

Safety in the Field

If something happens

Sickness

Presumed malaria: In case of unexplained high fever consult a doctor as soon as possible. Insist on taking a blood test before being prescribed antimalarial drugs; if you test positive for malaria, undergo medical treatment without delay. Try not to be alone during treatment, as side effects can be debilitating and you might need assistance.

Presumed dengue: Symptoms are similar to those for malaria (fever, headache, muscle and joint pain) but with the addition of a skin rash similar to that of measles. In case of unexplained high fever consult a doctor as soon as possible, and insist on taking a blood test to identify the pathogen. Treatment of dengue fever is symptomatic, as there is no medication against it. Get plenty of rest and stay hydrated. Use paracetamol to reduce pain, but make sure that you are not using aspirin or ibuprofen. Severe forms (Dengue Haemorrhagic Fever) require immediate medical attention.

Strong diarrhoea: Diarrhoea is common during travels, as your digestive system might not be used to the local diet and pathogens. In most cases diarrhoea will subside after 2 or 3 days. In cases of long-lasting, very strong, or bloody diarrhoea consult a doctor to rule out a serious infection or condition. Make sure to drink abundantly to avoid dehydration. After the diarrhoea has stopped, try to rebuild your intestinal flora in order to regenerate your immune system; pharmacies and doctors can give you advice or drugs.

Severe infection: Small wounds can sometimes get seriously infected. Do not wait too long before seeking medical advice, to avoid complications such as necrosis or blood poisoning. Use disinfectant cream or drops as soon as you cut yourself or have scrapes or wounds.

Others: If in doubt, seek medical advice from a trusted specialist. Avoid self-medication for any condition or ailment that you are not absolutely sure about. Do not take antibiotics and other strong medicine without prescription unless in a very remote area without access to medical advice.

Information: In all cases of serious medical condition, immediately inform the CDE representative and your HoC / project leader.

Witnessing a traffic accident

If you are a passenger in a car or bus driven by a local driver let them handle the situation, as they certainly know better than you how to do this. Refer all questions from other road users or from the police to the driver. Make sure you are out of danger (away from the road). Stay alert while the car is immobilized as it might attract thieves taking advantage of the commotion to steal from the luggage compartment.

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Involvement in a traffic accident

1. Secure the scene (triangle, blinkers, etc.)
2. Provide first aid to the injured and call an ambulance if needed. If you are injured, seek medical advice as soon as possible and request the doctor to write a certificate (for later compensation from / proof for your insurance).
3. Insist on calling the police if there is heavy damage, injury, or unclear responsibility for the accident. For minor damage it might be preferable to settle for cash compensation (either way).
4. Secure evidence and take photos of the scene from different angles. If possible, take contact details of witnesses.
5. Note the other person's number plate, name, national ID number, and insurance name and number (in some places it is a sticker on the windshield).
6. Inform your own insurance, or the insurance of the vehicle. Contact the owner of the car and explain the situation.

Theft

Inexpensive items (approx. < 200 CHF): you may as well forget about recovering such items, as they might not be worth the hassle of getting a policy report and mobilizing your insurance company.

Expensive items (approx. > 200 CHF): take photographic evidence (if any), note the exact location of the incident, and contact the nearest police post to get a report. Contact your insurance company to report the incident and ask their advice on the best way to proceed.

Credit card, bank card, postal account card: Immediately call the relevant hotlines to report the theft. Inform the CDE representative and your HoC / project leader about the situation and clarify available options in case you need financial support.

Data theft: Make frequent (daily) backups of your data, especially of original field data, if possible on a web-based storage (Campus Cloud, Dropbox, etc.). If your laptop containing such data is stolen, immediately report the incident to the police, to your insurance company, to the CDE representative, and to your HoC / project leader.

Reporting a thief: Beware before reporting petty thieves, especially in the open. In some places, if caught, they might face mob justice and be killed.

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Violent aggression

If you are the victim of violent aggression, such as armed robbery or a carjacking, your safety and that of people around you should be your main concern. This means you should follow the aggressors' instructions. In some places, shootouts between the police and gangsters are not uncommon, so aggressors are mostly very nervous. Failure to obey on your part could lead to a dangerous escalation of violence.

If you, or someone else, is injured in the incident, seek medical assistance as soon as possible. If no one was injured, or assistance was provided, inform the local CDE representative and request his/her help with the next steps. This might include alerting the police and the Swiss embassy and informing your HoC / project leader.

It might also mean seeking psychological support. It may be advisable not to return to "business as usual" directly after such an incident, as you might suffer from post-traumatic stress and need time out before resuming your activities. Do not stay alone and do not drive.

Rape

1. Try to move to a safe location and, if possible, find someone you know and trust to support you.
2. Seek immediate medical assistance as you may have suffered injuries or been exposed to other risks. An early medical examination may provide evidence if you decide to report the assault. Go to examination without bathing or changing.
3. Contact the Swiss embassy as they may be able to assist you with other information in relation to your safety, medical facilities, legal concerns, and steps associated with reporting the assault.
4. You have no obligation to inform the CDE counterpart, but he/she might also provide valuable assistance.
5. Decide whether to report the assault to the police or not.
6. If you report the assault, it is recommended to appoint a lawyer to help you and to keep the case active.
7. If the perpetrator is caught, you may be requested to be present in court; otherwise the case could be dropped.
8. Consider undergoing counselling with an experienced counsellor, and receiving psychological support.