



**RISK ASSESSMENT PRIOR TO INTRODUCTION OF COVID-19 AIR TRAVEL
REQUIREMENTS**

1. As more States lift COVID-19 related cross-border restrictions for air travellers, it is important for increased air travel connectivity and improved facilitation, in all States globally, that pandemic related restrictions should only be introduced and maintained based on evidence-based risk management, and following World Health Organization (WHO) and ICAO recommendations and guidance. This approach contributes to enhanced travel, tourism, trade and economies.
2. The WHO has assessed that the SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) pandemic is still ongoing. There have been reports of increased cases of COVID-19 and in particular the emergence of new highly transmissible Omicron sub-variants, such as XBB and XBB.1.5 in some parts of the world. Some States have introduced a range of different travel requirements for passengers travelling by air.
3. There are many variables that need to be taken into account by States when considering public-health related measures applied to air passengers: wide geographical variations in terms of types of circulating SARS-CoV-2 variants; other respiratory pathogens; number of COVID-19 cases and deaths; level of population immunity; extent of vaccination coverage; and, capacity of public health systems to manage COVID-19 in addition to their regular workload.
4. For some States the situation has raised health concerns regarding increased transmission, potential immune escape, the introduction of variants into new areas, and the risk of development of more dangerous mutations. Many States also have concerns regarding continuity of air connectivity, especially in view of the importance of maintaining consistent operations to support global health and safety, food security and supply chains, tourism and trade, thereby facilitating economic recovery and growth.
5. Although the pandemic circumstances have changed over time, the underlying principles previously referred to by ICAO in its COVID-19-related documentation are still valid. States are reminded to take account of the applicable ICAO Standards and Recommended Practices, State Letters, Electronic Bulletins and the recommendations in the ICAO guidance material contained in the Council Aviation Recovery Task Force (CART) reports, the *Take-off: Guidance for Air Travel through the COVID-19 Public Health Crisis* (TOGD)¹ and the *ICAO Manual on COVID-19 Cross-Border Risk Management* (Doc 10152)².

¹ [Documents and Forms \(icao.int\)](https://www.icao.int)

² [ICAO Manuals](https://www.icao.int)

6. In all circumstances, States must follow an evidence informed and risk based approach in accordance with the World Health Organization (WHO³) and CART recommendations, especially if they consider introducing travel requirements, and ensure that essential travel is prioritised at all times. A short summary of important factors to take into account before introducing travel requirements is set forth in the Attachment hereto.

Enclosure:

Important factors to consider before introducing travel requirements during the COVID-19 pandemic

Issued under the authority of the Secretary General

³ [Technical considerations for implementing a risk-based approach to international travel in the context of COVID-19: Interim guidance, 2 July 2021](#)

**IMPORTANT FACTORS TO CONSIDER BEFORE INTRODUCING TRAVEL
REQUIREMENTS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

1. Introduction

Some States are experiencing the emergence of new variants of SARS-CoV-2 and increased COVID-19, decreasing staff availability and strained public health services. Some States re-introduced travel requirements, which typically lead to disruption of air travel, including flight cancellations, rescheduling of flights and in some instances border closures.

The objective of this document is to provide guidance to ICAO Member States to maintain air connectivity, while at the same time continuing to mitigate the risk of SARS-CoV-2 transmission.

2. Principles to consider before introducing air travel requirements

States are encouraged to consider the following principles when considering whether to re-introduce mitigation measures:

- 2.1 coordinate and communicate with the appropriate national authorities through national facilitation committees and/or other existing national frameworks;
- 2.2 consider States' risk tolerance levels and other relevant national factors;
- 2.3 note that objectives could be different for individual States and that they could change over time;
- 2.4 take care to balance the public health risk with the need for continuation of services by considering the objectives, feasibility and effectiveness of each measure before re-introducing travel restrictions;
- 2.5 carry out regular, thorough risk assessment based on evidence and comparable indicators;
- 2.6 assess health resources including public health capacity and treatment capability in both departure and destination States;
- 2.7 communicate risk mitigation measures and travel restrictions to all relevant stakeholders; and
- 2.8 review recommendations from ICAO and WHO on a regular basis.

3. Surveillance of variants

- 3.1 The current global epidemiologic picture reflects the presence of different variants circulating in different parts of the world.
- 3.2 Of concern has been the increasing spread of the highly transmissible recombinant Omicron variants (XBB and XBB.1.5), which are rapidly increasing in prevalence and appear to have the potential to replace other sub-variants in some countries. XBB1.5 appears to have the potential to be immune evasive.
- 3.3 Continued surveillance and reporting of accurate and credible information, including genomic sequencing remains essential to enable the WHO and Member States to conduct rapid robust risk assessments of evolving situations and to ensure that policy decisions are taken on an evidence-informed and risk-based approach.
- 3.4 The presence and trends of circulating variants need to be considered when implementing travel related mitigation measures as part of a multi-layered risk approach to mitigate COVID-19.

4. Recommendations to continue air connectivity

- 4.1 It is essential for States to keep borders open and maintain air connectivity to support global health and safety, food security and supply chains, tourism and trade, and to facilitate economic recovery and growth, including through implementation the Public Health Corridors (PHCs) concept during the transition period.
- 4.2 States should continue to explore bilateral or multilateral PHC Arrangements as a preferable and more suitable alternative to border closure.
- 4.3 Regarding aircrew, States are reminded to:
 - 4.3.1 recognize aircrew, including repositioning crew, front-line aviation workers, and aviation workers in critical safety and security positions as essential workers to ensure the availability of air transportation ;
 - 4.3.2 facilitate their entry into and departure from States; especially for crew performing international flights crossing several borders within a short timeframe and cargo crew performing round trips or closed loop flights; and
 - 4.3.3 exempt fully vaccinated crew from testing requirements.
 - 4.3.4 publish the measures adopted and communicate them to air services operators in a timely manner.

5. Recommendations to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in aviation

In mitigating the spread of COVID-19 in aviation, States are reminded to:

- 5.1 encourage COVID-19 vaccination and support States' access to vaccines;
- 5.2 continue to use the multilayer risk-based approach based on evidence and appropriateness of the various layers;
- 5.3 review and adjust mitigation measures regularly in accordance with the situation at the time by considering factors such as current variants in circulation, public health capacities to implement measures, and the level of population immunity;
- 5.4 apply general public health risk mitigation measures during air transport, including hygiene and sanitation practices, encouraging the wearing of masks, applying physical distancing where feasible and ensuring adequate ventilation;
- 5.5 implement evidence-based testing practices;
- 5.6 record and share data on testing, recovery and vaccination in a global, interoperable format, and;
- 5.7 consider exempting fully vaccinated passengers from testing.

6. Considerations for testing strategies

States are reminded to consider the following when deciding whether to implement testing strategies:

- 6.1 Assess whether the situation in the departing and arrival countries is such that any protection might be given to the respective populations by implementing a testing strategy;
- 6.2 Recognize that pre-departure testing has limited capability to reduce the risk of translocation given that travel may be during the incubation period;
- 6.3 Recognize that pre-departure testing may still be considered an effective layer of a risk mitigation strategy for flight associated transmission of COVID-19 in specific circumstances;
- 6.4 Assure that testing, if required, is done as close to departure time as possible, but in view of efficacy and practical feasibility it is recommended to be permitted up to 48 hours prior to departure;
- 6.5 Take note that antigen testing may be more appropriate as it can identify currently infectious travelers, provides results quickly and is less expensive;

- 6.6 Consider that, depending on the epidemiological situation at the origin and destination, post-arrival testing could be a strategy to mitigate the risk of translocation or alternatively support genomic sequencing with results being reported to the WHO;
- 6.7 Take note that the value and practicality of aircraft waste water testing is currently under review by CAPSCA and its use as a testing strategy will be considered as more evidence becomes available.

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