such as insulin, may not be available. Be aware of alternative substitute formulations. There are instances where "type A" of insulin is available locally, but, not "type B" or "type C".
- If you need to keep medicine/medical equipment refrigerated, access to a freezer/refrigerator for some medical equipment/medication may be difficult as electricity is sporadic throughout Ghana. Summer months are quite warm and humid in Accra and there is no air conditioning in the classrooms or dormitories, however, the International Student Hostel is equipped with shared refrigerators in the kitchens on each floor. Students may now rent a refrigerator for their dorm rooms.
- Complete all routine and required medical exams before coming to Accra and obtain all required and recommended immunization. Yellow fever vaccine is required to enter Ghana.

- Refer to the document issued by the U.S. Department of State, which details general health information: <http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/en/go/health.html>
- Follow advice acquired during the Online UCEAP Travel Health course.
- Follow through about vaccine recommendations with a travel health professional before departure.

The U.S. Department of State includes the following information in the Ghana Country Specific Information page:

*Medical facilities are limited, particularly outside Accra, the capital. Travelers should carry a supply of any needed prescription medicines, along with copies of the prescriptions, including the generic name for the drugs, and a supply of preferred over-the-counter medications.*

## **MENTAL HEALTH**

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Mental health is part of the primary health care system. Informal community care for Ghanaians plays an important role in psychiatric management. While efforts to improve mental health services are ongoing, be prepared for differences in the standard of care you may have become accustomed to in the U.S. Mental health facilities are virtually nonexistent or quite limited throughout Africa, and Ghana is no exception. Patients are treated in medical wards or one of the three public psychiatric hospitals. There is a small network of private care facilities in Accra. UC students have access to the private hospitals and mental health practitioners.

Mental health care in Ghana is based in the south of the country. Some medication is only first generation psychotropic drugs through the Ghanaian Health System. Better, more effective, modern drugs are available on the open market but these are very expensive. Prescription medication is covered by the UCEAP travel insurance.

### **Risk Mitigation**

- If you have recent or ongoing mental health concerns, you are responsible for documenting, in advance, what your detailed plan is (e.g. identified therapist in Accra; emergency contact person for communication in case of continued problem, etc.) for continuing care while away.
- Take advantage of the Wellness Program and meetings ("*Palaver Sessions*") offered by the Study Center Director. The Study Center also has a list of professionals who can help address mental health needs.
- The UCEAP Travel insurance includes mental health coverage; however students must pay upfront for medical or counseling services then submit a claim for reimbursement after treatment is received. If you need care, reach out to the UCEAP Resident Director and staff. The U.S. Embassy also provides a list of counselors and can help UC Study Center staff to establish contact to provide confidential treatment.
- If you are seeing a counselor/therapist in the U.S., consult carefully about health and medication management before departure.
- Bring an adequate supply of prescription medication to last through the stay along with a doctor's prescription and a letter indicating condition, treatment, and medication regimen. UCEAP does not recommend sending prescription medication through the mail as packages can take weeks to arrive at their destination and it may be held up in customs for an indeterminate amount of time.
- Be prepared for the inevitable cultural differences in medical and mental health services. If you need a particular type of medical care, find out in advance whether such care is available and discuss options with your health care provider.

## ILLCIT DRUGS

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Illicit drugs are becoming a concern for the local authorities because of the increasing availability and variety. The unlawful possession, use, or distribution of alcohol by students or employees on University of Ghana premises or as part of any University of Ghana activities is prohibited.

The possession of, distribution, or use of drugs is a crime in Ghana.

The unlawful possession, use, or distribution of drugs by students or employees on University/College premises or as part of any University/College activities is prohibited. Anyone found in possession of or using such drugs on University property will be severely dealt with and suspended from the University, in addition to facing criminal charges.

### Risk Assessment

- Penalties for drug offences, including possession, are severe in Ghana and may carry mandatory prison sentences.
- Buying, selling, consuming marijuana is illegal in Ghana.
- If you are traveling with prohibited narcotic drugs (cannabis; easy to purchase and popular to smoke, morphine, heroin, valium, cocaine, etc.), without a prescription, you would be committing an offense under Ghanaian law.
- When students are in an environment where they perceive an easier way to get away with smoking marijuana in public, for example, they may become lax and irresponsible about their choice to smoke and where to smoke it.
- The U.S. Embassy or University of California will not be able to assist a student arrested on drug charges.

### Risk Mitigation

- Act responsibly.
- University of Ghana expects students to comply with University policy and to conduct themselves in a lawful manner at all times.
- Violation of University of Ghana and University of California policies subjects students to disciplinary procedures, including dismissal from the program.
- Violation of country laws exposes the student to criminal charges and/or arrest.

## SEXUAL VIOLENCE

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### Risk Assessment

- Rape is a crime in Ghana punishable by five to 25 years in prison. However, rape is significantly underreported and remains a serious problem.
- Sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking are serious problems on U.S. college and university campuses and abroad. Violence against women and girls is not confined to any particular political or economic system, but it is prevalent in every society in the world. It cuts across boundaries of wealth, race and culture.
- About 35 per cent of women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or sexual violence by a non-partner at some point in their lives. However, some national studies show that up to 70 per cent of women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner in their lifetime.
- Police data are often incomplete and limited. Many women do not report sexual violence to police because they are ashamed, or fear being blamed, not believed or otherwise mistreated.
- Rape involving at least two or more perpetrators is widely reported to occur in many parts of the world. Systematic information on the extent of the problem, however, is scant.
- In Ghana, about 27% of local women reported being sexually assaulted in their lifetime. 1 in 3 women have been fondled or touched against their will. 6% of women had been threatened by a school-teacher or principal that their schooling would suffer if they did not have sex.

- This past year, at least two incidents of sexual assault perpetrated against a female student in Ghana were reported.
- Sexual assaults have been perpetrated against female students in Ghana this past year. Students can follow all personal safety recommendations to reduce risk and still become a victim of sexual assault.

### Risk Mitigation

- Practice risk reduction techniques. Do not assume that it cannot happen to you. Practice the buddy system when going out so you can alert your buddy if you feel threatened or uncomfortable in a situation. Stay alert.
- Attend the onsite workshop offered by the UCEAP Resident Director.
- Tell a roommate or friend about your travel or event plans.
- Research local resources and learn how to summon help in an emergency.
- Always have the UCEAP emergency number with you.
- Follow the RAINN (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network) Safety Tips, <https://www.rainn.org/articles/safety-tips-traveling>
- Be informed: Read and understand the UCEAP [Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment Policy](#).

## TRAVEL/TRANSPORTATION

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### ROAD SAFETY

#### Infrastructure

Road conditions in Ghana are extremely poor, and serious road traffic accidents occur daily inside and outside Accra.

The road from metropolitan Accra to the central region tourist area of Cape Coast continues to be the site of many accidents. Travel at dark, particularly outside the major cities, is extremely hazardous, due to poor street lighting and the unpredictable behavior of pedestrians, bicyclists, and farm animals such as goats and pigs. The safety standards of the small private buses that transit roads and highways are uncertain.

Armed robbers have targeted travelers following their arrival at Kotoka airport. An increasingly used tactic is to deliberately cause a minor road traffic accident to make a car stop, and to then rob the occupants. Travelers are routinely stopped at police checkpoints, and vehicles and passengers may be searched.

Ghana’s transportation system received the following rankings from the US State Department

Safety of public transportation:	fair
Urban road conditions/maintenance:	fair
Rural road conditions/maintenance:	poor
Availability of roadside assistance:	poor

### Risk Assessment

- Roads are mainly in a poor condition, particularly in rural areas.
- Road travel can be extremely hazardous due to poor driving practices, poorly maintained vehicles, insufficient street lighting, roaming livestock, pedestrians and cyclists.
- Drivers are often aggressive.

- Safety standards on small private buses and taxis are often low and do not meet US standards.
- According to the US State Department, aggressive drivers, poorly maintained vehicles, and overloaded vehicles pose serious threats to road safety throughout Ghana.
- According to iJET International, the University of California's contracted travel intelligence service; use of public transportation greatly increases the likelihood of falling victim to petty crimes.
- Travel to tourist and historic areas of the country are popular and generally safe, although incidents of machete robberies have occurred on rural roads. There are occasional reports of clashes between government forces and bandits; however, foreigners are normally not affected.
- Road traffic accidents may be one of the main threats facing students.

### **Risk Mitigation**

- Avoid traveling by road outside the main towns after dark, when the risk of accidents and robbery is greater.
- Check with local staff before venturing off main roads in outlying areas.
- While traveling by car, make sure to lock car doors and keep windows rolled up at all times.
- Due to poor driving conditions and the poor mechanical state of many vehicles in Ghana, vehicular travel after dark outside Accra should be avoided.
- Inform yourself.

### **Tro-tros**

#### **Risk Assessment**

- Tro-tros generally are the main providers of intra-city transport and are frequently involved in crashes.
- Tro-tros are usually made from converted minibuses and are designed to fit as many people, possessions, and occasionally livestock, as possible.
- Tro-tros have no schedules, stopping randomly and without notice and generally leave when very full.
- Tro-tro accidents are quite common due to unidentified speed limits, disregard of stop signs and lack of general defensive driving.
- Informal and loosely regulated routes engender fierce competition and reckless driving that results in many injuries and deaths of passengers, pedestrians and cyclists every year.
- Because profits are so low, operators run tires until the treads are so bare the tire explodes.

#### **Risk Mitigation**

- Avoid tro-tros.
- Avoid travelling in any overloaded, overcrowded, top heavy vehicles.
- Choose newer, larger vehicles when available.

### **Taxis**

#### **Risk Assessment**

- Criminals sometimes use taxis to rob patrons.
- The operation of streetlights in Ghana at night is inconsistent and dark areas become prime targets for criminals.
- The potential for carjacking exists in Ghana and there have been some reported armed robberies and snatching of taxis from drivers.

- The Accra Metropolitan Assembly (AMA) requires all taxi drivers to wear a sea blue shirt and dark blue trousers as their uniform.
- Also, drivers are required to register their vehicles with the Assembly to get a special serial number consisting of only three digits to be embossed with reflectors on both sides of the front doors to make identification easy even at night. This measure has been implemented to further enhance security for both taxi patrons and owners.

### **Risk Mitigation**

- Exercise caution when traveling in taxis, and only ride in government-registered taxis
- Confirm that the taxi has sufficient gas before hiring it, because drivers will lure taxi occupants to gas stations to be robbed by awaiting criminals.
- Never board a taxi with all male occupants already in or a female passenger and two male passengers as they could be decoys to rob you.
- Avoid travelling in communal or unmarked taxis.

### **Pedestrian Travel**

#### **Risk Assessment**

- Sidewalks are often lacking.
- Where sidewalks exist, they are often taken over by vendors and parked vehicles, forcing pedestrians onto the streets.
- Pedestrians frequently jaywalk.
- Few intersections have pedestrian crossings.
- Some sidewalks have large open storm drains.
- Pedestrians account for 43% of road crash fatalities.
- Pedestrians DO NOT have the right of way.

#### **Risk Mitigations**

- Cross streets at corners. DO NOT jaywalk.
- Make sure you are seen.
- If sidewalks are not available, walk facing traffic on the edge of the road, as far from the travel lane as possible.
- Carry a flashlight when walking in the dark.
- When crossing, use all of your senses and don't use your cell phone for calls and texting.

## **AIRPORT TRAVEL**

#### **Risk Assessment**

- Thefts of both luggage and travel documents occur at Kotoka International Airport in Accra and in hotels across Ghana.
- There have been increasing incidences of impostors who approach travelers before the main arrivals area claiming to be the traveler's driver or contact. The impostor will have obtained the traveler's name from the board displayed by the official driver in the arrivals area outside the airport. The impostor then attempts to extort money from the traveler once the traveler is in the impostor's vehicle.

#### **Risk Mitigation**

- Be cautious about all offers of unsolicited assistance at the airport unless from uniformed porters or officials.

- All permanent staff at the airport are issued current ID cards bearing their name and photograph. ID cards without a photograph are not valid.

## **CRIME** (source: U.S. Embassy, INTERPOL)

### **Risk Assessment**

- In 2015, the INTERPOL launched a program to strengthen border management in Ghana, strengthen regional police capacity to prevent fraud, smuggling, and trafficking, and other organized crimes; however, crime in Ghana is an ongoing concern. Crimes that are most commonly reported in Ghana are home invasions, police roadblocks, and armed/unarmed robberies.
- Street theft is the most common crime reported by western visitors. U.S. travelers have reported these types of theft at crowded markets, beaches, parks, and tourist attractions. Street persons asking for handouts may grab jewelry or other items from one's neck or wrist, or distract the victim for a pickpocket.
- Criminals will sometimes use motorcycles to drive by unsuspecting pedestrians and snatch their bags, especially at night. According to the U.S. Department of State; there were numerous reports in 2014 of bags/purses being snatched from people walking on the street, especially at night, by men on motorcycles.
- There also have been some reports of muggings carried out by groups of men.
- Armed robberies tend to occur at night in dark areas. The assailants typically use machetes or handguns.
- Home invasions are prevalent throughout Ghana. The criminals are sometimes armed and the police response to the incident varies based on resource availability.
- Police officers will also establish fraudulent road blocks throughout the country in attempts to extort money.
- The U.S. Embassy in Accra reports that crimes against American citizens have been nonviolent in nature.
- Even though there is visible police presence in Accra, the Ghana police force is poorly trained and equipped and lacks adequate manpower to successfully investigate crime, but is for the most part professional in behavior. Police response is very slow. Theft of unattended property is common in Ghana.

### **Risk Mitigation**

- Be vigilant at all times and never venture out alone.
- If you are victim of crime, contact the UCEAP Resident Director and staff at the Study Center immediately.
- Use the buddy system; go in groups. Walking alone anywhere, especially in remote areas, is not advised. Should you feel in any way at risk, proceed to a location (e.g. police, shopping center or service station) where help is available.
- Pay close attention to your personal security at all times and monitor the media for information about possible new safety or security risks.
- If confronted by would-be assailants or police, remain calm and compliant. There have been several incidents where people have resisted trying to hang on to their purse/bag, or it was perceived as resistance and they were seriously injured.
- Exercise caution and monitor developments that might affect safety in Ghana because of the risk of criminal activity.
- Stay in well-lit areas, walk midpoint between curbs and buildings, away from alleys, entries and bushes.

- Carry only necessary credit cards and money; you will not need your airline ticket with you at all times until your scheduled return flight. Keep valuable property e.g. your passport, laptop, electronics, etc., under lock and key. Do not carry or flash excessive amounts of money.
- If you are followed, act suspicious. Keep looking behind you and you may discourage the follower.
- Never hitchhike.
- Ensure that others know of your whereabouts. Pay attention; be aware of your surroundings, especially in crowded streets and shopping/market areas.
- Avoid uncontrolled crowds.
- Look like you know where you are going; do not wander into unknown areas.
- Do not accept lifts from strangers. Be cautious about strangers, especially those who attempt to quickly befriend you. Do not accept food, drinks, or rides from strangers. Trust your instincts. If you feel uncomfortable in any place or situation, leave it.
- Plan the safest route to your destination and use it, keeping to well-lit busy areas.
- Keep a vigilant eye on your bags and other property.
- Carry your money in several locations on your person, not just in your safety wallet and consider carrying a “fake wallet” that holds a small amount of cash.
- Limit purchases or cash advances using your credit cards, as credit card fraud is a serious problem. Do not allow anyone to take your credit card out of your sight.
- Protect your cell phone.
- Avoid areas known for crime. When in doubt, ask Study Center staff for advice.
- Ignore attempts by locals to provoke an argument. Change the topic of discussion and, if possible, remove yourself from the situation.
- Read the U.S. Department of State, Country Specific Information on Ghana at <http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/country/ghana.html>

## **CREDIT CARD AND CYBER SCAMS**

### **Risk Assessment**

- Credit card skimming is a concern throughout most of Africa and is especially prevalent in Ghana. Perpetrators of business and charity fraud often target foreigners, including Americans. Fraud schemes are prevalent throughout West Africa, including Ghana.
- Another scam is when a “hospital” or “doctor” calls or emails to say you, your family, or a friend and states one of you has been in an “accident” and needs immediate financial assistance to cover medical bills.

### **Risk Mitigation**

- Carry limited amounts of cash and only photocopies of key documents.
- Avoid the use of credit cards, if possible. Only use credit cards in reputable restaurants or shops. Always keep an eye on your credit card.
- Ask to be present during the transaction process. If they refuse or get upset, consider not using a credit card.
- Retain and destroy all receipts and carbons.

- Keep accurate records of any transactions.
- Monitor your bank accounts regularly.
- Notify your bank's fraud department immediately if you suspect fraudulent charges.
- Always verify or have your family verify the legitimacy of any requests for medical assistance or funds.
- Be suspicious of overly-friendly locals offering tours, discounted lodging, or other services that seem questionable.

## SECURITY ON THE UNIVERSITY OF GHANA CAMPUS

The University of Ghana campus is extremely large and there are many entry points beyond the official, guarded gates. Lighting on certain parts of the campus is substandard.

Primary responsibility for security on campus resides with the University Security Office of the University. The University Security services have the authority and duty to enforce order, protect life and property, and make arrests as provided by law, conduct investigations, and exercise powers similar to the police. The administrative office is located at the Main Entrance of the University and runs a 24-hour, seven-days-a-week schedule. Security is staffed by non-commissioned security guards, usually ex-military or ex-police force personnel.

University Security is on duty 24/7, 365 days a year and in constant communication with the main Security center. All reports of criminal activity made to University Security are investigated and coordinated with appropriate area law enforcement agencies as needed. University Security initiates all criminal prosecutions with respect to offences taking place on the campus of the University of Ghana.

The University security guards patrol the exterior areas of the campus, twenty-four hours a day. In some cases, additional regular tours of the interior of the residence halls to check lounges, corridors and other common residence areas are carried. Guards, assisted by Porters or other resident staff members, may confront residents and visitors suspected of violations of University policy.

Generally, University personnel, without the permission of the student, will not enter resident rooms nor will student's personal possessions be searched. However, in cases directly relevant to the welfare of individuals or the safety of property or if reasonable cause exists to believe that University policy has been violated, housing and resident staff members are authorized to enter student rooms without permission of the resident(s).

Student activity in violation of campus policy and Ghanaian law may result in both internal and external judicial action being taken. The Dean of Students initiates disciplinary action in accordance with the University Statutes for violators who are students. Cases of incidents involving international students are initially dealt with by a specific committee of inquiry constituted by the Office of the Dean of International Programs.

**Carry ID cards at all times on the University Campus.** Photo ID cards must be obtained from the Photo ID Centre within a reasonable time following initial registration. This card must be validated every semester, and must be kept on the student's person during times that the student is on campus.

### Risk Mitigation

- Lock doors and windows at all times; including while asleep.
- Do not answer the door to anyone after a certain time at night. Avoid the services of errand boys, who can monitor information and provide it to accomplices.
- Ask to change locks if robbed.
- Avoid isolated footpaths and shortcuts.
- Walk in pairs, groups, and in well-lit areas; use the buddy system as much as possible.
- Conspicuous displays of wealth are inappropriate and endanger the safety of all.
- If at any time you are threatened at knife or gun point, do not resist or act in a confrontational manner.

- Share specific concerns with the Study Center Resident Director and/or staff, and follow their guidelines.

#### **In the classroom:**

- 1 Avoid working or studying alone in a building at night.
- 2 Keep your purse and petty cash in a locked cabinet or drawer.
- 3 While in class or in the library keep personal belongings in view.
- 4 Use the Shuttle bus at night. A free shuttle bus links the International Students' Hostel and other parts of the campus every evening from 7 p.m. until 11:00 p.m.
- 5 Report anyone who behaves suspiciously to University Security Guards.

#### **Living on campus:**

- 1 Cohabitation is not permitted in the residence halls.
- 2 Do not entertain hawkers.
- 3 Keep doors locked, even if you are away for a few minutes. Remember that most losses occur during the day.
- 4 Keep emergency phone numbers in your phone and in a secure place.
- 5 Use the peepholes in residence doors (if available) before permitting entry to anyone. If the peephole is broken or missing, notify the residence hall director.
- 6 There are un-employed youths who perform personal services for students such as washing clothes etc. We encourage you not to use them.
- 7 If you return to your residence and suspect that it has been illegally entered, do not enter. Call University Security or a Porter immediately.
- 8 If someone you don't know tries to enter a building behind you, or asks to go past the Porter checkpoint with you for any reason, say NO.
- 9 A significant proportion of incidents involving foreign students originate from "friendships" made through cursory contacts in town. Do not give out personal information, i.e., room numbers, home address details, telephone numbers etc. unnecessarily.

### **GENDER AND PERSONAL IDENTITY ISSUES**

The number one concern for lesbian, bisexual, transgender and straight travelers, and their families, is staying safe while traveling.

#### **Risk Assessment**

- Ghanaian law criminalizes 'unnatural carnal knowledge'. If consenting adults are caught engaging in such acts, they can receive up to 3 years imprisonment according to Section 104 of the Criminal Code (Amendment) Act of 2003.
- Lesbians and gays face widespread discrimination, as well as police harassment and extortion attempts.
- There is a minimum misdemeanor charge for homosexual activity.
- There is a small gay community.
- There is a lot of stigma towards gay men and lesbians living in Ghana. A large portion of Ghanaian society does not accept that such activity exists.
- A gay social life exists, mostly in the form of house parties, and a few queer-friendly clubs in Accra, but there are risks.
- Ghanaians are generally tolerant of all religious and racial groups.

#### **Risk Mitigation**

- Inform yourself. Research tolerance levels and laws for every country that you visit. Homosexuality is illegal in almost every African country. Remember that legal recognition and social acceptance may not be at the same level.
- Be careful and be safe. Social media sites are often used for entrapment in some countries, so when using a social media network to meet friends or locals.
- Further information is available from:

U.S. State Department LGBT Travel Information: <http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/go/lgbt.html>

The 2015 Human Rights Report for Ghana:

<https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm#wrapper>

UCEAP Diversity portal: <http://eap.ucop.edu/Diversity/Pages/LGBTQ.aspx>

## **LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Photography at airports, railway stations, naval bases, air bases, military installations, public water and energy plants, police stations, harbors, mines and bridges is prohibited in Ghana.

### **Risk Assessment**

- Laws are strictly enforced and all restrictions should be observed.
- Foreigners are more likely to be at risk than locals.
- Students could be fined or jailed.

### **Risk Mitigation**

- Risk is preventable. Awareness of the laws, common sense precautions, and proper conduct are the key to avoiding trouble. Follow local laws and social customs.
- Students should research the legal system in Ghana to be aware of penalties and other laws, e.g., laws relating to drugs/alcohol, sexuality; severity of punishment for crimes; nature of the legal system; and official recommendations for obtaining legal assistance.