Coronavirus – Impact and preventive measures at Brussels Airport

Brussels Airport is going through a difficult period. The coronavirus has hit the travel sector hard, and our airport has not been spared. As the days and weeks pass, the activity at Brussels Airport decreases and currently only essential flights are operating. Today, Thursday 26 March, 90% of the scheduled passenger flights have been cancelled. The occupancy rate of the flights that are operating is very low, since only the most essential trips are permitted. Fewer than 4,000 passengers a day use Brussels Airport, and that number will reduce even further in the coming days. This week, some repatriation flights are still taking place, but subsequently the number will be reduced. Our airport is thus only operating cargo flights and essential humanitarian, medical and diplomatic flights.

Preventive measures

The coronavirus has been on the radar of Brussels Airport since January. We published the first extranet report about it on the 24th of January and since the very beginning we have communicated how important hand hygiene is. Since it became known that the virus was spreading in China, Brussels Airport Company has been in permanent contact with the FPS Public Health and all partners at the airport were permanently kept fully updated on the current situation and on the impact and necessary measures at the airport. We would like to list the additional measures that are now in place and inform you about how consultation is progressing.

Via the AVL (ArbeidsVeiligheid Luchthavengebruikers [Work Safety for Airport Users]) there is permanent consultation with the prevention advisers of all airport companies and they have been consulted at several special meetings about the impact of the coronavirus and the necessary preventive measures. In addition, several partners also hold daily meetings in the Airports Operations Center (APOC) where daily consultation takes place and information is exchanged. And during the EPC (Emergency Preparedness Committee) consultation is undertaken with the stakeholders (FPS Mobility, handlers, Airlines, Airport Operators Committee and the Federal Police) at contingency manager level in order to explain the Covid-19 measures. At the Local Security Committee a specific session on Covid19 will be held on 30 March, together with the Parquet, Federal Police and all security authorities at and around the airport.

Brussels Airport Company takes its role as operator of the airport very seriously; in addition, it is up to each of the airport companies to implement the measures among their staff on the work floor.

Brussels Airport Company has taken several additional measures on the airport grounds, both for passengers and for staff.

- More than 200 dispensers with disinfecting hand gel have been installed throughout the terminal and airport buildings.
- Plexiglass partitions have been fitted at the check-in and service desks in the departure hall; we provided the material for this to all our partner companies.
- A procedure has been introduced whereby one check-in desk per two is open to maintain social distance.
- Non-stop disinfecting of the terminal is undertaken by a special 4-person cleaning team, whereby the desks, for example, in addition to the standard cleaning after each shift, are also cleaned and disinfected during the night.
- Permanent disinfecting of hand luggage trays at the screening.
- Arriving passengers are advised to use public transport or a taxi.
- BAC staff and police officers are on permanent patrol to remind the passengers of the social distancing measure.
- The federal police are also making additional patrols and where necessary can issue fines.
- Only people who work at the airport or are travelling through the airport have access to the terminal.
- The terminal is strictly limited to staff who must actually be there (for travel or work).
- When offboarding arriving flights, only small groups are allowed to disembark at once in order to ensure that social distancing is respected up to border control.
- Passengers are keep updated about new measures via our website and social media channels. A special crisis number has been opened where passengers can find answers to questions they have concerning corona.
- At the request of the federal government, all passengers arriving since Wednesday 25/3 have been given an information sheet stating that they must follow the social distancing rules in force in Belgium and that they have to quarantine themselves at home for 14 days.
- Since Sunday 22/3, the federal police have been checking that travellers are actually undertaking essential journeys. They are asked why they are travelling and some people have already been turned away because they did not have a valid reason for their journey. Flights from Italy, Spain and Greece arrive at the B-pier so that checks can be held there.

The approach of social distancing in figures

We have been making our passengers aware for some time that they should respect the measures of social distancing and have been going this via various channels. An overview:

- 1500 A2-posters
- 250 A3- posters - 3000 seating stickers (on every alternate chair)
- 500 floor stickers in baggage reclaim and in meeters & greeters area
- Communication on every screen in baggage reclaim - Communication on all other screens in a loop.
- 7 floor stickers at each entrance, 6 additionally at each passport control with distancing marks.
- A message is transmitted every 2 minutes in all passenger areas.
- A poster hangs in each sanitary block with the 7 basic rules and instructions on how to wash hands.

The Federal Police reserve have been deployed since 24 March to check the entrances to the airport; only staff and travelling passengers are welcome in the terminal. People are not allowed anymore to wait in the arrival hall for passengers; people coming to collect passengers
must wait outside or in the car. Anyone who does not comply with the measures could face a fine.

**Temperature checks?**

Since the start of the corona crisis in January, Brussels Airport has been working closely with the FPS Public Health, which defines the guidelines and any measures that must be applied at Brussels Airport. The FPS has decided not to implement temperature checks on passengers because, according to their experts and virologists, such checks are not effective in identifying sick passengers. Even those who do not display any symptoms can be a carrier and transmit the virus.

The most important measure is respecting a social distance of 1.5 metres. In recent weeks, Brussels Airport has taken a large number of measures (stickers, posters, public announcements and checks by our own staff and the police, etc.) to make our passengers aware of the need for respecting social distancing. In addition it is, of course, important that people know that, if they fall ill, they must contact their doctor and remain indoors.

Passengers who show symptoms during a flight are isolated and, on arrival, are met by a doctor of Brussels Airport Company for thorough testing which will determine whether quarantine or referral to the hospital is necessary.