

# Swine Flu Still Scares Airlines

The H1N1 virus, aka the swine flu, has had a media resurgence and the travel industry seems to be panicking - but is it justified or alarmism?



So far airlines have said they will likely bar sick passengers from boarding, offer anti-bacterial wipes and keep blankets and pillows off planes. (Someone should tell them that it's a virus, not a bacterial infection.) Apparently the threat of the pandemic is so large that passengers are now more likely to hire a charter plane than fly on a commercial airline. According to Bloomberg:

"Swine flu has certainly increased traffic," said Rob Dore, a director at Jet Direct Service Ltd. based in Shoreham-by-Sea, England. "Predominantly it's the largest corporate clients. They are concerned about the wellbeing of their staff from a commercial, as well as a moral, standpoint."

It's been estimated that about \$6 billion was lost in the airline industry because of the fear of swine flu, although many companies now admit their part in escalating the global pandemic was voluntary:



Dr Rose Ong, who heads the corporate medical department at Cathay Pacific Airways in Hong Kong . . . said companies can be swept up by the public reaction to swine flu, noting that banks and transportation systems in Asia began distributing surgical masks earlier this year even though the actual danger was low.

“We really felt we had to do something similar even though we did not medically support the use of masks,” she said.



So, the question is, are airlines escalating customer panic rather than easing it? Most health experts agree that travel restrictions are of little use. And in the end, swine flu or not, it's still just the flu. So maybe airlines should channel all their efforts into getting passengers immunized, or educating them about places to get flu shots, rather than spend so much time and effort in promoting scare tactics.

To date, at least 3,205 people world-wide have died from the virus, according to the World Health Organization.

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Date: 2009-09-28

Article link:

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