Central America

Each Global Partners trip requires participation in several orientation sessions—usually held from 5-7 p.m. at Gundersen Health System in La Crosse—which prepare volunteers to encounter the culture, travel, language and other aspects of the volunteer service trip. Attending in-person is preferable, but a WebEx option is available for those who are joining the team from outside the Coulee Region. Details about these sessions will be sent out via email to the volunteers signed up for each trip following the sign-up deadline.

If you are interested in learning about opportunities to volunteer in Central America, please complete a volunteer form.

Global Partners-Central America volunteers must be able to endure long days (10+ hours) of physical activity, which may include standing, walking, light lifting and sitting. Volunteers must be age 16 or older. Minors must be accompanied by a parent or guardian.

Travel: Trips are usually eight days in length. Travel days are long and include multiple flights plus ground transportation.

Cost: The total estimated cost per volunteer is $1,800-2,000. These expenses include flight, accommodations, interpreters, transportation and most meals. These costs are considered a charitable contribution for volunteer service work, per the IRS code. Additional expenses, which will be each volunteer's responsibility, include pre-trip immunizations, passport costs and medications.

Gundersen employees may apply for a Global Partners grant to help offset the costs of volunteering in Central America (up to $500).

Medical issues: Your trip leader will inform you of needed vaccinations and medications for travel to Central America. Vaccinations need to be up-to-date and include Hepatitis A & B, Typhoid, Influenza, DPT and MMR. Do not make an appointment to get your vaccines until AFTER your first volunteer orientation meeting.

Zika Virus: In November 2015, the first local transmission of Zika virus infection (Zika) was reported in Central America. Since then, several Central American countries have reported ongoing transmission of Zika. There have been reports of a serious birth defect of the brain called microcephaly and other poor pregnancy outcomes in babies of mothers who were infected with the Zika virus while pregnant. Global Partners recommends that women who ARE or MIGHT BE pregnant during the time they would be in Central America should postpone travel.
More information about Zika will be shared with Global Partners volunteers during orientations prior to their trip. Up-to-date information can be found on the [CDC website](https://www.cdc.gov) or by contacting Global Partners-Central America medical lead Dana Benden, MD, at dmbenden@gundersenhealth.org.

**Communication:** Spanish is the primary language in Central America. As you go further from the centers of commerce, fewer people speak English. Learning common phrases in Spanish is a helpful and friendly way to meet people in Central America.