COVID-19 Environmental Health Tips for Rural Airlines

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends airline companies review and update, their personal protection policies and train employees on how to manage sick travelers during the COVID-19 emergency. COVID-19, the illness caused by the 2019 coronavirus, spreads easily from person to person. Be sure to make yourself aware of and abide by travel restrictions imposed by the communities you serve, as well as any travel restrictions and mandates set by the State of Alaska. Airlines can help reduce the spread to rural Alaska by updating disinfection and screening policies. Suggestions for updated policies are as follows:

Routine Handwashing- Staff should frequently wash their hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, or with alcohol-based hand sanitizers containing at least 60% alcohol. Handwashing should occur: when visibly dirty, before eating or preparing food, and after using the restroom, sneezing or coughing, cleaning, handling cargo or in contact with sick passengers.

Enhanced Cleaning- all surfaces inside the plane should be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected in-between flights.
- **For hard (nonporous) surfaces** (eg. walls, leather seats, controls, and metal seat buckles):
  - Remove visible contamination and then disinfect with products approved by the EPA to kill the COVID-19 virus. Always use products according to manufacturer's instructions, follow suggested contact times and wear recommended personal protective equipment (PPE) (eg. gloves).
- **For soft (porous) surfaces** (eg. cloth seats, cloth seat belts, and carpet):
  - Remove visible contamination and then disinfect with appropriate cleaning products. Always use products according to manufacturer's instructions and wear recommended PPE (eg. gloves).

Porous surfaces are much harder to clean and disinfect. If possible, try to only fly aircrafts that have seats made of nonporous materials, like leather. If your aircraft has seats made of porous material, like cloth, consider covering the seat with a seat cover or cloth cover that can be removed and washed frequently, or plastic bags that can be disposed of.

Symptoms of COVID-19- Staff should be aware of COVID-19 symptoms:
- A fever (100.4°F or higher, or warm to touch) that has persisted for more than 48 hours.
- A fever AND one of the following: a persistent cough, difficulty breathing, or obviously unwell.

Passenger Screening- Prior to flying or reporting to work, passengers and staff should be asked the following questions:
- Have you been in close contact, within 6 feet, of someone confirmed or suspected of having COVID-19?

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- Have you traveled outside of Alaska or to any CDC warning level 2 or 3 locations recently?
- Do you have a fever, cough, or shortness of breath?
- Are you allowed to travel under the current mandate that limits travel to only critical infrastructure or critical personal needs? –Rely on passenger's assurance that they are eligible to travel.
- If possible, consider screening temperatures with a non-contact thermometer.
- Consider requiring all passengers and crew to wear a facemask or cloth face covering if they are able and available.

Passengers and staff who answer yes to any of the first three questions should be quarantined at least 6 feet away from others, be further evaluated by calling a healthcare provider, and possibly not be allowed to fly or report to work. There may be passengers with other known respiratory ailments with symptoms similar to COVID-19. Staff should discuss with passenger and/or guardian before making any determination about whether that person should fly. A 14-day self-quarantine is recommended for all employees after possible COVID-19 exposure and after returning from out of state.

Discovery During Flight-Ideally, you want to prevent someone with COVID-19 from flying. If you discover that a passenger has/may have COVID-19 during the flight:
- Be prepared; have facemasks, hand sanitizer, and other PPE/supplies on board and available for both the pilot and passengers incase COVID-19 is identified during a flight.
- Give them a facemask or ask them to cover their mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing and have them immediately clean hands with hand sanitizer.
- Consider approving alternate flight plans to return to place of departure or to a larger city such as Anchorage.
- If landing in a rural community, contact appropriate parties via telephone including health professionals and community leadership.
- Disinfect the plane with the enhanced cleaning policies, paying special attention to the 6-foot area around where the sick person was seated. Treat all bodily fluids as infectious and wear proper PPE.

Protecting Employees- Appropriate PPE should be provided to staff to help protect their health.
- **For routine enhanced cleaning in-between flights:** Cleaning crews should wear disposable gloves and any other PPE recommended on the cleaning product label. After cleaning, staff should thoroughly wash their hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, or with alcohol-based hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol. Staff must be careful not to touch their mouth, nose or eyes before washing hands.
- **For enhanced cleaning after possible contact with COVID-19:** Cleaning crews should wear disposable gloves, disposable gowns, a facemask, and a face shield or goggles. If

these supplies are not available, possible alternatives include: rubber gloves, rubber rain gear, coveralls or other long sleeve protective clothing, and homemade masks (bandanas, scarves); these items should be kept separate from other supplies and be disinfected after each use. Staff should be trained on how to properly put on and take off PPE, and disinfect or dispose of PPE after use. After cleaning, staff should thoroughly wash their hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, or with alcohol-based hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol. Disposable PPE should not be reused and should be disposed of properly.

Freight Considerations- While COVID-19 is thought to primarily spread from person to person, it's also possible to spread by contact with contaminated surfaces. A recent study suggests that the COVID-19 virus can survive on:

- Plastic for 72 hours
- Stainless steel for 48 hours
- Cardboard for 24 hours
- Copper for 4 hours

If you are concerned about transmitting the COVID-19 virus to a community via freight, consider quarantining cardboard containers for 24 hours and disinfecting plastic and metal containers with products approved by the EPA to kill the COVID-19 virus. Always use products according to manufacturer's instructions and wear PPE. Also consider telling the communities that you serve to think about requiring packages be quarantined and recommending residents disinfect or dispose of shipping containers and wash hands thoroughly after handling packages.

Best Practices for Work Place Health:
- Wash hands often for at least 20 seconds; especially after blowing your nose, coughing, sneezing, going to the bathroom and before eating and preparing foods. If soap and water are not available, use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Cover your cough and/or sneeze into your elbow or a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash and wash hands.
- As much as possible, avoid hand shaking and placing bare hands on high touch surfaces (elevator buttons, door handles, etc.).
- Clean high touch surfaces in your workspace and home (office, computer, phones, desk, doorknobs, etc.) daily with a disinfectant spray or wipes.
- At this time, employing social distancing (staying 6 feet away from people) is important in preventing COVID-19 transmission.
- If you become symptomatic, call your doctor to discuss. Do not go directly to their office.

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