

WHO: Air travel is low-risk for Ebola transmission

Note for the media

14 August 2014 / GENEVA - The World Health Organization (WHO) today reiterated its position that the risk of transmission of Ebola virus disease during air travel remains low.

“Unlike infections such as influenza or tuberculosis, Ebola is not airborne,” says Dr Isabelle Nuttall, Director of WHO Global Capacity Alert and Response. “It can only be transmitted by direct contact with the body fluids of a person who is sick with the disease.”

On the small chance that someone on the plane is sick with Ebola, the likelihood of other passengers and crew having contact with their body fluids is even smaller. Usually when someone is sick with Ebola, they are so unwell that they cannot travel. WHO is therefore advising against travel bans to and from affected countries.

“Because the risk of Ebola transmission on airplanes is so low, WHO does not consider air transport hubs at high risk for further spread of Ebola,” says Dr Nuttall.

In early August, after the meeting of the Ebola Emergency Committee under the International Health Regulations, WHO provided advice to countries to help contain the current Ebola outbreak and prevent it from spreading further. The guidance recommended:

- no ban on international travel or trade;
- that countries be prepared to detect, investigate, and manage Ebola cases; including access to a qualified diagnostic laboratory for Ebola virus and, where appropriate, the capacity to identify and care for travellers originating from known Ebola-infected areas who arrive at international airports or major land crossing points with unexplained fever and other symptoms.

Worldwide, countries should provide their citizens traveling to Ebola-affected countries with accurate and relevant information on the Ebola outbreak and measures to reduce the risk of exposure.

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