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## Air Canada to Lung Association: don't hold your breath over pet policy

*Amy O'Brian, Canwest News Service VANCOUVER* — Air Canada is standing firm on its new policy to allow cats and small dogs to travel in passenger cabins, despite health concerns from people who suffer from pet allergies.

The Lung Association is calling on Air Canada to reconsider the policy, which went into effect Wednesday, and is asking the airline to consider pet-free flights. "In an age when we don't allow smoking on airplanes and we don't allow nut products on airplanes, why on Earth would you put animals in a passenger cabin at 40,000 feet in the air? It doesn't make any sense," Lung Association spokesman Cameron Bishop said Friday.

But Angela Mah, spokeswoman for Air Canada, said the airline is simply following the lead of other international airlines and will not be reconsidering its policy any time soon.

"The vast majority of airlines around the world carry pets in the cabin," Mah said. Air Canada's policy restricts the number of pets allowed in the cabin depending on the size of the aircraft. And the dog or cat must travel in an approved carrier that is small enough to either fit under the passenger's seat or under the seat in front of them.

"We believe our policy is prudent," Mah said.

The Lung Association disagrees and has asked both Air Canada and WestJet — which also allows small pets in its passenger cabins — to compromise and designate some flights pet-free so allergy sufferers can fly without concern.

But both airlines are refusing to budge on the issue, so the Lung Association launched a campaign on Friday asking people to send a letter to federal health committee chairwoman Joy Smith.

The form letter, which is on the Lung Association's website, calls for parliamentary hearings to consider the public health implications of allowing pets to travel in airplane passenger cabins.

"We have offered to compromise. We've offered to sit down with them (the airlines). We've offered all sorts of stuff and they are just not willing," Bishop said.

On its website, Air Canada says it is sensitive to the concerns of allergy sufferers and asks that travellers with pet allergies advise a check-in agent of their allergy to ensure they are not seated next to a customer with a dog or cat.

Mah also noted that the air in most passenger cabins is an equal combination of outside air and re-circulated air, and that the re-circulated air is moved through powerful filters that remove 99 per cent of the particles.

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