

Video-Audio Clip Transcript-Jolene Bowen, Infection Preventionist, OSF HealthCare

A recent Department of Defense study found minimal risk of getting COVID-19 from a masked passenger on a commercial plane, especially if the flyer is wearing a mask as well.

“The air that comes in enters at the ceiling and enters at the floor so that if you’re a passenger and you’re doing normal breathing, the air currents carry it down and all the air is sent through a HEPA filter.” (:19)

Bowen says the study found tracer “virus” particles were cleared from the air every six minutes.

“There are about 20 to 30 air changes per hour; kind of similar to in a hospital or in an operating room where you have 12 to 15 air changes per hour - that’s why it feels almost breezy sometimes or it feels chilly because of the air current. That part (air circulation and filtration) provides a lot more safety than other forms of transportation.” (:26)

Despite some precautions airlines are taking, Bowen says it’s best to limit movement and pay attention to your seatmates’ activities.

“So in particular, when you’re eating your meal, whether it’s food you brought from the outside or your morning coffee or your water, be mindful if your neighbor in their seat has their mask off and they’re exposed and they’re eating or drinking. Then that’s not a good time for you to be doing that.” (:22)

Flyers can reduce their risk of getting COVID-19 while flying by looking at traveling off hours.

“You can try to pick off-peak hours. That’ll reduce your exposure at the airport as well as when you’re landing and when you’re actually in the plane.” (:12)

Bowen suggests picking an alternative day to celebrate a holiday to reduce crowded planes and roadways.

“Maybe it would be easier if you had Thanksgiving on a Sunday or maybe on Wednesday so that even if you’re driving, you’re not on the road at the same time as a lot of other travelers. That’ll decrease your exposure if you’re going to the gas station to pump gas or if you’re going in and getting a snack or using the restroom or even going to a rest area.” (:24)