

COVID-19 Questions and Answers

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1. What is the current situation in the world regarding COVID-19?

- WHO has declared Covid-19 a 'public health emergency of international concern' and **NOT** a pandemic. According to WHO Director General, Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, "using the word pandemic carelessly has no tangible benefit, but it does have significant risk in terms of amplifying unnecessary and unjustified fear and stigma, and paralyzing systems." WHO has also explained that the global risk level of "very high" is the highest alert the organisation can declare.
- WHO says that world leaders still have a chance to contain the virus within their borders.
- WHO is working in close consultation with the World Tourism Organisation and with other partners to assist states in ensuring that health measures be implemented in ways that minimize unnecessary interference with international traffic and trade.

Note: Status on the number of cases confirmed in the world as well as countries affected are available on the SharePoint site linked at the end of the document.

2. What is the situation in Mauritius?

- The authorities have currently issued directives to restrict entry to Mauritius for persons who have been in a number of countries most affected by the outbreak. *(Note: Updated documents listing those countries are available on the SharePoint site – see end of this document).*
- These directives also specify that Mauritian nationals, residents, their spouse and children coming from or having travelled through the above regions within the last 14 days, will be allowed entry in Mauritius and will be placed in quarantine. However, they will not be allowed to board if they present symptoms.

3. What are the precautions being taken by the Mauritian authorities?

- Passengers arriving to Mauritius from all destinations are being screened by the health authorities.
- Passengers displaying symptoms are being subject to a more thorough examination and when required are being kept in quarantine or isolation at designated centres.
- All passengers departing Mauritius are also being screened.

4. What is Air Mauritius doing to manage the situation?

- Air Mauritius has suspended all operations to Shanghai and Hong Kong.
- Operations to Singapore and Kuala Lumpur have been reviewed and Air Mauritius is now operating a round robin on these destinations.
- Air Mauritius is closely monitoring the situation with local and international authorities including the World Health Organisation, CDC, ICAO, EASA and IATA.
- The Company is also collaborating with key stakeholders in national forums set up to coordinate initiatives being taken at national level.
- The Company is strictly adhering to all directives issued by local and international authorities and reaffirms that the health and safety of its passengers, crew and the public is its topmost priority.

5. What protocol does Air Mauritius follow?

- Well established company procedures exist for the management of communicable diseases. They are in line with recommendations of the World Health Organisation, IATA, and other authoritative bodies.
- As per these procedures, a coordinating committee has been set-up where the Air Mauritius Leadership team as well as representatives of various functional areas including Health & Safety, HR, Flight Operations, Cabin Operations, Ground Operations, Technical Services, Inflight Services, Commercial, Strategic Planning, Procurement and Corporate Communications meet daily to take stock of the situation and coordinate measures being taken.
- These procedures also cover several operations processes including flight crew procedures, passenger handling at ground operations, technical services and aircraft cleaning among others. All personnel are trained in the application of these procedures.

6. How are the procedures for the management of communicable diseases being applied at Air Mauritius?

- All Air Mauritius personnel including front liners as well as back office staff (where required) are being briefed and will be receiving refresher courses in the application of these procedures in due course.
- Key information about Covid-19, protocols to be applied and precautionary measures to be taken are also being imparted through sensitization campaigns.
- Documentations and other resources have been circulated and have been made available on the SharePoint portal linked at the end of this document.
- The Company has taken the extra initiative to also sensitize company suppliers and stakeholders about the Covid-19 outbreak. Air Mauritius is also monitoring their contingency plans.

7. What are the precautionary measures being taken at Air Mauritius?

- All our aircraft are equipped with Universal Protective Kits (UPK) for dealing with suspected cases of communicable diseases.
- Since the outbreak of Covid-19, the upload of protective equipment on sensitive flights have been increased. Cabin Crew on these flights are allowed to wear protective masks while performing their in-flight duties.
- Messages for upholding higher standards of hygiene are being reinforced for all customer facing as well as back-office personnel.
- Hand sanitizers are provided for all inflight personnel, ground staff and have now been extended to all back-offices.
- All aircraft are thoroughly cleaned with proper disinfecting agents while aircraft arriving from sensitive countries undergo a deep cleaning procedure with a special product approved by health authorities.
- In a statement, Airbus has confirmed that the air on all its aircraft is completely changed every three minutes and go through fine filters that eliminate clusters of virus and bacteria.

Additional Q&A answered by Dr David Powell, IATA's Medical Advisor

1. Given the current situation, does IATA think there is a need for people to cut down on air travel to reduce the chances of getting infected with this new strain of coronavirus? Why yes/ no?

- The WHO is not advising any restrictions on travel or trade, even though many countries have made unilateral decisions to introduce them. International coordination is key in dealing with the virus outbreak.

2. What can plane passengers do to protect themselves better from any infection on board?

- The range of simple measures advised by WHO are effective even for passengers on a flight: careful handwashing on a regular basis, or at least hand sanitiser, avoiding touching other people, covering coughs and sneezes (and then handwashing), avoiding travelling if becoming unwell.
- One question that is often asked is whether passengers should wear masks when on a flight. Wear a mask if you are not feeling well. Otherwise there is no need to do so.

3. What can airlines do to better protect passengers during this time?

- Let's look what's being done across the aviation industry as a whole. Exit screening has been implemented in China. And entry screening has been implemented at many airports.
- Reviewing the available evidence tells us that unless travelling in close proximity to someone who is currently unwell, the risk to passengers is very minimal. At the individual level, normal measures are effective: careful handwashing on a regular basis, or at least hand sanitiser, avoiding touching other people, covering coughs and sneezes (and then handwashing), avoiding travelling if becoming unwell.

- Guidelines have also been produced and accepted by the WHO for cabin crew on what to do when dealing with a suspected case of communicable disease on board a flight, as well as guidelines for cleaning crew dealing with an arriving aircraft with a suspected case on board.
- Many people don't realise, but the risk of contracting a virus on board a flight is probably lower than in many confined spaces because modern aircraft have cabin air filtration systems equipped with HEPA filters. These filters have similar performance to those used to keep the air clean in hospital operating rooms and industrial clean rooms. These filters are effective at capturing greater than 99.97% of the airborne microbes in the filtered air. Furthermore, the cabin air system delivers approximately 50% outside air and 50% filtered, recirculated air. This means the supplied air is essentially sterile!

4. Is there higher risk of contracting a virus on a plane as compared to say going to a shopping centre or going to work in an office?

- We assess that the risk is lower. Compared with those locations, a modern aircraft has its cabin air changed many times more frequently than offices or shops. The air supplied to the aircraft cabin is either fresh or is filtered through HEPA filters of the same efficacy (99.97% or better) in removing viruses as those used in surgical operating rooms. As in a shopping centre or an office, the biggest risk is if someone remains in the environment while unwell with a viral infection. Hence maintain good personal hygiene is key!

5. What advice/ support is IATA providing to its members in the light of the current situation?

- Over the years, IATA has developed a suite of guidelines for airlines, aimed at cabin crew, ground staff, baggage handlers, cleaning crew, and many more, in the event of a public health emergency. These were developed and updated when dealing with the various public health emergencies since SARS and are accepted by the WHO. They are available free online before this outbreak, and have been further distributed since concerns arose.
- We have also been in regular contact with airlines through various channels following the outbreak, including a daily update from IATA's medical advisor to the IATA medical contact group of about 200 airline representatives to apprise them of the latest developments.

YOU ARE ENCOURAGED TO CONSULT AVAILABLE DOCUMENTATION ON THE SHAREPOINT PORTAL AT:

<http://sharepoint.airmauritius.mu:9080/Lists/Coronavirus/AllItems.aspx>