



Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

What Aircraft Maintenance Workers Need to Know about COVID-19

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a respiratory illness caused by a virus called SARS-CoV-2. Symptoms often include a fever, cough, or shortness of breath. Our understanding of how the virus spreads is evolving as we learn more about it, so check the [CDC website](#) for the latest information. The virus is thought to spread mainly from person to person:

- Between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet).
- Through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs, sneezes or talks.

Recent studies indicate that the virus can be spread by people before they develop symptoms or who never develop symptoms. It also may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes. However, this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads. Older adults and people of any age who have serious underlying medical conditions may be at [higher risk for more serious complications](#) from COVID-19.

As an aircraft maintenance worker, how can I protect myself?

As an aircraft maintenance worker, you could be exposed to COVID-19 in situations such as when you have close contact with someone with COVID-19 or when you touch surfaces while repairing aircraft interiors and lavatories that have been touched or handled by a person with COVID-19.

- Limit close contact with others by maintaining a distance of at least 6 feet, when possible.
- Practice routine cleaning and disinfection of frequently touched surfaces, following the directions on the cleaning product's label.
- Use gloves whenever you touch surfaces contaminated by body fluids.
- Proper [hand hygiene](#) is an important infection control measure. Wash your hands regularly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol.
- Key times to clean hands in general include:
 - Before, during, and after preparing food
 - Before eating food
 - After using the toilet
 - After blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing
- Additional times to clean hands on the job include:
 - Before and after work shifts
 - Before and after work breaks
 - After touching frequently touched surfaces
 - After removing any personal protective equipment (PPE)
 - After performing maintenance tasks such as handling untreated human waste

- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth.

Recommendations based on work tasks:

Interior Work:

- Wear your normally required PPE, if applicable, when making repairs in the passenger cabin area.
- Do not use compressed air or water sprays to clean surfaces contacted by passengers, as these techniques may aerosolize potentially infectious material.
- If cleaning is required before you make repairs, first review [CDC cleaning guidance for Airlines and Airline Crew: Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#) and contact your employer for additional guidance.

Air Filter Replacement:

- Wear your normally required PPE, if applicable.
- Follow the manufacturer's filter replacement schedule.
- When replacing air filters (including HEPA filters):
 - Avoid hitting, dropping, or shaking the filter.
 - Do not use compressed air to clean a filter. This will keep materials in the filter from becoming airborne.
 - Dispose of the used filter and gloves in a sealed plastic bag.
 - [Clean your hands](#) when the task is finished.

Waste and Wastewater Handling:

- Follow standard practices when performing work tasks that could expose you to untreated waste and wastewater. Untreated waste and wastewater colored blue (i.e., a deodorizing agent in some aircraft toilets) are not disinfected and have the potential to be infectious. Take these steps to protect yourself:
 - Avoid causing or creating a fine spray of untreated waste material.
 - Do not vent aircraft vacuum waste tanks inside hangars if the aircraft's external venting system is not equipped with a filter to prevent the spread of germs from the waste. If you must vent the vacuum waste tanks inside a hangar, use a technique that exhausts the air outside the hangar.
 - Use employer-provided PPE when handling human waste or sewage:
 - Splash-proof face shield
 - Liquid-repellent coveralls
 - Waterproof gloves
 - Rubber boots
 - Remove PPE after use following your employers' instructions, and immediately [wash your hands](#) with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.

What steps should my employer take?

Employers of aircraft maintenance workers should develop a COVID-19 health and safety plan to protect employees. This plan should be shared with you and your coworkers. Employers should:

- Take [steps to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 if an employee is sick](#). Actively encourage sick employees to stay home. Sick employees should not return to work until [the criteria to discontinue home isolation are met](#), in consultation with healthcare providers and state and local health departments.
- Provide information on whom to contact if employees become sick.

- Implement flexible sick leave and supportive policies and practices. Consider drafting non-punitive emergency sick leave policies if sick leave is not offered to some or all employees.
- Designate someone to be responsible for responding to COVID-19 concerns. Employees should know who this person is and how to contact them.
- Provide employees with accurate information about COVID-19, its symptoms, how it spreads, and risk of exposure.
- Provide training on proper [handwashing](#) practices and other routine infection control precautions. This will help reduce the spread of many diseases, including COVID-19.
- Provide employees with appropriate PPE when necessary and provide training on using the PPE and ensuring it fits correctly.
- Provide employees with access to soap, clean running water, and drying materials, or alcohol-based hand sanitizers containing at least 60% alcohol at their worksite.
- Provide disposable disinfecting wipes so that commonly touched surfaces can be wiped down by employees as needed. Provide products to disinfect that meet [EPA's criteria for use against SARS-CoV-2](#) [↗](#), diluted household bleach solutions, or alcohol solutions with at least 70% alcohol, and are appropriate for the surface. Provide employees training on manufacturer's directions for use.
- Provide tissues and no-touch disposal receptacles for employees to use.
- Frequently clean workstations, such as areas within maintenance shops, employee break rooms, rest areas, and other common areas.
- Place posters that encourage [staying home when sick](#), [cough and sneeze etiquette](#), and proper [hand hygiene](#) at the entrance to the workplace and in other workplace areas where employees are likely to see them.
- Follow all applicable worker safety and health federal regulations and public health agency guidelines.

Where can I get more information?

Stay informed. Talk to your employer, supervisor, union representative, or airport personnel who are responsible for responding to COVID-19 concerns. See these sources for more information on reducing the risk of worker exposures to COVID-19:

- [CDC Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers](#)
- [NIOSH Workplace Safety and Health Topic](#)
- [NIOSH Report HETA 98-0203-2778 Evaluation of airplane toilet maintenance](#) [📄](#)
- [CDC COVID19](#)
- [CDC Updated Interim Guidance for Airlines and Airline Crew: Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#)
- [CDC: Guidance for reducing health risks to workers handling human waste or sewage](#)
- [OSHA COVID19](#) [↗](#)
- [WHO Water, sanitation, hygiene and waste management for COVID-19](#) [📄](#) [↗](#)
- [WHO Guide to hygiene and sanitation in aviation](#) [↗](#)
- [Suspected communicable disease guidelines for maintenance crew](#) [📄](#) [↗](#)
- CDCINFO: 1-800-CDC-INFO [📞](#) (1-800-232-4636 [📞](#)) | TTY: 1-888-232-6348 [📞](#) | [website](#)

Page last reviewed: April 3, 2020

Content source: National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases (NCIRD), Division of Viral Diseases