

# Recommended Guidelines for Suspected Plague Cases at Winnipeg International Airport



## COMMUNICABLE DISEASE CONTROL

In the event that a person is identified at the Winnipeg International Airport with a suspected case of the plague the following steps and procedures should be followed:

- Upon discovery of a suspected case of the plague on an aircraft, the Winnipeg International Airport will institute their Emergency Procedure dealing with infectious diseases, thereby contacting Health Canada at 981-2172.
- Emergency Procedures developed by Health Canada will be immediately implemented, a Health Canada representative will contact Manitoba Health, Emergency Services at 786-7289 (24 hrs).
- Emergency Health will immediately ensure that the following agencies are notified;
  - Winnipeg Ambulance Department
  - Manitoba Health, Medical Officer of Health
  - Health Science Center
- The Medical Officer of Health will notify the City of Winnipeg Health Department and Manitoba Health, Winnipeg Region.
- Any personnel which are in contact with patients suspected of having plague are to have adequate respiratory protection as specified by LCDC (mask filtration rate of at least 1 micron. The mask must provide a tight facial seal. HEPA filter mask may be useful).
- All agencies involved will follow strict respiratory isolation precautions and standing procedures for infection control.
- Media releases will be coordinated through the office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health, Manitoba Health.

### Emergency Procedures – Plague

For a Suspected Plague Case(s) on an Airplane en Route:

**Note: In general, all current emergency procedures for ill persons on board aircraft and arriving at airports remain in effect. The following special situations apply only for suspected plague cases.**

1. When the flight crew identifies a passenger with symptoms suggestive of plague (see attached criteria), standard procedures for notification of the destination of an ill person on board will be followed by the airplane's captain.
2. If the passenger is coughing, a surgical mask should be provided and the passenger should be required to wear it for the remainder of the flight. If feasible, the passenger should be moved to a quiet area of the airplane.
3. The cabin crew member assigned to care for the needs of the ill passenger will be in close personal contact with that persons. Although a confirmed diagnosis of plague will not have been established, the crew member should use a respirator (see below) for the duration of the contact with the passenger.
4. On arrival, the airport Quarantine Officer and/or designated medical officials will escort the passenger directly to the designated health care facility *before any other passengers or crew disembark.*
5. All family members and persons accompanying the ill person will also be escorted to the designated health care facility.
6. Once the ill passenger and accompanying persons have been assisted from the aircraft, the Quarantine Officer or nurse will enter the aircraft and make an announcement (see attached) to reassure passengers and obtain locating information for preventive public health measures if a diagnosis of plague is confirmed by the health care facility.

7. After making the announcement, the Quarantine Officer or nurse will distribute two documents to all crew and passengers prior to their disembarking:

- A form requesting identifying information for purposes of follow-up if the ill person is confirmed as a case of plague. The information includes name, address, destination (if other than the point of arrival), telephone numbers where the persons can be reached over the next seven days (see attached form). All passengers must fill out the form before disembarking and surrender the form to the official at the airplane door.
- A Health Canada Travel Health Advisory for all crew and passengers with essential information on how to proceed if they become ill in the following seven days (see attached).

8. All passengers may then disembark and proceed through normal customs and immigration processing.

## Use of Masks and Respirators

Plague in general is a disease of rodents, particularly rats, infected with the plague bacterium. It spreads to humans via the bites of rat fleas. One form of the disease, Bubonic plague, is restricted to the part of the immune system that filters germs before they reach the bloodstream. Therefore, an infected person with Bubonic plague can not transmit it to another person and does not represent a threat to the health of other persons.

The Pneumonic form of plague infects the lungs. This form of plague may be transmitted from person to person. When a person with plague pneumonia coughs or sneezes, large droplets containing the infectious germ are spread into the air. A person in close proximity may breathe in the particles and develop an infection of the lung.

To minimize the possible spread of suspected Pneumonic plague from an ill passenger, the following measures must be followed:

- A severely ill patient who meets the criteria for a suspected case of plague and who is coughing is required to wear a surgical mask. A surgical mask will reduce significantly the number of cough droplets being expressed into the immediate environment.

- When an airplane enroute notifies that it has an ill passenger who meets the criteria for a suspected case of plague, the airplane will be met by a Quarantine Officer and designated health care personnel. The ill passenger will be escorted immediately from the airplane and transported to the designated health care facility. Thus the ill passenger will pose no risk to customs or immigration officials or other support personnel. If the seriously ill passenger is coughing, the escorting officials should wear an accepted respirator<sup>1</sup> for personal protection.
- When a Quarantine Officer or other official who is meeting a designated flight notices an ill passenger disembarking at the airplane door, the passenger will be escorted immediately to the isolation area as noted above. If the passenger is coughing, the escorting officials should wear an accepted respirator for personal protection.

<sup>1</sup> The accepted respirator must be NIOSH certified and meet Canadian Labour Code and Treasury Board Requirements.

**For passengers arriving on an airplane without an ill passenger(s) on board:**

**Note: In general, all current emergency procedures for ill persons on board aircraft and arriving at airports remain in effect. The following special situations apply only for suspected plague cases.**

1. All designated flights will be met by Quarantine Officers who will conduct a visual inspection of disembarking passengers at the airplane door.
2. Any ill passenger who appears to meet the criteria for a suspected case of plague (see attached) will be immediately escorted to the airport isolation area for further evaluation by medical personnel.
3. All family members and persons accompanying the ill person will also be escorted to the isolation area, but will remain outside the isolation room itself.
4. If coughing, the ill passenger must wear a surgical mask. All escorting personnel should use a respirator for the duration of the close personal contact with a coughing, ill passenger.
5. All other passengers may continue to disembark for routine processing.
6. The immediate removal of the ill passenger from the usual processing procedures removes all risk of plague for additional airport personnel.

For passengers arriving by indirect routes on an airplane without an ill passenger(s) on board:

**Note: In general, all current emergency procedures for ill persons on board aircraft and arriving at airports remain in effect. The following special situations apply only for suspected plague cases.**

1. Passengers from India may arrive in Canada by circuitous routes. The possibility that such a passenger is infected or ill with plague is remote.
2. Aircraft arriving in Canada that are not travelling along direct routes from India are not considered designated flights and will not be met by Quarantine Officers.
3. Passengers disembarking from such flights will not be subjected to visual screening to identify ill passengers.
4. In the unlikely event that a passenger should become seriously ill during the initial processing in customs, a primary inspection line officer (PIL) may be the first person to assist the ill passenger. If it appears that the ill passenger might meet the criteria for a suspected plague case (see attached), the Health Canada Quarantine Officer and/or the airport nurse should be summoned at once. The Quarantine Officer and/or nurse will escort the passenger to the airport isolation area.
5. For a brief period the PIL will be in close contact with a possible case of plague. For the duration of the contact the PIL should wear a respirator.
6. All family members and persons accompanying the ill person will also be escorted to the isolation area, but will remain outside the isolation room itself.
7. If coughing, the ill passenger must wear a surgical mask. All escorting personnel should use a respirator for the duration of the close personal contact with a coughing, ill passenger.
8. All other passengers may continue to disembark for routine processing.
9. The immediate removal of the ill passenger from any additional processing procedures removes all risk of plague for additional airport personnel.

## Criteria for Identification of Persons with Plague

Plague is an infectious disease and while the risk of travellers acquiring this illness is very low, *untreated* infections are serious and may be fatal.

### Possible Symptoms Suggestive of Plague

Symptoms of the disease may present 2-8 days after infection and they are marked by a high fever (temperature), severe headache, chills and shivering, weakness and pain. Passengers with this disease generally appear quite ill.

In one form of the disease (Bubonic plague), infected individuals develop large swollen lymph nodes (glands) in the groin, armpit or neck region.

In another form of this illness (Pneumonic plague), infected individuals are severely ill with extensive pneumonia and have high fever, cough, shortness of breath and appear pale.

### Transmissibility

Patients with Bubonic plague are considered non-infectious for other persons. Patients with Pneumonic plague are considered to be infectious since their coughing produces airborne droplets that carry the plague bacteria. Thus, direct person-to-person transmission is possible.

### Action to be Taken

If a passenger with symptoms suggestive of plague is coughing, they must be required to wear a surgical mask to decrease the spread of coughed droplets in the air.

## **Speech to be given to passengers if someone is taken off sick from a flight from India which lands in Canada**

Ladies and gentlemen, may I have your attention for an important announcement.

As you may know, a passenger from this flight has fallen ill and has now been taken off the plane to be cared for and examined by medical personnel. Since this passenger visited an area where some cases of plague have been reported, we are adopting a very cautious approach and are making this announcement of the proper public health procedure to follow.

First, we want to reassure you that it is extremely unlikely that this person is in fact a case of plague. Second, even if it is case of plague, the risk of transmission to other passengers during a flight is very, very low.

To be extra safe, however, we would like to be able to contact each passenger during the next week in the

unlikely event that this does turn out to be a case of plague. Therefore, we will be distributing forms to each passenger to record locating information. Please fill out your name along with the address and phone number of all places you will be staying during the next week. This information will enable you to be contacted in case further medical advice needs to be given. There is also a toll-free phone number indicated on the Health Canada Travel Health Advisory which you may call for further information.

Please hand the completed forms to the official as you exit the plane. Make sure that your form is collected before you enter the main part of the airport.

We would like to emphasize again that we do not feel there is a serious risk to your health. We are taking these steps so that if we need to contact you we will be able to do so without delay.

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