



ASSEMBLY — 41ST SESSION

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Agenda Item 12: Outcomes of High-level Conference on COVID-19

LESSONS LEARNED FROM COVID-19 AND PREPAREDNESS FOR FUTURE PANDEMICS

(Presented by the International Air Transport Association (IATA))

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

IATA acknowledges the work undertaken by ICAO through the Council Aviation Recovery Taskforce (CART) and the Collaborative Arrangement for the Prevention and Management of Public Health Events in Civil Aviation (CAPSCA) in responding to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the global response to COVID-19 has shown the limitations of the existing multilateral framework. The fragmented nature of the measures imposed by States has resulted in a complex patchwork of border restrictions and health measures that has created confusion for both travelers and operators and which has hampered the recovery in international aviation.

While the COVID-19 pandemic is not over, many countries have taken significant steps to facilitate the restoration of international mobility. It is therefore timely to take stock of the response to COVID-19 and learn lessons that can support a faster and more coordinated response to future health emergencies.

Action: The Assembly is invited to:

- request that ICAO commission a full review of *Take-off: Guidance for Air Travel through the COVID-19 Public Health Crisis* and Doc 10152, *Manual on COVID-19 Cross-border Risk Management*, published by the CART;
- call on ICAO to lead the development of a framework for responding to future health emergencies that may affect international travel. The framework should be informed by the review of *Take-off: Guidance for Air Travel through the COVID-19 Public Health Crisis* and be “pathogen neutral”; and
- instruct ICAO to formalize the governance of CAPSCA in order to increase its effectiveness as a platform for collaboration between aviation and health stakeholders. The governance framework should be supported by a formal work program.

<i>Strategic Objectives:</i>	This working paper relates to Strategic Objective <i>Economic Development of Air Transport</i>
<i>Financial implications:</i>	Negligible
<i>References:</i>	<i>Take-off: Guidance for Air Travel through the COVID-19 Public Health Crisis</i> , Doc 10152, <i>Manual on COVID-19 Cross-border Risk Management</i>

¹ English, Arabic, Chinese, French, Russian and Spanish versions provided by IATA.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 IATA appreciates the efforts of ICAO and CAPSCA to foster cooperation between the air transport and public health communities. IATA also welcomes the work of the CART in rapidly developing a multi-layered set of biosafety protocols for managing the health risks associated with cross-border travel.

1.2 Effective cross-sectoral coordination and reliable public-private cooperation are essential to an effective global response to pandemics and public health emergencies and the experience of COVID-19 has shown that much work needs to be done to ensure that future health emergencies do not disrupt air transport to the same extent as has been the case with COVID-19.

1.3 As the trade association for the global airline industry, IATA reaffirms the commitment of airline members to implementing globally agreed protocols to manage the spread by air travel of communicable diseases during public health emergencies of international concern.

2. BUILDING ON THE HIGH-LEVEL CONFERENCE ON COVID-19 (HLCC)

2.1 ICAO Member States acknowledged the challenges created by the fragmented response to COVID-19 and the profound impact that they have had on global connectivity and mobility as well as the recovery of the global economy, at the High-level Conference on COVID-19 (HLCC) in November 2021.

2.2 The HLCC also recognized the role of air transportation in the distribution of vaccines as well as essential medical supplies and personal protective equipment in support of the global effort to combat the COVID-19 pandemic as well as other crises and emergencies.

2.3 States committed to follow a “risk management strategy for international civil aviation, which is adaptable, proportionate, non-discriminatory and guided by scientific evidence in close cooperation and coordination with public health sector, with agreed practices harmonized to the greatest extent possible and underpinned by regular review, monitoring and timely information-sharing among States”. The Conference acknowledged that these commitments were critical in order to safely restore international connectivity, support the safe recovery of international civil aviation. rebuild the confidence of the travelling public and facilitate revival of the global economy.

2.4 This working paper proposes three sets of measures to give effect to the HLCC recommendations and to ensure that the aviation sector is better prepared for future pandemics.

3. LESSONS LEARNED FROM COVID-19

3.1 *Take-off: Guidance for Air Travel through the COVID-19 Public Health Crisis* was instrumental in enabling the first steps towards the restart of international air travel. The guidance was developed at admirable speed, reflecting the urgency of the situation at that time. As the pandemic was still in its early stages and much was still unknown both about the dynamics of virus transmission and the effectiveness of various measures at limiting the spread of the virus, the multi-layered approach based on the “Swiss cheese” model was appropriate.

3.2 Since May 2020, much has changed:

- a) the virus has evolved significantly, such that the predominant variants in mid-2022 have very different characteristics to the wild-type virus;
- b) the development and distribution of highly effective vaccines and treatments has increased the ability of States to manage the impacts of COVID-19; and
- c) there is much greater understanding of which of the public health mitigation measures are effective in managing the spread of the virus and which measures are less useful.

3.3 Although the pandemic is not over, as the recovery in international air travel gathers pace, it is timely to take stock of the initial response to COVID-19 — as codified in *Take-off: Guidance for Air Travel through the COVID-19 Public Health Crisis* and Doc 10152, *Manual on COVID-19 Cross-border Risk Management* — in order to capture the lessons learned and inform a faster and more effective response to future health emergencies that minimizes the disruption to international aviation.

3.4 IATA proposes that ICAO should commission a review of *Take-off: Guidance for Air Travel through the COVID-19 Public Health Crisis* and associated documentation. The review should seek input from the COVID-19 Aviation Scientific Advisory Group (CASAG) and report to the Council.

4. TOWARDS A FRAMEWORK FOR RESPONDING TO FUTURE OUTBREAKS

4.1 In order to promote greater consistency and predictability in the response to future health emergencies that may affect international travel there is a need for a common response framework. The framework should be informed by the review of *Take-off: Guidance for Air Travel through the COVID-19 Public Health Crisis* and be sufficiently flexible to be easily adapted to the specifics of the pathogen of concern. At a minimum the response framework should include the following elements:

4.1.1 A proportionate set of risk mitigation measures that may be applied if needed. Special consideration should be given to minimizing the burden of any measures on crew, recognizing the crucial role of air transport in keeping global supply chains open including facilitating the distribution of vaccines, medicines and other medical equipment. Guidance on the possible introduction of public health risk mitigation measures should also give clear recommendations about the process of de-escalation and/or removal of such measures, for example through the use of sunset clauses.

4.1.2 A set of common standards for health credentials to support mutual recognition as well as similar protocols for the provision of contact tracing information, where necessary. Although the development of digital health credentials and government digital health platforms has been a major success of the global response to COVID-19, further efforts are required to increase the interoperability of the health credentials currently in use and to facilitate direct interactions between travelers and authorities. This work should be integrated with the World Health Organization (WHO) Smart Vaccine Certificate initiative. Efforts around digital health credentials should recognize the need of those without access to digital technology and be consistent with the goal that no country be left behind.

4.1.3 The response to future health events would be facilitated by greater transparency about risk assessments made by States. This is already set out in the International Health Regulations (IHRs). ICAO should facilitate a platform for sharing risk assessments.

4.1.4 A common platform for data sharing of travel measures applied to passengers and crew: Data from the Migration Policy Institute (MPI)² indicates that over 100,000 different measures affecting international travel were in place at the end of 2021. Navigating this fragmented system of measures has been confusing for travelers and caused major operational complexities for operators — especially where measures vary between passengers and crew. A common global platform should be put in place for the sharing and communication of this information.

4.1.5 The measures outlined in this paper will help mitigate the extent and duration of disruption to air travel in future health outbreaks and they will also facilitate a smoother recovery. COVID-19 restricted international air travel for over two years and there have been some temporary teething issues at a limited number of locations as demand has started to recover in significant volumes. While these recovery challenges are short-term and sporadic in the context of COVID-19, a smoother and more coherent response to health emergencies should mean that they can be avoided altogether in the future.

5. FORMALIZING THE ROLE OF CAPSCA

5.1 As the WHO publishes and administers the IHRs, ICAO and WHO need to work effectively together. COVID-19 has shown the challenge of effective coordination between aviation and health sectors at global and national levels, including between ICAO and WHO. CAPSCA offers a unique vehicle for improving this relationship. For CAPSCA to be fully effective, its role and purpose need to be clarified, the governance of CAPSCA needs to be tightened and the engagement of WHO enhanced.

5.2 IATA proposes the following three measures to enable CAPSCA to reach its potential:

- a) establish a clear mission statement for CAPSCA, with an emphasis on scientific analysis — including strengthening the role of the CASAG in producing guidance;
- b) based on the mission statement, CAPSCA should develop a formal three-year work program, including annual milestones and targets, to be approved by the ICAO Council; and
- c) in order to ensure a proper focus on delivery of the work program, there should be greater oversight of CAPSCA including regular reporting to the ICAO Council.

² Migration Policy Institute, “COVID-19 and the State of Global Mobility in 2021”

6. ACTIONS

6.1 The Assembly is invited to:

6.1.1 Request that ICAO commission a full review of the CART's *Take-off: Guidance for Air Travel through the COVID-19 Public Health Crisis* and other relevant documentation. The review should seek input from CASAG and report to the Council.

6.1.2 Call on ICAO to lead the development of a framework for responding to future health emergencies that may affect international travel. The framework should be informed by the review of the CART and be "pathogen neutral" to make it easy to adapt to the specifics of a given outbreak.

6.1.3 Instruct ICAO to formalize the governance of CAPSCA in order to increase its effectiveness as a platform for collaboration between aviation and health stakeholders. The governance framework should be supported by a formal three-year work program with regular reporting to and oversight by the Council.

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