

WHO sets up Ebola task force with global airline and travel sector

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The World Health Organization said Monday that it had set up a task force with the global airline and tourism industry in an effort to contain the spread of Ebola.

The UN agency said it was working hand in hand with the International Civil Aviation Organization, the World Tourism Organization, Airports Council International (ACI), the International Air Transport Association and the World Travel and Tourism Council.

The goal, it said in a statement, was to "support the global efforts to contain the spread of the disease and provide a coordinated international response for the travel and tourism sector".

It added that the task force would "monitor the situation and provide timely information to the travel and tourism sector as well as to travellers".

The first closed-door session of the [task force](#) took place on August 13, the WHO told AFP.

On August 8, the WHO declared a global public health emergency over the outbreak of Ebola, a deadly and highly contagious virus which has spread since the beginning of the year from Guinea to Liberia, Sierra Leone and Nigeria.

Concerns over [air travel](#) were heightened because the outbreak in

Nigeria was traced back to an ill traveller who flew from Liberia and infected contacts in Lagos.

In Monday's statement, the WHO reiterated that it does not recommend any ban on international travel or trade due to the Ebola outbreak, which has infected more than 2,100 people so far and killed 1,145.

The haemorrhagic disease is spread by direct contact with blood and other [body fluids](#) of infected living or dead persons or animals.

"The risk of transmission of Ebola virus disease during air travel is low," it said, underlining that unlike influenza or tuberculosis, Ebola is not spread by breathing airborne particles from an infected person".

"Travellers are, in any event, advised to avoid all such contacts and routinely practice careful hygiene, like hand washing," it said.

"The risk of getting infected on an aircraft is also small as sick persons usually feel so unwell that they cannot travel and infection requires direct contact with the body fluids of the infected person," it added.

To head off potential risks, the WHO reaffirmed that affected countries should "conduct exit screening of all persons at international airports, seaports and major land crossings, for unexplained febrile illness consistent with potential Ebola infection".

Anyone with an illness consistent with Ebola should not be allowed to travel, unless the journey was part of a medical evacuation, nor should people who have had contact with an Ebola case, it said.

The WHO underlined that most infections occurred in communities battling the disease or in health centres.

"The risk of a traveller becoming infected with the Ebola virus during a visit to the affected countries and developing disease after returning is very low, even if the visit includes travel to areas in which cases have been reported," it said.

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