

situation changes based on the amount of virus in the community.”

Dr. Mark Gendreau, an expert on infectious disease transmission on commercial aircraft and an assistant professor of emergency medicine at the Tufts School of Medicine in Boston, pointed to a recent German study he peer-reviewed. The study suggests that while airflow patterns in the cabin make the probability of in-flight transmission low, getting on and off the plane and bringing luggage on board could increase the risk of transmission.

Gendreau says he believes the risk of catching COVID-19 on a commercial flight is “probably moderate.”

“The reason I say that is because I do think that when people are travelling in this pandemic, that their guard is up, they’re practising good social distancing as much as they possibly can,” he said. “Most sane people are wearing a facemask. Most air carriers mandate it.”

Colin Furness, an infection control epidemiologist and assistant professor at U of T’s faculty of information, said not only is there a lack of research into the spread of COVID-19 on flights, there are difficulties with measuring how many people, if any, picked the virus up on an airplane.

“It’s really hard to pin down where people get sick,” said Furness. “So it’s awfully difficult from a contact-tracing standpoint to say it must have been the airplane.

“Same thing with public transit. You can conclude that public transit must be perfectly safe because we don’t have case reports of that. There’s an absence of evidence. I think that’s the situation we have with airplanes.”

Furness’s take on the safety of flying in the age of COVID-19? “We can’t say that it’s unsafe but I think it’s really unsafe.

Asked if he would fly next to someone in the current age: “You couldn’t pay me enough to do that.”

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