CAPSCA Aviation Continuance meetings and the Public Health Corridor Concept

Sitrep 20 April 2020

Background:

- The first CAPSCA Aviation Continuance meetings were held on 8 April 2020. One meeting was held with aviation stakeholders; and a second meeting with WHO, public health authorities and ICAO CAPSCA coordinators.
- These first meetings explored the need for collaboration between public health authorities and aviation authorities to ensure the continuance of essential flights (cargo flights transporting critical medical supplies, humanitarian flights, emergency medical flights, medical evacuation/ air ambulance flights, and repatriation flights) despite the uncoordinated implementation of COVID-19 health measures.
- The meetings were conducted under the CAPSCA framework, as this framework already provides a platform for the collaboration between aviation, public health and other sectors.
- The short-term deliverable of these meetings is the expedited development of coordinated guidance material to facilitate essential flights with minimum disruptions due to additional burdens to aircrew; while at the same time protecting the health and safety of aircrew as well as preventing the spread of COVID-19 through air travel.
- The long-term objective of these meetings is to expand the guidance to other flights such as other cargo and commercial passenger flights as part of the recovery plan when aviation can return to normal operations.
- The primary audience for the guidance material is the ICAO States (Regulatory Authorities), but major stakeholders are included in the meetings due to their experiences of the implementation of unilateral health measures and the direct impact on their operations and staff.
- Therefore, the initial meetings included not only public health authorities (WHO, ECDC, African CDC, USCDC) and CAPSCA focal points and partners (IFALPA, IATA, ACI); but also medical representatives from Civil Aviation Authorities and members of the ICAO MPSG (Medical Provisions Study Group).
- Since these first meetings, we have received requests to include additional participants, such as medical directors of airlines from the MAG (Medical Advisory Group) and other international partners. These requesting organizations have been included in subsequent meetings.
- Further meetings were held on 14 and 16 April; the next meeting is scheduled for 20 April.

Activities to date:

1. CAPSCA survey

- A survey was compiled to determine and summarize the current COVID-19 health measures being implemented; the results will assist in the development of coordinated guidance material to enable harmonized implementation of health measures.

- The survey was distributed to all Member States through the regional ICAO CAPSCA Coordinators, to WHO and their regional offices, and to international stakeholders such as IATA, ACI, IFALPA etc. for completion and discussion with their stakeholders.
- To date, a total of 45 completed surveys has been received.
- All of the survey responses are captured in a single spreadsheet by the CAPSCA consultant at ICAO.

2. NOTAMs

- There were complaints that NOTAMs that were issued regarding COVID-19 didn't provide sufficient information. States and stakeholders were asked to share examples of good and poor NOTAMs to help ICAO address this issue.
- The current NOTAM format was discussed, and there was a suggestion to develop a template to include additional requirements for aircrew.
- Further discussions were to review the NOTAM template in the future to determine if changes needed to be made to facilitate the full recovery phase.

3. Guidance material

- An initial first draft of guidance material was developed by the global CAPSCA Technical Advisor and his team and was forwarded to all meeting participants for review.
- Feedback was provided by everybody, and suggested amendments were discussed at the meetings.
- It should be noted that the primary audience for the guidance material is the ICAO States (Regulatory Authorities), but major stakeholders are included in the review of the guidance material due to the need to obtain practical input from them and the direct impact the implementation of these guidelines would have on them and their operations.
- The guidance material currently under discussion is to address the "here and now issues" in relation to essential and emergency flights.
- The guidance is not intended to be permanent, because CAPSCA is a dynamic programme and the guidance will be revised taking into account further developments relating to the COVID-19 pandemic, updated scientific findings and updated risk assessment models.
- Passengers flights will be addressed later as part of the full aviation recovery programme; and specific emphasis will be placed on regaining passengers' confidence when current "lockdown" restrictions are lifted.

4. Health Restrictions template/ repository

- The *ICAO COVID-19 safe operations* website contains information about various operational alleviations, including medical certification alleviations (https://www.icao.int/safety/COVID-19OPS/Pages/default.aspx).
- ICAO suggested developing a similar information repository relating to health screening measures to be published on the website.

- It was agreed that a repository would provide more information in advance to aviation stakeholders prior to scheduling flights and that a State Letter be issued in this regard.

5. Public health Corridor (PHC) concept

- The CAPSCA mechanism to manage, from an aviation perspective, essential flights that would allow aircrafts and their crew to perform heath related flights with minimal burden and cost while maintaining the safety and security of those involved in these flights, has become known as the Public Health Corridor (PHC) concept.
- The key elements of this strategy are to ensure as far as possible the use of "clean" crew, "clean" aircraft, and "clean" airport facilities to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 through air travel, while at the same time protecting the health and safety of the crew.
- The strategy involves the implementation of health measures, as well as disinfection and segregation procedures, to ensure that people carrying COVID-19 will not be allowed on flights.
- However, there are some medical scientific constraints (available information regarding the virus and its behaviour) as well as resource constraints (e.g. availability of PPE, availability of resources to perform screening tests etc.) which need to be taken into account.
- The implementation of this concept is based on a risk-based approach, taking into account safety management principles. It is important to remember that this process will not result in zero risk (i.e. there will still be a risk to crew and passengers, but the risk will be mitigated as far as reasonably practical by implementing these mitigation strategies).
- In the future, the expanded proposed recovery plan to return to normal flight operations will not only include the health considerations, but consider all aspects of operation, licensing, medical certification, crew requirements, aircraft requirements and procedures onboard in all areas including airports, airlines, other aircraft operators, air navigation services etc.