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Etihad Airways flight makes emergency landing after baby falls ill

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CHENNAI: An Abu Dhabi-Jakarta Etihad Airways flight made an unscheduled landing at the Chennai airport on Saturday after an eight-month old baby suffering from fever developed bouts of vomiting and diarrhoea. The aircraft landed at around 9.10 am and the baby was immediately shifted to a private hospital in Guindy. Hospital sources said that the child is out of danger.

The flight, with the remaining 320 passengers on board, departed for Jakarta at 8.30 pm. Earlier, the passengers were accommodated at different hotels in the city.

Airport sources told TOI that a medical emergency had developed on board 50 minutes after the aircraft had flown past Chennai in an easterly direction. The pilot decided to turn and head to Chennai because Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur were about two hours away.

"The pilot selected the closest international airport and informed Chennai about the medical emergency on board. The child was moved to the nearest hospital after airport doctors attended on it briefly," an official said.

According to an air traffic controller, the pilot had informed about a medical emergency on board. "So, priority was accorded to the flight for return and landing," the official said.

During such emergencies, pilots follow set procedures. They identify the nearest airport in a city that has facilities to treat the passenger. They then inform air traffic control about the sick passenger and ask for diversion and landing priority. The pilots file a report about the incident, explaining the reason for the unscheduled landing.

"Pilots also contact airline officials over the frequency allotted to the aircraft before selecting an airport to land. The airline officials also check whether the closest airport has their representatives to help, and ground-handling arrangements for smooth handling of the emergency and transfer of passengers," said an airport official.

The Chennai airport has a medical emergency room where a doctor is on duty round-the-clock. The doctor treats the ailing passenger who is then transferred to nearest hospital. The Airports Authority of India (AAI) has tied up with a couple of hospitals near the airport to handle emergencies.