

ID CARE – HOT TOPIC FAQ – RESISTANT TUBERCULOSIS

Extensively drug resistant tuberculosis (XDR-TB)

A US citizen with extensively drug resistant tuberculosis (XDR-TB) travelled on two long haul intercontinental flights; Atlanta-Paris on May 12 and Prague-Montreal on May 24. The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) has assessed the risk to other passengers on these flights as being very low. However, given the seriousness of XDR-TB, ECDC has recommended that passengers seated near the person with XDR-TB be traced and tested.

What is XDR-TB?

Extensively drug resistant tuberculosis (XDR-TB) is a rare type of tuberculosis that is resistant to nearly all drugs used to treat TB disease.

How infectious is XDR-TB?

Like most other forms of tuberculosis, XDR-TB is not highly infectious. You need to be in close contact with someone who is ill with tuberculosis for several hours in order to be at risk. Being in close contact with a person who is infected with tuberculosis, but who has not yet developed symptoms of the disease (for example coughing) carries little or no risk.

Why do people who traveled on the transatlantic flights with the XDR-TB patient need to be traced?

The chances that anyone on the flight was infected with XDR-TB are very low. The person with XDR-TB was not exhibiting symptoms of the disease and so should not have been infectious. However, given the seriousness of XDR-TB, ECDC has recommended that passengers seated near the infected person be traced and tested for TB. EU Member States are now acting on this information and tracing the affected people.

What flights did the person with XDR-TB fly on?

The two long haul flights (over 8 hours) that the US patient with XDR-TB flew on are:

1. **Air France # 385** departing Atlanta on May 12 and arriving in Paris on May 13, 2007
2. **Czech Airlines # 0104** departing Prague, Czech Republic to Montreal, Canada on May 24, 2007

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What should I do if I traveled on one of these flights?

If you have not already been contacted by the public health authorities in your country it probably means you were not seated near the infected person. However, as a precaution you could contact the public health authorities in your country or region. If you do not know who these authorities are, contact your doctor and ask him or her to help you.

How much danger am I in if I was on the flight and seated near the infected person?

Your chances of having been infected are very low, and even so you may never develop the disease.

The person with XDR-TB spent nearly 2 weeks in Europe. Are other people who came into contact with him in danger?

No. You need to be in close contact with a TB patient for several hours to be at risk of infection. Casual contact with an infected person (for example, eating at the same restaurant as them, or staying at the same hotel) does not pose a risk. Nor does traveling on a short haul flight (i.e. a flight of less than 8 hours) or other public transportation with them.

How dangerous is it to be on an airplane with a person infected with XDR-TB?

The World Health Organization's guidance on Tuberculosis and Air travel is that you need to be on a flight of 8 hours or more for this to be a risk. Furthermore, you need to have been seated either in the same row of the airplane as the person with tuberculosis, the two rows in front of them or the two rows behind. The person also needs to be in an infectious stage of the disease.

Is it rare for a TB patient to be put in isolation?

The federal isolation order is rare but every state has public health laws. Most people are happy to follow the advice to stay home and not travel until it is clear they are not infectious. In cases where patients do not comply an isolation order can be issued. In fact, patients can be imprisoned until they have been treated adequately to ensure they are no longer contagious.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT ONE OF OUR OFFICES:

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