

PRESS RELEASE

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COVID-19 Travel Restrictions

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AAPA Calls for Review of COVID-19 Travel Bans

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia – The Association of Asia Pacific Airlines (AAPA) is urging Governments to roll back or refrain from introducing travel restrictions. Reports from the World Health Organisation (WHO) indicate that the COVID-19 outbreak has now spread to over 100 countries. In the majority of the countries, the spread is now predominantly through local transmission rather than from imported cases. WHO has repeatedly advised against travel or trade restrictions as such measures are generally ineffective.

Furthermore, travel restrictions cause significant disruptions to supply chains, commerce, trade and most importantly to peoples' livelihoods due to the severe economic impact.

Based on the latest situation reportⁱ issued by WHO on 10 March 2020, although over 90 countries have introduced some form of travel restrictions, only 45 States have informed WHO of such additional measures and provided the associated public health rationale, as requiredⁱⁱ under the International Health Regulations (IHR).

WHO has also noted that travel restrictions if introduced, must be based on a careful risk assessment, be proportionate to the public health risk, be short in duration, and be reconsidered regularly as the situation evolves.

Medical experts have stated that air travel is safe. To protect the travelling public, the airline industry has been adhering strictly to WHO and IATA guidelines on inflight hygiene and disinfection, including the stepping up of cleaning of aircraft and airline lounges, and the use of hospital grade HEPA air filtration systems on board aircraft. To date, we are not aware of any reports of COVID -19 infections attributed to inflight transmission.

Given that the COVID-19 outbreak is now progressing across the globe, it is time for a fundamental rethink on travel restrictions.

Mr. Andrew Herdman, AAPA Director General said, “The airline industry is fully committed to the safety and well-being of the travelling public. Asia Pacific airlines are well-equipped to handle health crises, and are strictly following established guidelines developed by the International Air Transport Association (IATA), in consultation with the WHO and Airports Council International (ACI), covering the management of public health risks.

Mr. Herdman reiterated, “However, the proliferation of travel restrictions worldwide, and insufficient adherence to the IHR are imposing enormous costs on society with little or no public health benefits. AAPA appreciates the leadership of WHO on this issue and calls on governments to fundamentally reconsider the rationale for such travel restrictions and measures, taking into account the disruption caused to people’s livelihoods and the negative repercussions to the wider economy.”

Mr. Herdman concluded, “Governments must strengthen cooperation across borders and work together with WHO, ICAO, and other stakeholders to develop a more globally coordinated set of policy measures, in addressing the current outbreak, avoiding unnecessary social and economic disruption. Additional resources could then be directed towards strengthening the public health response.”

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Association of Asia Pacific Airlines (AAPA)

The AAPA is the trade association for scheduled international airlines based in the Asia-Pacific region. The AAPA permanent secretariat is headquartered in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia with international representation in Brussels and Washington, D.C. Collectively, the region’s airlines carry 1,623 million passengers and 23 million tonnes of cargo, representing over one-third of global passenger and air cargo traffic, and thus play a leading role in the ongoing development of global aviation.

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ⁱ WHO COVID-19 Situation Report - 50 https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/situation-reports/20200310-sitrep-50-covid-19.pdf?sfvrsn=55e904fb_2

ⁱⁱ Roojin Habibi, et al, Do not violate the International Health Regulations during the COVID-19 outbreak, Lancet Vol.395 February 2020, [https://www.thelancet.com/pdfs/journals/lancet/PIIS0140-6736\(20\)30373-1.pdf](https://www.thelancet.com/pdfs/journals/lancet/PIIS0140-6736(20)30373-1.pdf)