

IATA's De Juniac briefs media on COVID-19



IATA Director General and CEO Alexandre de Juniac admits frustration with the world's governments as they react in a knee-jerk fashion instead of listening to science

During IATA's first COVID-19 briefing of 2021, Director General and CEO Alexandre de Juniac began by extending sympathy on behalf of the industry to the families and loved ones of those who lost their lives in the tragic Sriwijaya Air crash over the weekend. He stated that, since safety is aviation's number one priority, accidents are rare. When they happen it serves as a grim reminder never to take safety for granted. "On the very rare occasions when things do go wrong, we investigate, and we improve."

De Juniac said the industry also brings this serious approach to safety to COVID-19, and it is partly because of the industry's tireless work to keep staff and passengers safe and to reduce the risk of importation of infection, including the implementation of the ICAO CART recommendations proposals to replace quarantine with COVID-19 testing, that those in the industry are becoming ever more frustrated with the lack of governmental progress.

He stated that things have become even worse rather than better in the short term, as governments tightened borders in a "knee-jerk response" to a virus mutation. While countries including Canada, UK, Germany, Japan and others have added testing to their COVID-19 measures, they did so without removing quarantine requirements. "In other words, they have chosen policy measures that will shut down travel," de Juniac said.

He said, "This approach tells us that these governments are not interested in managing a balanced approach to the risks of COVID-19. They appear to be aiming for a zero-COVID world. This is an impossible task that comes with severe consequences—the full extent of which it would be impossible to calculate."

His points about the consequences of these decisions include:

- The travel and tourism economy will not recover
- Jobs will continue to disappear
- And the lockdown's toll on people's mental health will continue to grow—particularly on those who are separated from loved ones

De Juniac is calling for a more balanced public policy approach, one based on testing instead of — and not in addition to — quarantines. He reminded us that effective testing will ensure traveling will not be a significant factor in community spread.

He did also announce some good news: “The first pilot of the IATA Travel Pass app was launched in partnership with Singapore Airlines on routes to Kuala Lumpur and to Jakarta. We are still on track for a full rollout of the app during the first quarter of this year.”

De Juniac then quoted the UN Secretary General, Antonio Guterres: “Aviation is an important engine of our world and will play a critical role in lifting the world to recovery from COVID-19. Let us ensure it receives the support it needs to keep the world’s nations connected and united.”

He concluded, “The support starts with consistent, well-reasoned, scientifically supported policies to manage the risks of COVID-19 and travel. That is the antithesis of what we witnessed over the holiday period. Our top priority for 2021 is to change that!”