

Emergencies preparedness, response

No rationale for travel restrictions

1 MAY 2009 - WHO is not recommending travel restrictions related to the outbreak of the influenza A(H1N1) virus. Today, international travel moves rapidly, with large numbers of individuals visiting various parts of the world. Limiting travel and imposing travel restrictions would have very little effect on stopping the virus from spreading, but would be highly disruptive to the global community.

Influenza A(H1N1) has already been confirmed in many parts of the world. The focus now is on minimizing the impact of the virus through the rapid identification of cases and providing patients with appropriate medical care, rather than on stopping its spread internationally. Furthermore, although identifying the signs and symptoms of influenza in travellers can be an effective monitoring technique, it is not effective in reducing the spread of influenza as the virus can be transmitted from person to person before the onset of symptoms. Scientific research based on mathematical modelling indicates that restricting travel will be of limited or no benefit in stopping the spread of disease. Historical records of previous influenza pandemics, as well as experience with SARS, have validated this point.

Travellers can protect themselves and others by following simple recommendations related to travel aimed at preventing the spread of infection. Individuals who are ill should delay travel plans and returning travellers who fall ill should seek appropriate medical care. These recommendations are prudent measures which can limit the spread of many communicable diseases and not only influenza A(H1N1).