



# Managing crew fatigue during industry recovery from pandemic

## IATA/IFALPA Joint Safety Statement

### Background

The global outbreak of COVID-19 created an immediate need for aviation to facilitate the repatriation of citizens and the transport of essential supplies. States granting Operators alleviations to their existing Flight and Duty Time Limitations (FTLs) helped prevent crews from being exposed to an increased risk of infection or subject to invasive testing or quarantine while still maintaining their existing operations.

FTL alleviations refer to temporary exceptions to existing regulations as allowed by ICAO. They were introduced as an interim measure to support the continuation of urgent operations in the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. There is concern that some States and operators may use these alleviations outside of the rare and exceptional circumstances for which they were intended.

### Returning to "new normal"

As the initial emergency conditions of COVID-19 and country restrictions for crew rest are subsiding, and the aviation industry adjusts to a "new normal" for international operations, it is important for operators to return to the use of existing FTLs or an approved Fatigue Risk Management System (FRMS), as the continued use of alleviations or extensions beyond normal flight and duty time limits could introduce the risk of cumulative fatigue. Adaptive mitigation options to avoid FTL extensions should be utilized. Examples include alternative route designs that enable crew layovers in suitable locations, and the use of the ICAO Public Health Corridor concept as described in the ICAO CART guidance<sup>1</sup>, to name just a couple.

During times of significant change, it is important that managing fatigue and operational safety remain a primary focus for operators. As such Operators must continue encouraging their crew members to provide fatigue and safety reports without fear of consequence.

Collecting and analyzing fatigue data is critical for safety management, however it must be understood that data collected during COVID-19 operations from flights with FTL alleviations is unique in nature and not directly comparable to that of pre-pandemic operations. If the data is not understood in this context, flawed assumptions and ineffective fatigue risk mitigations could be introduced. Some differences may include:

- Crews not working a full roster
- Flights operated with heavily augmented crews
- Different rest facilities used (i.e. Business class seats vs. crew bunks)
- Mindset of crew - 'Mission focus'

While vaccines are being approved and distributed, COVID-19 will continue to impact aviation, and the "hot spots" will continue to change. At the onset of the pandemic Industry proved its resilience and ability to effectively react to such changes in a timely manner through collaboration. This collaboration amongst regulators, operators, and pilot representatives must continue for Industry to successfully navigate through and out of this pandemic crisis.

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<sup>1</sup> ICAO CART guidance <https://www.icao.int/covid/cart/Pages/default.aspx>