

Mbalula confident airports are Covid-19 ready

Transport Minister Fikile Mbalula has expressed confidence that the aviation industry and the country's airports will adhere to Covid-19 regulations and directives, as the sector reopens.



Image via [King Shaka International Airport](#)

The Minister made the declaration on Wednesday at the OR Tambo International Airport, where he was inspecting the airport's adherence to lockdown regulations and directions.

"These regulations and directives are there for the protection of all people and we expect absolute compliance," said Mbalula.

He said government understood the need for a balanced gradual reopening of the economy and safety and good health.

"I am confident that our airports will play a central role in reigniting the economy, reconnecting our economic hubs, while strictly operating under these conditions."

During the visit, the Minister observed that ORTIA had vending machines for personal protective equipment (PPE) and witnessed social distancing within the facility.

During the visit, airport leadership demonstrated how cabins were being disinfected and prepared as restriction flight

operations resume.

"I am satisfied that the airport has started out well and we expect this to continue. Now that we have started with opening up aviation, we must look ahead with determination in order for the transport sector to perform its vital economic role."

Over and above the approval of the ORTIA procedures, he said, the South African Civil Aviation Authority (SACAA) has approved the procedures for Cape Town International and is currently reviewing the procedures for King Shaka International.

"In terms of the readiness of the airlines, I would like to state that the airlines, including charters, have also submitted their procedures, which are being reviewed by the SACAA," he said.

Level 3 regulations

At the weekend, the Minister outlined regulations at which airlines would resume operations under lockdown level 3.

At this level, only passengers are allowed inside the terminal buildings. Temperature screening will become a norm at terminal building entrances before any passenger is allowed entry. Passengers without facemasks will not be given access to terminal buildings, Mbalula said.

The Airports Company of South Africa (ACSA) is expected to ensure the effectiveness of the sanitisation process before entering the terminal buildings, which may result in the number of entrances being reduced.

"All the airports will have markings on the floor for social distancing of 1.5 metres. This will be applicable at check-in counters, security checkpoints and airport lounges," the Minister said.

At boarding gates, boarding will be staggered and prioritised in terms of the number of passengers waiting to board. Sectional boarding will be implemented to avoid unnecessary contact inside the aircraft.

"Inside the cabin, full capacity will be allowed. It must be noted that the risk of Covid-19 infection onboard a commercial passenger airliner is lower than in many other confined spaces. All our commercial aircrafts are fitted with High-Efficiency Particulate Air (HEPA) filters. These are manufactured to the same standard as those used in hospital operating theatres and industrial clean rooms, with the same efficacy of 99.97% in removing viruses," Mbalula said.

Catering and magazines will not be allowed in the cabin. Last rows to be reserved for isolation of suspected cases, should they be detected on board.

Loading capacity for all airport buses must be limited to 70%. The buses must be disinfected after off-loading. Drivers, baggage handlers and ground handlers must be fully equipped with appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE)," said the Minister.

On arrival, all passengers will be screened as they enter terminal buildings, with suspected cases referred to Port Health.