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Flight cancellation fees unfair during pandemic: passenger

By CBC News

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Megu Mogaki said Japan Airlines is effectively penalizing people who are forced to cancel because of swine flu. Her boyfriend Kaya Rosenbloom added that such a hefty penalty could result in people flying when maybe they shouldn't because they can't afford to cancel.

"The airlines didn't have a policy that encouraged [Megu] to make that decision. They didn't make it easy, that's for certain," said Rosenbloom.

"She basically decided that she would be putting others at risk by flying," said Rosenbloom. "There would be a personal penalty in rescheduling her flight but it was kind of the right thing to do."

Japan Airlines did not return calls for an interview.

Travel agencies have advised customers to factor swine flu into their vacation plans and have warned people not fly if they have H1N1. Most are advising travellers to take out health insurance, especially during the swine flu pandemic.

One Flight Centre agent in Toronto estimated that medical insurance for a \$2,000 return flight between Toronto and Tokyo would have cost about \$71.

Federal Health Minister Leona Aglukkaq this week asked airlines and travel agencies to make it easy for Canadians to rebook travel plans if they fell ill.

At least one agency has responded. FlightNetwork.com, a Canadian online travel sales site, announced this week it would waive its cancellation and rebooking fees for the duration of flu season until April 2010.

"We have chosen to waive our rebooking and cancellation fees, but as airlines define their H1N1 travel policies, the best way for travellers to protect themselves from additional fees due to illness is to purchase travel insurance," Naman Budhdeo, president and founder of FlightNetwork.com, in a news release.

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