

# Special Report

## COVID-19: Impact on Air Medical Transport

March 20, 2020

The current COVID-19 pandemic is limiting air medical evacuations. This is due to multiple factors:

- **New travel bans /restrictions and border closures limit the access to countries** usually used as evacuation destinations - including all countries overflowed or used as technical stops.
- The **diminishing availability of resources** in the local health care systems or their preparation for an uptake in their COVID-19 patient load means that most countries are now limiting access to hospital beds especially for non-citizens/residents

### Medical conditions not related to COVID-19:

Due to the restrictions noted above, transports may no longer be directed to the most appropriate nearby evacuation destination, but may have to be directed to the patient's home country of residency or citizenship, resulting in the potential delay in the evacuation, longer flight times, increased risk for the patient, and increased cost.

Additionally, patients will be required to provide proof that they are COVID-negative before they can be transported.

### COVID-19 Specific Patients

These increasing limitations further impact the ability to transport COVID-19 patients. Should medical evacuation be considered for a patient suspected or with actual COVID-19 infection, UnitedHealthcare Global will adhere to the transport guidelines that the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the World Health Organization established for MERS and SARS. Specifically relating to the current COVID-19 crisis, the following details need to be taken into account:

- Each transport must be cleared by several government authorities in all countries impacted by the transport. This includes countries of origin and destination as well as all other countries overflowed during the evacuation – whether a technical stop is needed or not
- Strict public health regulations must be enforced, and countries retain the right of refusal for such medical transport flights
- All healthcare professionals involved in the transports must be fully trained to specific disease protocols
- Limited availability of air ambulance partners who have the expertise to manage such patients as well as the equipment necessary – such as a bio-containment unit

[Learn more about UnitedHealthcare Global Intelligence Services at uhcglobal.com](https://www.uhcglobal.com)

### Summary

Medical evacuations are in a constantly evolving status with multiple factors to take into account. For an evacuation to be considered, significant lead time and coordination must be in place. The possibility for an evacuation to occur will depend on the complexity of the transport, the evolving nature of the pandemic, adherence to new government regulations and restrictions, and the need for various health authorities, governmental bodies and medical staff approvals.

Because of this, companies should review and update their Business Continuity Plans to ensure they have the proper protocols and parameters defined for the determination of when to keep employees in situ vs. returning home if they become ill or injured and medical evacuation is no longer an option.

### Questions?

Contact the UnitedHealthcare Global intelligence team

- [intelligence@uhcglobal.com](mailto:intelligence@uhcglobal.com)
- +1.713.430.7300 and ask to speak to an Intelligence Department representative

**Visit [uhcglobal.com](https://uhcglobal.com)**