

IATA reminds travelers to wear face masks or risk penalties

The International Air Transport Association (IATA) has issued a reminder that all passengers must wear face masks throughout their entire air travel journey in order to ensure safety for all crew and passengers during this pandemic.

There have been reports of passengers refusing to wear face coverings during flights, and some of these onboard incidents have become violent. This has necessitated inconvenient and expensive flight diversions.

The wearing of face coverings is a key recommendation of the International Civil Aviation Organization's (ICAO) guidance for safe operations, developed jointly with the World Health Organization (WHO) and governments.

Imperative to follow guidelines

The IATA reminds travelers that in purchasing a plane ticket they agree to the airline's terms and Conditions of Carriage. Airlines have a right to refuse passage to any individual whose behaviour interferes with a flight, violates government regulations or causes other passengers to feel unsafe.

During this pandemic, passengers are reminded often that they are required to wear a face covering. Failure to comply means that a passenger faces the risk of being offloaded from their flight, restrictions on future carriage or penalties under national laws.

Research from the University of Edinburgh shows that the proper wearing of a face covering can cut the forward spread of potential COVID-19 droplets from the mouth by 90%; face coverings are therefore considered imperative to prevent transmission to others.

"This is a call for common sense and taking responsibility. The vast majority of travelers understand the importance of face covering both for themselves as well as for their fellow passengers, and airlines appreciate this collective effort. But a small minority create problems. Safety is at the core of aviation, and compliance with crew safety instructions is the law. Failure to comply can jeopardize a flight's safety, disrupt the travel experience of other passengers and impact the work environment for crew," said Alexandre de Juniac, IATA's Director General and CEO.

Protecting others at all times

Face covering forms part of a multi-layered approach in the ICAO Take-off guidance to cut the risk of transmission of COVID-19 during the travel journey. Other measures to protect the safety of passengers during the pandemic include contactless check-in and immigration formalities at both the departure and arrival airports, social distancing where possible, increased cleaning and sanitization at airports and on aircraft, and contact tracing.

"The research we have seen to date, and our own investigations with the world's airlines, tell us that the risk of catching COVID-19 on a flight remains very low. There appears to be a number of factors supporting that. The high flow rate of cabin air from top to bottom, constant filtering of air through state-of-the-art HEPA filters, the fact that all seats face the same direction and of course wearing a face covering and sanitization of the aircraft all play a part," said IATA's Medical Advisor, Dr. David Powell. "This is not just about protecting yourself. It's about protecting everyone else on the flight."