

Flying? What are the real risks from COVID?

In the absence of reliable data, we decided to ask the experts about the possibility of contracting the virus while on a flight. On the whole, airplanes on their own provide generally safe environments when it comes to air quality, but experts said the risk for infection depends largely on policies airlines may have in place.

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According to experts, the risk of catching the coronavirus on a plane is relatively low if the airline is following the procedures laid out by public health experts: enforcing mask compliance, spacing out available seats and screening for sick passengers.

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Airlines frequently note that commercial planes are equipped with HEPA filters, the [Centers for Disease Control-recommended](#) air filters used in hospital isolation rooms. HEPA filters capture [99.97%](#) of airborne particles and substantially reduce the risk of viral spread. In addition, the air in plane cabins is completely changed over 10 to 12 times per hour, raising the air quality above that of a normal building.

Because of the high air exchange rate, it's unlikely you'll catch the coronavirus from someone several rows away. However, you could still catch the virus from someone close by.

"The greatest risk in flight would be if you happen to draw the short straw and sit next to or in front, behind or across the aisle from an infector," said [indoor air pollution expert] Richard Corsi.

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