

World Health Organization

MetMUNC XLIX

Topic: COVID-19 & Travel

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In our modern, globalized world, pandemics can spread to every corner of the globe within weeks of the first outbreak. To prevent their own major outbreaks, many countries must adapt their own travel restrictions to halt the entry of infected people into their borders. Even if a country has successfully shrunk the amount of new cases and deaths, and reduced the amount of infected persons, they still face the threat of a renewed outbreak. These nations must decide whether they are ready to lift travel restrictions, or to reenact them when people start returning from heavily infected areas. All of these issues have been present in the current COVID-19 pandemic, as many nations struggle to contain the disease, with others seeing new outbreaks from returning travelers.

Diseases like COVID-19 can spread very quickly once entering a country. One infected person entering into a country can cause thousands of new cases in the following weeks. For example, on January 20th the United States got its first case. Within eight weeks that number was in the thousands, with other countries like Italy having thousands of cases after only a month

¹ This is why regulating the flow of travel in and out of a country is vital to determining how badly it will be affected. Controlling the quantity and origin of travelers can have a huge impact

¹ <https://covid19.who.int/table>

on how the disease will spread within the country. In addition, requiring travelers to quarantine before entering a country can also have a positive impact.

Despite these benefits travel restrictions can have negative economic effects. The reduction of business for transportation and travel services affects the economies of several countries, and can cause these businesses to decline. Demand decreased both, due to the fear caused by the spread of the virus, along with because of travel restrictions. Many airline companies have shut down due to the COVID-19 pandemic and are close to bankruptcy. These include the British airline Flybe, along with the Trans States Airlines (US), Compass Airlines (US), Virgin Australia (Australia), and Avianca (Colombia)². Moreover, travel restrictions and quarantines can cause backlash if enacted too early or if they remain active for long periods of time. During the pandemic, world governments are forced to formulate ever changing travel regulations to prevent outbreaks caused by travelers returning from highly infected regions.

In the first two months of the Coronavirus pandemic, travel out of China spread the virus across the globe. After this, travel restrictions were created in the United States and many European countries to prevent infected persons from entering or leaving. Certain countries banned travel from others



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<https://www.businessinsider.com/coronavirus-airlines-that-failed-bankrupt-covid19-pandemic-2020-3#flybe-uk-march-2020-1>

Image 1:
abcnews.go.com/Politics/trump-announces-travel-europe-restricted-amid-coronavirus-threat/story?id=69543646

with a substantial number of cases. Some stopped people from exiting highly infected areas.

Example of US travel bans during the early stages of the pandemic

In addition, travel restrictions and airline shutdowns also caused negative economic effects for the countries involved along with causing some companies to approach bankruptcy. Shutdowns caused companies to lay off workers, reducing spending and therefore hurting the economy. Also, countries which rely on tourism and airline transportation as a large portion of their GDP were negatively affected by travel restrictions and airline shutdowns. All of these issues need to be addressed quickly by world governments to secure economic prosperity and prevent more Coronavirus outbreaks.

Moreover, the timing of enacting and removing travel restrictions is essential in preventing the impact of pandemics as shown by the COVID 19 pandemic. Several infected people entered countries around the world within weeks of the first major outbreak of COVID 19. By the time travel restrictions were in effect these countries already had thousands of cases



Plane being disinfected after travel has been shut down

each^{1,2}. This led to major outbreaks in these countries that could have been prevented had travel out of China been blocked, or entry into these countries had been prevented earlier.

Furthermore, removing or easing travel restrictions too early can cause new

outbreaks, such as the ones seen in several European countries and

Japan in August¹. Also, keeping them active too long can cause discontent as people have to

cancel vacations and business trips. Even if the timing is right, travel must be adapted to be safer while the disease is still circulating. Correctly timing travel restrictions is an important part of stopping the negative effects of a pandemic and addressing this is a responsibility of governments during the current Coronavirus pandemic.

To continue, travel has always been a huge factor in the severity of the pandemic in different countries or regions. Controlling travel from infected areas along with ensuring that the travel that is done is safe can have a huge impact on preventing a severe outbreak. One example of a government failing to do this is how travel from Europe brought several cases of Coronavirus to New York, and it took weeks for the travel ban to be enacted³. By the time travel restrictions were put in place there were hundreds of cases already in the state¹. Also, safe travel is just as important as travel restrictions in preventing infections. For example, in late August a flight from Greece carried seven infected passengers who infected nine more by the time of arrival⁴. This shows how unsafe travel can also cause new infections if the right measures aren't taken.

To summarize, the Coronavirus has affected every country differently, and their responses were just as different. Countries like the United States, Brazil, and India all had millions of cases by early September¹. Others had seen thousands of new cases a day and cases

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<https://www.cnbc.com/2020/07/16/cuomo-slams-trump-coronavirus-response-as-virus-of-american-division-and-federal-incompetence.html>

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<https://www.usnews.com/news/world-report/articles/2020-08-31/193-people-ordered-to-self-isolate-after-16-passengers-test-positive-for-coronavirus-on-flight-from-greece-to-wales>

Image 2:

www.usatoday.com/story/travel/airline-news/2020/03/19/coronavirus-how-sanitize-your-airline-seat-if-you-have-to-fly/5073670002/

reached in the hundreds of thousands before stopping their outbreaks. Some examples include Italy, Spain, France, and Germany¹. Also, some countries had a significant amount of cases and deaths early on but quickly halted the outbreaks. These include South Korea and China. The differences in the effects of the pandemic in multiple countries was caused by the differences in travel restrictions and the safety measures taken.

Many countries have implemented social distancing, mandatory mask wearing, travel restrictions, and quarantines in an attempt to contain the pandemic. Every country has had a different approach with varying success. For example, in early September some countries like the United States, Russia, and China had partially open travel, while others had either no restrictions like the United Kingdom and Brazil, or were completely closed like Canada and India⁵. Also, certain countries implemented mandatory mask wearing, while others only suggest wearing masks. Mainly, countries have been implementing social distancing and travel restrictions to lower case numbers and prevent the healthcare system from becoming overwhelmed. This is to limit deaths and contain the disease until a vaccine is ready. Delegates should learn their countries' response to the pandemic, especially in regards to travel to prepare for this committee session. The goal of the session is to create universal WHO guidelines for handling the Coronavirus, mostly relating to travel restrictions and safety.

Delegates representing countries with a wide range of different issues will need to compromise on an outline that affects all countries involved. A guideline for when travel restrictions should be put into effect following an outbreak, rules for safe travel, and how to support the declining travel businesses should be created. The resolution may also involve other

⁵ <https://www.kayak.com/travel-restrictions>

safety measures though it should focus mainly on travel. The resolution created could also find a way to aid countries that are suffering because of the pandemic. The suggested responses from the guideline created in the committee should have the ability to apply to any country and should assist governments in using a working policy to stop the pandemic.

Questions to Consider:

1. What measures is your country taking to respond to the pandemic?
2. How severe is the pandemic in your country?
3. What travel restrictions does your country have in place?
4. Does your country plan on lifting or easing travel restrictions in the near future?
5. Has your country been successful in dealing with the pandemic?
6. What parts of a WHO pandemic guideline would your country be willing to follow?

Helpful Links:

- <https://covid19.who.int>
- <https://www.kayak.com/travel-restrictions>