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COVID-19 UPDATE: Travel Advisory Raised to Level 4

By Elizabeth M. Klarin

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As expected, the U.S. Department of State has raised the "Global Health Advisory" to "Level 4: Do Not Travel"—the highest level possible. This means that while Americans can still leave the U.S., they do so at their own risk. The State Department has effectively shuttered its doors or shut down operations at most of its Embassies and Consulates worldwide, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. With significant backlogs and wait times for both immigrant and nonimmigrant visas, this and will likely impact thousands of individuals with interests in the U.S., who will no longer be able to obtain visas for an undetermined time period. Once normal operations do resume, it is possible that the suspension of services may result in a surge of requests for limited visa slots—creating backlogs resulting in long lines at many locations where previous wait times had been estimated at a few weeks or less.

With regard to the Level 4 travel advisory, as as noted at the Department of State's COVID-19 site:

"The Department of State advises U.S. citizens to avoid all international travel due to the global impact of COVID-19. In countries where commercial departure options remain available, U.S. citizens who live in the United States should arrange for immediate return to the United States, unless they are prepared to remain abroad for an indefinite period. U.S. citizens who live abroad should avoid all international travel. Many countries are experiencing COVID-19 outbreaks and implementing travel restrictions and mandatory quarantines, closing borders, and prohibiting non-citizens from entry with little advance notice. Airlines have cancelled many international flights and several cruise operators have suspended operations or cancelled trips. If you choose to travel internationally, your travel plans may be severely disrupted, and you may be forced to remain outside of the United States for an indefinite timeframe.

On March 14, the Department of State authorized the departure of U.S. personnel and family members from any diplomatic or consular post in the world who have determined they are at higher risk of a poor outcome if exposed to COVID-19 or who have requested departure based on a commensurate justification. These departures may limit the ability of U.S. Embassies and consulates to provide services to U.S. citizens.

For the latest information regarding COVID-19, please visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) website."

Please contact your Lippes Mathias professional with questions concerning this or other impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on immigration to or from the U.S.

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