

FIT TO FLY?

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Category: [Cabin Crew](#)

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Editorial

It's not only passengers who can become unwell in the air.

A high proportion of in-flight emergencies are medical related and passengers sometimes fly with medical conditions without informing the airline or checking if they are fit to fly. Whether intentionally or not, this could be because passengers may not appreciate the susceptibility of their condition in the cabin environment at altitude i.e. the effects that flying can have on their body. Certain medical conditions may not tolerate the changes in cabin pressure on board the aircraft. Flight times, time zone changes and the associated 'jet lag' feeling may aggravate their medical condition if medication schedules and usual meal times are disrupted. Any one of these factors could contribute to a medical incident on board.

Occasionally cabin crew also become unwell during a flight, cabin crew are human too! If you feel

unwell, please inform one of your crew members as soon as possible. Remember that cabin crew first aid training doesn't just apply to passengers, but to crew as well.

As part of the recruitment stages and prior to cabin crew starting to fly, all UK airlines require a medical to be passed. Pre-existing conditions must be declared, as must any prescribed medications and any illnesses/medical procedures within a certain time period. This not only meets the requirements of the airline but also the Regulator. When you report for a duty, you are confirming that you are fit to operate. It is a crew members responsibility to advise your operator if you suffer from a deterioration in your medical fitness. Remember, the role of cabin crew is a safety critical role.

The CAA stipulate in [MED.A.020 Decrease in medical fitness:](#)

Cabin crew members shall not perform duties on an aircraft and, where applicable, shall not exercise the privileges of their cabin crew attestation when they are aware of any decrease in their medical fitness, to the extent that this condition might render them unable to discharge their safety duties and responsibilities.

It is usual practice across all industries for sickness and absence days to be closely monitored. Airlines will have different sickness and absence policies in place, and these will be specified within your terms and conditions. The monitoring of sick days is to be expected but it should be recognised within the company that those who fly have more stringent requirements only to operate when fit to do so, whereas working with blocked ears or sinuses might be ok in an office job, it is not ok in the flying environment and could make an illness worse. CHIRP do not investigate reports that involve industrial relations, terms and conditions of employment or personality-based conflicts.

The implications of operating as a cabin crew member when unfit to do so are clear and a safety concern for everyone on board as well as for your own health. A pre-existing illness or injury could be exacerbated and your ability to perform the safety critical role (at any stage of flight) of cabin crew could also be affected. When you report for a duty, you are confirming that you are fully fit, rested and able to complete all duties and requirements during the subsequent period of your duty, it is important for the safety of all onboard (and yourself) that this is the case. Inevitably some crew will have operated sectors when they shouldn't have: blocked ears, an upset stomach, toothache and even appendicitis; these are all symptoms of conditions that are amplified at altitude. Please also remember that cabin crew are food handlers and gastroenteritis-related illnesses are communicable to others, even when you are might feel you are clear of symptoms, follow your companies' procedures.

In the event of a crew member becoming incapacitated during the flight review your operations manual. 'Incapacitation' means a sudden degradation of medical fitness that occurs during flight duty period either in-flight or during a flight transit of the same flight duty period away from

operator's base that prevents any cabin crew member from performing their duties.

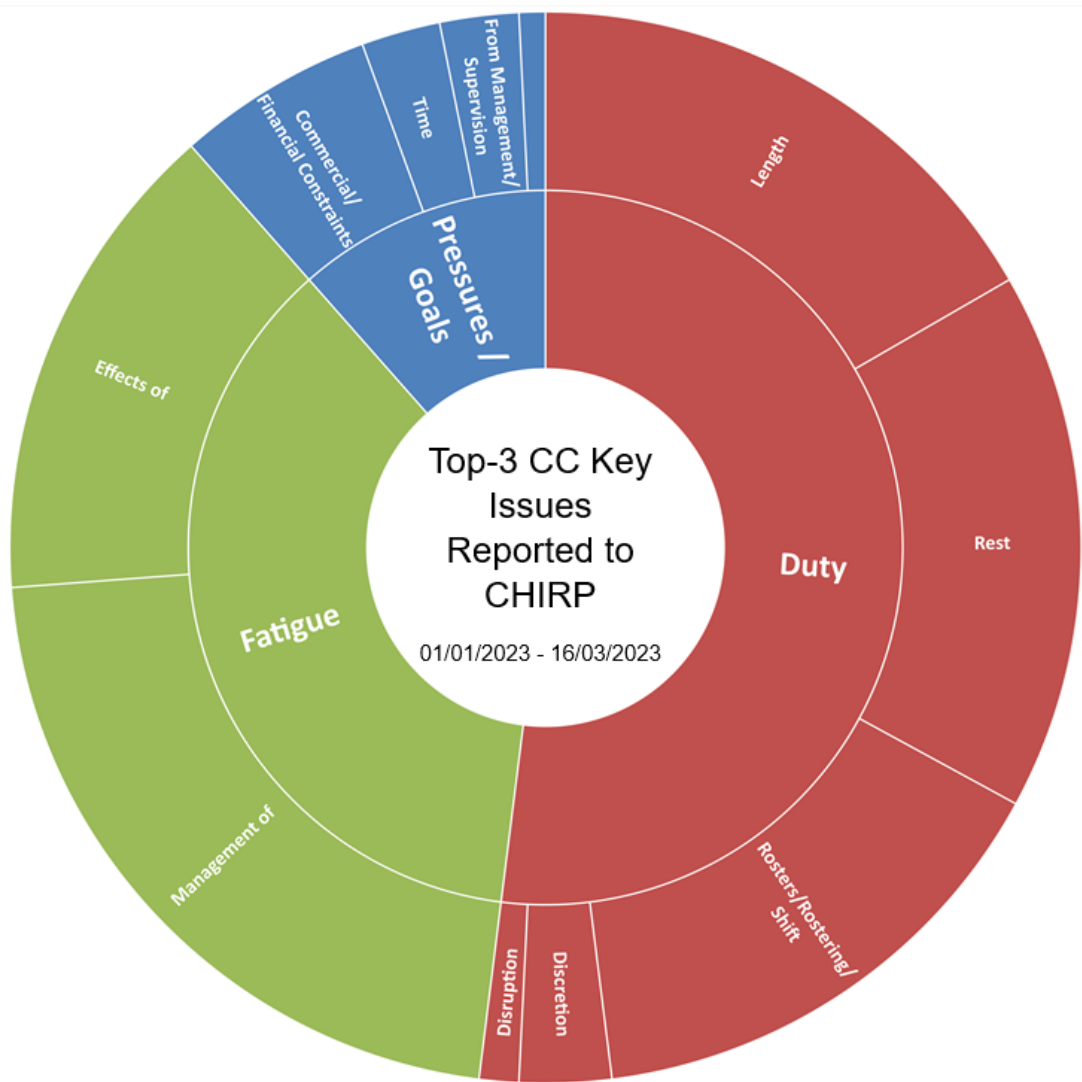
in unforeseen circumstances and/or when down route, if the number of cabin crew members is reduced below the applicable legal minimum required number, there may be procedures in place that require the passengers to be moved for landing or offloaded. There could also be procedures to permit the flight to operate back to base with a reduced crew complement. If this is the case the Regulator is notified via a Mandatory Occurrence Report (MOR). Effective communication during any flight is essential, for some operators, passengers may need to be accommodated in specific seats for trim requirements, therefore any seat movements in this instance will need to be authorised by the flight crew. Medical assistance might also be required once the aircraft has landed.

Jennifer Curran, CHIRP Cabin Crew Programme Manager

Latest CHIRP Cabin Crew Statistics

CHIRP has received 89 confidential cabin crew safety reports in the first quarter of 2023. Of these, 27% reports were not reported internally to the operator. As CHIRP frequently advises, reporting internally helps an operator identify and monitor trends and put mitigations in place. CHIRP is completely independent from both operators and the Regulator. The only people who have access to your confidential reports are the CHIRP team. This is why it is important, that you report any safety concerns to your operator as well as to CHIRP. Your operator may also have an internal confidential reporting policy as well.

The top 3 cabin crew Key Issues reported to CHIRP in this first quarter of 2023 were relating to Duty, Fatigue and Pressures/Goals. These high-level Key Issues were further sub-classified into detailed factors as shown in the outer ring of the illustration below.



Every report that CHIRP receives is triaged and coded into specific categories, the coding of each report allows the data to be used for trend monitoring. CHIRP codes each report using both the ICAO Accident/Incident Data Reporting (ADREP) taxonomy as well as a CHIRP-specific Human Factors 'Key Issues' taxonomy. The ICAO Accident/Incident Data Reporting (ADREP) system is based on the ADREP taxonomy.

Some reports are investigated further and with the reporter's permission 3rd party communications may take place, such as with the operator or the CAA. Please be assured CHIRP never shares the reporters details with anyone, your personal data is secure and confidential.

In Memoriam: Peter Tait, Chief Executive of CHIRP 1995-2013

CHIRP is sad to report that Peter Tait, Chief Executive of CHIRP over the period 1995-2013, recently passed away. After a distinguished career that embraced RAF pilot, test pilot, display pilot and senior positions in commercial aviation and aerospace, Peter guided CHIRP as it expanded from being solely a conduit for Flight Crew/ATCO reporting to include Cabin Crew, Engineers, General Aviation and Maritime. His leadership of the CHIRP team and its contribution to aviation safety received International recognition in 2013 from the International Federation of Airworthiness who awarded CHIRP the Whittle Safety Award "In recognition of their contribution to aviation safety, through the development of a confidential reporting programme on human performance issues and concerns. An addition to formal reporting systems within the United Kingdom, the programme covers all aviation related sectors and disciplines." The CHIRP team would like to offer Peter's family our deepest and most sincere condolences.

COMMENTS ON PREVIOUS FEEDBACKS

Here at CHIRP we very much value your inputs and comments, positive or otherwise. We recognise that there is always room for improvement, and we want to ensure that we are giving you valuable content to support and enhance safety. Please do get in touch at mail@chirp.co.uk and let us know what you think about this edition, or anything else (that's safety related). The below comments were received from readers of CHIRP Air Transport FEEDBACK Edition 144. To read this edition in full, click here <https://chirp.co.uk/category/aviation/airtransport/>

COMMENTS ON PREVIOUS AIR TRANSPORT FEEDBACKS

Comment No 1 – Living with COVID

I refer to your comments concerning positive Covid tests [Air Transport FEEDBACK Edition 144]. This needs some further explanation. There is no reason why you should not attend work having produced a positive outcome with a SARSCoV-2 rapid test. It is really a matter whether the person involved has symptoms that are incapacitating or likely to be incapacitating. In terms of coming to work with a positive test this is a cultural and social issue. You should not lose sight of the fact at the present time the infection rate is currently 1 per 35 persons in England and increasing so it is highly likely that you are already in contact with an infected person. We are going to have to learn to live with Covid along with the Influenza/Respiratory Syncytial virus.

CHIRP Response:

This comment again refers to the editorial where one of the quoted sickness reports mentioned that a Cabin Crew member had stayed away from work due to testing positive for COVID and had lost pay as a result. The background to this report was that it

was received in early summer and, whilst we don't know what the specific date of the Cabin Crew's reported comments was, perhaps they were at a time when they were required by their particular company to stay away from work. Whether they were actually suffering from symptoms of COVID is unknown by us, and individual airlines have differing policies, but the underlying regulatory requirement is to stay away from work if suffering from symptoms that make you unfit to fly. The thrust of the editorial was to highlight company sickness policies and this particular COVID comment was just part of a wider piece about inconsistencies in the way that sickness and absence are being handled by companies. We hope that the comment about COVID didn't detract from that particular aim.

Comment No 2 – Pronouns

The pronoun "they" was used to refer to the captain several times in your response to a report [Air Transport FEEDBACK Edition 144, Report No 8 (FC5219)]. In one instance it was used when talking about the captain in a verbal dispute with cabin crew members. It was difficult to understand who was talking to whom. Please cease this politically correct idiocy and continue to use correct English. The use of "they" in this way is grammatically incorrect and potentially confusing. As you are no doubt aware it is also encouraged by the current gender hysteria. Why not simply continue to use the word Captain?

CHIRP Response:

We use 'they' as a deliberate policy to assist in protecting confidentiality. Many small airlines have few female captains for example and so if we used 'she' then it could narrow down the field if someone was familiar with the circumstances. Or it may be that the reporter does identify as gender neutral which we should respect. Repetitive use of 'the Captain' or other titles can become stilted in reported speech so we'll continue to also use 'they' in reports where appropriate but it's a fair point that we need to make sure that in doing so we do not detract from the ability to understand the report itself.

Bullying, Harassment, Discrimination and Victimisation

The CHIRP Aviation Programme also provides a facility for confidential reporting of Bullying, Harassment, Discrimination and Victimisation (BHDV) where there is an identifiable safety related concern. CHIRP has no specific expertise or resources to investigate BHDV reports. CHIRP's role is to aggregate data to build a picture of the prevalence of BHDV in the aviation sector. See our BHDV page on the CHIRP website for further information. [CHIRP's role in BHDV](#).

