

## Travel safe, travel smart

By Michael Marek RN

**It turns out that mother was right. The things she always told you – wash your hands, be prepared, don't drink too much, talk to someone if you're hurt – were not just personal codes of conduct but also insightful tips for today's airborne travellers.**

By using the onboard medical equipment and following a small number of simple tips, your passengers and your crew could significantly reduce the possibility of disease transmission while avoiding severe medical conditions accelerated by the inflight environment.

- **Wash your hands.** Many organisms are deposited on hard surfaces and are waiting for passengers to liberate them. Touching the nose or eyes will give such organisms the new home they are waiting for. The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports: "Handwashing is the single most important means of preventing the spread of infection." Not only should passengers wash with soap and water, and do so frequently during travel, they can also carry disposable towelettes, cleaning their table trays and arm rests during flight.
- **Stay hydrated.** The best hydration solution is water, not soft drinks or juice. Passengers should feel comfortable asking the airline for water, which is generally in stock.
- **Limit alcohol.** Oxygen deprivation is a natural effect of flying at altitude. As a result, passengers should limit alcoholic beverages the day prior to and of air travel. Cabin altitude, which is kept to 8,000 to 10,000 feet, can exacerbate respiratory problems and the effects of alcohol.
- **Be prepared.** Pack medications in a separate carry-on bag for easy accessibility. From insulin and eye drops to antacids and blood pressure medication, passengers should be encouraged to carry their own 'mini-medicine' kits on board to avoid possible medical situations.
- **Move around.** Circulation in the legs is important to travellers, to help



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avoid deep vein thrombosis (DVT) in which blood pools in the legs and causes dangerous clots (see **Regional International's 'Medical Advisory'** in April 2007). Airline attendants should encourage passengers to move about the cabin when it is safe to do so.

- **Speak up.** Passengers should be encouraged to talk to a crew member if they see suspected signs of illness or injury prior to boarding or while in flight.

### **Communicating with passengers**

So, how exactly does the regional carrier communicate these vitally important messages to passengers? Consider one or all of these tactics:

- Increase the amount of health information on your airline website.
- Include health tips on seatback cards.
- Include a travel safety article in your inflight magazine.
- Add tips to your print-and-go ticket (when online check-in is offered).
- Communicate health and travel advice to travel agents.
- Continue to complete rigorous airport fit-to-fly assessments.
- Use your airline's on-hold messages to provide travel safety tips.

Airlines can also assist passengers by identifying the carrier's most common inflight medical incidents. Working with medical advisory personnel, airlines have the ability to actively monitor data about the types of crew and passenger illnesses occurring on their aircraft. That information can then be used to create specific tips for prevention.

By taking a few precautionary measures and planning ahead, passengers – and crew – can reduce the chances of illness or delay, prevent inflight emergencies and travel the world safely. Travel safe, travel smart.

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