

IATA's de Juniac addresses need for COVID testing in first media brief of 2021



Alexandre de Juniac, Director General and CEO, IATA, says governments should eliminate quarantines and replace it with COVID-19 testing in an urgent need to restart travel and help support industry recovery

In the [first media briefing of 2021](#), the International Air Transport Association's ([IATA](#)) Director General and Chief Executive Officer Alexandre de Juniac remarked on the state of the industry.

Before discussing the virus, he extended sympathies to the families of those who lost their lives in the tragic [Sriwijaya Air crash](#) over the weekend.

"Safety is aviation's number one priority and our greatest success. Because of that, accidents are rare. When they do happen, it is a reminder that we must never take safety for granted," de Juniac said. "Our reputation for safety is something that we earn each day and with each flight. And, on the very rare occasions when things do go wrong, we investigate, and we improve.

Airlines bring this same serious approach to handling COVID-19, he said.

IATA is working with governments to keep flying safe and reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19 due to travel. The association is encouraging the implementation of the International Civil Aviation Organization's ([ICAO](#)) Council Aviation Recovery Taskforce ([CART](#)) recommendations to replace

quarantine with COVID-19 testing.

But, the industry's situation is "still perilous," de Juniac said, adding that it worsened over the year-end holiday period and that the current picture is "bleak".

Instead of a boost from this holiday period, the new year is met with more government restrictions, including tightened borders in a "knee-jerk response" to a virus mutation. Canada, UK, Germany, Japan and others have added testing to COVID-19 measures without removing quarantine requirements - essentially choosing policies that will further shut down travel, he said.

This approach reveals that these governments are not interested in managing a balanced approach to the risks of COVID-19, de Juniac expressed. Because of the approach, the travel and tourism economy will not recover; jobs will continue to disappear; and, the lockdown's toll on people's mental health will continue to grow - particularly for those separated from loved ones.

De Juniac said a more balanced policy approach is needed. Testing should replace quarantines in order to start addressing the severe side-effects of COVID-19 policies on the industry.

"Science tells us that travelers will not be a significant factor in community transmission if testing is used effectively," he said. "But, most governments have tunnel-vision on quarantine and are not at all focused on finding ways to safely reopen borders - or alleviate the self-imposed economic and mental health hardships of the lockdowns."

The holidays did see some positive developments, including the first pilot of the [IATA Travel Pass app](#) which launched in partnership with [Singapore Airlines](#) on routes to Kuala Lumpur and to Jakarta. The app is on track for full rollout during the first quarter.

De Juniac concluded the briefing by reiterating a quote from the UN Secretary General, Antonio Guterres, on the urgent need to restart flying:

"Aviation is an important engine of our world and will play a critical role in lifting the world to recovery from COVID-19. Let us ensure it receives the support it needs to keep the world's nations connected and united."

This starts with "consistent, well-reasoned, scientifically supported policies to manage the risks of COVID-19 and travel," de Juniac continued. "That is the antithesis of what we witnessed over the holiday period. Our top priority for 2021 is to change that!"