



health

Department:
Health
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



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INTERNAL MEMO

Date:	30 December 2020		
To:	The Honorable Dr ZL Mkhize, Minister of Health	From:	Ministerial Advisory Committee (MAC) on COVID-19

REGIONAL AND DOMESTIC AIRLINE TRAVEL RISK REDUCTION

Problem Statement

The MAC on COVID-19 was requested to review the COVID-19 travel restrictions for regional and domestic airline travel.

Points of consideration

- COVID-19 is spread as a respiratory droplet spread through sneezing, coughing or speaking. Limited evidence for aerosol spread is emerging.
- Aeroplane ventilation systems air enters at the ceiling through the overhead ventilation ducts. The air is directed towards the floor and exits at the row or very close through the floor. Any portion of the air recirculated to maintain the cabin temperature in an energy efficient way, is passed through High Efficiency Particulate Air (HEPA) filters.
- Any remaining risk of transmitting an infection is driven by the direct contact between passengers within a row, in close proximity or while boarding or exiting the plane.
- Despite substantial numbers of travelers, the number of suspected and confirmed cases of in-flight COVID-19 transmission between passengers around the world appears small (approximately 42 in total). In comparison, a study of COVID-19 transmission aboard high-speed trains in China among contacts of more than 2300 known cases showed an overall rate of 0.3% among all passengers.
- Onboard risk can be further reduced with face coverings, as in other settings where physical distancing cannot be maintained.
- Long-haul flights have been associated with “super-spreading” of coronavirus from symptomatic individuals within a cabin area, between two and six rows away from the symptomatic person^{1,2}.

Recommendations

- Symptom and temperature screening of all passengers at airports is required and implemented by Port Health Personnel. It is recommended to impose a legal obligation to be truthful in responding to the screening questions, together with the penalties for non-compliance to the screening tool. Travelers identified to have fever or symptoms suggestive of COVID-19 should undergo antigen testing or be denied access to the airport³.

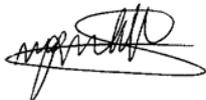
- Only airline passengers, airport staff and other relevant personnel should be allowed into the airport. In the case of minors travelling unaccompanied, an adult should be allowed to escort them to the relevant airline personnel.
- Passengers are required to adhere to social distancing at all times, particularly when at the boarding gate and entering or exiting the airplane.
- Passengers boarding an aeroplane are required to follow the instructions of the flight captain and crew. The MAC strongly supports the flight captain to implement social distancing recommendations, non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPIs) by restricting the movement of passengers in-flight and the continuous masking of all occupants of the flight. The MAC supports airline flight captains to execute their authority to remove a passenger non-compliant with the NPI recommendations, and request the law enforcement authorities to support the flight captains in this regard.
- Wearing of masks, as stipulated in the regulations, is compulsory at all times. If any passenger refuses to wear a mask, they will be contravening the law and should be dealt with appropriately.
- It is recommended that all domestic and regional flights lasting less than four hours should have no food and beverage service. Passengers should be informed by the airline to bring their own supplies.
- An airline notified of a COVID-19 confirmed case is obliged to inform all passengers on the flight. It is recommended that airlines require that passengers download the NDOH COVID-Alert App to facilitate the rapid distribution of information related to COVID-19 exposure.
- Flight announcements should recommend to passengers to continue social distancing, restrict non-essential movement for 7 days post-travel, daily symptom screening and consider COVID-19 Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) or antigen testing 3-5 days after travel if symptomatic.

References

1. Transmission of SARS-CoV 2 During Long-Haul Flight *Emerging Infectious Diseases. Early release – Volume 26, Number 11–November 2020*
2. The Lancet Infectious Diseases. Published on 1 September 2020. Volume 20, Issue 9
3. MAC on COVID-19 Advisory on Using Antigen Testing at Ports of Entry, 30 October 2020. Internal Memo to Minister of Health.

Thank you for consideration of this request.

Kind regards,



PROFESSOR NHLANHLA MKHIZE
ACTING CHAIRPERSON: MINISTERIAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON COVID-19
DATE: 30 December 2020

CC:

- » **Dr S Buthelezi (Director-General: Health)**
- » **Dr T Pillay (Deputy Director-General)**
- » **Incident Management Team**