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Flying – Part II

Role of the Airlines, Resources and Reporting Travel Problems and Solutions

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Samples of stickers

In Flying - Part I Ventilator Users' Report and Manufacturers' Role, December 2012 *Ventilator-Assisted Living* (Vol. 26, No. 6), we reported on the responses from IVUN's Ventilator Users' Survey regarding flying, and the information collected from the manufacturers. The manufacturers remind users that equipment certified for flying has a sticker on it.

If that is not the case, check Manufacturers' Certification Letters.

Role of the Airlines

IVUN sent a brief survey to 54 airlines (Adria Airways to Virgin Airlines) asking about their policies regarding the use of a ventilator during flight, their policy on hooking up to the plane's power supply, and the use of oxygen during flight. The response was minimal.

IVUN has created a chart called "Links to Accessibility/Medical Policies of the Airlines" and uploaded it at www.ventusers.org/adv/issues.html. There has been a significant improvement in

the quality and amount of information available on each site to assist travelers. Airlines are not required to allow a plug in, but the good news is that the newer ventilators come with smaller and swappable batteries. In fact, even if an airline lets someone using a ventilator to plug in, they often require equivalent battery backup for the duration of the trip anyway. Remember, it is still true that the captain of the plane has the final word as to what happens on the flight.

Responses from Airlines

Scandinavian (SAS) sent the most comprehensive reply. Batteries must conform to the International Air Transport Association Dangerous Goods Regulations (IATA DGR chapter 2.3.4.8) and the ventilator must fit under the seat or in the hat rack. Plugging in depends on which aircraft type is used on the route. Passenger-owned oxygen containers must conform to IATA DGR chapter 2.3.4.1. SAS sent a print out of charts listing all the approved equipment and the approval condition for each.

British Airways allows all FAA-approved vents and oxygen concentrators on board. Power ports are not available in all cabins. If so, an adapter is required to connect to power and the ventilator must be switched off during takeoff and landing.

AIRLINE	PHONE #	Link to policies related to use of ventilators
Air Berlin	866-266-5588	Transporting medical equipment
Air Canada	888-247-2262	Customers with Special Needs
Air China	800-882-8122	Special Travel Needs
Air France	800-992-3982; 800-210-6508	Reduced mobility and other disabilities
Air Tran	800-247-8726	Medical Portable Electronic Devices, M-PEDs
Alaska	800-654-5669	Ventilators, Respirators, and CPAP Machines
Alltalia	800-223-5730	Traveller's care, No Barrier Travelling, Health on Board
All Nippon Airways	800-235-9262	Travel Assistance of Disabled Customers

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Hawaiian Airlines states they do not have power ports. Approved portable oxygen concentrators may be used during flight, with restrictions, and personal oxygen is not accepted.

SkyWest Airlines (operates as United Express, Delta Connection and US Airways Express) reports that RTCA (Radio Technical Commission for Aeronautics) approval documents are required to use a ventilator during flight. None of their aircraft have power outlets for personal use. Oxygen and other devices can be used if they are on the approved list, which they attached.

Delta referred us to a great deal of information at www.delta.com/content/www/en_US/traveling-with-us/special-travel-needs/disabilities.html

United assured us that they are in full accordance with FAA safety regulations and the guidelines set forth in Part 382 of the Air Carriers Act and referred us to www.united.com, and under the "Travel Information" tab, click on "Special Travel Needs."

Reporting Travel Problems and Solutions

Our survey asked for comments from users of home mechanical ventilation who have flown. The comments could be categorized as "About the airlines" and "Regulations."

About the airlines:

"I will not fly any other airline but Southwest. SWA tries hard in every way; however, in spite of the Permobil rep working with SWA in Dallas, they still cannot seem to protect our power chairs in flights."

"I discussed my needs with Delta Airlines. I was told by their Manager for Disabilities that there was no problem with using my BiPAP and battery on any Delta flight. The flight attendants were very helpful and understanding. In fact, it was the same crew both directions and they remembered me."

"Besides the refusal of Air France. I was also refused by Turkish Airlines. In the case of Turkish Airlines I was allowed to fly using the vent one way but not back. They took my equipment away, sealed and stored it. I was forced to ventilate myself manually with a bag for four hours."

"Traveling with cheaper priced airlines is virtually impossible because these companies don't allow for exceptions, (which is why they are cheap)."

Regulations:

"TSA is our greatest challenge. They don't recognize the equipment and then evaluate it (and have left necessary 'pieces' of the circuit/system out of the bag after examining it). We have also arrived at our destination with broken/cracked components after examination."

"I have never been refused to fly because of my ventilator but because my wheelchair was 'too big.'"

"It is reasonable to require a vent to have battery power in the event of onboard power failing, so I do not think it is necessary to require airlines to provide power. The first step should be to require the airlines to allow vents and make a clear path to get vents approved."

"If airlines have electrical outlets for computers, then why can't an oxygen or ventilator device be used?"

Report Experiences (Good and Bad)

IVUN has developed a way to collect the travel experiences of ventilator users on its website. The form collects not only information about flying, but about train travel, cruise ships and road travel. Share your experiences. Enter the good and the bad. IVUN will make these experiences available to other vent users and researchers. Look for the orange "Travel" button on www.ventusers.org.



▶ Links to Governmental Policies and Resources

Laws and Regulations

- U.S. Department of Transportation, 14 CFR Part 382, Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Disability in Air Travel
- European Union Commission guidelines regarding Regulation (EC) No. 1107/2006 and the rights of disabled persons and persons with reduced mobility when travelling by air
- U.S. Department of Transportation, Passengers with Disabilities: About the Air Carrier Access Act

Medical Information

- Transportation Security Administration: Travelers with Disabilities and Medical Conditions
- Managing passengers with stable respiratory disease planning air travel: British Thoracic Society Recommendations, *Thorax*, September 2011, Volume 66, Supplement 1
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Your Survival Guide to Safe and Healthy Travel

Consumer Protection

- U.S. Department of Transportation, Aviation Consumer Protection, File a Consumer Complaint
- Association for Airline Passenger Rights (AAPR): Section for Passengers with Disabilities
- International Air Transport Association (IATA), All Passengers This Way

General Travel Information

- Transportation Security Administration: TSA Cares (855-787-2227) is a toll free helpline to assist travelers with disabilities and medical conditions. TSA recommends that passengers call 72 hours ahead of travel for information about screening policies, procedures and what to expect at the security checkpoint.
- U.S. Department of Transportation: Air travelers who experience disability-related air travel service problems may call the hotline at 800-778-4838 (voice) or 1-800-455-9880 (TTY) to obtain assistance. ■

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