

Understanding and serving business travellers

By Robb Leigh MD

Do you know who is travelling on your carrier?

The chances are that a large percentage of your passengers are travelling on business. First-hand travel experience means that these people will be very well-informed about air travel-related issues and will understand the increased risks associated with frequent air travel.

Alarming, though, many business passengers are actually less likely to take precautions because, for the most part, they have experienced few negative health effects during their extensive travels. Even so, their fast-paced lifestyles put them at greater risk for a range of medical issues, because their schedules often prevent regular visits to doctors and result in irregular eating and sleeping habits.

malaria, yellow fever and dengue fever, to name but a few.

The aircraft cabin can also put these frequent travellers at risk. Although air filtration systems are highly effective – removing 99% of infectious material, including viruses, bacteria and fungi – a passenger with a respiratory infection can still spread infectious material. When he or she coughs, the material can become suspended in the air and can be breathed in before reaching the filter, potentially transmitting an infection to another passenger.

Furthermore, passengers returning from developing countries may also be subject to the most common ailment, traveller's diarrhoea, or may be experiencing injuries from motor vehicle accidents.

recommended vaccinations before travel. Although the risk of exposure to communicable diseases increases in the confines of an aircraft cabin, some of these diseases are vaccine-preventable.

- Protect yourself from insect bites while at your ground-based destination. Doing so is key to avoiding some serious communicable diseases.
- Take important medicines in carry-on luggage, not checked baggage.
- Carry a medical history summary: a small card with a brief history of hospitalisations and operations, a record of current medications and allergies and your doctor's name and contact information. If a heart patient, you should consider carrying your baseline electrocardiogram (ECG). All this information can be stored in an electronic USB flash drive that can be easily accessed by most healthcare providers in the event of an emergency. This step can put the caregiver in a better position to provide adequate treatment.
- Practice regular exercise routines and follow a proper diet. Attention to these details will prevent most problems and complications related to health, especially for the business traveller who needs to constantly adapt to a changing environment. ■



Which particular medical matters should most concern business travellers?

Moreover, many business travellers are among an ageing population and have medical conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure and heart disease that may require continuous maintenance therapy.

When flying extensively, business travellers are also open to a series of other travel-associated risks such as dehydration, hypoxia (shortage of oxygen in the body), deep vein thrombosis and diseases that are endemic at some destinations, such as

Advice for passengers

To better serve this large population of travellers, and to help prevent inflight emergencies, regional carriers can help educate these frequent flyers with simple seat-back information cards, inflight magazine articles and videos. Consider offering the following pieces of advice to passengers:

- Visit a travel medicine practitioner or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and World Health Organization websites for

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