Dear Cabin Crew

September 2020

As recently as the beginning of this year, no one could have imagined the widespread devastation our industry is facing right now. While we have bounced back from crisis after crisis during our lifetime, this one has affected all of us, changing our lives forever. IATA’s Economics team estimates that airlines have lost $84.3 billion, with 7.5 million flights cancelled. This impacts each and every cabin crew member around the world.

Because airlines are in the unenviable position of having to cut costs in drastic numbers, laying off staff either temporarily or permanently, many of you will have already said goodbye to some of your friends and colleagues and we understand that your working environment has changed dramatically.

Why are we sending you this newsletter?

This is the first in a series we are creating specifically for you, our invaluable and beloved Cabin Crews around the world. Our goal is to bring you a personal note of encouragement, support and information that is relevant to YOU in the midst of the COVID-19 crisis.

We want you to know we are thinking about you, care about you and appreciate the multiple professional and personal challenges you are facing every single day. All the while with the safety of passengers and crew at the forefront.

Thank you, on behalf of all of us.

Jonathan (JJ) Jasper,
Manager Cabin Safety, IATA

Are we safe from COVID onboard an aircraft?

Hopefully you already know that you are safer on board an aircraft than in many other everyday places. IATA is working tirelessly to spread the message to travellers that air inside the cabin is exchanged on a constant basis, that HEPA filters are installed on almost all aircraft and that all the different levels of biosafety work towards maintaining a safe environment for crew and passengers.

We have shared many animations and videos demonstrating this on various social media platforms and on our website.

If you can, why not share some of them on your own social media to spread the word and encourage more people to fly?
Your customer service skills have never been more important than now

Passengers are still uncertain about travelling and it is vital that we all play our part in restoring consumer confidence to travel by air. Today’s passenger experience is indeed very different than yesterday’s.

Once they have navigated all the changes they face at the airport - necessary for their own health and safety as well as that of others - physical distancing, temperature checks, segregation at security searches and boarding gates, they will step aboard your aircraft.

Once onboard it is your responsibility to reassure them that you have things under control, that you are taking steps to keep them safe, and above all that you understand, empathize and can take care of them.

Exemplary customer care onboard during a crisis is one solid step you can take towards getting them to return to your airline for their next journey.

Smile, even though your face is covered

We know that most effective communication between crew and passengers relies on our body language, expression and tone of voice.

Even though your face is probably covered by a mask, a smile will show in other ways. And it’s never been more important to smile.

Transparent or clear face masks are also available and if these are approved by your airline and your aviation regulator, they will really help you to communicate with everyone, not just those who are hard of hearing.

And while we’re on the subject of masks, don’t forget to only remove them when you are in a safe environment and out of sight of passengers.

$419 billion
Total estimated airline revenue losses in 2020


Cabin-safety@iata.org
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Keep yourself updated
With the rate of COVID-19 infections increasing and decreasing daily in each country, health precautions and measures are added or removed regularly. It’s really important to keep yourself up-to-date with your airline’s policies and procedures every time you go to work so you can give the right information to passengers, and do the right thing at all times to protect yourself and your colleagues.

Don’t forget your safety training
At the beginning of the crisis, IATA worked hard to help airlines obtain exemptions and alleviations to the training requirements for cabin and flight crew. This allowed airlines to reduce the number of crew within training centres, as well as extend recurrent qualifications temporarily.

While it may have meant you didn’t have to attend your recurrent training this year, it is still your responsibility to keep yourself up-to-date and competent to perform your safety role on board.

It’s likely that your airline has provided some additional tools or communications to help you, but please take time to use them properly so that you can ensure you put safety first in everything you do.

What is IATA Cabin Safety doing to help?
IATA’s role is to help our member airlines as much as we can. Right from the outset of the crisis, we were involved with regulators, representing airlines in the decision-making processes. We issued guidance documents to help airlines determine their policies and procedures on how to keep aircraft and crew safe.

We worked closely with airline members from our Cabin Operations Safety Task Force (COSTF), a group comprising Cabin Safety specialists from several airlines to create and update this guidance for the benefit of all.

Active COSTF airline members currently include:

- British Airways
- Cathay Pacific Airways
- Delta Airlines
- Emirates Airline
- GOL Airlines
- Kenya Airways
- Lufthansa
- Qatar Airways
- Swiss International
- TAP Portugal
- Turkish Airlines
- Virgin Australia
- Westjet

You can find all our guidance materials on our website at www.iata.org

The risk of onboard transmission is counted as low

To date, despite independent research, there is still little confirmed evidence of onboard COVID-19 transmission between passengers.

Sitting next to someone on a plane is low risk. Why?

Safety reporting
The current situation can have a negative impact on the level of safety reports submitted by crew. Many airlines submit these reports to IATA for entry into a global database, so that we can analyze safety risks around the world.

It is really important for us to maintain the level of reporting from cabin and flight crew, as you are the eyes and ears of the industry.

Remember that each report you submit works towards giving all of you a safer working environment.

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Take better care of yourself

You may be operating much longer duties than you are used to, so that you can avoid any requirement for quarantine. You may be confined to hotel rooms during layovers and only permitted to use room service for meals. This is not ideal, and you’ll need to be mindful of your own physical and mental well-being.

As cabin crew, you are known for your interpersonal skills and caring attitude. Please take some time to look out for your colleagues who may be struggling and offer them help if you can, or ask for help if you feel you need it.

Don’t give up

Thousands of cabin crew around the world have lost their jobs and to many this might feel like the end of the world, as there really is no other job like it. But in the search for other employment, take some time to think about what skills you have learned which can be demonstrated to others and transferred to other roles, including for example:

- Medical knowledge
- Time pressures and time management

- Teamworking
- Retail and product promotion
- Problem solving
- Customer care and customer service
- Diversity and inclusivity
- Cultural awareness
- Emergency response

Several websites and social media group pages are also available, providing support and encouragement for ex-cabin crew members until such time as they might be able to return to the role they love most in the world.

Questions, feedback and suggestions

If you have any questions about new rules, recommendations and guidance for airline cabin crew operating during the pandemic, your first point of contact is your own airline, as they are the ones responsible for setting the company policy to which you are required to comply.

Remember to fully use your own company reporting system to report safety or security concerns, incidents or suggestions.

We at IATA do value your interest and feedback, so if you would like to ask us questions or make any suggestions for future newsletters for the cabin crew community, please contact us at cabin_safety@iata.org

Factors lowering the risk of COVID-19 transmission onboard aircraft

1. Seats and passengers face forward meaning limited face-to-face interactions.
2. Seat backs act as a solid barrier.
3. Research to date suggests airflow exchange rates and direction are less conducive to droplet spread than other indoor environments, or modes of transport.
4. Modern jet airliners deliver high air flow and replacement rates, combined with hospital-grade HEPA filters. Cabin air is exchanged every 2-3 minutes.

Unlike other modes of transport, the cabin environment already makes the transmission of viruses difficult and we have seen little evidence of onboard transmission.