

A guide for fliers worried about Ebola outbreak

August 5 2014, by Scott Mayerowitz

As the Ebola outbreak in West Africa grows, airlines around the globe are closely monitoring the situation but have yet to make any drastic changes. Below are some key questions about the disease, what airlines are doing and how safe it is to fly.

Q: Why are airlines concerned?

A: Airlines quickly take [passengers](#) from one part of the globe to another. One sick passenger on a plane could theoretically infect hundreds of people who are connecting to flights to dozens of other countries. Health and airline officials note, however, that Ebola only spreads through direct contact. Outbreaks of diseases that can spread through the air, such as the flu and severe acute respiratory syndrome, or SARS, are more problematic for airlines.

Q: Should people travel to West Africa?

A: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on Thursday issued a warning for Americans to avoid nonessential travel to the West African nations of Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone.

Q: Is Ebola deadly?

A: Very much so. If contracted, there is no vaccine and no specific treatment. Ebola has a fatality rate of at least 60 percent. The World Health Organization estimated Monday that there have been 887 deaths

from the current outbreak.

Q: How is Ebola transmitted?

A: The virus only spreads through direct contact with the blood or fluids of an infected person, according to the CDC. It can also be spread through objects, such as needles, that have been contaminated with infected fluids. No airborne transmission has been documented.

Q: Do U.S. airlines fly to West Africa?

A: Delta Air Lines flies to Dakar, Senegal; Accra, Ghana and Lagos, Nigeria. The airline also flies to Monrovia, Liberia, but for unrelated business reasons previously announced it will cancel that service at the end of September. Delta is letting passengers with flights to the region in the next two weeks push back travel until the end of the month. United Airlines also flies to Lagos, but has not issued any travel waiver. American Airlines does not fly to Africa.

Q: What are U.S. airlines saying about it?

A: There have been no flight cancelations. All three airlines said they are in regular communication with government agencies and health officials and will follow their recommendations.

Q: What about airlines from other countries?

A: European carriers such as Air France-KLM, British Airways and Lufthansa all fly to Western Africa from their hubs in Paris, Amsterdam, London and Frankfurt.

Lufthansa notes that "there is no risk of getting infected by the Ebola virus via air circulation during flight." Crews on Brussels Airlines flights

have access to special thermoscans to check passengers' temperature, if they feel it's necessary. And British Airways has briefed all crew members flying to the region about the "causes and symptoms of Ebola." The only airline, so far, to cancel any flights is the Middle East airline Emirates. It has suspended its service to Conakry, Guinea, until further notice. It is still flying to Dakar.

Q: Are passengers leaving Africa being screened?

A: Since the outbreak erupted, the CDC has sent about two dozen staffers in West Africa to help try to track cases, set up emergency response operations and provide other help to control the outbreak. Last week, CDC officials said the agency will send 50 more in the next month. CDC workers in Africa also are helping to screen passengers at airports, according to CDC director Dr. Tom Frieden.

Q: Is the U.S. government doing anything extra for arriving passengers?

A: Border patrol agents at Washington's Dulles International Airport and New York's John F. Kennedy International Airport, in particular, are looking out for travelers who might have been exposed to the virus. They're watching for signs of fever, achiness, sore throat, stomach pain, rash or red eyes. The CDC also has staff at 20 U.S. airports and border crossings evaluating travelers with signs of dangerous infectious diseases and isolating them when necessary.

Q: Has the airline industry dealt with any outbreaks in the past?

A: In 2003, there was a global outbreak of severe acute respiratory syndrome, or SARS. The disease was first reported in Asia but quickly spread to more than two dozen countries in North America, South America and Europe. Unlike Ebola, SARS can spread when an infected person coughs or sneezes. During the 2003 outbreak, 8,098 people

worldwide became sick with SARS; 774 of those died. Airports started screening incoming passengers for fever. For [airlines](#), the disease was devastating because fearful passengers stayed home.

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