

Dear Fellow Rotarians,

Rotary Youth Exchange is where my heart is. As you probably know my wife Susanne and I hosted more than 40 youth exchange students over the past years.

Many Rotarians over many generations have shared in this experience, and I want to thank Youth Exchange officers, host families, and other volunteers for their contributions. Together, we've helped young people build an understanding and appreciation of different cultures, learn new languages and forge lasting friendships across the globe.

To ensure that our legacy continues, these valuable, life-changing experiences must build from a foundation of safety and well-being for all our students, families and communities. To that end, Rotary's Board of Directors has been regularly monitoring the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on communities around the world to determine whether it is safe to reinstate the Youth Exchange program for the 2021-22 school year.

With the continued uncertainty of the pandemic and COVID-19 virus variants, inconsistent disease mitigation efforts, and the global imbalance of vaccine access – **the board has decided to suspend the Youth Exchange program through 30 June 2022.**

The board's decision was informed by scientific data, global health guidance and a number of factors required to guarantee a safe, equitable and quality experience. Careful consideration was also given to ease and availability of international travel, access to medical care and insurance coverage, school delays and closure, potential financial impact on participants' families and Rotary volunteers.

Given the global imbalance of access to the COVID-19 vaccine and the financial impact of the pandemic, many areas of the world would be unable to participate in 2021. Moving forward with only the limited number of participating countries with access to the vaccine would contradict Rotary's core value of fairness and commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Our ability to meet in person is limited now, but we know that Rotary Opens Opportunities, always. Now is the time to get ready, so that when the pandemic is behind us, Rotary's Youth Exchange program will come back stronger than before, serving a world that is yearning to reconnect.

Sincerely,

Holger Knaack
President, Rotary International 2020-21