

A collaborative and co-ordinated approach by industry, member states and relevant stakeholders is vital to reconnect and reunite Europe by air travel.

Reinstating consumer confidence to fly again is vital to our industry's recovery process; however, proven scientific mitigations must be employed to enhance this confidence and not undermine it or give rise to heightened anxiety. In addition, all measures must be financially, operationally and logistically viable.

The risk of virus transmission on board an aircraft is low, as evidence has suggested.

Modern aircraft utilise High Efficiency Particulate Air (HEPA) filters, which are the same as those used in hospital operating theatres and provide strong mitigation. The HEPA air filters have an efficiency of 99.9 per cent and have demonstrated good performance with particles of the SARS-Cov-2 size (approximately 70–120nm). Top-down air flow in the aircraft cabin is not comparable to regular air conditioning and air flow experienced in other indoor environments, thus also reducing the risk of transmission.

European Regions Airline Association (ERA) supports several key measures to ensure the safety of passengers and industry personnel as airlines begin to restart operations including:

1. The loss of the middle seat is not supported and not feasible for many ERA member airlines. Many regional airline operators' aircraft have a 2 × 2 configuration. The reduction of 50 per cent of cabin availability would drive up costs both to the airline and the passenger to unsustainable levels and increase the CO₂ footprint per seat. This in turn would impact essential regional connectivity and weaken the economic recovery process. PSO routes are regulated in terms of price, frequency and capacity and the impact on these operations should not be underestimated.
2. In the short to medium term, face masks and coverings should be worn for the entire travel experience, both prior to boarding and after disembarkation. This will provide additional confidence to consumers throughout the entire journey. This shall remain the responsibility of the passenger. Guidance is required on the quality of masks used to ensure appropriate protection. See the WHO website for further intelligence:
<https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/q-a-on-covid-19-and-masks>
3. The temporary use of face masks and coverings on board aircraft by passengers, flight and cabin crew as well as all operational ground crew is supported.
4. In-flight cabin services could be simplified to reduce and lower interaction, and passengers should be encouraged to remain seated whilst on board.
5. Where appropriate, measures should be taken to adjust aircraft boarding and disembarkation procedures in order to reduce the opportunity for overcrowding and the very close proximity of passengers.
6. Additional border, security and biosecurity lanes may be required at airports to process passengers in a timely fashion with the ultimate objective to maintain the flow of passengers and keeping transit times to a minimum.
7. There is limited evidence that temperature checks provide effective benefits and mitigate the spread of the virus, particularly those passengers that are not showing symptoms, however ad-hoc checks for a limited period of time may be deemed viable.
8. Following a risk-based methodology, enhanced cleaning and disinfecting practices shall be followed, alongside traditional liquid disinfection methods. Consideration should be given to UV systems that provide suitable levels of sterilisation in an environmentally friendly manner using less energy than boiling or using liquids.
9. A fundamental reciprocal acceptance across the EU and third countries is required as, without this, the recovery process will be slow and complex for both airlines and passengers. The more complex the solutions, the more arduous and laboured the travelling experience will become.
10. Contact tracing protocols and measures taken by industry are fully supported, establishing a level playing field and setting coherent and consistent expectations for the passenger; however, it is vital that these processes are conducted, as much as is practically possible, prior to airport arrival and aircraft boarding to ease the flow of passengers and to keep crowding to a minimum.
11. We encourage the sharing of intelligence and experiences from other travel sectors in an effort to utilise best practices and tried and tested methods of passenger transportation whilst social distancing measures are in place.