

Pandemic Threats: Summary Travel Guidance for SC Staff

Revised August 9, 2018

This document serves as the revised summary of Pandemic Threats guidance for Save the Children staff regarding the risk of person-to-person respiratory transmission while traveling. SC remains concerned about the continuing possibility of a severe pandemic that could rapidly disrupt international travel. SC updates this guidance to reflect that of WHO and US CDC. For more information on travel safety, please see

<https://savethechildren1.sharepoint.com/How/security/Pages/TravelerSafetyandSecurity.aspx> or <https://savechildrenusa.sharepoint.com/gss/Pages/TravelerSecuritySafety.aspx>

Influenza pandemics are worldwide epidemics caused by new flu viruses from animals, which adapt to allow sustained person-to-person spread. Person-to-person flu transmission is most likely through close exposure (distances up to 2 meters or 6 feet), putting all those in crowded situations, including most travelers, at a higher risk of infection.

Human infections with the H5N1 avian flu virus have continued since late 2003. Although the 2009 H1N1 (“Swine Flu”) pandemic was not severe, Save the Children and others remain concerned about the continuing possibility of a severe pandemic, which could rapidly and substantially disrupt international travel and affect SC staff, families, and beneficiaries around the world. This threat is summarized on the US State Department webpage on *Options During a Pandemic*:

<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/international-travel/emergencies/options-during-pandemic.html>. International travelers, and SC staff posted away from their families, may wish to review this page.

Two additional concerning threats emerged in late 2012 and early 2013: avian flu H7N9, and MERS-CoV (Middle East Respiratory Syndrome coronavirus, not an influenza virus, but related to the virus that caused SARS). The concern is that any of these could evolve into a virus capable of sustained person-to-person respiratory transmission, and potentially cause a severe pandemic.

There is no way of estimating the likelihood that H5N1, H7N9, or MERS will ever evolve into a human pandemic virus. Such an event would lead to reports of one or more outbreaks, involving sustained person-to-person transmission “in the community” (outside of health facilities), with increasing numbers of cases of illness and death, posted on the following sites:

- www.who.int/csr/don/en/index.html (WHO)
- <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/notices> (US CDC)
- <http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/alertswarnings.html> (US State Department)

Travelers may somewhat reduce risks of a respiratory virus infection by avoiding, as much as possible, crowded, enclosed spaces, and close contact with people who are coughing or sneezing. Frequent hand washing, especially after direct contact with ill persons or their environment, and refraining from touching one’s own eyes, nose, or mouth, can also reduce the risk of transmission. Ill persons should delay travel and practice respiratory etiquette (maintain distance, wear a surgical mask, cover coughs and sneezes with disposable tissues or clothing, and wash hands). (See guidance

for airline cabin crew at: <https://www.capsca.org/Documentation/Zika/IATA-health-guidelines-cabin-crew-2011.pdf> & <http://www.cdc.gov/quarantine/air/managing-sick-travelers/commercial-aircraft/infection-control-cabin-crew.html>)

The current risk to travelers of contracting H5N1 or H7N9 through exposure to birds, poultry products, and surfaces contaminated by birds, is very low (see: <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/diseases/avian-bird-flu>). At this time, the risk to travelers of contracting MERS-CoV (from camels or in health facilities) is also considered low (see: <http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/mers/travel.html>).

For additional information on influenza and pandemic threats and Save the Children's preparations, please see: <https://www.savethechildren.org/us/about-us/resource-library/influenza-library> or <https://savechildrenusa.sharepoint.com/gss/Pages/AvianFluUpdates.aspx>.