



April 30, 2009

Julie Showers
Senior Vice President, Inflight Services
Northwest Airlines
7200 34th Avenue South Dept F5700
Minneapolis, MN 55450

RE: Measures to Limit the Spread of Swine Flu

Dear Ms. Showers:

As you will know, the Acting Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services announced on April 26, 2009 that a public health emergency exists nationwide involving Swine Influenza A (H1N1) that affects, or has significant potential to affect, national security. In light of this potential swine flu pandemic, I am writing to you to formally request that Northwest Airlines and Delta Air Lines implement specific steps to limit the spread of disease. Our Air Safety Chair Jeanne Elliott has briefed me on the initial discussions that took place this week in our joint AFA & Company Safety Committee quarterly meeting and we look forward to continued close collaboration on this matter.

Given what we have seen with the spread of SARS on commercial flights, the Association of Flight Attendants-CWA, AFL-CIO (AFA-CWA) is concerned by the health threat to airline crewmembers, passengers, and the public at-large that is posed by swine flu, not to mention the economic threat to airlines. We are particularly concerned for our members who must work either on flights to or from affected areas, or on connecting flights.

Some countries have issued travel advisories recommending that passengers planning elective or non-essential travel to affected areas postpone their trips until further notice. This includes parts of the U.S. In turn, the U.S. has issued a travel advisory discouraging non-essential travel to Mexico. Flight attendants are based in affected areas and are being assigned to work on flights to affected areas. They must show up for work or could risk discipline. As such, they need to be protected.

To address these serious issues, we request that our airline take the following steps:

Develop, implement, and enforce passenger-screening as recommended by the WHO, CDC, or the relevant national health authorities; and

Ensure that aircraft are equipped with proper and sufficient hand washing materials, and emphasize to crews the importance of regular and thorough hand washing, preferably with soap and water or with alcohol-based gels. Only aircraft with an operative potable water system and an adequate supply of soap and paper towels should be operated to and from affected areas. Hand washing is especially important before eating and serving food and drinks. Also, inform crews of the need to avoid touching one's eyes, nose, and mouth; and

Provide non-latex gloves and appropriate face masks* to flight attendants, at least on trips to, from, and within

* A surgical mask will provide limited protection, but is better than nothing. With the SARS epidemic, the CDC recommended that people with symptoms wear an N95 disposable respirator, which provides better protection because less air leaks out around the face. The US National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) has published standards for respirator masks, N/R/P 95/99/100; these are summarized at <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/respsumm.html>. The European Union has two published standards, CE EN149:2001 (FFP 2/3) or EN143:2000 (P2), which are summarized in a document from a UK safety equipment distributor, http://www.sba.co.uk/content/doc_11.pdf. Masks should conform to these or comparable national/regional standards.

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areas that are at increased risk. Allow flight attendants to choose whether or not they wear these gloves/masks. At the very least, allow flight attendants to wear their own gloves/masks, without discipline. Inform flight attendants that wearing gloves will prevent them getting infected through any cuts on their hands. Ensure that they know to remember to not touch their face when wearing gloves and to wash their hands after they take the gloves off. If the gloves get torn, tell them to remove the old gloves, wash their hands, and put on a new pair; and

Inform crewmembers that, while onboard, if they have to cough or sneeze, do so into their elbow or shoulder and wash their hands afterwards. This also applies to passengers; and

Train flight attendants to recognize and manage potentially infected passengers after the aircraft doors have been closed. This includes encouraging any passengers with flu-like symptoms to wear a face mask* and isolating them from other passengers to the extent possible. Train flight attendants who are in contact with a potentially-infected passenger to wear a face mask* and gloves. Ensure that adequate supplies are readily available; and

Inform crews that pregnancy increases their risk of influenza-related complications and their immunity can be suppressed; and

Tell flight attendants to avoid close contact with passengers and with each other, as well as with potentially infected surfaces, all to the extent possible; and

Train pilots to turn up the air packs to "high" whenever possible, especially during ground operations when risk of infection is highest because people are active and in closer contact with each other when stowing bags. Maximizing the airflow to the cabin can reduce the risk of exposure to airborne viruses; and

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that anyone with flu-like symptoms stay home. This is to protect the sick person and to control the spread of disease. Please suspend any policies that discourage flight attendants from calling in sick in light of this CDC recommendation and this emerging pandemic; and

Flight attendants should be trained to inform passengers in the pre-flight safety briefing of appropriate means to reduce the spread of infection.

Protecting flight attendants who must work in and around potentially infected passengers will reduce the risk of disease transmission for your passengers too. To this end, we urge you to implement the protective and proactive measures outlined in our letter. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Janette Rook
NWA MEC President
Association of Flight Attendants-CWA

Cc: Jeanne Elliott, MEC ASHS Chair