



ORGANISATION MONDIALE DU TOURISME
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منظمة السياحة العالمية

UNWTO response in face of the influenza A(H1N1) virus

As part of the preparedness efforts for a possible pandemic situation, UNWTO established some three years ago regular and active contacts within the United Nations system, in particular with the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations System Influenza Coordination (UNSIC), the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and the Department of Public Information of the UN (UNDPI). Internally, UNWTO reinforced its preparedness work with the establishment of a Risk and Crisis Management Section, which is the focal point for the coordination with the UN on pandemics.

Since the onset of the outbreak of the novel influenza A(H1N1) in April 2009 UNWTO was actively involved in the coordination and communication efforts for the travel and tourism sector. The overall objectives of our activities were:

- Facilitating fast and targeted communications and providing relevant real-time information;
- Promoting consistent messages throughout the travel and tourism sector;
- Minimizing the impacts of the pandemic on the sector through coordination and close cooperation with Member States, WHO, UNSIC and TERN; and
- Providing guidance and assistance to Member States;

To meet those objectives, UNWTO engaged at three levels:

- Inside the UN-system, UNWTO actively participated in the top-level coordination effort with WHO, ICAO and UNSIC to ensure that views and concerns of the travel and tourism sector were taken into account in the decision making process.
- On the Member States' level, UNWTO immediately activated the Influenza Focal Point structure, which had been put in place as part of the Avian Flu preparedness. UNWTO provided the Influenza Focal Points with regular information updates, guidelines and common messages, and shared lessons learned from previous pandemic simulation exercises.
- With respect to the industry, UNWTO was in close contact and coordinated frequent meetings with the Tourism Emergency Response Network (TERN) and

WHO. TERN consists of key global travel and tourism network associations, both public and private across all sectors[1].

The active coordination and communication between UNWTO, TERN and WHO provided an insight into the needs, views and concerns of the travel and tourism sector.

At this particular stage, it is important to highlight that despite the declaration of the pandemic alert Phase 6 on 11 June 2009, travel restrictions are not recommended by WHO. The designation of this phase is based on the geographic spread of the virus and not its severity.

Limiting travel and imposing travel restrictions would have very little effect on stopping the spread of the influenza A(H1N1) virus but would be highly disruptive to the global community.

The severity of the virus is currently considered moderate by WHO and measures recommended are prevention practices that apply in daily life, such as hand-washing and normal cough 'etiquette'. However, WHO has also pointed out that influenza viruses are well known for their instability. The further development of the influenza A(H1N1) virus remains uncertain and the severity of the pandemic can change considerably over time and differ by location and population. Staying informed is therefore important. Travelers should regularly check with www.SOS.travel or other reliable resources for the latest updates and information issued by health and travel authorities as the situation evolves.

It is important to keep in mind that the current influenza pandemic is the first one, for which the global community has extensively prepared. These preparedness efforts were reflected in the global response to the challenges of the influenza outbreak over the last weeks. Although the development of the virus remains uncertain, we are confident that our joint work will help us avoid unnecessary repercussions on the travel and tourism sector.

For more information see www.SOS.travel and www.unwto.org