

# Communicable Diseases and Air Travel: The APAC Perspective



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The spread of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) in 2003 raised concerns for ICAO, the World Health Organization (WHO) and a number of States and Special Administrative Regions (SARs) in South East Asia. This led to the development and implementation of Anti-SARS protective measures and guidelines at certain airports as a means of controlling the disease and preventing its spread through air travel. The SARS outbreak had devastating effects on air traffic to, from and within the affected areas.

The onset and widespread effects of avian Influenza in 2005 raised even greater concerns regarding the possibility of a human pandemic. The unpredictable behavior of this influenza virus was a challenge, as neither the timing nor the severity of the next pandemic could be predicted with any certainty.

## ICAO's Global and Regional Initiatives

Article 14 of the Chicago Convention on International Civil Aviation requires each contracting State to take effective measures to prevent the spread of communicable diseases by means of air navigation. ICAO, in coordination with its Member States, has developed *Preparedness Planning Guidelines (Aviation Aspects) for a Communicable Disease of Public Health Concern* to prevent the spread of avian influenza and similar communicable diseases by air travelers and to mitigate the socio-economic consequences.

In 2006, ICAO established the Cooperative Agreement for Preventing the Spread of Communicable Diseases through Air Travel (CAPSCA) aimed at reducing the risk of spreading avian influenza and similar communicable diseases by air travelers through cooperative arrangements between the participating States/Administrations and airports. This would be achieved initially by the application and implementation of ICAO guidelines.

The CAPSCA project provides on-site training in the public health domain at major international airports in participating States. ICAO guidelines for States are available via the ICAO Web site. To date, China, Hong Kong China, Indonesia, Macao China, Malaysia, Mongolia, Nepal, Papua New Guinea, The Philippines, Singapore, The Solomon Islands, Thailand, Tonga, and Vietnam have joined this cooperative arrangement.

The first Steering Committee Meeting (SCM) of CAPSCA was held in Hong Kong China in August 2007, the second SCM was held in Indonesia in June 2008, and the third SCM was held in Macao China in June 2009. A Regional

Aviation Medicine Team (RAMT) has now been established by the SCM.

Three RAMT meetings have also taken place in Bangkok: one in October 2007; the next in Sept 2008; and the most recent in September 2009. The Fourth Meeting of the CAPSCA Steering Committee and Workshop/Seminar on Aviation Business Continuity Planning was held recently in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, from 24–26 May 2010.

The next major event in this field will be the Global RAMT from October 15–16 2010. It will be held at the Singapore Aviation Academy and will aim to ensure the worldwide coordination of technical CAPSCA project activities.

ICAO has developed a template for a National Aviation Preparedness Plan, which will be presented at the upcoming APAC Regional Aviation Medicine Team Meeting in October 2010. ICAO will continue to work with airline and airport operators, international organizations, experts and governments to ensure that involvement and coordination continues regarding preparedness for pandemic influenza and to maintain the continuity and safety of air travel in general. ■

## RECENT CHANGES TO HEALTH-RELATED ICAO PROVISIONS

### ■ Annex 6—Operation of Aircraft

An aeroplane shall be equipped with accessible and adequate medical supplies. On board medical supplies should include a 'Universal Precaution Kit'.

### ■ Annex 9—Facilitation

A Contracting State shall establish a National Aviation Plan in preparation for an outbreak of a communicable disease posing a public health risk or public health emergency of international concern.

### ■ Annex 11—Air Traffic Services

Air Traffic services authorities shall develop and promulgate contingency plans.

Preparatory action plans should include Public Health Emergencies.

### ■ PANS-ATM

Communications procedures with affected aircraft.

### ■ Annex 14—Aerodrome Design and Operations

The Aerodrome Emergency Plan shall provide for the coordination of the actions to be taken in an emergency occurring at an aerodrome or in its vicinity. The action plan should include public health emergencies.