



Civil Aviation Authority
SAFETY NOTICE
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The Effect On Aviation Mental Health From the Covid-19 Pandemic and Return to Re-defined 'Normal' Flight Operations

This Safety Notice contains recommendations regarding operational safety.

Recipients must ensure that this Notice is copied to all members of their staff who need to take appropriate action or who may have an interest in the information (including any 'in-house' or contracted maintenance organisations and relevant outside contractors).

Applicability:	
Aerodromes:	All Aerodrome Operators All Ground Handling Organisations
Air Traffic:	All ATS
Airspace:	Not primarily affected
Airworthiness:	All Airworthiness Organisations
Flight Operations:	All AOC/NCC/SPO Operators
Licensed/Unlicensed Personnel:	ATO and Registered Facilities Flight/Cabin Crew, TSMs, Ground Handling Personnel

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The aviation industry has been significantly impacted by the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic with operations either ceasing or being greatly reduced and in many cases now resulting in pan-organisational restructuring. Restart activities have commenced to return to commercial flying operations and which will, in time, lead to a re-defined operational 'normal'. This unparalleled era of change has developed into an unprecedented time of uncertainty and has highlighted the importance and the need to be aware of, and support, the psychological health and mental wellbeing of all aviation related safety sensitive professions.
- 1.2 The purpose of this Safety Notice is to enable the industry, under the banner of total system safety, to understand the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the health and wellbeing of all aviation safety sensitive personnel involved in flight operations and the resulting potential human performance risks they should be aware of and should be managing.

2 Safety Concern

- 2.1 This unprecedented period of change and disruption to established routines and the working environment would naturally lead to high levels of uncertainty and provoke a range of feelings that are not generally experienced in such a dramatic way. It is likely that people are, at times, experiencing heightened examples of stress, anxiety, low mood, sadness and even depression. When under more pressure than usual, when things are concerning people or playing on their

mind, they may behave differently than normal. Some may appear to act as usual and accept change whilst others may find the disruption to a new reality challenging. Both are normal reactions in an exceptional context.

Everyone reacts in different ways, but when the balance tips towards people not coping with life as well as they usually would do, it isn't uncommon to feel upset, irritable or short-tempered. Work, relationships, finances and life in general will be challenging at times, creating stress and anxiety that can weigh heavily on peoples' minds. These may be of loss (financial or routine), worry (about loved ones and the future) and upset (future plans). These internal reactions may manifest themselves as loss of appetite or comfort eating, increased alcohol intake or the use of psychoactive substances, feeling tearful and withdrawn, avoiding social interaction - even if the current rules restricting this are partly responsible for feeling this way to begin with, not being able to concentrate, not being interested in the things that are usually enjoyed, having a low sex drive and not being able to sleep all might suggest that mental health and wellbeing is suffering.

- 2.2 The risk to safe operations is that this high level of change presents additional stressors and may reduce a person's capacity and ability to perform or monitor themselves as effectively as would be usual. The impact, in terms of human factors and operational performance, is a compound risk. Both the CAA and EASA have published reviews of aviation safety issues arising from the Covid-19 Pandemic that have recognised this aspect of human performance as a priority total safety system issue that affects individuals, regulated entities and also their key suppliers.
- 2.3 In all cases, where individuals are feeling low, anxious, worried or even tearful is not something to be embarrassed about and those feelings should not be ignored. It is OK to not feel OK, and it is important for individuals to be able to and share those feelings with someone and to ask for the help and support that is needed; most importantly, not to operate when there is the potential for risk to flight safety. This needs to be recognised and supported by operators and employers.

3 Recommendations

- 3.1 Help and support are available and should be clearly signposted. Safety sensitive professionals experiencing a dip in health and wellbeing should be prompted to speak with their GP, AME, family, friends or colleagues. Things will get better, and the best way to ensure this happens is for individuals to share their problems and ask for the help needed. Asking for extra support is the best option in the long-run and should not automatically mean unfitness for work. If there are concerns about your fitness for duty and you need time off work, then the appropriate steps should be taken through established HR & Occupational Health procedures to make sure help and time off that is appropriate is provided. By receiving advice and help early, it might mean that individuals can safely continue to work, or if they can't, then they will get back to work quicker in the long run. **Employers should take a careful, non-discriminatory approach (with professional HR and medical advice) to their handling of these sensitive matters that ultimately can have adverse negative flight safety outcomes.**
- 3.2 Human factors, performance and crew resource management principles promote mindfulness and high-reliability operating. Potentially, they equip people with a capacity for calm, unhurried reflection. In an operational context, this capacity can deliver important health and wellbeing benefits, including:
- accommodation of distractions and stressors
 - recognition and identification of effects on performance
 - canvassing of opinion and receiving support
 - formulation of effective action plans

Learning to manage distractions and stressors helps individuals to maintain focus and be ready for the unexpected. Recognition and identification of effects on performance (for example, concerns for the health and wellbeing of a colleague) supports effective working. Formulating an action plan keeps minds focused by structuring and directing activity and staying ahead of the task by making extra time to accommodate unusual or unexpected change.

3.3 Support Programmes are key. It remains essential that senior management of all aviation stakeholders, mental health professionals, trained peers, and in many cases representative organisations of crew members and safety sensitive personnel work together to enable self-declaration, referral, advice, counselling and/or treatment, where necessary when mental or wellbeing issues arise. CAT operators are strongly encouraged to continue with their maintenance of or preparations for introducing Support Programmes, or maintaining existing programmes, in accordance with recent changes to EU regulation, to optimise their crews' physical and mental fitness during the Covid-19 crisis and in the aftermath and so maintain and improve a high level of aviation safety. In particular:

- a. Aviation stakeholders should make funding available for peer support programmes and, if possible, to extend access to peer support programs for all employees that have been affected by organisational re-structuring
- b. Make peer support programmes and signposting accessible to all categories of safety sensitive personnel (e.g. flight and cabin crew, Technical Support Members, ATCOs, engineering and ground handling personnel etc.)
- c. Encourage collaboration between stakeholders where appropriate, to make peer support programs accessible to smaller operators or organisations who might not be able to implement their own or access other support programmes
- d. Support awareness, education and training initiatives to enhance physical and psychological health and wellbeing and recognise and support the different cultural and regional approaches in managing psychological and mental health problems

3.4 The stressors of the Covid-19 pandemic will wax and wane due to different challenges with different effect even within individuals. Therefore, it is vital to maintain awareness and increased vigilance of operational staff continuously to potential issues of:

- a. Legacy effects of lockdown including the effects on work patterns, travel, isolation, family care and health advice that can impact on fatigue, anxiety and low mental and physical health
- b. Increased uncertainty about longer-term impact including job security
- c. Specific anxieties surrounding competency checks such as simulator evaluations or LOSAs after significant periods away from work or flying.

4 Further Information

4.1 Further useful information to support psychological and mental health and wellbeing can be found at:

The CAA Medical Guidance web pages: <https://www.caa.co.uk/Our-work/Newsroom/COVID-19-guidance-for-commercial-and-recreational-aviation/>

The CAA Human Factors web pages: www.caa.co.uk/humanfactors

EASA guidance: <https://www.easa.europa.eu/the-agency/coronavirus-covid-19>

Flight Safety Foundation Wellbeing Guide: <https://flightsafety.org>

Centre for Aviation Psychology 'The Psychology of Uncertainty':
<https://www.centreforaviationpsychology.com/publications>

Core Aviation Psychology Guide 'Cleared for Take-Off': <https://www.core-ap.co.uk>

Kura Human Factors 'Coping with Redundancy': <https://kurahumanfactors.com/aviation-coping-with-redundancy/>

Trinity College Dublin 'Turbulent Times: the Pilot lived experience project'
<https://www.tcd.ie/cihs/projects/pilot-lived.php>

MOD Headfit resource: <https://headfit.org/home/>

5 Queries

- 5.1 Any queries or requests for further guidance as a result of this communication should be addressed to External.Response@caa.co.uk.

6 Cancellation

- 6.1 This Safety Notice will remain in force until further notice.