
Industry responds to coronavirus

By **Jane Hobson** on January, 31 2020 | Airline & Terminal News



As the novel coronavirus outbreak continues through China and other regions, airlines and the companies that serve them are shifting into high alert with precautionary measures and policies to do their part to help prevent it from spreading.

While many countries have issued non-essential travel advisories to China, carriers, airlines, suppliers and caterers are also adjusting their services. Some airlines have suspended travel to mainland China full stop while others have organized special flights and scaled back inflight services. Meanwhile, operations on the ground have advised employees to monitor their health, practice good hygiene and avoid the facility if they feel symptoms.

Amid these international travel adjustments, the [World Health Organization](#) (WHO) declared the novel coronavirus outbreak a global health emergency yesterday spawning further reaction from the aircraft industry.

At the second meeting of the International Health Regulation Emergency Committee regarding the outbreak, convened by WHO Director-General Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the committee concluded that the new coronavirus, that has as of January 31, a death toll of more than 210 and more than 9,900 cases of infection recorded worldwide, now meets the criteria of a Public Health Emergency of International Concern.

“The Committee believes that it is still possible to interrupt virus spread, provided that countries put in place strong measures to detect disease early, isolate and treat cases, trace contacts, and promote social distancing measures commensurate with the risk,” reads the online [WHO statement](#).

It continues: “It is important to note that as the situation continues to evolve, so will the strategic goals and measures to prevent and reduce spread of the infection.”



World Health Organization

Many airlines have temporarily suspended flights to and from mainland China, where the virus originated in the city of Wuhan, a central location in Hubei province. Some of these airlines include Air Canada, Air France, [Air Astana](#), [American Airlines](#), [British Airways](#), Cathay Pacific, Cebu Pacific Air, [Delta Air Lines](#), [EgyptAir](#), [El Al Israel Airlines](#), [EVA Air](#), [Finnair](#), [KLM Royal Dutch Airlines](#), [Lufthansa](#),

[Scandinavian Airlines](#), [Turkish Airlines](#) and [SWISS](#). A more comprehensive list has been published online by [Business Insider](#).

[Air Canada](#) announced on January 29 that “following the Government of Canada’s advisory to avoid non-essential travel to mainland China it is temporarily suspending all direct flights to Beijing and Shanghai effective...until February 29, 2020.”

Yesterday, [Air France](#) announced that it too has suspended all scheduled flights to and from mainland China until February 9, 2020, citing that its top priority is “the health and safety of its customers and employees in France and around the world.” The online statement from the carrier also reads that beginning yesterday, it will “operate special flights to and from Shanghai and Beijing using volunteer crew members in order to permit customers and employees to return safely.” The other suspension remains in effect but the online statement advises that passengers with select bookings can change their flight or request a refund at no extra cost.

Meanwhile, Philippine carrier [Cebu Pacific](#) released a statement today announcing that it is working closely with the Department of Health and the Bureau of Quarantine on necessary actions after the identification of a 38-year-old Chinese female passenger with confirmed novel coronavirus who flew with the airline January 21, 2020. The airline is now implementing “preventative measures” to reduce the risk of infection across all its flights.

And, according to a January 29 statement from the [Cathay Pacific Group](#), the flag carrier of Hong Kong is “implementing temporary service modifications on all Cathay Pacific...flights to and from destinations in mainland China...until further notice.” Rather than cancelling flights altogether, Cathay’s meal service in First and Business Class cabins on mainland China flights will be comprised of a single tray with appetizer, main course and dessert served together. Trolley services will be suspended and the meal offering in First Class will be the same as that offered in Business Class. Passengers traveling in Premium Economy and Economy Class on medium- to long-duration mainland China flights will be served a disposable snack bag with a hot handheld snack and other items. The meal offering on shorter flights will remain unchanged.

“This modified service offering is strictly a temporary measure designed to further strengthen our health and safety protocols in light of the evolving situation regarding coronavirus cases in mainland China,” the online statement from Cathay Pacific reads. “These changes will enable us to provide enhanced protection for our customers and crew while at the same time continuing to deliver a satisfactory inflight experience for passengers.”

Along with meal modifications, the statement adds that amenities including hot towels, pillows, blankets and magazines will not be offered to passengers in any classes during the modified service period and inflight duty-free sales are temporarily suspended.

“We applaud our airlines worldwide for more liberally allowing fee-free changes and refunds to areas most directly affected by the coronavirus,” Joe Leader tells *PAX International*. “APEX has had discussions with select airline and supplier members on this since as requested. Airlines have gone through previous periods of concern with SARS and MERS with greater danger. Airlines should simply continue to focus on customer well-being and safety.” Leader is the Chief Executive Officer of the Airline Passenger Experience Association (APEX) and International Flight Services Association (IFSA).



Beyond airlines, suppliers are also taking precautions in their facilities and along the entire supply chain. Like many other caterers, [LSG Group](#) has been monitoring the situation closely since the novel coronavirus outbreak began.

“The wellbeing of our staff and the passengers always are our top priorities,” LSG Group’s Holger Rosemann, Head of Global Operations Value Chain, tells PAX. “We are working in close contact with our local contacts in Hong Kong and mainland China, as well as with our shareholder, Lufthansa Group, its Medical Service, our customers as well as the local airport authorities to decide upon suitable measures.”

In 2016, the company introduced the LSG Sky Chefs Pandemic Plan as a supplement to its pre-existing LSG Emergency Response and Action Plan. “This plan provides our units with specific measures in case of an infectious diseases, epidemic or a pandemic,” Rosemann says. The plan is based on the caterer’s experience in handling the SARS outbreak, H1N1 virus in April 2009 and the MERS outbreak in South Korea five years ago.

In its China facilities, precautionary measures including monitoring body temperature, declaring health conditions and travel history, handwashing and sanitizing are in place. “In our business, hygiene is of paramount importance. This is why washing hands, wearing gloves, proper cleaning and sanitation of equipment is part of our standard procedures and our staff worldwide is well-trained to adhere to these procedures,” Rosemann says.

He adds, “Nevertheless, we reminded our staff again via posters and internal communications of the fact that they can actually stave off viral infections by following some basic common-sense tips for staying healthy: washing hands with soap; coughing hygienically; keeping a distance to ill people; avoiding gatherings; realizing when one is sick and being released from duty until full recovery.”

If applicable, staff has also been asked to work from home for the time being and drivers who offload

aircraft are wearing masks and gloves in mainland China and Hong Kong, Rosemann also noted.

“Local customers in Hong Kong and mainland China have reduced their catering services and switched from hot meals to snacks with disposable packaging instead of tableware,” Rosemann says. “Some airlines gave clear instructions with regards to the offloading process of their flights.”

While carrier flight cancellations may have an unfavorable impact on business, Rosemann says LSG Group obviously understands the industry’s decision to try to help interrupt the wider spread of the virus. “We hope that this drastic measure will soon show an effect, that the virus will be contained and that the airlines will be able to resume their operations soon again.”