

Governments urged to follow global guidelines on crew testing

The International Air Transport Association (IATA) and the International Federation of Air Line Pilots' Associations (IFALPA) have jointly called on governments to follow the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) Council Aviation Recovery Task Force (Cart) guidelines to exempt crews from Covid-19 testing that is applied to air travellers.



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The Cart guidelines specifically recommend that crew members should not be subject to screening or restrictions applicable to other travellers. Furthermore, according to Cart, health screening methods for crew members should be as "non-invasive as possible".

Despite this guidance, an increasing number of states are applying the same public health measures for crew that are applied to the general travelling public. Such measures include providing proof of a negative Covid test prior to departure and in some cases, a second negative Covid test is required upon arrival. Furthermore, several civil aviation regulators only allow crew members with a negative Covid-19 PCR test certificate to layover in their respective countries.

Complying with requirements, acknowledging risk profiles

"These measures not only contravene the recommended ICAO global guidance, but they also fail to take into account the fact that interactions with the local population are minimised," said Gilberto Lopez Meyer, IATA's senior vice president, safety and flight operations. For example, crew on layover are often restricted to the hotel. Such measures also ignore the fact that airlines already comply with the requirements of their home country health protection and monitoring programmes to manage crew health, which typically includes measures to reduce the risk of infection.

"The measures being employed by some states are not only contravening the recommended guidance but are also putting undue stress and pressure on crews. The guidance provided has been carefully developed to ensure operations can continue without jeopardising safety for both crews and passengers," said Captain Jack Netskar, IFALPA president.

In addition to the intrusion and physical discomfort of daily Covid-19 testing, there are significant cost considerations. One global airline has estimated the cost of complying with such requirements for a single daily flight would add up to an additional US \$950,000 per year.

"Airlines are willing to invest in safety that delivers meaningful outcomes, but that is not the case with unilateral, uncoordinated testing requirements. States should acknowledge that crew present a different risk profile than passengers and that more flexibility and relaxation of testing requirements and/or quarantine could be considered including exemptions," said Lopez Meyer.

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