



Allergen sensitive passengers

Purpose of this communication

The purpose of this communication is to provide information to allergen-sensitive passengers to help them minimize the risk of an allergic reaction on board an aircraft. In that regard, this document will not provide basic information about allergic reactions that most allergen-sensitive passengers know or that they can easily obtain through many different sources, starting with their treating physician. The document will provide information on what airlines can do and on what the allergen-sensitive passengers can do to facilitate their travel and prevent allergic reactions.

Background

Severe allergic reactions on board are an extremely rare occurrence. However, when they do occur, the consequences may be amplified because of the remote environment. In that context, allergen-sensitive passengers susceptible to severe allergic reactions should do everything in their power to prevent these cases or be prepared if it does happen. The airlines, on their side, are obliged to meet all the requirements of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and of their respective government, which incidentally differ from State to State.

Regulations for airlines

ICAO's standard on the requirements for medical equipment is the following "An airplane shall be equipped with accessible and adequate medical supplies". Then ICAO provides recommendations and guidance material. Each national authority must meet the general standard, but when it comes to details (e.g. first aid kit or emergency medical kit contents), this may be very different from one State to the other.

A similar situation applies to training. The ICAO standard requires that an airline establish and maintain a training program that shall ensure that each member of cabin crew is drilled and capable in the use of the emergency and life-saving equipment that is required to be carried. This basically requires that all cabin crew be trained in first aid. The details of the training are left to the individual States and therefore the required skills and the details of the equipment vary.

Over and above ICAO and individual States requirements, airlines may be able to provide other services dependent on different factors such as the size of the airline and the type of operations. By definition these services vary from airline to airline.

Recommendations for allergen-sensitive passengers

Travelling for allergen-sensitive passenger can be challenging but it is possible to have an enjoyable and uneventful trip with careful planning.

Before travel:

- Contact your physician and discuss the travel related risks involved. If he/she prescribes an epinephrine (adrenalin) auto-injector (such as EpiPen®, Anapen® or Twinject®) make sure you always carry this medication, any other prescribed medication for your allergy and your written emergency plan, in your carry-on baggage. Have the medication easily accessible throughout the flight (at your feet or in the pocket in front of you). While many airlines carry epinephrine in accordance with their national regulations, most of them do not carry an epinephrine auto-injector. The same applies to any other emergency medication that is prescribed for you. You should never assume that the airline will carry the medication you need.
- Make sure that you carry a prescription for the auto-injector and an emergency plan signed by your doctor to avoid problems when passing through airport security.

- When you make your reservations, you should ask the airline how they deal with allergen-sensitive customers. It is always preferable to deal directly with the airline and not through a third party. Even if the airline does not serve the food to which you are allergic, it cannot guarantee an allergen-free environment. For example, if you have a peanut allergy, other passengers may bring peanuts on board the aircraft. Airlines are also unable to provide allergen-free meals because commercial kitchens cannot guarantee compliance. The reason for this is the presence of allergens, such as peanut and peanut-products, across many types of foods, insufficient labelling of peanut as an ingredient in foodstuff and cross contamination.
- Even though airlines carry out routine cleaning procedures of the aircraft, it is impossible to guarantee an allergen-free environment on board.
- Allergen-sensitive minors should never travel unaccompanied.
- If you purchase travel insurance, consider asking the insurance company if you are covered in case of anaphylaxis, or other severe allergic reactions.

Day of travel:

- Arrive early at the airport and allow yourself plenty of time to re-confirm your requests regarding specific seating, early boarding, etc.
- Consider mentioning to the passengers sitting close to you or your allergic child that you or your child has a severe allergy. If it is your child, try to position the child away from other passenger (a window seat for example or between yourself and your spouse or another one of your children). At reservation time, you can also request the back or front row of a section, which will also limit the proximity to other passengers.
- Consider bringing your own sanitizing wipes if you wish to wipe down the armrests, meal trays and seat back areas of your seats.
- Consider alerting the cabin crew in-charge that you or your child has a severe allergy so they can respond quickly and appropriately if a reaction occurs. However, be advised that many airlines will not make specific broadcast announcements to passengers for these cases.
- The safest option is to take your own food on board with you. Should you decide to do so, ask the airline at the time of reservation if it has any restrictions on food brought on board. For instance, some airlines have regulations restricting the re-heating of passengers' food. It is always preferable to take non-perishable food. If you have a multi segment trip, you may have to check the different applicable quarantine laws before departure, as some countries may not allow certain types of food to be carried in transit.