

Passenger health - the risk posed by infectious disease in the aircraft cabin

Every year, an increasing number of people undertake air travel. Whether for business or pleasure, these journeys should be safe and enjoyable. However, there is continuing public concern about whether, or to what extent, aircraft cabins represent an increased risk of transmission of infectious disease. The purpose of this report was to review the current literature on the potential risk of disease transmission within an aircraft cabin.

The evidence suggests that passengers' health is not greatly at risk through air travel and widespread infections are unlikely. Although there have been cases of infectious disease transmission in aircraft cabins, there is evidence that such transmission was primarily due to the crowding together of a large variety of people in a confined space, not specifically due to aircraft cabin conditions. This suggests that the risk of transmission within an aircraft cabin is no greater than in other crowded and confined spaces, provided circulation and filtration systems are working properly. Perhaps of greater concern is the opportunity for infection to spread in airport terminals, where passengers who are traveling to or from many destinations are gathered together.

The increase in international travel has also heightened the risk for the global spread of infectious diseases. It is not possible to predict when the next pandemic will occur or how long it will last but many health officials think that it's only a matter of time. Although the increase in international air travel could assist with the spread of a future influenza pandemic, the aviation industry will also play a critical role in mitigating the consequences.

Full report available from <http://www.atsb.gov.au/publications/2008/ar2007050.aspx>