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## **In-flight medical incidents set to rise**

Airlines have been warned that in-flight medical problems are set to increase as the Australian population ages and more people take to the skies. Currently it is estimated there is an in-flight medical incident involving one in every 11,000 to 14,000 passengers.

Each year more than 55 million passengers are carried by international, domestic and regional airlines in Australia. Most in-flight medical problems can be successfully dealt with by the aircraft crew, although flight diversions can be required.

One study showed 70 per cent of medical cases were satisfactorily handled by cabin crew, with medically qualified passengers being asked to assist in more serious cases. Details of in-flight medical incidents are set out in the latest edition of the Civil Aviation Safety Authority's flagship safety publication, Flight Safety Australia magazine.

In the magazine Dr David Newman, an aviation medical consultant, says most in-flight medical events are not serious. Dr Newman writes that these include fainting, hyperventilation and ear problems. The most common inflight emergencies are cardiac, gastrointestinal, neurological and respiratory illness. "Many major airlines are now also using telemedicine, with the aircraft linked to a specialist ground-based medical centre," Dr Newman says in the article. "Many airlines carry on-board cardiac monitors and automatic external defibrillators and cabin crew should use them. In serious cases, a diversion might be necessary. "According to a British Airways study, asthma is the most common potentially life-threatening condition reported on its aircraft. Most cases are minor, however." Passengers can faint due to dehydration, vomiting and diarrhoea are easily treated with fluid replacement and medication from on-board medical kits and fatigue and stress can bring on epileptic seizures and strokes.

According to the International Air Transport Association one in every three million passengers died on an aircraft – mostly middle aged men, with the main cause of death being heart disease