

Canadian border closure and other updates

March 17, 2020

On Wednesday, March 18, 2020, Canada will close its borders to everyone but Canadian and US citizens and a small number of very special exceptions. Even some Canadian citizens could have their travel home delayed if they show symptoms of COVID-19 infection before embarking to Canada. International flights arriving in Canada may land only in Toronto, Calgary, Montreal, and Vancouver. These restrictions are in place indefinitely.

At the same time, the European Commission has proposed a similar restriction for the entire European Union: no non-essential travel into the EU by non-EU citizens. As of this writing, this collective border closure hasn't been enacted, but it does seem likely to happen. The Schengen Area, which comprises 26 countries in Europe, has already closed external (and some internal) borders to non-essential travel by non-residents. This closure is to be in effect for at least 30 days, beginning March 16th.

The move is extreme, but it is not out of line with similar actions being taken by countries all over the world, in an attempt to at least slow the spread of COVID-19.

Countries such as the United States, Argentina, Czech Republic, Ecuador, Hong Kong, India, Norway, Oman, Panama, Poland, Qatar, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Serbia, Ukraine, and others have imposed at least partial bans on non-citizens. Some bans focus on the origin and/or recent travel of the traveler, but some (like the Canadian closure) do not include such a distinction.

Other countries, like Australia, El Salvador, Israel, New Zealand, and a host of others, while allowing some foreign travelers to enter, enforce a mandatory quarantine for at least the first two weeks after arrival—regardless of health status. Brunei, as of March 16, still allows certain visitors to enter, but has suspended the exit of any citizens and foreign residents from the country until further notice.

In addition to the possible travel restrictions implemented by countries of destination, it is equally important to consider those policies being implemented by the country of origin. That is, it would be wise to verify your ability to return home before you travel abroad.

The restrictions and quarantine rules are changing every day (and even by the hour). While most health officials encourage simply avoiding travel altogether, we understand that sometimes it may be necessary. If you feel that an international trip is necessary for any of your employees, we encourage you to contact a member of our Global Immigration Practice right away. We can advise on the current restrictions that may affect the trip and help you plan accordingly.

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