

## Restarting the Economy: What Air Transportation Workers Need to Know

June 5, 2020

Globally, the response to COVID-19 hit the air transportation industry in swift and dramatic fashion. Initially the government approach to air travel restrictions was tepid, but on March 16, the government closed borders to non-Canadian citizens and non-permanent residents. It also closed all but four airports to international travel. Since then, Canadian airlines have collectively reduced their capacity by more than 90%. Close to 80% of workers in the air transportation industry have been laid off. The 20% that remain are working in a very different environment.

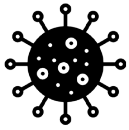
Workers in the air transportation industry were on the front lines of the pandemic from the very beginning. They monitored travelers for symptoms and were charged with barring entry to flights if necessary. Workers in airports and on airplanes were interacting with travelers on a daily basis any of whom could have been carrying the virus. Sanitization and distancing regimes were slow to adapt but have since developed into robust health and safety protocols that are leading the charge against the spread of novel coronavirus.

The industry will continue to operate at this significantly reduced capacity for some time. Predictions around the return to previous passenger volumes changes weekly but there is a consensus among analysts that the return to 2019 traffic levels is years away. The return to full capacity is dependent upon opening borders, loosening restrictions on isolation and ensuring consumer confidence that the air transportation system is safe.

In amongst all of this turmoil and uncertainty it is imperative that employers and governments ensure workplaces are sufficiently adapted and prepared to protect workers and travelers from the spread of the novel coronavirus.

### ***What air transportation workers can expect when returning to work***

International travel restrictions will likely remain in place for some time. Domestic travel has been severely restricted as well. As a result, many workers will not return to their workplaces for some time. Those that do return should expect to see that robust health and safety standards have been put in place. Both workers and



travelers are required to wear a mask at all times. Where possible, strict physical distancing protocols have been put in place to keep workers and travelers from coming into close contact. When this is not possible, the use of personal protective equipment has been implemented. Some airlines are requiring temperature checks and others may follow suit.

Airlines have restricted the number of people physically present in call centres and mandated some workers to work from home. This creates the conditions necessary to meet physical distancing requirements.

In airports, air traffic control centres, aircraft and call centres, Unifor has worked diligently with employers to create an environment that is safe as long as protocols are respected. Workers should expect to participate in substantial training in all new processes and procedures related to preventing the spread of the coronavirus. Unifor is working directly with many of our employers to develop protocols and practices that will lead workers to be safe and feel safe.

### ***What air transportation workers should expect from their Employers***

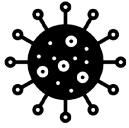
Workers are in close contact with travelers and interact with hundreds of people during the course of one work day. Employers are responsible for ensuring the proper processes and equipment is in place to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. In multi-employer workplaces such as airports, the airport authority and individual employers have responsibilities to keep workers and travelers safe. In this environment employers must:

- Ensure robust health and safety protocols have been developed and extensive training deployed for all workers and travelers alike; protocols must be tailored to specific workplace needs;
- Clean and sanitize workstations continuously and aircraft after every flight, ensuring every inch is addressed including the cockpit and cargo hold;
- Ensure all workers have access to appropriate PPE when the situation requires it;
- Mandate and participate in airport wide health and safety committees to oversee the coordination of and mitigate gaps in health and safety protocols that can be created in multi-employer workplaces; and
- Ensure workers' right to know is respected by participating in multi-employer workplace log of contact with the virus.

### ***What air transportation workers need from government***

Government decisions will play a key role in bringing the air transportation industry back to full capacity. There are actions government must take now, during the acute phase of the pandemic to ensure the industry does not fail. Once restrictions have lifted, government must act quickly and decisively to assure consumers of the safety of air travel. In order to ensure the safe and robust return to air travel government must:

- Step in to prevent the failure of any airline whose collapse has been made imminent by the pandemic. We also expect government to set strong enforceable conditions on any corporate rescue package in the airline industry;



## COVID-19 FLATTEN THE CURVE



- Set clear expectations and guidelines for travelers' use of PPE and behavior in close quarters. Workers and consumers need to know the highest standards are being met by all participants in the travel experience;
- Contact trace workers and travelers who have been infected with coronavirus and ensure adequate access to testing.

### ***Additional resources***

Unifor has launched a hub for member information about the pandemic at [unifor.org/COVID19](https://unifor.org/COVID19) and encourages members to check the site regularly for updates.

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