

# TRAVEL WEEKLY

As three Caribbean and two South American countries this week banned travel from Ebola-stricken West Africa nations, and as members of Congress accused health officials of not doing enough to contain it, the travel industry weighed in on calls for travel restrictions and what the industry can do to address travelers' concerns.

"We're taking our cues from security and health experts who have been opposed to travel bans, which are ineffective at best and even counterproductive at worst," said Jonathan Grella, senior vice president of public affairs at U.S. Travel Association, which opposes a travel ban.

As for how it's advising its members to respond, Grella, said "The best folks can do is gather as much intelligence information as there is, share it and urge responsible action. That may seem fundamental, but obviously is challenging at a time of a lot of upset and at a time with an election in the background."

Since Sept. 30, there have been three confirmed cases of Ebola in the U.S. including one death, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

But concerns mounted after it became known that one of the two healthcare workers who later tested positive for Ebola had taken two domestic flights. The CDC on Thursday was reaching out to passengers on either of the two flights: Frontier Airlines flight 1142 from Dallas/Fort Worth to Cleveland on Oct. 10 Frontier Airlines flight 1143 from Cleveland to Dallas/Fort Worth on Oct. 13. The second healthcare worker who tested positive for Ebola had traveled on those flights prior to reporting symptoms.

On Thursday, a congressional hearing was held to examine U.S. health officials' response to Ebola, with a number of Republicans calling for a travel ban on travelers from the Ebola-stricken West African countries of Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone, as well as other heightened responses to the outbreak.

President Obama responded that imposing a travel ban from West Africa would be counterproductive. Instead, the CDC and the Department of Homeland Security's Customs & Border Protection this week and last week

## Travel industry seeks to assure, educate clients about Ebola

By Michelle Baran | October 26, 2014

implemented additional screening measures at five U.S. airports through which 94% of travelers from Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone pass when entering the U.S.: New York's JFK International Airport, Washington-Dulles, Newark Liberty, Chicago-O'Hare, and Atlanta. There are no direct flights from West Africa at this time.

The screenings include examining passengers arriving from those countries for signs of illness, asking them a series of health- and exposure-related questions and providing health and self-monitoring information for identifying Ebola symptoms.

Meanwhile, some countries have decided to opt for a travel ban. Jamaica this week said it would not accept travelers from Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone. Guyana, St. Lucia, Haiti and Colombia have also banned arrivals from the three African countries.

"I think a lot of what is behind people calling for a travel ban is reasonable," said Dan Richards, CEO of Global Rescue, a provider of integrated medical, security, intelligence, travel risk management and crisis response services. "The game we're playing here is a game against time. We're trying to reduce the number of people who are possibly affected, who could intersect with other people."

But Richards added, "If you look at the numbers of people who have been affected, it's infinitesimally small compared to other diseases. The greatest killer of travelers are motor vehicle accidents, certainly in the developing world. The likelihood that someone gets on an airplane here in the U.S. from Boston to Cleveland and contract Ebola, it's not zero, but it's as close to zero as it gets."

Like others in the travel industry, Richards said it was important for travelers, travel providers and companies whose employees

travel for work to arm themselves with information as well as with an action plan in the event that someone does get sick.

Complicating matters, he pointed out, is that the Ebola cases are hitting just as the country is entering flu season, which means people who could be exhibiting flu-like symptoms might think they have Ebola symptoms.

Steve Loucks, chief communications officer for Travel Leaders Group, said that given the level of public anxiety and complicating circumstance, it is crucial that travel agents "be armed with facts on topics potentially impacting travel, like Ebola, so they may in turn speak authoritatively with their clients."

Consequently, Travel Leaders has been rolling out updated "talking points" to its member agents that they can use when discussing Ebola-related travel concerns with clients. The points are based on information gathered from the CDC, the World Health Organization, the State Department, the Federal Aviation Administration and Customs & Border Protection.

For example, in its latest talking points, Travel Leaders emphasized that Ebola is not an airborne virus and that transmission occurs through contact with the bodily fluids of someone already infected.

In a statement to Travel Weekly about whether a ban should be implemented and how concerned travelers should be, Airports Council International (ACI) said, "The scientific fact is that to contract Ebola one has to have direct contact with the body fluids, blood, secretions or articles contaminated with these fluids from an infected person -- all unlikely exposures for the average traveler. As a result, even when traveling to one of the affected countries, the risk of contracting the disease is very, very low."

ACI does not support a travel ban or travel restrictions and is confident the aviation industry can successfully responded to this public health emergency just as it has to other outbreaks such as Swine Flu, Avian Influenza and SARS, in the past, the organization stated.