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Headline :- **Covered on the campus: Why students must buy travel insurance**

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Many students are gearing up to embark on a life-changing journey abroad for higher studies. Before they leave India, they should arm themselves with a comprehensive student travel insurance plan. Contrary to what its name suggests, a student travel insurance policy is more than just a travel cover. It is a safety net that safeguards students from unexpected financial setbacks due to medical contingencies, travel disruptions, and much more.

### **Buy at home or abroad?**

Most experts favour buying a plan from India. According to Bhabatosh Mishra, director-underwriting, products and claims, Niva Bupa Health Insurance, “Indian insurance plans offer lower premiums compared to their foreign counterparts. Furthermore, having a policy from India means that in case of emergencies, a family member back home can notify the insurer and ensure that the insurance requirements are handled efficiently. This eases the burden on the student who would otherwise have to manage it alone in a foreign land.”

Indian policies may also be more comprehensive. Says Aditya Sharma, chief distribution officer, retail sales, Bajaj Allianz General Insurance: “A health insurance plan purchased from a foreign university will not cover the student during travels to and from India, as Indian policies will. They also cover a contingency visit by a family member if the student falls ill abroad. These policies also provide personal liability cover. And they also cover the student during visits to other countries during holidays.”

It may also be prudent to get a cover before leaving India. Says Naval Goel, chief executive officer (CEO), PolicyX: “It is possible that the student may face difficulties in obtaining a cover abroad, given the varying terms and conditions that prevail in foreign countries.”

A student who decides to purchase a policy from India must ensure that it meets her university's coverage criteria.

Students should first check the sum insured required by their university. That should be the baseline cover they should buy.

Beyond that, they should buy what they can afford. Buying a higher cover is especially crucial for students heading to the US or to Canada, where health care costs are exorbitant.

Says Manas Kapoor, product head-travel insurance, Policybazaar.com: "If the student is going abroad for a short-term exchange programme of one week to three months, then a cover of \$50,000 or \$1 lakh may suffice. But if she is going for a one- to two-year programme, then a cover ranging from \$2.5 lakh to \$5 lakh is ideal."

Sharma recommends a sum insured of \$10 lakh for students heading to the US for a year.

#### Deciding the premium

Premium costs can vary depending on the sum insured and the breadth of coverage. According to Kapoor, the cover usually costs around one-two per cent of the tuition fee. According to Mishra, a cover of \$1 lakh for one year is likely to cost around Rs 18,500-20,000.

Sharma estimates that a \$1 million cover could cost anywhere between Rs 30,000 and Rs 50,000, with premiums being lower if coverage in USA and Canada are excluded.

#### Key features

Student travel insurance plans offer a wide menu of features. On the medical side, they cover hospitalisation, outpatient department cover, dental coverage, medical evacuation, and repatriation of remains.

This policy also covers travel-related incidents such as loss of baggage, lost electronic items, passport and driving licence, and flight delays or trip cancellation.

Legal covers include personal liability (in case the student causes harm to someone or their property) and bail bond cover (in case the student gets arrested).

Study-related covers include study interruption and sponsor protection (if the person funding the student's costs passes away, the plan makes a payout).

#### Watch out for exclusions

Students need to be aware of the exclusions in these policies. For instance, standard plans usually do not cover pre-existing diseases, non-prescription drugs, diseases related to alcohol and drug consumption, experimental or non-standard treatment, cosmetic and plastic surgery. Other exclusions might include adventure sports, HIV-AIDS related illnesses, and war, etc.

However, students can buy coverage for some of these exclusions, such as pre-existing diseases, as an add-on.

Indian insurers partner with international assistance companies for efficient claim settlement. For example, Bajaj Allianz has Allianz Worldwide as its partner in 156 countries. Niva Bupa partners with Europ Assistance. “These partnerships enable cashless treatment for students, especially when hospitalisation is for more than 24 hours and treatment takes place in a network hospital,” says Kapoor. Study-related benefits, he adds, are offered in the form of reimbursement.