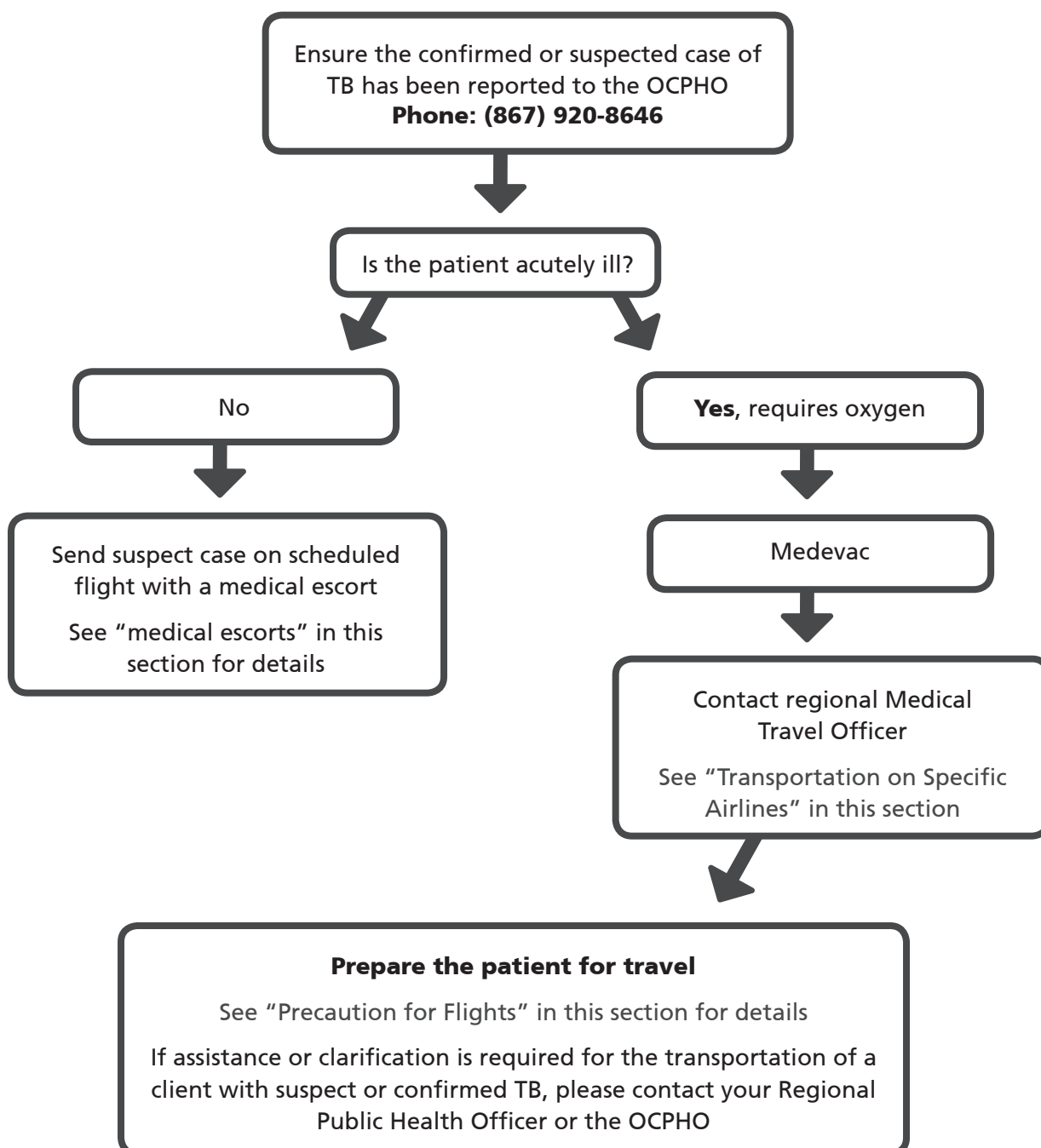


Medical Transportation of a Confirmed or Suspected Case

Figure 7.2: Medical Transportation of a Confirmed or Suspected Case



Transportation of patients with TB in the NWT presents unique risks and challenges. Many TB cases are identified in smaller communities, necessitating patient transportation over great distances to receive appropriate medical treatment.

Generally, the patient is transported by air, requiring careful planning by the primary and receiving caregivers to reduce the risk of transmission of TB during travel.

The final decision as to the acceptance of any air passenger with an infectious disease rests with the airline and captain of the flight. Asymptomatic or symptomatic TB patients, even if smear positive, can be safely transported by commercial ("scheduled") flights. Symptomatic patients who are acutely ill should be transported by Medevac. World Health Organization (WHO) Tuberculosis and Air Travel Guidelines state ≥ 8 hours of travel with an active TB patient requires notification only to those travellers in close contact with and exposed to the index case.

Using **Precautions for Flights** the risk to other passengers and operators/ attendants on airplanes or in ground transportation can be minimized.

For transporting patients, the Medical Travel Officer must be informed that the patient must comply with wearing a N95 mask during transportation.

Figure 7.3: N95 Mask



Precautions for Flights

It is preferable that the patient wear a low-filtration (less than one micron) mask that is National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) approved (e.g. N95), that provides a tight facial seal (<10% facial seal leak). Only NIOSH-certified respirators should be worn for TB protection. Although a surgical mask is not a respirator, it is acceptable only in the rare circumstance when an N95 respirator is not tolerated. It can only be used during a single patient medevac.

The patient must have a container capable of tight closure, for the disposal of tissues where cough and sputum are involved.

The patient may safely be situated in any seat; the pilot of a small plane may direct the patient to the "safest" seat, depending on the airflow in the plane. Other passengers may be seated ahead, behind, or across the aisle from the patient. It is preferable for the patient's escort to occupy the adjacent seat.

When an escort is advised; they will accept responsibility of assisting the patient with the instructed airborne precautions.

No other special precautions need to be taken. Meals may be taken normally, except that the patient must use a paper tissue over the mouth if any coughing occurs during eating and use the container with tight-fitting lid for tissue disposal. There is no need for isolation procedures for any of the utensils or plates.

Medical Escorts

The OCPHO advises most cases of suspected or confirmed TB need to be accompanied by a medical escort on scheduled flights in order to ensure compliance of airborne precautions. For other reasons such as language and/ or cognitive barriers, the airline may also require that a non-medical person escort the patient.

A medical escort is key in maintaining airborne isolation precautions. There may be a perceived social pressure for a patient to not appear “ill” in public, and therefore a temptation to remove their mask. The medical escort must be informed that an important part of their role is to ensure the patient exercises respiratory precautions.

Using the **Precautions for Flights** and with a reliable medical escort, the risk of projecting droplet nuclei containing tubercle bacilli is minimal.

The medical escort must be identified before scheduled departure. The HCP must ensure the medical escort:

- Is committed to providing care for and advocating for the patient
- Has a good understanding of the rationale and importance of maintaining respiratory isolation precautions
- Has enough medical materials for the journey, given the possibility of delays (i.e. extra masks, tissues)
- Is a reliable caregiver for both transporting and staying at the hospital, with the patient
- Is medically/physically able to carry out the duties of an escort
- Has photo ID for travel

Transportation on Specific Airlines

Transportation policies of airlines for passengers with suspected or confirmed TB are presented below. These policies are subject to change.

Arrangements for transportation are done between the Medical Travel Officer for each Regional Health and Social Services Authority and the head office of the airline.

Regional Airlines (Air Tindi, Kenn Borek, Northwright, etc.)

- Attending health professional will provide requested information on the appropriate form to the Medical Travel Officer, as per medical travel guidelines.
- Medical Travel Officer or attending health professional will complete the **Communicable Diseases Passenger Notification form** and fax a copy to the air carrier’s head office and the health professional making the travel request (if applicable).
- The air carrier will provide a copy of the completed and signed passenger declaration to the pilot.

First Air

- Medical Travel Officer or attending health professional will call First Air Reservations **(1-800-267-1247)** and inform them that they are arranging transportation of a passenger with or suspected to have an airborne disease.
- Medical Travel Officer or attending health professional will complete the appropriate form specific to the airline and fax it to the First Air Reservations Office.
- The Medical Director for First Air will review the form for medical clearance. A verbal reply will be given to the Reservations department stating acceptance or rejection of the patient's travel.
- Personnel from the Reservations Office will ensure the airline's Medical Director's decision is given to the Medical Travel Officer.

Air Canada

- The patient is required to travel with an escort.
- Patients who require oxygen will not be considered for transportation.
- Medical Travel Officer or attending health professional **(1-888-247-2262)** will book flight with Air Canada reservations, and provide flight number and locator number to attending health care professional.
- Attending healthcare professional will call Air Canada Medical Desk (MEDA) at **1-800-667-4732** to arrange clearance for their patient's flight. They will be faxed a form which will require the following information:
 - Name of patient;
 - Date of travel;
 - Flight number and locator number;
 - Place of departure and destination; and
 - Patient diagnosis.
- The attending health care professional will complete the Air Canada medical clearance form and fax back to MEDA; MEDA will forward form to the Air Canada Medical Director for approval.
- The healthcare professional will receive a verbal acceptance or rejection of their patient's travel. This information will be sent via fax or phone to the booking agency or Medical Travel Officer.

Canadian North

Canadian North declines to serve passengers who have suspected or confirmed TB.