



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

News Release

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HAWAI'I CONDUCTS AIRPORT SCREENING OF INTERNATIONAL TRAVELERS FOR FLU-LIKE ILLNESSES

HONOLULU - The Hawai'i State Department of Health, in collaboration with the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Hawai'i Department of Transportation and Japan Airlines, today conducted the next phase of a pilot project successfully launched this past June to screen passengers of international flights for flu-like illnesses at Honolulu International Airport. Hawai'i is the first and only state in the nation to implement a voluntary checkpoint screening process to detect flu-like illnesses among incoming international travelers.

"We know that Hawai'i is a major international travel destination. With that distinction comes the possibility that infectious diseases may spread from other parts of the world to our state," said Director of Health Chiyome Fukino, M.D. "That's why it's so important our department and our partners be prepared and able to check the airport for ill travelers who may have infectious diseases. We want to help control the spread of new illnesses, not only to our community, but to others as well."

"CDC is happy to partner with the Hawai'i Department of Health and U.S. Customs and Border Protection on this pilot program," said Jennifer Brooks, Chief of the CDC Quarantine Station in Honolulu. "In the event of a highly contagious disease outbreak like a flu pandemic, federal authorities will likely conduct surveillance that may include actively screening passengers for signs and symptoms consistent with flu as they enter the United States. Through this program,

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we hope to establish efficient standard procedures that we can share with the rest of the country to screen travelers for illness.”

“The initial phase of the pilot conducted with Hawaiian Airlines went extremely well,” noted Dr. Sarah Park, chief, DOH Disease Outbreak Control Division. “Building upon that successful experience and the strong partnerships that have developed, we focused on the added challenges of efficiently screening a larger number of passengers including non-English speakers. We are grateful for the cooperation and support of all our partners, whose knowledge and experience have been invaluable in enhancing this active surveillance program.”

“U.S. Customs and Border Protection secures the borders and facilitates trade and travel,” said Bruce Murley, CBP Acting Honolulu Area Port Director. “Partnering with the Hawai'i State Health Department and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in this pilot program adds to our capabilities of providing proper enforcement coverage in the event of a public health emergency.”

The screening process begins with a questionnaire asking for basic demographic information, recent travel itinerary and illness history including the presence or absence of fever. Travelers feeling feverish are asked to voluntarily pass through a quick checkpoint staffed by trained medical screeners. If fever is detected, the traveler would enter the routine influenza-like illness surveillance procedure and be asked to undergo a throat swab to test for a flu infection. If the passenger does not have a fever or other symptoms of illness, he or she would be directed to the CBP processing area to resume routine entry procedures. All information collected is kept confidential.

In November 2005, Hawai'i became the first state in the nation to establish a passive airport surveillance program for all Honolulu-bound travelers. The program was designed to detect influenza-like illness and infection with new flu virus strains, including avian flu. Currently, pilots must notify the Honolulu airport tower if they are arriving with a potentially ill passenger on board. The CDC Quarantine Station is called to meet and evaluate the passenger at the gate. Passengers who have fever and respiratory symptoms are asked to undergo flu testing.

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