



NEWS RELEASE

AIRLINE TRAVELLERS URGED TO PRACTICE GOOD HYGIENE AND STAY AT HOME IF UNWELL

14 March 2020, Johannesburg – The Airlines Association of Southern Africa (AASA) says that while airlines are taking every possible precaution to curb the spread of the COVID-19 (Coronavirus) infection, passengers should also act responsibly and with due care by limiting their exposure to fellow travellers, air crew and airport workers.

“Airlines throughout Southern Africa are complying with stringent international and local health and safety measures to curb the spread of COVID-19, but we urge any passengers who are feeling unwell, displaying any respiratory illness symptoms, or who may have come into contact with a carrier of the Coronavirus, not to travel to airports or board flights,” said AASA CEO, Chris Zweigenthal.

“Similarly, people who have recently travelled and who subsequently display symptoms suggestive of respiratory illness, should seek medical attention and share their travel history with their health care provider,” added Mr Zweigenthal.

Since the outbreak and spread of COVID-19, airlines across the region have intensified precautionary measures in line with practices recommended by global and national authorities, including the UN World Health Organisation, the International Air Transport Association, the Center for Disease Control, South Africa’s Department of Health and its National Institute of Communicable Diseases. These precautions include sanitising and cleaning of aircraft cabins, including seats, safety belts, seat-back trays, window blinds, overhead baggage stowage doors, lavatories, galleys, catering equipment and other touch-points.

In the air, the risk of contracting a virus on an aircraft is lower than in most other public spaces. Modern commercial aircraft have their cabin air replaced, scrubbed and recirculated continually throughout every flight. Cabin air is passed through HEPA air filters manufactured to the same standards as those used in hospital operating theatres. Nevertheless, if a person with a viral infection is in that environment, the risk will be heightened so good personal hygiene (eg. regular hand washing with soap and water, avoiding contact with unwell people as well as covering coughs and sneezes) and common sense is crucial.

On the ground, workers at South African airports have been issued with facemasks and latex gloves and are also required to follow a number of measures to maintain hygiene and reduce the risk of infection.

“Despite these various measures, among the confirmed COVID-19 cases in South Africa are people who recently travelled by air and who may have infected other passengers on the same flights. For this reason we are appealing to all travellers to act responsibly. If you are unwell, please don’t fly. Instead, please see a doctor,” added Mr Zweigenthal.

AASA’s members include all of the domestic airlines in South Africa, most airlines in the SADC region and the Indian Ocean islands, many of the region’s major airports, ground handling companies, aircraft and engine manufacturers, fuel suppliers and air navigation service providers.

ISSUED BY THE AIRLINES ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHERN AFRICA

Tel: +27 11 609 0050

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