



ICAO

**TENTH MEETING OF THE REGIONAL AVIATION SAFETY GROUP - ASIA AND PACIFIC REGIONS (RASG-APAC/10)**

*(Bangkok, Thailand, 17-18 December 2020 on Virtual Platform)*

RASG-APAC/10-WP/29

Agenda Item 5

**Agenda Item 5: ICAO / Member States / Industry Presentations**

**THE SAFE USE OF COVID-19 VACCINES  
FOR AVIATION MEDICAL CERTIFICATE HOLDERS**

*(Presented by the Republic of Korea)*

**SUMMARY**

The recent months have seen rigorous development in studies and clinical trials of different types of potential COVID-19 vaccines, with several candidates rolling out waiting for official approval for their immediate use. Some States have already granted an emergency use approval for several products and initiated a process to designate their priority groups for the vaccines, comprising of those frequently exposed to COVID-19 risk and those with particularly vulnerable immune system.

On that note, the Republic of Korea is of the view that the recently released COVID-19 vaccine should be considered potentially posing a medical risk to personal licence holders, such as pilots and air traffic controllers, until it is fully determined to be safe and effective. As international flights accounts for the majority of air transport and the pilot licenses are validated and converted by other States in accordance with Article 33 of the International Civil Aviation Convention, a globally harmonized guidance for Contracting States in using the COVID-19 vaccine for aviation medical certificate holders is needed to ensure the safety of the international air transport.

The action item is in paragraph 3.

**1. INTRODUCTION**

1.1 According to the Annex 19 – *Safety Management*, Contracting States shall implement documented processes and procedures to ensure that individuals and organizations performing an aviation activity meet the established requirements before they are allowed to exercise the privileges of licence, certificate, authorization or approval to conduct the relevant aviation activity as a part of their State Safety Oversight System or the State Safety Programme.

1.2 Related to this obligation for States, Republic of Korea (ROK) is of the view that careful considerations on medical risk related to the licences of aviation personnel should be given in using the recently rolled out COVID19 vaccines by medical certificate holders, to ensure they are medically fit to undertake their job required by the license authority.

**2. DISCUSSION**

2.1 Many States have provisions for emergency use approval for drugs, devices or tests, to facilitate the use of medical countermeasures during public health emergencies, such as the current COVID-19 pandemic. They may allow the use of such products even in the absence of complete

scientific evidence that would fully establish their effectiveness and safety, if they determine at their own discretion that the vaccine's potential benefits could outweigh its potential risks.

2.2 The recent months have seen rigorous development in studies and clinical trials of different types of potential COVID-19 vaccines, with some rolling out waiting for official approval for emergency use. Some States have already granted an emergency use approval for several products and initiated a process to designate their priority groups for the vaccines, comprising of those frequently exposed to COVID-19 risk and those with particularly vulnerable immune system.

2.3 For instance, flight crews can be subject to frequent exposure to latent COVID-19 risks because of their nature of frontline service workers travelling all over the world. This is evidenced by growing media coverage in recent days amid concerns on increasing confirmed cases among cargo crews, who attend services more frequently than before the pandemic.

2.4 Notwithstanding the foregoing, States remain cautious about endorsing such vaccines as these vaccines have yet to be proven completely safe and effective. The Annex 1 – *Personnel Licensing* requires medical assessment holders to be fit enough to meet the medical requirements, specifying that an applicant for any class of medical assessment shall be free from any effect or side-effect of any prescribed or non-prescribed preventive medication taken, such as would entail a degree of functional incapacity which is likely to interfere with the safe operation of an aircraft or with the safe performance of duties.

2.5 As each State takes their own approach to assessing effectiveness and safety of the vaccines, some States have allowed their medical certificate holders to receive the vaccine from a specific manufacturer while the others consider vaccines not compatible with requirements of their own medical certification.

2.6 Each State is entitled, at their discretion, to approve the vaccines for their public. However, the attention should be drawn to the fact that aviation is by definition international and that the decision of one State will affect other States in terms of flight safety and with regard to Article 33 of the Convention on International Civil Aviation (“Convention”) on conversion and validation of the license of flight crew.

2.7 Contracting States are obligated to comply with the Convention and to establish and maintain their Safety Oversight System for safe and orderly development of the international air transport. To fulfil the duties of safety oversight on medical assessment, a globally-harmonized advice and/or guidance for States regarding the use of vaccines for aviation medical certificate holders is needed at the earliest possible to ensure the safety of international air transport.

### **3. ACTION BY THE MEETING**

3.1 The Meeting is invited to:

- a) note the information contained in this paper; and
- b) call on ICAO, in cooperation with the World Health Organization, to provide advice and/or guidance for States regarding the use of COVID-19 vaccine by medical certificate holders, given the time sensitive nature of this issue.