IS IT SAFE TO FLY? HOW TO AVOID CORONA VIRUS ON FLIGHTS?
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Air travel is extremely accessible today, linking us to countries all over the world. You can wake up in New York and go to sleep in Tokyo; any destination is possible. With the convenience of air travel, comes the risk of spreading diseases more easily. Now not only do over a million people take flight each day, but so do a wide variety of germs, influenza's and illnesses.

We've all heard the recent stories surrounding Corona Virus, so it's no wonder there is concern surrounding the containment of these illnesses and how to prevent them from spreading rapidly through our skies. So how can you protect yourself from Corona Virus on your next flight, and what are airlines doing to help stop the spread of germs?

#1: General Public Vs. Airplanes

Before you begin to panic about your upcoming flight, consider the entire trip as a whole, including buses, trains, taxis, public waiting areas, etc. If you've ever been unfortunate enough to contract a virus while traveling, the question then needs to be asked, where did you first come in contact? The total travel experience must be taken into consideration before assuming the illness was a direct result of air travel.

#2: Filtered Air

Breathe easy!! The risk of catching a serious viral infection on an aircraft is low. All commercial jet aircraft recirculate 10%-50% of the air in the cabin and mix it with outside air. The recirculated air then passes through a series of HEPA filters, helping capture 99.9% of particles containing bacteria, fungi and larger viruses. Air does not flow up and down the aisle; it flows diagonally in small sections. This helps to create an environment that is unfavorable to the spread of most illnesses.

#3: Regular Testing

The EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) regularly tests the water supply on-board all commercial aircraft carriers. Their aim is to provide the public with additional protection from disease-causing organisms like E. coli and other pathogens, which can sometimes be found in on-board water supplies. If bacteria are present, the airline must then deactivate the plane's water system and have it decontaminated.

#4: Strict Guidelines

If a serious illness or infection is suspected on board a flight, a procedure is then put into place to help eliminate the spread of any harmful bacteria. The captain of any aircraft bound for the United States, is required by law to notify the Center for Disease Control and Prevention of any suspected ill passengers or passengers who may have died on-board the flight before arrival. If this occurs, the plane must then be decontaminated and passengers would need to be assessed.

#5: Airplane Cleaning

Virus and other microbes live on the surfaces around us, including seats, armrests and any other object on a plane. Although airlines have taken measures to cut down the spread of germs during the recent Corona Virus outbreak, the fact is, planes are in constant motion and don't always have time for a thorough cleaning after each flight. Most airlines only require their planes to be deep-cleaned (lavatories, seat covers, tray tables) every 30 days and perform light-cleans every 2 weeks. That being said, there are steps you can take to protect yourself and to help ensure you stay healthy on your next flight.

Here are a few tips to help keep you healthy while in the air!

Face masks & gloves:

If you have recently travelled through an airport, you may have noticed the increased number of people wearing face masks and hand gloves. Unfortunately there is very limited evidence to support the benefit of wearing a mask. if you're sick, wearing a mask is a courtesy to the people around you since you'll be less likely to spread your illness when you cough, sneeze, laugh or talk. But masks aren't perfect and are designed to block large particles and droplets, not small virus particles which can get in through gaps around the nose, mouth, and chin. So even though a mask might provide some protection, it's going to be very small.

Hand Hygiene & Disinfectant Wipes:

The number one way to protect yourself is by practicing good hand hygiene. A 20-second scrub using warm running water and soap is always the best practice. During flight when hand washing becomes more difficult, use hand sanitizer before eating, and avoid touching your face, mouth and nose.

If your worried about all the previous passengers who sat in your seat, a great way to put your mind at ease is to bring a small package of disinfectant wipes with you in your carry-on. Wipe down your armrests, table trays, window and TV screen before taking your seat.

Stay hydrated:

When flying at high altitudes, the humidity levels can cause your nose and throat to get dry. When our nasal passages don't have enough moisture, our bodies can't flush out harmful bacteria and viruses. Drinking lots of water allows our mucus membranes to stay hydrated, creating a better environment to fight germs.

Avoid leaning on the window:

The window seat can be a great place for those wanting to take in the views or rest their head during sleep; but it can also be a great place to pick up germs. Bacteria can linger on surfaces for long periods of time, so avoid close contact with the window if possible.

Adjust the airflow:

You can't always pick your seat-mate and may find yourself sitting next to someone with the sniffles. To avoid sharing the germs of those around you, turn the air above your head to a medium flow to ensure circulation, but avoid pointing it directly towards your face.

Wash your hands as soon as you land:

To ensure you don't take away any unwanted germs, find the nearest lavatory once off the plane, and wash your hands thoroughly with warm water and soap. Diligent hand washing and use of hand sanitizers is always the best way to ward off infection.

If you're sick, don't fly:

Realistically we can't always change our travel plans when we are sick, but we can however avoid trying to spread our germs to others. If you find yourself sick with a mild cold while traveling, be sure to wash your hands often and cover your mouth when coughing. Wearing a mask in this situation can help protect others, but if you're ill with a much more contagious disease, please avoid flying all together! Airlines will help to re-book you when you are too sick to travel. Remember, just because your body can fight off a very serious infection, doesn't mean the elderly lady or young child sitting next to you can!

Stay in the know:

Overall, the best way to protect yourself from getting sick is to practice good hand hygiene, avoid touching your face and to stay in the know. Since the Corona Virus is a rapidly developing situation, we recommend checking with the WHO and CDC websites prior to any air travel. They provide up-to-date information and will list any travel restrictions.

The likelihood of contracting Corona Virus is currently low, but that doesn't mean you should ignore these tips when traveling by air. The regular flu and common cold are at a high this time of year, so practicing good hygiene is a win-win no matter where you are traveling. These simple steps can keep you healthy year round and can make your next trip to the airport a little less stressful.