



PRESS RELEASE

ETOA Guidelines on Swine Flu

Ever since Dr Margaret Chan, the director of the World Health Organisation (WHO), raised the pandemic alert on the H1N1 virus “Swine ‘flu” to Level Five, worldwide concern has been expressed at the possibility of a rampant disease cutting down individuals on every continent. The early stages of any epidemic are characterized by ignorance as to what is happening: predictions are uncertain and naturally prone to morbid exaggeration. Governments have to plan for the worst. The press has to attract attention with sensational projections of doom. When no-one knows enough, everyone is free to imagine the worst.

We are already reaching the stage where governments have threatened irrational reactions. This has included the killing of pigs, (a bizarre act of “species cleansing”) the issuing of a travel advisories against most of Europe and numerous proposed bans on travel to Mexico. Even the WHO has pointed out that such measures are futile. When their governments start to counter imaginary threats, travellers follow suit.

Whatever the threats of a “pandemic” pose to the world, currently the risk posed to potential travellers within Europe is nil. Even were the disease to become far more deadly and virulent than currently proved, death from H1N1 Swine ‘flu is less likely than death by falling trees, bee stings, snake bites, lightening strikes or a wide variety of bizarre modes of fatality. Even if it is not contained, it seems to be respond to treatment and is not as deadly as first suggested. It is far less of a threat to life than existing endemic ‘flu strains.

Responding to this “threat” seems to pander to stupidity.

But from the clients’ view, the concern is genuine. And the travel industry has to react to clients’ concerns, however ill-founded. ETOA members are agreeing on a list of measures that can be adopted by operators to re-assure people that everything is being done to minimise a minimal risk.

Tom Jenkins, Executive Director of ETOA, says “This is like wrestling with blancmange: there is nothing to grab. If no threat is posed, telling people that “no threat exists” automatically raises suspicions.

As Travellers in Europe, people are ridiculously safe from being harmed by the H1N1 virus.”

“Yet the threat to the travel industry is real. Comparatively spurious threats to individuals can trigger a mass response. In 2001 the foot and mouth crisis posed no threat to anyone travelling in the UK. Yet demand for holidays in the UK dropped sharply. After September 11th it was ludicrously safe to fly, but planes flew empty. SARS was largely restricted to a affected 0.0002% of the population of Asia, yet travel in that region dropped by 40%. There is a pattern of disproportionate damage.”

“So we have to declare the industries comparative safety and our determination to ensure that our clients remain safe from this virus.”

ETOA’s assertion is that the use of face masks should be avoided. If someone is ill, then a mask may help prevent them spreading disease. If used incorrectly (such as removed when sneezing) they are worse than useless. And if someone is ill, then they ought to be in bed. The use of masks

does nothing to protect the wearer. It creates a false sense of security and needlessly generates a sense of crisis.

ETOA's recommendations for operators are:

- When coaches are used, they should be vacuumed and cleaned with anti-bacterial agent daily
- Ensure air conditioning filtration systems are cleaned regularly
- On request from clients, supply antiseptic gels or wipes
- Remind clients of good hygiene procedures
- Where necessary, supply a bin for disposal of tissues
- Ensure that the usual procedures on isolating sick clients are followed
- Ensure clients have adequate medical insurance

Sources:

- WHO, http://www.who.int/ith/updates/2009_04_28/en/index.html
- DirectGov UK, http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Swineflu/DG_177814
- EU Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, <http://ecdc.europa.eu/en/Default.aspx>

On face masks:

<http://esciencenews.com/sources/the.guardian.science/2009/04/29/do.masks.protect.against.swine.flu>

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/8024605.stm>

http://www.hpa.org.uk/webw/HPAweb&HPAwebStandard/HPAweb_C/1240986147745?p=1231252394302

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About ETOA

Since its foundation in 1989, ETOA has grown exponentially to include over 350 member organisations, of which 102 are Tour Operators. Collectively, ETOA represents over €6 billion spending on accommodation and travel services annually.

ETOA provides representation at the European government level for companies involved in bringing tourists to Europe. The Association promotes greater awareness of the benefits provided by the group travel industry in Europe - particularly increased income and employment. ETOA also influences European tourism policy and legislation.

Areas of specific activity include:

- Promoting Europe as a tourism destination
- Establishing codes of conduct and guidelines for its members
- Establishing commercial opportunities between buyers and sellers
- Working with other travel & tourism associations to raise the industry's profile