Ground Operations

Operational Safety Instruction
Notification of Medical Incidents, Communicable Diseases and Death on Board Aircraft

It is the responsibility of all employers to ensure that relevant OSIs are brought to the attention of their staff. However, individuals remain responsible for their own actions and those who are in any doubt should consult their Supervisor or Manager.

1. Introduction

1.1 This Operational Safety Instruction (OSI) informs airport organisations, and in particular airlines, of the protocols and actions for the notification of medical incidents, communicable diseases or any death on board an aircraft at or arriving at Heathrow Airport.

1.2 The older version of ASGrOps_OSI_039 Notification of Medical Incidents, Communicable Diseases and Death on Board Aircraft (Version 2.2) is hereby cancelled.

1.3 Red bars have been added to the side of the document to draw the reader's attention to where changes have been made.

1.4 All current OSIs can be found via the link here or via the Quick-response (QR) code below.

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2. Aims

2.1 To deliver a consistent and coordinated response to medical events on board aircraft.

2.2 To provide appropriate flight priority to flights declaring medical emergencies.

2.3 To contain and control communicable diseases and disease vectors which are at risk of entering the UK or being transmitted onto outbound flights.

3. Legislation

3.1 International Health Regulations (2005)

3.2 Public Health Aircraft Regulations (1979)

3.3 Public Health (Infectious Disease) Regulations (1988)

4. Definitions

Abbreviation	Description
ACARS	Aircraft Communications, Addressing and Reporting System
Airport Control or APOC	Airport Operations Centre
ATC	Air Traffic Control
BCU	Border Control Unit
NBHCU	National Border Health Control Unit
LAS	London Ambulance Service
MO	Medical Officer
MPS	The Metropolitan Police Service
UKHSA	United Kingdom Health Security Agency
WHO	World Health Organisation

5. Roles and Responsibilities

5.1 Airlines/Ground Handlers

5.1.1 The Captain of an aircraft, airline representative or its handling agent, are responsible for informing the National Border Health Control Unit (NBHCU), as part of the UKHSA, without delay if they become aware of any disease reportable under the above legislation, or any illness or symptoms suggestive of a communicable disease. This applies to travellers, including those who are about to disembark or board at Heathrow Airport. Notification to UKHSA should be achieved by contacting ATC or the Airport Control (APOC).

5.1.2 The Captain of an aircraft, airline representative or its handling agent, are responsible for informing Airport Control (APOC) directly or through ATC where there is a requirement for medical assistance or a death on board an aircraft on the ground or in flight.

5.2   ATC

5.2.1   Air Traffic Control are responsible for ensuring the onward communication to Airport Control (APOC) of any notification of communicable disease, death or request for medical assistance.

5.3   Airport Control or APOC

5.3.1   Airport Control (APOC) is responsible for the management of medical incidents, deaths on board or notifications of communicable diseases, ensuring the appropriate resources are deployed and assistance provided to airlines/ground handlers

5.4   Airfield Operations

5.4.1   Airfield Operations Team is responsible for facilitating the expeditious assistance of medical support to Airlines through the provision of leading and marshalling services, the escorting of emergency services and 'on the ground' management of incidents of communicable diseases.

5.5   London Ambulance Service (LAS)

5.5.1   LAS are the nominated first responder to all medical incidents on board aircraft.

5.6   Metropolitan Police (MPS)

5.6.1   MPS will be requested to attend and manage incidents of death on board aircraft and to support other agencies in the response to medical incidents or incidents which have the potential to impact on public health.

5.7   National Border Health Control Unit (NBHCU) (As part of the UKHSA)

5.7.1   The NBHCU at Heathrow Airport is responsible for containing and controlling communicable diseases and disease vectors which are at risk of entering the UK.

6.   Procedures

6.1   Medical Emergencies

6.1.1   In the event of a life threatening, critical medical emergency on board an aircraft in the air, on the ground or inbound to Heathrow; dependant on the severity, a Medical PAN or a MAYDAY should be declared, and details of the emergency passed directly to ATC.

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6.1.2 In order to ensure the swiftest response, the following information are required for triage:

6.1.2.1 Age, gender and medical history of the patient
6.1.2.2 If the patient is awake, conscious and breathing
6.1.2.3 If there is any serious bleeding or chest pain
6.1.2.4 Any other pertinent information as to the nature of the injury/incident

6.1.3 ATC will pass details to Airport Control (APOC) without delay via the direct liaison line and seek medical assistance to meet the Aircraft.

6.1.4 Airline representative or its ground handler based at Heathrow Airport should inform Airport Control (APOC) of any subsequent emergencies via 222 (internal) or 0208 759 1212 (external) and relay as much information as possible.

6.1.5 Airport Control (APOC) will ensure that an appropriate medical response is provided which may include the attendance of the Airport Fire & Rescue Services until such time as an ambulance arrives.

6.1.6 Airfield Operations Team will be deployed to the location of the incident or to meet the aircraft on arrival and ensure that there is no delay to the parking of the aircraft or access by the emergency services.

6.2 **Medical Incidents/Requests (Non-emergencies)**

6.2.1 In the event of non-life threatening, non-critical medical events on board aircraft on the ground or inbound to Heathrow Airport; requests for medical assistance should be passed directly from aircraft to airline representative or its ground handler via internal communication processes such as ACARS or via the nominated medical advice service subscribed to by the airline.

6.2.2 Airline representative or its ground handler based at Heathrow Airport should pass any subsequent requests for medical assistance direct to Airport Control (APOC) via 222 (internal) or 0208 759 1212 (external) with as much information as possible. Where insufficient information is provided, ambulance requests may be delayed due to Local Authority triaging processes.

6.2.3 Airport Control (APOC) will coordinate an appropriate response subject to the severity and timeliness of the event and ensure escorting arrangements are in place for any external emergency services.

6.2.4 In events such as this a Medical PAN **should not** normally be declared, and Air Traffic Control may not be aware of the incident or provide any flight priority.

6.3 Communicable Diseases

6.3.1 A communicable disease (International Health Regulations 2005) is suspected when **three or more travellers (passenger or a crew member) has a fever (temperature 38 °C / 100 ℉ or greater) AND** one or more of the following conditions:

- Appearing obviously unwell
- Bruising
- Bleeding without previous injury
- Confusion of recent onset
- Skin rash
- Swollen glands
- Jaundice
- Persistent diarrhoea
- Persistent vomiting
- Persistent coughing
- Difficulty/Impaired breathing
- Headache with a stiff neck
- Decreased consciousness
- Unexplained bleeding

6.3.2 If UKHSA highlights a specified risk, the protocol in Paragraph 6.3.1 will be superseded with advice and guidance from UKHSA.

6.3.3 If the combination of the above symptoms is identified, Airport Control (APOC) will allocate recourses based on the information given. This may include dispatch of either LAS or a UKHSA Medical Officer.

6.3.4 If **one or more passengers** show a combination of symptoms listed above, a request for medical assistance should be made via ATC, Airline Representative or Handling agent who will then pass details to Airport Control (APOC) via 222 (internal) or 0208 759 1212 (external) for an ambulance request. LAS will triage the passenger and determine what further action is necessary. Airport Control (APOC) will inform the NBHCU who will dispatch a UKHSA Medical Officer for further assessment.

6.3.5 If the temperature is normal, but several travellers have similar symptoms, other public health issues such as chemical exposure should not be ruled out and notification to UKHSA should continue.

6.3.6 If a communicable disease is suspected on board aircraft on the ground, the Captain of aircraft must inform the ground handler or airline representative who must in turn to inform Airport Control (APOC) on 222 (internal) or 0208 759 1212 (external).

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6.3.7 A Medical Officer at UKHSA Border Control Unit will make a health protection assessment of the situation and advise on what action to take with respect to the affected person and other passengers. If the ill person requires immediate clinical care, an Ambulance will be requested to attend.

6.4   Aircraft & Passenger Quarantine

6.4.1 Normal practice should be to remove the ill passenger from the aircraft as soon as possible and allow disembarkation of other passengers immediately afterwards. In some circumstances, the UKHSA Medical Officer may ask for Passenger Locator Cards to be completed prior to disembarkation. It will be very rare for the UKHSA Medical Officer to ask for an aircraft to be held in a secure area and disembarkation prevented.

6.4.2 The UKHSA Medical Officer will advise on;

    6.4.2.1   Management of the passenger, e.g. transfer to hospital by ambulance, advice to contact medical services at destination.

    6.4.2.2   Information collection from other passengers or crew, e.g. Passenger Locator Cards

    6.4.2.3   Provision of information and advice to concerned passengers and crew

6.4.3 If necessary, the Border Control Unit will assist in the collation of information in relation to any other passengers that may be affected.

6.4.4 In the event of a passenger/staff member needing hospitalisation the Border Control Unit will request the ambulance service to transport them to the designated hospital. Airport Control (APOC) or the Border Control Unit will also notify the UK Border Force.

6.4.5 In some cases, the UKHSA Medical Officer will be required to notify the Environmental Health Officer (telephone 0189 525 0190 daytime or 0189 525 0111 out of hours). This is when:

    6.4.5.1   There has been a spillage of bodily fluids connected with the suspect case.

    6.4.5.2   There is an outbreak of suspected food poisoning.

    6.4.5.3   The aircraft has come from a country where there is infectious disease and insect/vermin vectors are involved.

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6.5   Death [Natural] on Board

6.5.1   In the event of a death on board the aircraft (not suspected to be related to a communicable disease); Airline or its ground handler should request an ambulance to meet the aircraft on arrival by contacting Airport Control (APOC) on 222 (internal) or 0208 759 1212 (external). The Airport Control (APOC) Operations Coordinator will transfer the call to the London Ambulance Service (LAS) and also notify the Metropolitan Police Service.

6.6   Disposal of Contaminated Material

6.6.1   Any biological waste must be disposed of in accordance with guidance and legislation.

6.7   Disinsection of Aircraft

6.7.1   Certain flights en-route from areas where mosquito/flea borne disease is prevalent will be subjected to disinsection regimes as detailed in World Health Organisation (WHO) guidelines.

6.8   Disinfection of Aircraft (i.e. Biological)

6.8.1   Airlines are required to follow their cleaning disinfection guidance which should be in line with agreed national and international guidance. UKHSA can assist if unclear what type of cleaning is required. London Borough of Hillingdon will be informed as appropriate.

6.9   Special Protocol

6.9.1   In the event of extraordinary circumstance, such as a global pandemic or national epidemic, the above procedure must be adhered to unless a more stringent procedure is deemed appropriate. Special protocol for such an event will be promulgated through the publication of an Operational Advice Notice (OAN), which may supersede the above instructions.

7. References

7.1   International Health Regulations (2005)
7.2   Public Health Aircraft Regulations (1979)
7.3   Public Health (Infectious Disease) Regulations (1988)

8. Enquiries

All question relating to this OSI, please contact the Heathrow Airfield Duty Manager by email airfield.duty.manager@heathrow.com **or the** United Kingdom Health Security Agency (UKHSA) by email Heathrow.HCU@ukhsa.gov.uk.

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Document Data

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Document History

Revision	Description of Change	Date
V1.0	Initial Version	11th January 2019
V2.1	The following has been updated: • Change to title - now includes classification of 'Medical Incidents' • Notification for enactment of Special Protocol - Promulgated through an OAN • Update to general notification procedures • Updated template and editorial improvements • Update on identifying and controlling communicable disease • Update to quarantine procedure • New section for key responsibilities • Adds a distinction between medical requests and medical emergencies • Adds a procedure for medical incidents/requests; Airside/on-board an	8th September 2020

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		aircraft • Adds a section highlighting the ability for Heathrow to enact 'Special Protocol'	
V2.2	• Removal of "Special Protocol – COVID-19". • Replace the term "Public Health England (PHE)" with "United Kingdom Health Security Agency (UKHSA)". • Replace the term "PHE Health Control" with "Border Health Control Unit". • Updated email for the United Kingdom Health Security Agency (UKHSA)		21st August 2024
V2.3	• Updated temperature threshold for communicable disease. • Updated communicable disease symptoms. • Replace the term "Border Health Control Unit" to "National Border Health Control Unit". • Updated if one or more passengers show a combination of symptoms, the NBHCU shall be informed.		28th November 2024