

NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION
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OFFICE OF POLAR PROGRAMS

Medical Risks for NSF-Sponsored Personnel Traveling to the Polar Regions

Travel to the Polar Regions imparts certain risks to the traveler, because of harsh environmental conditions encountered, limitations in the medical care available, and difficulties, in emergencies, of providing timely evacuation to tertiary medical care facilities in the U.S. or other countries in the Polar Regions. United States polar programs participants should consider these risks before deciding to deploy to the Polar Regions.

Greenland, the world's largest island, is located in the Arctic region and is characterized by an extreme climate. Whenever you are in an arctic area you can expect changeable weather and must be prepared for all kinds of weather. The Polar Circle crosses the country south of Sisimiut/Holsteinsborg. Therefore, a great part of Greenland has dark winters and the midnight sun in the summertime. The temperatures vary between minus 5 degrees Celsius to minus 30 degrees Celsius in the winter and plus 5 degrees Celsius to plus 15 degrees Celsius in the summer. Generally the climate is Arctic, the main temperature being zero to subzero. The maximum temperature in the warmest month is 12 degrees Celsius. The coldest months are February and March. However, the temperatures do not feel as cold as in Europe as the wind is very dry. Greenland can only be reached by airplane.

It is important that polar participants recognize these limitations in medical care while they are deployed. It is, in part, because of these limitations, that the NSF requires medical and dental screening of personnel prior to deployment to the Polar Regions. These medical screening examinations are necessary to determine the presence of medical conditions that could threaten the health or safety of the individual while deployed. Persons who fail to meet these medical/dental screening criteria will be notified of the specific reason(s) for their disqualification. Disqualified individuals may request reconsideration by completing a waiver request package (obtained from the designated NSF support contractor).

Pre-deployment screening can identify existing medical conditions that may be difficult or impossible to treat effectively in the Polar Regions. Participants should realize that serious accidents or injuries might challenge the medical care system, as well. Therefore, individuals should recognize the limitations in the medical care system before they engage in any risk-taking behaviors (whether on-the-job or during recreational pursuits) that may result in accidents or injuries.

Data collected as a result of this medical screening requirement are maintained in accordance with the Privacy Act (5 USC 552a) of 1974 and protected against unauthorized release, as described in the appended Privacy Notice.

I have read and understand this information sheet.

Print Name

Signature and Date