



## **Frequently asked questions – Influenza A(H1N1) and Air Travel**

### **Is it safe to travel?**

The World Health Organization (WHO) is the expert international body coordinating the global response to influenza A(H1N1), previously known as Swine Flu.

WHO is not recommending travel restrictions related to the outbreak of the influenza A(H1N1) virus. Today, global travel is commonplace and large numbers of people move around the world for business and leisure. Limiting travel and imposing travel restrictions would have very little effect on stopping the virus from spreading, but would be highly disruptive to the global community.

Influenza A(H1N1) has already been confirmed in many parts of the world. The global response now focuses on minimising the impact of the virus through the rapid identification of cases, and providing patients with appropriate medical care, rather than on stopping its spread internationally.

It is considered prudent for people who are ill to delay international travel and for people developing symptoms following international travel to seek medical attention, in line with guidance from national authorities.

Any updates on this advice will be posted on the WHO website: [www.who.int](http://www.who.int).

### **Should I postpone my travel?**

There are no WHO travel advisories for any destination or place at this time. Travellers should also check with their national public health authorities for any local advice.

WHO advise that people who are ill should delay travel plans. Returning travellers who become ill should contact their health care provider.

### **What should travellers do to stay safe while travelling?**

Travellers can protect themselves and others by following simple prevention practices such as washing their hands frequently, avoiding contact with sick persons and with live animals in markets. Those travelling to affected areas should be extra vigilant.

WHO advises that people who are ill should delay travel plans. Returning travellers who become ill should contact their health care provider.

### **Are passengers more at risk of catching Influenza A(H1N1) on a plane?**

Influenza can be transmitted in many situations - at home between family members, in shopping malls, on the street, in buses or in aircraft. WHO has not identified any specific risks from air travel.

Passengers should be reassured by several things. Modern aircraft have very advanced air filtration systems, which ensure a high level of air quality despite the confined environment.

Aircraft are disinfected at regular intervals. And cabin crews have guidance on how to handle passenger who might fall ill during a flight.

And, as always, it is important that any passenger who is unwell consults with his or her doctor prior to undertaking any travel.

### **Is it safe to eat pork products served on board aircraft?**

WHO advises that there is no risk of infection from this virus from consumption of well-cooked pork and pork products.

### **Should I wear a mask on board flights?**

WHO has issued no advice indicating that healthy persons—on aircraft or anywhere else—should wear masks.

### **Are airlines prepared?**

The aviation industry has been a part of the global efforts on pandemic preparedness, particularly in light of the previous threat posed by avian flu. Industry and governments are much better prepared to deal with public health challenges than even a few years ago as a result of these efforts.

Airlines, through IATA, are coordinating closely with the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and WHO to facilitate the speedy implementation of any measures deemed necessary.

### **What should airlines be doing?**

In normal operations airlines take measures to ensure a safe and healthy environment on board aircraft. For example, passengers should be reassured that modern aircraft are equipped with very advanced air filtration systems which ensure a high level of air quality despite the confined environment.

Should additional measures become necessary to deal with Influenza A(H1N1), IATA follows the guidance of the international experts, WHO, and advises airlines accordingly.

### **What is IATA doing?**

The global response to the challenges of Influenza A(H1N1) is being led by WHO, which is working closely with national public health authorities and with NGOs and industry.

IATA is coordinating closely with WHO as well as with the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO). IATA has made available best practice guidelines to help airlines deal with public health emergencies. Along with a general guideline for dealing with public health emergencies, IATA's guidance material covers maintenance, passenger agents, cabin crew, cleaning crew and cargo.

### **Why is screening deployed in some airports and not others?**

WHO does not believe entry and exit screenings would work to reduce the spread of this disease. WHO advises that although identifying signs and symptoms of influenza in travellers can help track the path of the outbreak, it will not reduce the spread of influenza, as the virus can be transmitted from person to person before the onset of symptoms.

WHO notes that scientific research based on mathematical modelling shows that restricting travel would be of limited or no benefit in stopping the spread of disease. Historical records of previous influenza pandemics, as well as experience with SARS, validate this.

Country-level measures to respond to a public health risk are the decision of national authorities, under the International Health Regulations 2005.

WHO advises that countries adopting measures that significantly interfere with international traffic (e.g. delaying an airplane passenger for more than 24 hours, or refusing country entry or departure to a traveller) must provide WHO with the public health reasoning and evidence for their actions.

Travellers should always be treated with dignity and respect for their human rights.

### **Is it safe for crews to be working on aircraft?**

WHO has not identified any special risks arising from air travel for passengers or for crew.

Should passengers become unwell while on board, IATA has worked with WHO on guidance for crew to allow for safe handling and care. These can be found at [www.iata.org/NR/rdonlyres/DD29D97F-0E8C-4CBD-B575-1F5067174941/0/Guidelines\\_cabin\\_crew\\_finalDec2008.pdf](http://www.iata.org/NR/rdonlyres/DD29D97F-0E8C-4CBD-B575-1F5067174941/0/Guidelines_cabin_crew_finalDec2008.pdf).