

How can a passenger-related medical problem affect a flight?

If some medical emergency occurs in flight as a rule the cabin crew will try to find a doctor or a nurse among the passengers or initiate a first aid procedure. Flight attendants are trained to provide oxygen to passengers experiencing breathing problems, activate CPR and Defibrillator for passengers with heart problems, deal with minor/different injuries. Also the crew may organize consultation with ground medical specialists through MedLinks or other medical centers and receive necessary qualified recommendations for the patient. Fortunately in many cases they are able to resolve the situation successfully and proceed to destination. But on the other hand if the situation is serious/severe and life threatening the captain will make a decision to divert to a closer or more suitable aerodrome declaring Pan or MayDay. And in such a case, I think, the captain will try to choose an alternate with better a medical assistance for the passenger.

- **What are the most frequent medical problems on board an aircraft?**

The most common medical problems are: heart or asthmatic attacks, loss of consciousness (fainting), stroke, allergic reactions, food poisoning, infectious diseases, dehydration, baby delivery and different injuries like cuts, bruises, broken/fractured limbs, severe bleeding and so on.

- **What requests can a controller expect from pilots in case of a medical problem on board?**

In such a case the crew may request a short cut, a straight-in-approach, direct routing or rerouting and diversion to the nearest suitable aerodrome with priority landing. They will require medical services and special medical equipment on standby/standing by.

- **What are controllers' actions in case of a medical problems on board?**

The controller should follow the Euro-control principle to ASSIST.

ASSIST principle (*A – acknowledge S – Separate S – Silence I – Inform S – Support T – Time*)

Additionally, controllers should obtain as much information as necessary; provide a shorter route to the aerodrome chosen; re-arrange the traffic to provide priority.

- **What should a controller know about a medical problem on board to assist such a flight effectively?**

The controller should know number of sick passengers on board, the exact nature of a medical problem, symptoms, current passenger's condition, if it is an infectious disease or not. Sometimes the controller may request the age and the sex (male or female) of the sick passenger. Also number of ambulances and kind of medical assistance required.

- **Do special medical flights always have priority? Why?/Why not?**

I think, medical flights should have priority for landing and departure only with a sick person on board because the patients needs special or urgent medical assistance/attention. In the situation when there are only crew members and doctors the controller should handle the flight without a priority. It will be an ordinary flight.

- **In what cases are air ambulances commonly used?**

Air ambulances are used for emergency transportation of ill or injured persons from some location to hospitals and other medical centers. Air ambulances reduce transport times for critically ill patients during life-threatening emergencies. Besides they may be equipped with special medical facilities and doctors will be able to support the sick passenger during the flight.

- **Why are helicopters often used for emergency medical transportation?**

It's because helicopters can takeoff and land vertically, they don't need a RW and can even land on water, mountains. They can get patients in remote, hard to reach areas and transport him very quickly to the hospital.

- **Have you ever had a flight with a medical problem on board under control? What was the most stressful for you?**

Yes, I had such cases in my experience. One of them happened not long ago. Just after my instruction to taxi to holding point the pilot reported a medical problem on board. One passenger had high blood pressure and refused to fly. I immediately informed my supervisor, we alerted the medical service. Medical people removed the passenger from the plane and transported him to the hospital. I experienced a little bit pressure because I had to delay the aircraft and coordinate my further activities. As for a medical case itself it was not stressful for me at all.