

# IATA Guidance Note on Ebola

13 November 2014

## Guiding Principles

- Constant coordination with both the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO)
- Any positions taken or guidance provided by IATA on Ebola is based on information and guidance received from the experts, e.g. the WHO.
- Network of field and regional colleagues to monitor developments on a real-time basis
- Many new travel requirements (e.g. vaccination requirements) put in place as a result of Ebola are being reflected in TIMATIC  
(<https://www.iata.org/publications/pages/timatic.aspx>)

## Key Messages:

### International coordination and state responsibility are critical

- The WHO, the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), Airports Council International (ACI), International Air Transport Association (IATA) the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) have activated an Ebola Travel and Transport Task Force.
  - Its job is to monitor the situation and provide timely information to the travel and tourism sector as well as to travelers.
  - IATA's representative on this Task Force is Dr. Claude Thibeault.
- The development and execution of measures to combat public health emergencies are the responsibility of states through their public health authorities, not airlines.
- In this regard, it is critical for WHO member States to coordinate their responses to Ebola to avoid the imposition of a patchwork of differing measures across different States.
  - Failure to do so will result in confusion for passengers, inefficient implementation of measures to contain Ebola and a disproportionate operational burden on airlines
  - It is important for states to base their procedures on:
    - WHO guidelines
    - Existing internationally agreed standards and procedures. In November 2014 a traveler health declaration form was developed. A passenger locator form already exists. These documents are available at <http://www.iata.org/whatwedo/safety/health/Pages/diseases.aspx> and <http://www.who.int/csr/resources/publications/ebola/exit-screening-guidance/en/>

**WHO is the right forum to issue guidelines to manage an international crisis of this magnitude. IATA supports WHO recommendations and urges governments to follow them**

- The WHO has an area of its website dedicated to Ebola:
  - [www.who.int/csr/disease/ebola/en/](http://www.who.int/csr/disease/ebola/en/)
  - Which contains a significant amount of information about the disease itself and updates on the spread of the disease
  - It also contains guidance for health authorities and the transport sector, including its 'Ebola: travel and transport risk assessment' at:
    - <http://www.who.int/csr/resources/publications/ebola/travel-guidance/en/>

- In terms of the travel sector, the key WHO guidelines are currently:
  - Countries where an Ebola outbreak has already occurred should conduct exit screening of all persons at international airports, seaports and major land crossings.
    - Any person clearly displayed symptoms consistent with Ebola should not be allowed to travel unless the travel is part of an appropriate medical evacuation.
    - There should be no international travel of Ebola contacts or cases, unless the travel is part of an appropriate medical evacuation
  - Non-affected countries need to strengthen the capacity to detect and immediately contain new cases, while avoiding measures that will create unnecessary interference with international travel or trade.
  - WHO does not recommend any ban on international travel or trade.
  - On the contrary the WHO is still actively encouraging airlines to keep operating to affected areas, as this is often the only way to ensure that much needed medical supplies and medical professionals can access those affected areas
  - Travel restrictions and active screening of passengers on arrival at sea ports, airports or ground crossings in non-affected countries that do not share borders with affected countries are not currently recommended by WHO
  - Instead the WHO strongly believes that the focus should remain on exit screening, as mentioned above. The key is controlling the disease at source, therefore focusing on where the outbreak is greatest and preventing its spread, and isolating patients immediately once they are diagnosed.
  - Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, assisted by WHO and US CDC, are following WHO recommendations and all passengers flying from international airports in these countries are already screened prior to take off. Any individuals showing symptoms before boarding their planes are refused permission to fly.
  - Screening travelers when they land can only identify people who develop symptoms during their flight; the chances of this happening are minimal as it takes days for someone to exhibit symptoms of the disease. Furthermore, effective guidelines on how to identify a suspected case of a communicable disease on board already exist. As well as a standard ICAO procedure to report the case to destination before arrival.
  - The experience with SARS illustrates the limitation of entry screening: Canada screened over 1 million people and not one single case was found

**States should be discouraged from implementing disproportionate and unworkable new passenger data requirements**

- The safety of passengers and crew are an airline's number one priority. However, we do not think that imposing new passenger data requirements (e.g. requesting detailed PNR data) on airlines will enhance such safety.
- There are significant exit screening measures in place in affected countries, which should be relied upon as the most important line of defense against the spread of Ebola
- Proposed new data requirements are often unworkable from a purely technical standpoint, as airlines systems' do not always have the capability to retrieve origin and destination data, particularly when the itinerary includes travel across many days
- Passengers often use different airlines to complete a multi-sector journey, which could result in them taking stopovers on the way and having more than one PNR. In such circumstances, the airline transporting the passenger to their final destination may simply not have data relating to that passenger's entire journey.
- And as States start indicating their intent to control passenger movements via provision of PNR, those seeking to flee Ebola affected States will actively evolve their strategies. They will start booking separate tickets (i.e. Western Africa to a European transfer hub

and then a separate reservation from that EU hub onward). In those cases – the PNR will not show the true origin and the carrier boarding the person at the EU hub will have no access to up-line data.

- We therefore believe that such passenger data requirements are invariably disproportionate to the potential benefits they could derive.
- There are also potential legal barriers to airlines providing passenger data. For example, most States' data privacy regulations prohibit exchange of passengers' personal data except when such provision is mandated by law. Additionally, airlines in the European Union (and airlines whose passenger data are processed in the EU) are legally prohibited from providing PNR data to a third country government if that government has not signed a specific agreement with the EU. This restriction may be overcome if the country in which the airline is based has specific legislation in place that allows the carrier to transmit PNR data. Typically, such exempting laws allow data transfer only on a case-by-case basis (i.e. information about a specific individual, and not a request for all individuals on a flight).

### **The WHO advises that the risk of Ebola transmission while on board an aircraft is very low**

- Unlike infections such as influenza or tuberculosis, Ebola is not spread by breathing air (and the airborne particles it contains) from an infected person
- Transmission requires direct contact with blood, secretions, organs or other body fluids of infected symptomatic living or dead persons or animals
- A person is only contagious when showing symptoms and those symptoms are severe
- The risk of transmission of Ebola virus disease during air travel is very low
- 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
- The general advice is always that people who are sick are encouraged not to travel and see their doctor

### **The air transport industry is prepared**

- Safety is our top priority and that includes the health of passengers throughout the travel experience
- The industry has gained useful experience from dealing with public health emergencies due to previous outbreaks, such as SARS, Avian Flu A (H7N9) and MERS-CoV
- IATA has developed a set of guidance materials for maintenance crew, cabin crew, cleaning crew, cargo and baggage handlers and passenger agents, which have been endorsed by WHO and ICAO:
  - Available at [www.iata.org/whatwedo/safety/health/Pages/diseases.aspx](http://www.iata.org/whatwedo/safety/health/Pages/diseases.aspx)
- Based on the experience with SARS, IATA has produced an Emergency Response Plan and Action Checklist for use by air carriers in the event of a public health emergency:
  - Available at [www.iata.org/whatwedo/safety/health/Documents/airlines-erp-checklist.pdf](http://www.iata.org/whatwedo/safety/health/Documents/airlines-erp-checklist.pdf)