

Commercial Passenger Aviation

In the context of COVID-19 and the resumption of commercial passenger aviation activities as from 8 June 2020 and until further notice, any airport operator will have to apply the health measures detailed in this document. Any passenger airline operating on Belgian territory is invited to enforce the health measures detailed in this document except Chapter 2-B point "Obligation entering into force on 1 August 2020 concerning passengers travelling to Belgium" which is applicable to passenger airlines and passengers travelling to Belgium.

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Chapter 1. General health measures

A. Introductory remarks

It should be noted that commercial passenger aviation has never stopped. While the overall activity has been sharply reduced since March, airlines have continued to operate passenger flights at Belgian airports for repatriation purposes and essential travel. Belgian airports and airlines have therefore adapted to the particular situation generated by COVID-19 and have already implemented the health measures required to ensure the protection of passengers and members of the support staff. The challenge today is to maintain this high level of protection with more passengers.

The health measures currently implemented by airlines and within airports take into account the recommendations of EASA (European Aviation Safety Agency) and ECDC (European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control). This document aims to formally recall these EASA and ECDC measures but also those decided by the Belgian authorities which apply to aviation in Belgium.

The health measures described in Chapter 1 will have to be implemented within airports. The relevant actors are invited to do the same in aircraft. The measures mentioned in Chapter 2 set out what is expected of airports and airlines, respectively.

It is important to remind that if an arriving passenger shows symptoms consistent with those of COVID-19, he or she cannot be turned back at the entry controls or be repatriated for this reason. He or she will have to be cared for in the same way as any other Belgian citizen.

B. General health measures

As requested by EASA, ECDC and the Belgian authorities, it is requested that the following principles be strictly applied:

- Physical distancing:
 - o A minimum physical distance of 1.5 m between persons not belonging to the same “social bubble” should, as far as possible, be applied in all areas accessible to the public. Where physical distancing is not possible, other preventive health measures such as those mentioned below in point B and in Chapter 2 will have to be put in place.

- Masks:
 - o A “mask” means any type of mask that complies with the national obligations established by the National Security Council.
 - o It is reminded that it is compulsory to wear a mask from the moment of entry into the airport infrastructure for any person present at the airport from the age of 12.
 - o A mask is not mandatory in the offices of airport operators if the employees have no contact with people outside the company. The rules of the FPS Employment remain applicable in this regard.
 - o As advocated by EASA, airlines could apply stricter rules in aircraft.
 - o The mask must be temporarily removed, at the request of the authorities, during security or border checks.
 - o EASA requires a mask change after 4 hours of use. Each passenger will therefore have to ensure that he/she has a sufficient number of masks to cover his/her entire journey, from the moment he/she enters the infrastructure of the departure airport until after leaving the infrastructure of the destination airport.

- Airports and airlines will ensure that masks (and personal disinfection kits) are made available (free of charge or for a fee) for passengers who do not have sufficient masks.
 - Wearing a mask cannot be considered as a health measure that is sufficient in itself and that can replace any other preventive health measure.
- Hand hygiene:
- Both passengers and support staff will be asked to pay particular attention to hand hygiene. This is best achieved by regular hand washing with soap and water. However, hand disinfection stations using alcohol or other disinfectants will be made available in aircraft and at regular intervals along the passenger journey and will be visibly placed in the airport infrastructure, in particular in the check-in, arrival, baggage claim, border control and security areas.
- Protective gestures:
- Anyone showing symptoms consistent with those of COVID-19 is advised not to go to the airport but to contact his/her doctor instead.
 - As far as possible, it is requested to avoid any action requiring contact with objects and surfaces. The use of alternative electronic means should be encouraged (e.g. online check-in, scanning of boarding passes on mobile phones, electronic payment instead of cash payment, etc.).
 - Remember to sneeze and/or cough into your elbow even when wearing a mask.
 - It is required to maintain at least one free seat between two persons not belonging to the same social bubble on the seats made available at the airport.
 - When an elevator is to be used by people from a different social bubble, only two people at a time will be allowed to access it. These should be placed back to back in the elevator.
 - Please be careful to dispose immediately of all waste and in particular used masks, gloves, handkerchiefs, and towels in the waste bin dedicated for this purpose.
- Additional hygiene measures:
- The cleaning and disinfection of airport premises and passenger buses will be carried out in accordance with the requirements (means and frequency) prescribed by the Belgian authorities - FPS Employment in its generic guide - and ECDC). The cleaning and disinfection of the interior of aircraft will be carried out in accordance with the requirements (means and frequency) prescribed by EASA and ECDC.
- Special attention will be given to high-contact areas (e.g. self-service equipment such as trolleys, wheelchairs, counters, lift panels, handrails, screens, vending machines, check-in kiosks, security-check bins but also surfaces such as door handles, touch screens ...).
- Specific measures for support staff (at the level of airports and airlines):
- Airport operators, aircraft operators and service providers will have to provide their staff with the necessary personal protective equipment and ensure that they are trained in the appropriate use of such equipment.
 - Staff members who interact directly with passengers (e.g. security check officers, assistants for persons with reduced mobility, cleaning staff, etc.) must wear a medical mask and gloves.
 - Sufficient uniforms or working clothes must be available to staff members to enable them to alternate from day to day. Where uniforms or working clothes cannot be changed alternately every day, protective clothes must be available as an alternative.

- Security check officers who are required to perform body checks will have to wear face shields or appropriate alternatives in addition to their masks during these checks to minimise the risk of inhalation contamination caused by their very close contact with passengers.
- Staff members interacting with passengers behind a protective screen (prescribed by the FPS Employment in its generic guide) are not required to wear personal protective equipment at all times. In addition, if the screens have openings to allow the exchange and handling of documents, passengers will be asked to keep away from the counter when they are not exchanging documents or depositing luggage. Specific ground markings and pictograms will remind passengers of the rules to be followed.
- Staff members will receive the necessary information and training to ensure that they are familiar with the health rules.
- Similar to masks, when gloves are used, they should be changed regularly. Staff members will be given adequate information on the use and removal of gloves and on the risks that these may cause if these rules are not correctly applied.

Chapter 2. Specific health measures

A. Applicable to airports

- Access to the airport infrastructure:
 - Non-travellers are advised not to enter the terminals unnecessarily. If they come to the airport to drop off or pick up passengers, they are asked to respectively kiss and fly or to meet and greet outside the airport infrastructure (e.g. in car parks).

- Opening of non-essential services:
 - Shops as well as cafés and restaurants will remain open within the airports in order to distribute passengers as widely as possible and thus facilitate the physical distancing of 1.5 m (see the decision of 20 May 2020 transcribed in the FAQs).
 - Passengers should nevertheless be reminded that health rules also apply in these areas and to touch only what they buy.
 - The health rules governing each of these sectors in Belgium (shops, cafés, and restaurants) are also applicable within the airport infrastructure.

- Checking passenger temperature:
 - EASA and ECDC do not recommend taking the temperature of passengers to enable them to travel on “immunity passports”. The Agency reiterates that the relevance of this test is not supported by current scientific knowledge about SARS-CoV-2. Nevertheless, EASA and ECDC are monitoring scientific developments and will update their recommendations as appropriate if a suitable test becomes available.
 - However, Brussels South Charleroi Airport has decided, at the request of airlines operating at this airport, to implement temperature-taking tests for people entering the terminal. The airport guarantees that the chosen method will not cause delays or concentration of people at the entrance to its infrastructure.
 - Brussels-National Airport has also informed us of its decision to implement temperature-taking tests for people entering the terminal.

- Additional preventive measures:
 - Bins for depositing waste and, in particular, used masks should be available in sufficient number and disseminated throughout the passenger journey. These bins shall not require physical contact by the passenger to deposit his or her waste.
 - Stewards will be present within the airport infrastructure to support passengers, inform them and check that the measures are properly applied.
 - A coordinator will be appointed at each airport. He will be the point of contact between public health authorities.

- Organisation of passenger boarding and de-boarding:
 - The flow of departing and arriving passengers will be organised in such a way as to encourage physical distancing by using appropriate signage.
 - Airlines, in coordination with the airport operators and service providers concerned, will implement efficient boarding and de-boarding processes, limiting as much as possible the time of these operations while reducing the risks of contact and contamination.
 - Depending on the airport infrastructure, if boarding or de-boarding is done by walking, this will have to be organised in such a way as to guarantee the physical distance between passengers as much as possible.

- When buses are used in the boarding or de-boarding process, an increased number of buses shall, as much as possible, be used in order to guarantee the physical distance between passengers within buses.

B. Applicable to airlines

– Additional hygiene measures:

- Airlines will put in place an additional procedure for cleaning and disinfecting the aircraft cabin and cockpit to be applied after each flight in accordance with the ECDC principles and guidelines.
- A sufficient number of individual garbage bags will be distributed within aircraft so that passengers can deposit their waste and, in particular, used masks.
- Aircraft will be compulsorily equipped with HEPA filters. The HEPA designation applies to any device capable of filtering in one pass at least 99.97% of the particles with a diameter of 0.3 micron, considered the most difficult to filter. This is the standard filter used in the operating room. It has been scientifically proven that High Efficiency Particulate Air (HEPA) filters have a good efficiency for particles of the size of those of the SARS-CoV-2 and can therefore stop suspended particles containing the virus.
- In addition to HEPA filters, as requested by EASA, airlines will ensure that the proportion of fresh air in the cabin is increased and that the air is renewed at an accelerated rate.
- In coordination with airport operators, airlines will take the necessary actions to ensure that passengers do not remain locked in the cabin of a grounded aircraft for more than 30 minutes.
- As much as possible, passengers will enter the cabin without luggage. Hand luggage will be limited. Airlines will have to allow passengers to place their cabin suitcase in the luggage compartment at no extra charge.
- In accordance with EASA requests, duty-free will not be sold on board aircraft. On-board service will be organised in such a way as to offer minimum flight comfort and to prevent the risk of contamination.
- Cabin crew will remind passengers during the safety briefing that face masks must be removed before putting on oxygen masks if need be.
- During this briefing and at regular intervals during the flight, passengers will be reminded that if they feel symptoms consistent with those of COVID-19, it is important to report them to a crew member without delay.
- If, after take-off, a passenger shows symptoms consistent with those of COVID-19, cabin crew must be aware of the procedure recommended by EASA (through prior training, briefings...) and follow it scrupulously.
- In order to be able to correctly apply the procedure recommended by EASA, airlines will have to define an isolation zone within each aircraft, leaving two rows of seats clear around the suspect passenger.
- Without prejudice to the applicable rules on the protection of private data, airlines will have to provide without delay, at the request of the competent public health authorities, data concerning passengers, the seat number allocated to them, and their telephone number or email address. These data will be available for a minimum of 4 weeks.

– Organisation of passenger boarding and de-boarding:

- The boarding and de-boarding of passengers will be organised by row or group of rows.

– Obligation entering into force on 1 August 2020 concerning passengers travelling to Belgium

Following the publication of the ministerial decree of 24 July 2020 amending the ministerial decree of 30 June 2020 on emergency measures to limit the spread of the coronavirus COVID-19 :

- As from 1 August 2020, all passengers willing to travel to Belgium by air will have to fill in a “Passenger Locator Form” (PLF) beforehand, regardless of their departure point and nationality. Passengers failing to comply with this obligation or providing misleading or incomplete information can be denied access to the Belgian territory and fined.
- The PLF is now available in an electronic version on the website <https://travel.info-coronavirus.be/> and will be relayed in the coming days on the websites of the FPS Foreign Affairs and the Immigration Office. As from 1 August 2020, the use of the electronic form will become compulsory. Only persons who are technically unable to fill in the electronic form will still be allowed to use the paper form.
- All airlines are required by law to check that all their passengers have completed a PLF before boarding. Otherwise passengers must be denied boarding. Airlines failing to comply with this obligation are liable to sanctions. In practical terms, the airline will have to ask each passenger to show one of the following documents before boarding:
 - The proof that an electronic PLF has been submitted. This is the document with a QR code of which a specimen is attached.
 - For passengers who were technically unable to submit an electronic PLF, a paper PLF duly completed and signed. For intra-Schengen flights, this paper form must be collected by the airline and handed over to the health/designated authorities at the airport of arrival in Belgium, immediately after the flight. For extra-Schengen flights, the form must be handed over by the passenger himself or herself to the authorities responsible for border controls in Belgium.

Chapter 3. Communication

A. Promotion of aviation health measures to the public

- Airports, airlines, and federal and regional aviation authorities will communicate to the public in a coordinated manner the measures and rules that passengers will be required to follow, as well as the means implemented by airport operators and airlines to protect passengers and support staff from COVID-19 contamination, and more specifically on:
 - the health rules and precautionary measures that are implemented (cf. Chapter 1 point B and Chapter 2).
 - protective gestures, including a specific communication on the most appropriate way to put on, wear and remove a mask.
 - specific hygiene measures taken by airport managers and airlines (e.g. obligations concerning regular disinfection and HEPA filter, ...)
 - the need for non-travellers to avoid entering the terminals unnecessarily. If they come to the airport to drop off or pick up passengers, they are asked to respectively kiss and fly or to meet and greet outside the airport infrastructure (e.g. in the car parks).
 - the fact that a person in an airport who does not apply health measures may be sanctioned by the competent authorities that are present and may be denied boarding.

B. Flight preparation

- Airlines will remind their passengers by email and/or SMS in the days before the flight:
 - not to go to the airport for their trip if they show symptoms consistent with those of COVID-19. They will be advised to consult a doctor instead.
 - that measures are put in place by Belgian airlines to allow a passenger showing symptoms consistent with those of COVID-19 to postpone his/her flight free of charge until 6 hours before the flight.
 - to be aware of the measures and obligations to which they will be subject throughout their journey (in the infrastructure of the departure airport, within the aircraft, and in the infrastructure of the transit and destination airports).
 - to check whether, following the health measures put in place, it is not preferable to arrive a little earlier at the airport so that all the required formalities can be completed before the flight.
 - non-travellers are advised not to enter the terminals unnecessarily. If they come to the airport to drop off or pick up passengers, they are asked to respectively kiss and fly or to meet and greet outside the airport infrastructure (e.g. in the car parks).
- Airports will update on their website any information useful for preparing the journey and, specifically, if extended deadlines, due to the health measures put in place, have to be anticipated by passengers. These deadlines will be identified as precisely as possible and will be made easily accessible on the airport site.

C. In the airport infrastructure

- Posters and pictograms will remind travellers of the measures and rules to be complied with throughout their journey in the airport infrastructure.
- Reminders through audio and video messages will be made regularly and more specifically at possible waiting places (at checkpoints, boarding and de-boarding areas, waiting areas, ...).
- Passengers will be instructed on how to dispose of their waste and, in particular, their used masks safely.

- The places where passengers can obtain masks (free of charge or for a fee) and personal disinfection kits will be regularly indicated in airports.

D. In the aircraft

- The safety briefing will be adapted to incorporate health-specific messages.
- The health measures to be applied will be repeated several times during the flight at regular intervals.
- The health measures to be applied at the destination airport will be explained to passengers before they disembark from the aircraft.
- Passengers will be instructed on how to dispose of their waste and, in particular, their used masks safely.
- Passengers will be reminded that, should they run out of masks, they can obtain them from cabin crew (free of charge or for a fee). The same applies to personal disinfection kits.
- It will be specifically reminded on board aircraft that if a passenger feels ill during the flight, he or she should report it to the cabin crew directly.