

Survey Shows Canadians Want Pet-Free Flights

Eighty percent of respondents believe airlines should offer some flights without pets.

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A new survey by the Canadian Lung Association reveals that 80 percent of Canadians believe Canada's airlines should offer some pet-free flights to protect the health and safety of passengers and crew members.

The survey was conducted online by Angus Reid Strategies on June 23 and 24, polling about 1,002 adult Canadians.

The findings come as Air Canada prepares to join WestJet in allowing pets to travel in the passenger cabin of airplanes.

The association maintains that pet allergens can trigger serious or even life-threatening reactions in people with lung diseases like asthma and COPD. Even a small amount of an allergen, like the hair, saliva or dander of a pet, can spread quickly throughout the airplane due to small cabin space and re-circulating air, according to the association.

The survey also found that 75 percent of Canadians believe that the federal government has a responsibility to take action on this issue. The Canadian Lung Association reported that it is calling on the House of Commons Standing Committee on Health to examine this issue when the committee resumes in the fall.

"Canadians are saying quite clearly that the issue of protecting the health of airline passengers and crew must take precedence over a desire to enhance customer service," said Brian Graham, chair of Chronic Disease Policy for the association. "We believe that the airlines should do the right thing and offer pet-free flights as an option. For someone with asthma who has an allergy to cats or dogs, having a pet anywhere in the same airline cabin can trigger an episode of wheezing, coughing and shortness of breath."

The association thinks a middle ground can be reached.

"We all love pets," said Cameron Bishop, director of Government Affairs for the association. "This is not about trying to deny people the privilege of traveling with their furry companions. We think we can arrive at an important middle ground that balances the love of our pets with the health and safety of airline passengers and crews."

In the meantime, the association urges all Canadians with asthma or other respiratory diseases that may be exacerbated by allergic reaction to animals to ensure their disease is properly managed every day, including when they are planning to travel, and to take their quick-relief medicine in their carry-on luggage.