

Frequently asked questions – Swine Influenza and Air Travel

Is it safe to travel?

The World Health Organization (WHO) is the expert international body coordinating the global response to Swine Influenza. WHO advises there should be no restriction of regular travel or closure of borders. 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: <http://www.who.int> Passengers should also check with their national public health authorities for the latest local information and advice.

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

Should I postpone my trip to Mexico?

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

Why have some governments issued travel advisories?

WHO advises no restriction of regular travel or closure of borders. 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.

Some national governments may issue advice to travelers with an extra level of caution.

What should travelers do to stay safe while travelling?

Travelers should take some simple precautions like washing their hands frequently, avoiding contact with sick persons and with live animals in markets. Those travelling to affected areas should be extra vigilant. 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. Vigilance by all is critical.

Are passengers more at risk of catching swine influenza 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 regularly disinfected even in regular operations. 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 consult with his or her doctor prior to undertaking any travel.

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

There is no risk of infection from this virus from consumption of well-cooked pork and pork products. Individuals are advised to wash their hands thoroughly with soap and water on a regular basis and should seek medical attention if they develop any symptoms of influenza-like illness.

Should I wear a mask on board flights?

WHO has issued no advice indicating that healthy passengers should wear masks on board aircraft – or anywhere else.

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 Swine Influenza, IATA follows the guidance of the international experts - WHO - and advises airlines accordingly.

What is IATA doing?

The global response to the challenges of Swine Influenza 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 has not recommended screening measures. Some national health authorities have chosen to implement such measures, including the use of devices that monitor body temperature to detect fever.

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 http://www.iata.org/NR/rdonlyres/DD29D97F-0E8C-4CBD-B575-1F5067174941/0/Guidelines_cabin_crew_finalDec2008.pdf.