

## COVID-19 Resources

March 9, 2020

### Australia

<https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert>

### Canada

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/coronavirus-disease-covid-19.html>

### Europe

<http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/health-emergencies/coronavirus-covid-19>

### USA

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/index.html>

### Q & A

<https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/q-a-coronaviruses>

- [Coronavirus and Business Travel: Everything You Need to Know](#) By Mike Baker
- [Should You Cancel Travel Plans Amid COVID-19 Concerns? Here's What to Consider](#) TIME
- [Should You Cancel Or Postpone Air Travel?](#) FORBES

...But let's be clear where the real risks may be with air travel. For example, how much of a risk is the recycled air in airplanes? Well, the air does go through HEPA filters. HEPA stands for "high efficiency particulate air [filter]" and is supposed to filter out at least 99.97% of microbes, dust, pollen, mold, and any airborne particles that are 0.3 microns ( $\mu\text{m}$ ) in size. The filter may even be more efficient at filtering particles that are smaller or larger than 0.3  $\mu\text{m}$ , such as French fries.

Assuming that the HEPA filter is working properly then you may not have to worry so much about the air nozzle overhead that's creating a mini-tornado on your face. Plus, SARS-CoV2 can only travel so far in the air. It's not as if they have little wings. Viruses don't drink Red Bull. Instead, they hitch rides on respiratory droplets that come out of an infected person through coughing, sneezing, spitting, or the like. These droplets can travel up to three to six feet from the person.

What may be of greater concern is the close proximity between passengers on the plane. Over the past decade or so, passengers haven't exactly been declaring, "wow, what do I do with all this legroom? There's just too much legroom here in economy seating." In fact, [Stephanie Robertson has written for the New York Times](#) about "[Fighting the Incredible Shrinking Airline Seat](#)" and how airplane seat sizes have been shrinking since since the U.S. airline industry underwent deregulation in the 1970's. Maintaining a three to six foot distance from other passengers for the duration of the flight may be tough even if you were to have excessive and obvious heated flatulence. So yes, if the person next to or close to you is infectious, you could get exposed.

Then there are the various surfaces on the plane. You are probably more likely to catch respiratory viruses like coronaviruses and flu viruses through touching things that have been contaminated with the virus. That includes body parts like hands or surfaces like seat belt buckles and Baby Yoda figurines that have been touched by someone infectious. Quite a few of the surfaces in an airplane cabin would be considered "high touch," meaning that different people touch them frequently. These include tray tables, seats, seat belts, video monitors, and that crypt-like pocket

in the back of the seat in front of you. People shove who-knows-what in those pockets, including magazines, wrapping papers, used tissues, and maybe even a doughnut.

That's why, if you do fly, limiting what you touch, washing your hands thoroughly and frequently, and not touching your face with unwashed hands will be more important than holding your breath for the entire duration of the six hour or so flight. (By the way, you can only hold your breath for a few minutes before you pass out, so don't even try it.) Of course, not touching your face is easier said than done, [as I described previously for Forbes](#). Your face can feel like a gigantic planet with a massive gravitational pull on your fingers. Therefore, try keeping your hands occupied like putting them in your pockets, typing on a computer, or flashing gang signs to yourself.

Hand sanitizer can help but make sure you use it properly. Use enough sanitizer to cover all parts of your hands. Then massage your hands together as if they were the main characters in a romance novel. Keep up the rubbing until they become dry. Recite the alphabet while doing this so that you know that you've gone long enough, because isn't that what lovers in a romance novel do?

Washing your hands with soap and water, if done properly, is always better than just using hand sanitizer. However, airplane bathrooms may be areas of really high touch, in more ways than one. A lot can go on in a bathroom and a decent percentage of it is not good, from an infection control standpoint, that is. The words "airplane bathroom" and "luxurious" usually don't go together. While in a cramped airplane bathroom, it can be difficult to limit your touching, especially when turbulence makes it feel like you are an ingredient in a smoothie being made.

Therefore, definitely wash your hands thoroughly at the end of any adventure that you may have in an airplane bathroom. This may not be the easiest thing with the design of the bathroom sink. Many such bathrooms don't have automatic sensor-driven faucets. Instead you've got to continuously hold down those little faucet handles, and keep pushing that lever that allows the sink to drain. After drying your hands with a paper towel, try not to touch other used items when throwing the towel away in the garbage. This can be tough when the garbage container lid slams back shut like a gator's mouth. When you are leaving the bathroom, use a paper towel to handle the door knob so that you don't just re-contaminate your hands.

Pay attention to how everything in the cabin is maintained and cleaned. As a customer, consider it a right to know what safety and disinfection procedures are in place during and between flights. [According to the World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#), the new coronavirus may be able to survive on surfaces for "a few hours or up to several days." That means what happened in the cabin during the flights before yours may stay in the cabin. Therefore, before a flight, consider inquiring about the specifics of an airline's cleaning policies. After all, scrimping and saving on such things may be one way some airlines try to cut costs, unless customers shine more of a light on such practices.

Another question that is coming up is whether flights will be canceled or grounded due to the outbreak, possibly leaving you stranded. That will depend on where you are flying, how the outbreak proceeds, and what the governments and the airlines plan on doing. It is difficult to predict what may happen. Of course, if the government wanted to eliminate the possibility of air travel helping spread SAR-CoV2, it could start grounding all flights. But that would have major reverberating consequences on many people, so it remains to be seen whether the contribution of air travel to spreading the virus is high enough to justify grounding even some flights. Therefore, follow closely official CDC announcements and the news, the real news that is and not what Uncle Joey or Aunt Marmy are saying on Facebook or some random person who has no experience in infectious diseases or epidemic control is saying on Twitter.

Consider purchasing [travel insurance](#) or a Cancel for Any Reason (CFAR) policy to cover you in case plans have to change. As always, read the fine print of such policies, which may not always be so fine.

Also, look into alternatives to air travel. Even if you do end up taking a flight, it is helpful to know how you may get back if your return flight ends up getting canceled. Make sure that the options are viable. After all, find a bicycle and pedal like mad may not work if you are going from San Francisco to New York City.

Ultimately, it's difficult to make blanket recommendations about air travel. (Oh, by the way, make sure that airline blankets are properly cleaned before using them.) In general, this doesn't seem to be the best time to schedule optional travel. There's still a fair amount of uncertainty. So if you can easily cancel your air travel, then you may want to do so.

If your travel isn't completely optional, try to identify alternatives such as video-conferencing or sending a gigantic cake. Cutting down air travel not only may decrease your risk of getting sick but also reduce the risk of you carrying the virus to others who may be of even greater risk for bad health outcomes if they have other diseases or are older. It ain't a bad thing for the environment either.

If you are over 65 years of age or have a chronic medical condition like lung disease, have an even lower threshold for canceling your air travel. You may be at risk for worse health outcomes if you get infected. Check with your doctor before considering such travel.

If you are a little kid, enjoy smearing things on your face, or don't quite understand boundaries yet, you may not want to travel either, because you won't be able to maintain the necessary aforementioned infection control precautions. Besides if you are a kid, you are probably less likely to have essential work travel.

If canceling or postponing your air travel is difficult to do and you do end up having to travel by air, no need to be paranoid. "Be paranoid" is rarely the recommendation for any situation. Just take the precautions mentioned above, which are probably precautions that you should always take when traveling by plane regardless of whether a novel virus is circulating.

So, again, right now, you should **avoid the locations that the CDC website warns you to avoid**. Also, **consider canceling or postponing all non-essential air travel** if it is reasonably feasible for you to do so. Additionally, you may want to do whatever you can to **avoid air travel if you are in a higher risk group such those over 65 years of age or with a chronic medical condition**. Furthermore, if you are a little kids or act like one, you may want to stay off planes for now if it's difficult for you to maintain all the aforementioned infection control precautions needed.

Of course, your air travel may not quite fall into these categories, which then makes decision-making more difficult. As with all difficult decisions, your decision on whether to cancel your flight plans is personal, depending on your risk tolerance and needs. Yes, the SARS-CoV2 is a serious but still rather unknown threat. Yes, being confined close together with others in a cabin for several hours does have its risks. Yes, you are depending on others to keep surfaces clean and disinfected. Yes, you don't know exactly what will happen in the ensuing weeks. But there are things that you can do to reduce the accompanying risks. Realize that nothing in life has no risk.

Be aware of the real risks and not what so-and-so with ten followers on Twitter is trying to get you to believe. Don't listen to some of the panicky chatter out there or anyone who tells you that there is one definitive answer for everyone, such as all air travel should be canceled immediately or that no one should be concerned about air travel at all. These statements do not take into account the complexities of the situation. Keep in mind the expertise and agendas of anyone who may be giving advice. Follow closely announcements from trusted sources. If you can follow what a celebrity is doing with his or her hair each day on social media, you can frequently check websites like the CDC's. In other words, just stay appropriately grounded when making your decision of whether to fly.