Interim Guidance on Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) for Travellers

Updated March 17, 2020

This document provides information on the COVID-19 for travellers in the Caribbean. This information is based on currently available scientific evidence and expert opinion and is subject to change as new information becomes available. It should be read in conjunction with relevant national legislation, regulations and policies. This document has been adapted for the Caribbean situation, and therefore may differ from guidance developed by other agencies.

Key Points

• There is an outbreak of pneumonia caused by a new coronavirus, which is a family of viruses that includes the common cold, named COVID-19. The outbreak started in Wuhan, China and has spread to over 100 countries.
• Person-to-person spread is occurring in multiple countries, increasing the risk of international spread by travellers.
• The immediate health risk from COVID-19 to the general public in the Caribbean is very high as sustained community transmission has been reported in countries with direct flights to Member States.
• Travel warnings have been issued by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
• Many Caribbean countries have issued travel restrictions for countries with sustained community transmission
• Travellers to Caribbean countries may be asked questions about their health and travel history upon arrival and may be quarantined by port authorities when they arrive.
• This notice will be updated as more information becomes available on the outbreak.

Background

On 11 March 2020, the Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the outbreak of a novel coronavirus, COVID-19 as Pandemic. Whilst most cases are from China, in just two months the virus has rapidly spread to over 100 countries. The International Health Regulations ‘Emergency Committee is not recommending trade or travel restrictions currently. The US CDC has issued travel advisories in countries where there is demonstrated sustained transmission.

To date, imported cases have been reported in several Caribbean countries, the rapidly evolving situation now requires a shift in mindset in all countries from preparedness to readiness and rapid response. CARPHA has upgraded the risk of disease transmission to the Caribbean Region to Very High. The revised risk level is based on international risk assessment guidelines, since multiple countries outside the epicentre of the outbreak have reported secondary cases from imported cases, including an increasing number of countries reporting
sustained community transmission and sustained transmission of disease in countries with direct flights into the Caribbean Region. The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and several Caribbean countries have issued travel alerts and advisories to include countries reporting sustained community transmission.

What is COVID-19?
The virus belongs in the same family of coronaviruses as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), 2002/03 outbreak (CDC) and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS-CoV), 2012 outbreak. This 2019 virus is a new strain of coronavirus that has not been previously identified in humans. The cases in the Wuhan pneumonia outbreak have tested negative for both SARS and MERS-CoV.  

What are common signs and symptoms of infection?
A person infected may have the following symptoms:
• Fever
• Shortness of breath
• Cough
• Breathing difficulties
• Other flu like symptoms
• more severe cases: pneumonia, severe acute respiratory syndrome, kidney failure and death

How is it transmitted?
Currently, the source of the outbreak is yet to be identified. Early information found samples from the environment in the Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market in Wuhan City, but several of those infected did not visit the market. The virus has also been detected in health care workers caring for ill cases. The available information indicates that person-to-person transmission is taking place. Person-to-person spread has not yet been detected in other countries, but it’s likely to occur to some extent. There are early reports that some person who have not shown any symptoms have transmitted the disease to others (asymptomatic transmission). Precautions must therefore be taken to prevent human-to-human transmission of the disease.

While we don’t know much about the routes of transmission of COVID-19, from what we know about other coronaviruses (MERS and SARS), they are mainly transmitted by:
• Large respiratory droplets and direct or indirect contact with infected secretions
• Body fluids (e.g., blood, sweat, saliva, sputum, nasal mucus, vomit, urine, or diarrhea)
• There have been some instances when airborne transmission of other coronaviruses was thought to have taken place through exposure to aerosols of respiratory secretions and sometimes faecal material

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• Coughing or sneezing
• The COVID-19 may be spread by individuals that exhibit no symptoms
• There is no evidence that COVID-19 is spread by water, mosquitoes or food.

Air and Cruise Travel
Because of how air circulates and is filtered on airplanes, most viruses and other germs do not spread easily on airplanes. Although the risk of infection on an airplane is low, travellers should try to avoid contact with sick passengers and wash their hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use hand sanitizer that contain 60%–95% alcohol.

Cruises put large numbers of people, often from countries around the world, in frequent and close contact with each other. This can promote the spread of respiratory viruses, such as the virus that causes COVID-19. You may get sick from close contact with an infected person or by touching contaminated surfaces.

To reduce spread of respiratory viruses, including COVID-19, CDC recommends that crew members and passengers:

• Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
• Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
• Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom; before eating; and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.
  o If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains 60%–95% alcohol.
• Stay in your cabin when you are sick and let the onboard medical center know immediately if you develop a fever (100.4°F/38°C or higher), begin to feel feverish, or have other symptoms (such as cough, runny nose, shortness of breath, or sore throat).
Section 1: General Advice to Travellers


- Avoid nonessential travel to China and other countries where there is sustained community spread

- If you must travel:
  - Seek information on travel advisories from the country you want to visit
  - Discuss travel to countries with sustained transmission with your healthcare provider. Older adults and travellers with underlying health issues are at increased risk for COVID-19
  - Know that screening of passengers at air/seaport will occur
  - Avoid contact with persons with the flu (coughing, sneezing)
  - Maintain social distance, i.e. 1-2 meters/3-6 feet away, avoid shaking hands, hugging
  - Avoid close contact with animals (live or dead), animal markets, and products that come from animals (such as uncooked meat).
  - Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.

If you were in a country with sustained transmission in the last 14 days and feel sick with fever, cough, or difficulty breathing, you should:

- Seek medical care right away. Before you go to a doctor’s office or emergency room, call ahead and tell them about your recent travel and your symptoms.
- Avoid contact with others.
- Not travel while sick.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve (not your hands) when coughing or sneezing.
- Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.

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Section 2. Guidance for Travellers coming to the Caribbean

To date, there have been **108** reported cases of COVID-19 in the Caribbean region.

The risk of a case being imported to the Caribbean is high. Travellers must therefore take all necessary precautions when travelling.

There are currently no special precautions travellers need to take when travelling to the Caribbean; however, travellers are advised to:

- Stay informed about the COVID-19 situation in any countries they are travelling to.
- Practice general infection control measures, such as frequent hand washing with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

Travellers coming to the Caribbean from a COVID-19 affected country may undergo entrance screening if travelling through certain ports in the United States and in some Caribbean countries (see Section II below).

Section 3. Guidance for Travellers arriving or returning to the Caribbean from a COVID-19 affected country

Travellers arriving or returning to the Caribbean from a COVID-19 affected country may face special screening measures in Caribbean countries. Travellers are advised to:

- Seek information about the current COVID-19 situation and remain aware of up-to-date information from the WHO or the Ministry of Health in the destination country.
- When leaving the affected area, you may be screened by airport officials and again at airports in connecting countries. They may take your temperature and ask about your activities to assess the likelihood of you acquiring the infection.
- Some Caribbean countries also may be screening passengers from affected areas. They may take your temperature and ask about your activities to assess the likelihood of you acquiring the infection and may ask you to complete a survey with your travel history.

When travelling from a country with reported cases of COVID-19 travellers should:

- **a)** Seek medical care if you develop symptoms of COVID-19 during travel and mention your travel history.
- **b)** If you have symptoms during travel or upon arrival into a Caribbean country or territory, tell a flight attendant immediately, OR a port health officer or a border services officer when you arrive. They will determine whether you need further medical assessment.
- **c)** Monitor your health upon your return or entry into the Caribbean from a country affected by the COVID-19.
- **d)** Seek medical attention if notice any of the symptoms within 14 days after your arrival in the Caribbean: fever, headache, fatigue, severe and nonproductive cough, difficulty breathing, vomiting, diarrhea or any other severe symptoms.
- **e)** Be sure to tell your healthcare provider that you have travelled to a region where Novel coronavirus was present. Make sure to tell them about the activities or work you participated in and whether there was contact with a person known or suspected to have been infected by the COVID-19.

[Note: See Appendix A for a useful infographic prepared by the WHO]
Section 4. Guidance for Travellers going to a 2019 COVID-19 affected Area

CARPHA advises anyone travelling to an area affected by novel coronavirus should pay attention to health alerts and take necessary precautions. Non-essential travel to China, Iran, Italy, South Korea, Spain, France, Germany, Singapore, Hong Kong, United Kingdom, Taiwan or any country that has sustained person-to-person transmission should be avoided.

If you are travelling to an area affected by COVID-19, the following preventive measures will help to reduce your risk of getting infected (see Appendix A for a useful infographic prepared by the WHO).

**Before you travel:**
- Seek information about the current COVID-19 situation and remain aware of up-to-date information. Some cities may be closed to travellers.
- Assemble a travel health kit including a thermometer and know where you can seek medical care in case you start to feel ill.

**While you are in an area with reported cases of COVID-19:**
1. Avoid areas with outbreaks. Follow directives issued by the local Ministry of Health and/or World Health Organization.
2. The virus can spread through person to person contact
   a. Avoid direct contact with people that are visibly sick.
   b. Avoid contact with blood and other bodily fluids especially of a person you think is sick.
3. Avoid close contact with or handling of animals.
   a. Avoid live or dead animals, as both may spread the virus. Avoid animal or fresh meat markets.
   b. Avoid handling or eating raw or undercooked meat.
4. Practice strict and frequent hand cleaning routines with alcohol-based hand sanitizer or soap and water.
5. Know the symptoms of COVID-19 and seek medical care if you develop flu like symptoms: fever, headache, fatigue, severe and nonproductive cough, difficulty breathing, vomiting, diarrhoea, or any other severe symptoms.
6. Use the Tourism and Health Information System to report visitor-based illness. [http://this.carpha.org/](http://this.carpha.org/) Using this platform allows for real time monitoring and response to possible disease outbreaks.
7. Symptoms may start up to 2 weeks after exposure to the virus. Monitor your health and that of your travelling partners. If you need to seek medical care, let your healthcare provider know that you traveled to an area affected by the COVID-19.
8. When leaving the affected area, you may be screened by airport officials. They may take your temperature and ask about your activities to assess the likelihood of you acquiring the infection.
Appendix A

The following infographic from WHO illustrates, in summary form, the key points to keep safe when travelling to an area where the COVID-19 is present.

Infographic available from: https://www.who.int/images/default-source/health-topics/coronavirus/1overall.png?sfvrsn=4f38434f_4
Appendix B
Guidance for Airlines and Airline Crew

Report travellers with specific symptoms arriving from China.

- Report travellers with
  - fever (person feels warm to the touch, gives a history of feeling feverish, or has an actual measured temperature of 100.4°F [38°C] or higher) that has persisted for more than 48 hours OR
  - fever AND one of the following:
    - persistent cough
    - difficulty breathing
    - appears obviously unwell

- Report, as soon as possible before arrival.

It is recommended that companies update their infection control guidelines, as needed, their personal protection policies, communicate and train employees on how to manage sick travellers.

It is recommended that the following measures for cabin crew to protect themselves, manage a sick traveller, clean contaminated areas, and take actions after a flight.

- Practice routine handwashing.
  - Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds after assisting sick travellers or touching potentially contaminated body fluids or surfaces.
  - Use alcohol-based hand sanitizer (containing at least 60% alcohol) if soap and water are not available.

- Identify sick travellers who meet the above description.
  - Minimize contact between passengers and cabin crew and the sick person. If possible, separate the sick person from others (2 meters or 6 feet is ideal) and designate one crew member to serve the sick person.
  - Offer a facemask, if available and if the sick person can tolerate it. If a facemask is not available or cannot be tolerated, ask the sick person to cover their mouth and nose with tissues when coughing or sneezing.

- Treat all body fluids (respiratory secretions, diarrhoea, vomit, or blood) as if they are infectious.
  - Wear disposable gloves when tending to a sick traveller or touching body fluids or potentially contaminated surfaces. Remove gloves carefully to avoid contaminating yourself, then wash hands.
  - When tending to a sick traveller from China who has fever, persistent cough, or difficulty breathing, use additional protective equipment in the Universal Precaution Kit: face mask, eye protection, and a gown to cover clothing.
  - Properly dispose of gloves and other disposable items that came in contact with the sick person or body fluids in biohazard bag or a secured plastic bag labelled as “biohazard.”

- Clean and disinfect contaminated surfaces according to airline protocol.

After arrival, Quarantine Station staff will conduct a health assessment of the sick traveller’s symptoms and possible exposures. If necessary, quarantine staff will coordinate transport to a health care facility for medical evaluation and testing.
Appendix C

Guidelines for Cruise Ships

Preventing Spread:

Commercial shipping, including cruise ships and other passenger vessels, involves the movement of large numbers of people in closed and semi-closed settings. Like other close-contact environments, ships may facilitate transmission of respiratory viruses from person to person through exposure to respiratory droplets or contact with contaminated surfaces.

To reduce spread of respiratory infections including COVID-19, it is recommended that ships encourage crew members and passengers to

- Postpone travel when sick
- Watch their health
- Self-isolate and inform the onboard medical centre immediately if they develop a fever (100.4°F / 38°C or higher), begin to feel feverish, or develop other signs or symptoms of sickness
- Use respiratory, cough, and hand hygiene
  - Advise passengers and crew of the importance of covering coughs and sneezes with a tissue. Dispose used tissues immediately in a disposable container (e.g., plastic bag) or a washable trash can.
  - Remind passengers and crew members to wash their hands often with soap and water, especially after coughing or sneezing. If soap and water are not available, they can use a hand sanitizer containing 60%-95% alcohol.

Managing sick passengers or crew when boarding and onboard

Deny boarding of a passenger or crew member who is suspected to have COVID-19 infection based on signs and symptoms plus travel history in China or other known exposure at the time of embarkation.

Isolate passengers or crew onboard who are suspected of having COVID-19 infection in a single-occupancy cabin with the door closed until symptoms are improved. Discontinuing isolation precautions is made on a case-by-case basis, in consultation with local/regional health agencies.

Ideally, medical follow-up should occur in the isolated person’s cabin. Coordinate visits to the onboard medical center in advance, if needed, with medical staff. Have the sick person wear a facemask before leaving their cabin.
Preventing infection in crew members

Ensure your crew members are aware of the
- Global risk of COVID-19 during international travel
- Signs and symptoms that may indicate a sick traveller has COVID-19
- Requirement for the ship’s medical unit to report a traveller with suspected or known COVID-19 to CDC, if ship is destined for a US port
- Importance of not working on a ship while sick with fever or acute respiratory symptoms

The ship’s company should also review their sick leave policies and communicate them to employees.

It is recommended that crew members who self-report or appear to have fever or acute respiratory symptoms (such as cough or shortness of breath) be immediately evaluated.

In addition to annual influenza vaccination, have crew members follow these recommendations when their work activities involve contact with passengers and other crew members who have fever or acute respiratory illness.
- Ask the sick person to wear a facemask if tolerated, any time they leave their cabin or interact with other people.
- Maintain 6 feet from the sick person while interviewing, escorting, or providing other assistance.
- Keep interactions with sick people as brief as possible.
- Limit the number of people who interact with sick people. To the extent possible, have a single person give care and meals to the sick person.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water. If soap and water are not available and if hands are not visibly soiled, use a hand sanitizer containing 60%-95% alcohol.
- Provide tissues and access to soap and water and ask the sick persons to:
  - Cover their mouth and nose with a tissue (or facemask) when coughing or sneezing.
  - Throw away used tissues immediately in a disposable container (e.g., plastic bag) or a washable trash can.
  - Wash their hands often with soap and water for 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available and hands are not visibly soiled, the sick person should use a hand sanitizer containing 60%-95% alcohol.
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