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PREVENTING SPREAD OF CORONA DISEASE (COVID-19): GUIDELINES FOR FLIGHT OPERATIONS IN GENERAL AVIATION

PREAMBLE

WHEREAS the World Health Organization (WHO) has, on 11 March 2020, declared COVID-19 a pandemic, pointing to the over 118,000 cases of the corona virus illness in over 110 countries and territories around the world and the sustained risk of further global spread;

WHEREAS the President of the Republic of South Africa has imposed a travel ban on foreign nationals from high-risk countries such as Italy, Iran, South Korea, Spain, Germany, the United States, the United Kingdom and China as from 18 March 2020;

WHEREAS the Minister of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs has, on 15 March 2020 and in terms of section 27 of the Disaster Management Act, 2002 (Act No. 57 of 2002) issued a Declaration of a National Disaster and has classified COVID-19 as a National Disaster;

WHEREAS the Minister of Transport has, on 18 March 2020 and in terms of section 43(1)(h) of the International Air Services Act, 1993 (Act No. 60 of 1993) issued the International Air Services Regulations, 2020 ("the Regulations") to deal with the prohibition of embarkation and disembarkation of foreign nationals at international airports designated as ports of entry, improved hygiene control and disinfection facilities on international airports designated as ports of entry operated by licensed airport operator, cargo handling facilities, airport repair facilities, provider of airport maintenance or services, airport terminals, terminal operations and licensed airports operations; implementation of a tracking, tracing and monitoring system at airports and reporting and prohibition of holding of mass gatherings in and around airports;

WHEREAS the Minister has, on 26 March 2020 issued Directions in terms of regulation 10 (7) of the Disaster Management Act, 2002 (Act No. 57 of 2002) in order to provide for International and Domestic passenger flights prohibition, conditions on cargo flights entering the country, improved hygiene control and disinfection facilities on international airports designated as ports of entry operated by licensed airport operator, cargo handling facility, airports repair facilities, provider of

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airports maintenance or services, airport terminals, terminal operations and licensed airports operations and oversight responsibilities;

RECOGNISING THAT the Minister has, on 31 March 2020 amended the Directions issued in terms of the Disaster Management Act, 2002 (Act No. 57 of 2002) in order to provide for international, domestic passenger flight, cargo transportation, technical flight, crew, medical evacuation, evacuation, repatriation and technical flights;

AND THAT pursuant to Regulation (4)(7), 20(1) and (2) of the Disaster Management Regulations, 2020 the Minister issued Directions on 04 May 2020 to provide for measures necessary to address, prevent and combat the spread of COVID-19 as well as to permit some aviation operations in order to support the eased economic activities within the Republic;

WHEREFORE, IN ORDER TO prevent and control the spread of COVID-19 and ensure compliance with the Regulations, the Minister's Directions, as amended, in respect of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the Guidelines hereunder issued by the Minister;

IN ORDER TO give effect to the Regulations and the Minister's Directions, these guidelines are issued by the Minister for implementation by all operators and shall be overseen by SACAA to monitor and ensure compliance.

1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1.1 COVID-19 TRANSMISSION

There are two main routes of transmission of the COVID-19 virus, respiratory and contact:

- (a) Respiratory droplets are generated when an infected person coughs or sneezes. Any person who is in close contact with someone who has respiratory symptoms (for example, sneezing, coughing) is at risk of being exposed to potentially infective respiratory droplets; and
- (b) Droplets may also land on surfaces where the virus could remain viable; thus, the immediate environment of an infected individual can serve as a source of transmission (known as contact transmission). The risk of contracting the COVID-19 virus from the faeces of an infected person appears to be low.

WHO indicates that it is not certain how long the virus that causes COVID-19 survives on surfaces, but it seems likely to behave like other corona viruses. Based on a recent review, the survival of human coronaviruses on surfaces ranges from 2 hours to 9 days. The survival time depends on a number of factors, including the type of surface, temperature, relative humidity and specific strain of the virus.

The same review also found that effective inactivation could be achieved within 1 minute using common disinfectants, such as substance with 70% ethanol or sodium hypochlorite. Any person who is in close contact (within 1 metre) with someone who has respiratory symptoms (e.g. sneezing, coughing, etc.) is at risk of being exposed to potentially infective respiratory droplets. Medical masks, surgical or procedural masks that are flat or pleated (some are like cups) can be used as preventative measures. Coughing generates droplets of different sizes, increasing the risk of transmission from person-to-person.

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Larger droplets fall to the ground within a 1-2m radius of the person and the droplet nuclei that are small enough to enter the alveoli remain suspended in the air for up to 12 hours. The Risk of infection following exposure depends on production of infectious droplet nuclei particles, volume of air and ventilation exposure time and duration of exposure to contaminated air. Inhaling droplets (up to 1/4mm in diameter) and persons within 2m radius are at risk of contracting the virus. On aircraft, this encompasses 2 rows behind and in front, hence the passenger locator forms are issued to all passengers who are seated in the said proximity to the suspected person. The survival in the environment depends on pinnacular size, dryness, temperature and exposure to disinfectants.

The General Aviation (GA) work environment could be segmented between air and ground operations with safety precautions implemented.

2. GENERAL AVIATION OPERATIONS

- 2.1 GA operations, especially where single crew without passengers are concerned, does not present a higher risk of infection than many other economic sectors. GA operations, where more than one crew member is involved, shall be required to take appropriate precautions in line with all Regulations, Directions and these Guidelines.
- 2.2 The approved training organisation or company must submit procedures to the Civil Aviation Authority and the procedures must demonstrate measures they are going to put in place in order to minimise the risk of spreading COVID-19, as provided for in the Disaster Management Regulations issued by Minister of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, Directions issued by Minister of Transport and the Guidelines issued by the Civil Aviation Authority. The procedures must be added to the normal flight operations manual and approved by the SACAA.
- 2.3 Highly used areas of the GA operation and commonly touched surfaces by crew, passengers and staff must be regularly disinfected and employees working in these areas must be provided with the necessary Personal Protective Equipment such as hand sanitisers, wet wipes, face masks or other measures as necessary.
- 2.4 **Measures to prevent spread of COVID-19 for Aerial GA operations**
 - 2.4.1 Safety measures must be taken regardless of nature of the activity. As sufficient social distancing is not always possible inside the GA operated aircraft, as they are small in nature, the following measures should be adhered to, even for single crew operations, with or without passengers:
 - (a) Each crew member must be supplied with hand sterilisers onboard the aircraft;
 - (b) Each crew member/passenger must be issued with a face shield if there is more than one person on board the aircraft or a mask if there is only a pilot on board the aircraft;
 - (c) Gloves should be provided to all crew and passengers to avoid and reduce any potential contamination;
 - (d) Work surfaces, tools, equipment, baggage, aircraft interior and controls, must be disinfected prior to and after each flight;

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- (e) Crew, or student and instructor, must wear face shields or masks in line with (b) above and must not face or turn towards each other when speaking. The use of intercom system is recommended when flying; and
- (f) Physical contact between persons is not allowed.

2.5 Measures to prevent spread of COVID-19 for Ground GA operations

Ground Operations must adhere to the following measures:

- (a) Measures must be put in place to ensure that access to areas is restricted to approved essential personnel only;
- (b) Areas must have their own cleaning team and enough equipment to disinfect and hand sanitise;
- (c) Each office must have safety measures and equipment in place;
- (d) Each employee must be issued with a personal bottle of disinfectant, hand sanitiser and a mask or face shield, as necessary;
- (e) Each area of operation must have separate COVID-19 safety related briefings detailing all protocols;
- (f) Each work area, desk, ablution facility, must be disinfected before and after work and should be cleaned after use, as the case may be; and
- (g) Logs must be kept of such activities to not only ensure responsibility, but also accountability and traceability.

3. PERSONNEL

- a) All persons who are allowed in the GA facility must be screened and their temperature must be taken before entering the premises.
- b) Any person who have a temperature of over 37.5⁰c or is showing any COVID-19 symptoms should not be allowed into the facility but rather should immediately seek medical advice and personnel with underlying medical conditions should be considered for remote work deployment.
- c) The screening personnel must be equipped with calibrated non-contact infrared thermometers.

4. TRAINING OF GA PERSONNEL ON INFECTION CONTROL MEASURES AND PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT

4.1 Ensure that GA personnel receive training on the following:

- (a) Corona Virus;
- (b) Hand hygiene;
- (c) Use of PPE;
- (d) Respiratory etiquette;
- (e) Cleaning of toilets;
- (f) Environmental cleaning;
- (g) Process to be followed when disposing Medical Waste Material;
- (h) Infection prevention control procedures for management and control of suspected cases; and
- (i) The role of each personnel.

4.2 GA Operations should ensure that personnel are trained on ways to identify symptoms and signs of suspected cases of COVID-19. Personnel shall use some of the below primary

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screening methods to identify suspected cases of COVID-19 in order to ensure early intervention and containment:

- (a) Visual Screening;
- (b) Brief History-Taking; and
- (c) Temperature Measurement.

4.3 Personnel must sign a declaration to state that they were trained on the Infection Prevention Control Procedure.

5. PERSONAL PROTECTION WHEN HANDLING PASSENGERS WITH FEVER

5.1 GA Operations should ensure that employees wear disposable medical caps, medical protective masks, goggles, gloves, disposable protective clothes, and disposable shoe covers when treating secretions, excreta, and vomit that is potentially contagious. When taking off PPE, the correct order of steps should be followed to prevent cross-infection.

5.2 The removed PPE should be placed in medical waste bags and be disposed of as medical waste. Reusable goggles should be sterilised and dried every time after use. Personnel should avoid wiping goggles with anti-fogging film with disinfectant. Instead, it is recommended that it be washed with water then exposed to close-range direct ultraviolet lighting for over 30 minutes in a room with no one in it.

5.3 Passengers with fever will be referred to the Ports Health Authorities for further investigation.

6. MANAGEMENT OF MEDICAL WASTE AND DISPOSAL

6.1 Procedure for disposal of bio-hazardous material for crew and ground staff shall be clearly communicated to all crew, ground staff and service providers at all stations.

6.2 The management of waste sorting, and the collection of used masks should be enhanced so that waste could be cleaned in time.

6.3 The cleaning of waste containers such as trash cans should be strengthened, and regular disinfection should be performed, either by spraying or wiping with 250 to 500mg/L chlorine disinfectant, or by disinfected wipes.

6.4 When potentially contaminated waste is found, related local departments should be promptly contacted in accordance with the medical waste management procedures.

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7. EFFECTIVE DATE AND AMENDMENT

These Guidelines are effective immediately on date of approval by the Minister and are subject to amendment from time to time as necessary.

Duly Approved By:



**Hon Fikile Mbalula, MP
Minister of Transport**

Date: 30/05/2020