

**Working Papers  
Project on the Public and Biological Security  
Harvard School of Public Health**

**15.**

**AIRLINE CONTAGIOUS DISEASES**

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## **Survey Finds Most Air Travelers Want to Be Contacted if They Might Have Been Exposed to a Serious Contagious Disease**

**Most Are Willing to Provide Information to Help Health Officials Contact Them, But They Are Not Willing to Spend Much Extra Time to Provide It**

Boston, MA – A new study by the Harvard School of Public Health *Project on the Public and Biological Security* finds that the vast majority (94%) of air travelers would want public health authorities to contact them if they might have been exposed to a serious contagious disease on an airplane. Large majorities of Americans who fly domestically or internationally are willing to provide information that would help public health officials contact them in such an event.

Currently international air travelers are required to provide emergency contact information, and a large majority are willing to continue doing so. Nearly nine in ten Americans who travel internationally (89%) would be willing to give the airlines the name and telephone number of someone who could be contacted in case of an emergency. Similarly, about nine in ten (88%) of those international air travelers who take a cell phone, pager, or hand-held wireless email when they fly are willing to provide the phone or pager number or email address for these devices. Nearly three-fourths (73%) are willing to provide the addresses and telephone numbers of the places they are going. Overall, 89% of international fliers are willing to provide one or more type of contact information, 7% are unwilling to provide any, and 4% don't know.

Domestic air travelers are not currently required to provide emergency contact information, but most of them are willing to. The proportion of domestic travelers willing to provide such information is nearly identical to that of international travelers. Overall, 93% are willing to provide one or more type of contact information, 5% are unwilling to provide any, and 2% don't know.

These findings are based on interviews conducted June 4-8, 2004, with 1,006 adults nationwide, including 633 domestic fliers (Americans who take one or more domestic flights within the U.S. per year) and 240 international fliers (Americans who take one or more international flights per year).

“The combination of possible threats of bioterrorism carried out on airplanes and newly emerging infectious diseases has left most Americans willing to cooperate with public health authorities who need emergency contact information to head off the spread of dangerous diseases,” said Robert J. Blendon, Professor of Health Policy and Political Analysis at the Harvard School of Public Health.

The worldwide SARS epidemic last year highlighted the difficulties public health officials can have in notifying airline passengers quickly. Their experience was that, once passengers left the airport, it was very difficult to contact those who might have been exposed to SARS. This raised the question of what could be done to make such contacts easier.

About half of domestic (52%) and international air travelers (50%) believe that public health authorities today can quickly obtain air passengers' emergency contact information to warn them about possible exposure to a serious contagious disease.

### *Time Is an Important Consideration*

There is an important caveat to air travelers' willingness to provide emergency contact information: most are not willing to wait very long to provide such information.

More than three in five domestic (61%) and international fliers (66%) said they would either not be willing to give emergency information at all or would no longer be willing to do so if it added 10 minutes to the time it took to make a reservation or to check in.

In addition, about two-thirds of fliers said they were concerned that the privacy of their emergency information would not be protected. Nearly four in ten domestic (37%) and international fliers (38%) said they were very concerned.

“These findings suggest support for airlines and public health officials to work together to find some simple system where this information can be entered and retrieved easily while maintaining passengers’ privacy,” said Professor Blendon.

#### *Easiest Ways to Provide Emergency Information*

About three in five domestic (60%) and international (63%) travelers who take a cell phone, pager, or hand-held wireless email with them when they fly said that the numbers or email addresses for these devices were the easiest form of emergency information for them to provide. A majority of those who do not take along such devices when they fly domestically (68%) and internationally (55%) said that it was easiest to provide the name and telephone number of someone who could be contacted in case of an emergency.

Air travelers considered the least convenient type of emergency information to be providing the addresses and telephone numbers of the places they were going.

For each of the types of emergency information air travelers were willing to provide, air travelers said that the easiest time to supply this information would be when they make their airline reservation.

This study was designed and analyzed by researchers at the Harvard School of Public Health. The project director is Robert J. Blendon of the Harvard School of Public Health. The research team also includes Catherine M. DesRoches, John M. Benson, Stephen R. Pelletier, Kathleen Weldon and Elizabeth Raleigh of the Harvard School of Public Health and Melissa J. Herrmann of ICR/International Communications Research. Fieldwork was conducted via telephone by ICR/International Communications Research of Media (PA) between June 4-8, 2004. The survey was conducted with a nationally representative sample of 1,006 adults age 18 and over. The sample included 633 domestic fliers (Americans who take one or more domestic flights within the U.S. per year) and 240 international fliers (Americans who take one or more international flights per year).

The margin of error for domestic fliers is +/- 4 percentage points; for international fliers, +/-7 points.

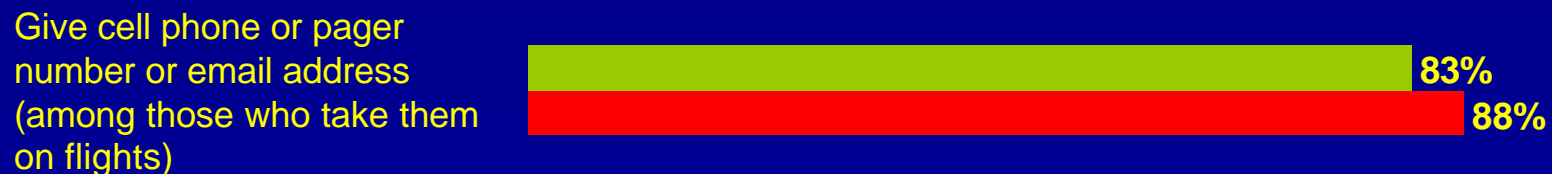
## Willingness of Air Traveler to Provide Emergency Information

*If you had been on an airplane with someone who had a highly contagious disease...*

■ Domestic Fliers  
■ International Fliers



*In order to help public health officials contact you as quickly as possible, willing to....*



Source: Harvard School of Public Health Project on the Public and Biological Security, June 2004.

## Easiest Way to Provide Emergency Information

*Among those who take cell phone, pager, or hand-held wireless email on this kind of flight*

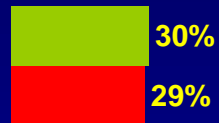
*Among those who don't take such devices*

Give cell phone/pager number/email address

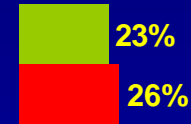
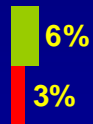


NA

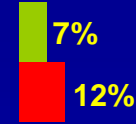
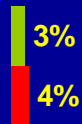
Give name/phone number of emergency contact



Give addresses and phone numbers of places you are going



Not willing to give any



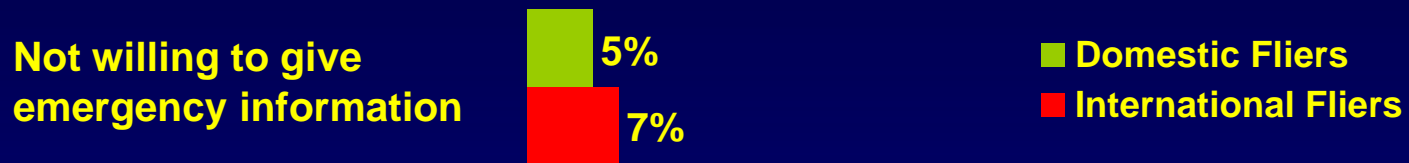
"Don't know" not shown

■ Domestic fliers ■ International fliers

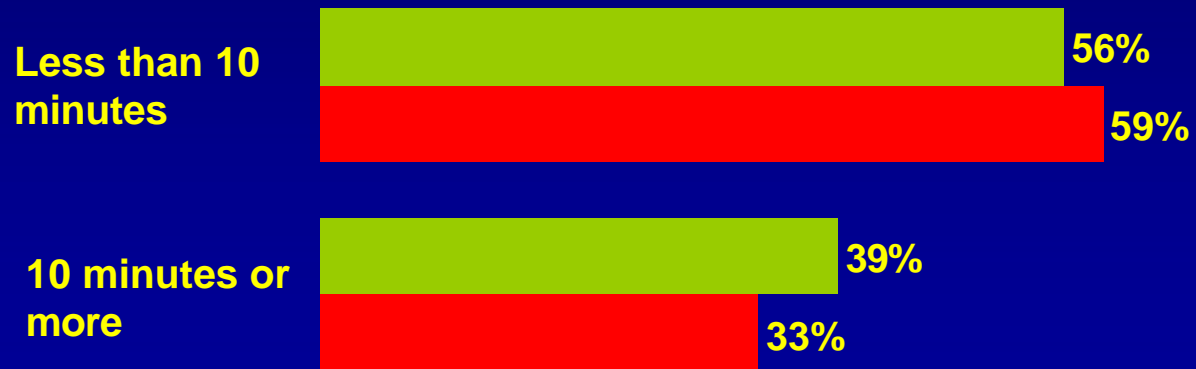
Source: Harvard School of Public Health Project on the Public and Biological Security, June 2004.



## How Much Extra Time Fliers Would Be Willing to Take to Provide Emergency Information



### Willing to wait



Source: Harvard School of Public Health Project on the Public and Biological Security, June 2004.

**Harvard School of Public Health  
Project on the Public and Biological Security**

**AIRLINE CONTAGIOUS DISEASE SURVEY**

**June 4-8, 2004  
N=1006 adults nationwide,  
including 633 domestic fliers and 240 international fliers**

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I N T E R N A T I O N A L C O M M U N I C A T I O N S R E S E A R C H

**Harvard School of Public Health  
Project on the Public and Biological Security  
Airline Contagious Disease Survey**

**This study was conducted by telephone from June 4 – June 8, 2004 among a nationally representative sample of 1006 adults age 18 and older. All field work by ICR/International Communications Research of Media, PA. “Domestic fliers” are those who take one or more domestic flights within the U.S. per year (n=633). “International fliers” are those who take one or more international flights per year (n=240).**

You may remember that last year public health authorities were very concerned about the possible spread of a highly contagious disease called SARS. While SARS did not affect the United States, many were concerned that Americans could be infected with SARS by traveling with infected people on airplanes.

SA-1. If you had been on an airplane with someone who had a highly contagious disease, such as SARS, tuberculosis (TB) or meningitis, would you WANT or would you not WANT public health authorities to contact you to warn you of your potential exposure?

	<b>Would WANT public health authorities to contact you</b>	<b>Would not WANT public health authorities to contact you</b>	<b>Don't know</b>	<b>Refused</b>
Total adults	94	4	2	1
Domestic fliers	94	5	1	0
Intl fliers	94	4	1	0

SA-2. If you had been on an airplane with someone who had a highly contagious disease, such as SARS, tuberculosis (TB) or meningitis, would you EXPECT or would you not EXPECT that public health authorities would contact you to warn you of your potential exposure?

	<b>Would EXPECT public health authorities to contact you</b>	<b>Would not EXPECT public health authorities to contact you</b>	<b>Don't know</b>	<b>Refused</b>
Total adults	80	17	2	1
Domestic fliers	81	18	1	*
Intl fliers	78	20	1	0

SA-3. If public health authorities TODAY had to get passengers' emergency contact information to warn them about possible exposure to a serious contagious disease, do you think it would be easy or hard for them to get this information?

	Easy	Hard	Don't know	Refused
Total adults	52	40	8	1
Domestic fliers	56	34	4	0
Intl fliers	56	40	4	0

SA-4. If public health authorities TODAY had to get passengers' emergency contact information, do you think they could do this quickly, or would it take them a long time to get this information?

	Do quickly	Take a long time	Don't know	Refused
Total adults	47	44	8	1
Domestic fliers	52	43	5	*
Intl fliers	50	46	3	*

SA-5. Do you have a cell phone, pager or hand-held wireless email, or not?

	Yes	No	Don't know	Refused
Domestic fliers	65	35	0	0
Intl fliers	72	28	0	0

(Asked of total who have a cell phone/pager/hand-held wireless e-mail)

SA-6. Normally, do you or do you not take any of these with you when you travel by airplane within the United States?

	Take with you	Do not take with you	Don't know	Refused
Domestic fliers	82	18	0	0

(Asked of total who have a cell phone/pager/hand-held wireless e-mail)

SA-7. And do you or do you not take any of these with you when you travel by plane internationally?

	Take with you	Do not take with you	Don't know	Refused
Intl fliers	57	43	1	0

SA-8. If you had been on an airplane with someone who had a highly contagious disease, public health authorities would want to contact you as quickly as possible. In order to help public health authorities do this, would you or would you not be willing to do any of the following? First (INSERT STATEMENT)?

- a. Give your cell phone or pager number or email address to the airline you are flying with (asked of those who have a cell phone/pager/hand-held wireless email and take it with them in the following type of flight)

	Willing	Not willing	Don't know	Refused
Domestic fliers	83	15	2	0
Intl fliers	88	11	1	0

- b. Give the name and telephone number of someone who could be contacted in case of an emergency if the authorities could not contact you directly

	Willing	Not willing	Don't know	Refused
Domestic fliers	93	6	1	*
Intl fliers	89	10	1	0

- c. Give the airline you are flying with the addresses and phone numbers of the places you are going

	Willing	Not willing	Don't know	Refused
Domestic fliers	74	24	2	*
Intl fliers	73	25	2	0

SA-9. You said that you would be willing to (LIST Q.8a = 1 MENTIONS). Of these, which one do you think would be EASIEST for you to provide?

SA-8/9. Combo Table

	Give your cell phone/page number or e-mail address to the airline you are flying with	Give the name and telephone number of someone who could be contacted in case of emergency	Give the airline you are flying with the addresses and phone number of the places you are going	Not willing to give any info	Don't know/refused
Among those who have a cell phone/pager/handheld wireless email and take it with them on the following type of flight					
Domestic fliers	60	30	6	3	2
Intl fliers	NA	68	23	7	3
Among those who do not take such devices					
Domestic fliers	63	29	3	4	3
Intl fliers	NA	55	26	12	7

SA-10. Which of the following would be the easiest way for you to give the airline (INSERT)? Would it be easiest to give it (READ LIST)?

**Easiest way**

a. Your cell phone or pager number or e-mail address (Asked of total who would be willing to give their cell phone or pager number or e-mail address to the airline they are flying with)

	When you make your reservation	When you check in online from home or office	When you check in at the kiosk	When you check in at the counter	At the gate before boarding	Don't know	Refused
Domestic fliers	56	15	3	19	5	1	*
Intl fliers	50	15	4	24	7	1	0

b. The name and telephone number of an emergency contact (Asked of total who would be willing to give the name and telephone number of someone who could be contacted in case of an emergency if the authorities could not contact them directly)

	When you make your reservation	When you check in online from home or office	When you check in at the kiosk	When you check in at the counter	At the gate before boarding	Don't know	Refused
Domestic fliers	61	12	2	19	3	2	*
Intl fliers	58	12	3	21	3	4	0

c. The addresses and telephone numbers of the places your are going (Asked of total who would be willing to give the airline they are flying with the addresses and phone numbers of the places they are going)

	When you make your reservation	When you check in online from home or office	When you check in at the kiosk	When you check in at the counter	At the gate before boarding	Don't know	Refused
Domestic fliers	45	15	3	27	9	2	*
Intl fliers	48	11	1	32	6	1	0

SA-10a. Is there another way that would be almost as easy for you?

**Second easiest way.**

- a. Your cell phone or pager number or e-mail address (Asked of total who would be willing to give their cell phone or pager number or e-mail address to the airline they are flying with; n = 299)

	When you make your reservation	When you check in online from home or office	When you check in at the kiosk	When you check in at the counter	At the gate before boarding	No other way is easier	Don't know	Refused	Didn't name an easy way
Domestic fliers	17	20	8	27	8	15	3	*	1
Intl fliers	19	21	8	25	6	17	4	0	1

- b. The name and telephone number of an emergency contact (Asked of total who would be willing to give the name and telephone number of someone who could be contacted in case of an emergency if the authorities could not contact them directly; n = 902)

	When you make your reservation	When you check in online from home or office	When you check in at the kiosk	When you check in at the counter	At the gate before boarding	No other way is easier	Don't know	Refused	Didn't name an easy way
Domestic fliers	15	18	7	28	11	17	2	*	3
Intl fliers	13	19	5	25	14	19	2	*	4

- c. The addresses and telephone numbers of the places your are going (Asked of total who would be willing to give the airline they are flying with the addresses and phone numbers of the places they are going; n = 706)

	When you make your reservation	When you check in online from home or office	When you check in at the kiosk	When you check in at the counter	At the gate before boarding	No other way is easier	Don't know	Refused	Didn't name an easy way
Domestic fliers	21	14	7	21	11	20	3	*	2
Intl fliers	20	17	8	19	11	21	3	0	1

(Asked of total who would be willing to choose at least 1 way of giving info to airline)

SA-11. Would you or would you not still be willing to give this information if it meant it took (INSERT) longer to make a reservation or to check in?

	Not willing to provide info	Not even willing at 2 minutes	Willing at 2 minutes but not at 5 minutes	Willing at 5 minutes but not at 10 minutes	Willing at 10 minutes but not at 15 minutes	Willing at 15 minutes	Don't know
Domestic fliers	5	6	16	34	12	27	1
Intl fliers	7	7	19	33	9	24	1

SA-12. How concerned are you that the privacy of your emergency contact information will not be protected? Are you very concerned, somewhat concerned, not too concerned, or not concerned at all?

	Very concerned	Somewhat concerned	Not too concerned	Not at all concerned	Don't know	Refused
Domestic fliers	37	28	23	11	1	0
Intl fliers	38	30	22	10	*	*

SA-13. How often do you take domestic flights within the United States—never at all, 1-5 times a year, 6-9 times a year, or 10 times or more a year?

	Never at all	1-5 times a year	6-9 times a year	10 times a year	Don't know	Refused
Total adults	40	52	4	2	1	1

SA-14. How often do you take international flights-- never at all, 1-5 times a year, 6-9 times a year, or 10 times or more a year?

	Never at all	1-5 times a year	6-9 times a year	10 times a year	Don't know	Refused
Total adults	77	20	1	*	1	1