

Podcast Transcription

Fly by Night: Officer Update, November 2020

Captain Chris Lee My guests today are Captain Dave Chase, MEC Chairman, Captain Bill Hubbell, MEC Vice Chairman, and First Officer Don Loepke, MEC Secretary-Treasurer. Thanks for coming, guys. We're seeing a recent uptick in COVID cases around the world. Can you update the pilots on where we stand?

Captain Bill Hubbell Yeah, absolutely. You know, the news, the nationwide and local news is definitely showing an uptick. I'm sure everybody's paying attention to that. And it definitely coincides with the numbers we're seeing here with our pilot group. We're over 160 positive cases now, it's an increase of 15 over the last week and almost 50 in the last month. So, over a 40 percent increase in just one month. So we are definitely in a spot where the cases are rising very rapidly. We're seeing lockdowns back in England, Germany, France, fairly significant, severe type lockdowns going back to where we were, you know, back more in the spring and early summer.

Captain Dave Chase We've talked a lot about the COVID Safety Working Group that we have. They're having pretty good discussions with the Company about how a lot of these things are occurring. But what's really important is to go back to the Positive Rate, read the material we're putting out on the different restrictions, staying current as you move through your trip. Things are changing and it's really fluid. And also staying with the [Company CIQ page](#) and cross-referencing that information. If you're not sure, I'd call the duty officer before you fly to a new country and be aware of what you're flying into, security and COVID-wise.

Captain Chris Lee In regards to the [Company CIQ page](#), how do we feel the Company's doing communicating these issues to the pilots?

Captain Dave Chase I think it's an important resource, but I think there's a lot more information that could be shared. So I think they're doing OK, but not well enough. Every pilot who goes out on the road for the Company deserves to have the most up to date information, to have the actual restrictions placed on them by the individual countries. It's fluid. We've said it before. It's a dynamic operating environment. I would read the Positive Rate and the latest information we're putting out and the [Company CIQ page](#) each and every time before I move to a new layover place.

First Officer Don Loepke Yeah, we're not asking them to direct deal with the pilots. We just expect that the pilots have all the information they need to make the decisions they need when they're on the road. As far as hotel isolations, planning for those so that you can plan exercise, whatever way that can occur in your room or anything to keep your mental health where it needs to be while we're out flying around the world for the Company.

Captain Dave Chase And things like food, right? I mean, guys are asking, well, if I'm stuck in the hotel, can I get out to the curb to get Uber Eats? And we're asking the Company, where's that restriction? Let the guys see what the letter of the law is. Let them understand why the restriction is in place. They've assured us they're not doing more than they need to do. But that's not the same as providing that information to the pilots. So we continue to press for that and we're going to do it. And Don brought up exercise. That's a prime example of something I feel like the Company could do a lot more for. You can't go on the

road 14 days out of every month for a lot of these international pilots and the Hong Kong pilots can't leave any of their hotel layovers currently. And there's just got to be more done, more Company resources need to be put forward to find guys opportunities to be able to get some outside time or to get some exercise time or both. And we've written some letters to the Company and it's time that they step up and take action.

Captain Bill Hubbell Our pilots are working very, very hard at levels we've never seen before for months and months on end. This isn't a short term problem. All of our pilots are trying really hard to stay within the bounds of what's acceptable and what's legal in all these conditions. And they need to really delineate some very clear boundaries for what they can do when they're out and about. I think everybody's doing their best to comply, but they need to know what they're trying to comply with.

Captain Chris Lee And we've been hearing that we're operating at peak levels and now peak is actually coming. So it's about to be peak on top of peak.

Captain Bill Hubbell Absolutely. The foot is firmly on the gas pedal and I don't see it letting up anytime soon. Extra business is always a good thing to have, but it creates other problems for the pilot group. And you're right, Chris, it's yeah, we're going into double peak now. It's like double overtime and we're looking at possibly a vaccine rollout, which you can only imagine what that's going to look like too. So this is not going away anytime soon.

Captain Dave Chase We're excited to be part of a successful business, but there's only so much that any individual pilot can be asked to do. There's still mental health, physical health, time at home with your family, their safety, security on the road. All those things stay important to us. We don't just represent the pilot group as a whole. We try and represent individuals, too, and think about how different decisions that are being made affect individual people and their ability to have a sane lifestyle and a career that's rewarding for them and some of the steps we see being taken right now, we're concerned that when you look at the whole any one trip, you might be able to handle something like that. But how many months in a row can you handle that kind of thing? We've definitely engaged many times on these issues. I haven't seen enough progress. Personally, I'd like to see a lot more and I'd like a lot more explanation going to the pilots on how these things are expected to be mitigated.

Captain Bill Hubbell The mitigation thing is the perfect example. I was thinking earlier, you get into fatigue talk or sleep deprivation and there are all these short-term mitigation tools you can use, you know, coffee, little naps here and there. We're way beyond the Band-Aid fixes here. We need bigger, broader solutions and they need to get outside of the box is what it is. This is not a short term problem.

Captain Chris Lee We get a lot of questions about the Everbridge app and the notices that pilots receive essentially daily requesting us to fill out a form. Can you talk about that some and are pilots required to fill out that form?

Captain Bill Hubbell When we negotiated the Medical MOU, that was part of what we determined to be a proper requirement in compliance with the SAFO for this. So, yes, the short answer is yes, you do have to comply with the Everbridge (the app) and those questions.

First Officer Don Loepke With the Everbridge, when you're answering those questions, they're asking you specifically about COVID symptoms. So when you answer those

questions in the affirmative, then you will be in the protocol for COVID. You will be NOQ and that will involve Harvey Watt to return to work.

Captain Bill Hubbell Yeah. And just to clarify a little bit more. We've seen several PDRs where there's a little bit of confusion about that NOQ status. So essentially, when you answered the Everbridge questions in the affirmative, you're put in NOQ, you're put into this Harvey Watt return to work protocol. A lot of that is dependent on whether or not you ultimately test positive. If you do not test positive, then it comes out of your normal sick bank, which, of course, you can do make up sick later to replenish that if you'd like. If you do end up with a positive test, you may still see initially your sick bank docked, but it will be replenished. And that's because of the Medical MOU. Ultimately at the end, you are pay protected for a positive test. But I just want people to be aware it does get a little bit confusing once you're in that protocol, but it is dependent on whether or not you ultimately test positive.

Captain Dave Chase You could be deemed sick in this protocol, as Bill said, and that will come from your sick bank. But what I'd implore all of our pilots to do is, is to follow the protocol, not fly sick. Don't put other people in situations where you could then turn out to have had COVID and spread that around and create close contacts. The close contacts even if you don't feel overly concerned personally about your risks with COVID, these can have extreme consequences for other pilots and where they're located in the world. Different localities, different countries are treating close contacts or COVID positives differently. And I know that regardless of your sick bank usage and having to go out and do make up sick or whatever those are, it's not fair to other people when they move through the world and get put in some of these more devastating consequences. So I ask everybody, follow the protocols if you've got to go back out and get a make up sick, then so be it. There is a lot of flying out there that's available. Just please don't put other people in a condition where you could get them sick and they're bringing it home or they're losing time from work themselves.

First Officer Don Loepke I think that kind of brings us full circle too back to Bill's initial briefing on where we're at with this COVID virus. I think is doubly important that we hold each other accountable for wearing your mask when you're in AOC, washing your hands frequently, doing the little things that really aren't that big of an inconvenience but yet they could go a long ways toward hopefully getting our COVID numbers back down.

Captain Dave Chase And keep holding the Company to those standards. You know, we're seeing these crew busses full, some of the hotels. We just had a PDR of ten people in a crew van. It's OK to take steps to keep each other safe. And the operation does better when we take steps to make it safer. And we've seen a lot of instances of that where people are calling a stop to certain things that they don't think are safe enough. And that's how it should be. You should be able to go out there, like Don said, protect yourself and be considerate and protective of others. You may view your risks one way, but somebody else doesn't have the opportunity to tell you what their risks are. And we just need to be really cognizant of that for other people that they're out on the road trapped in hotels for 14 days. Maybe they do, maybe they don't have all the medication they need to be on the road for that length of time or other things that are going on with them physically that they need to take care of. So please be respectful. Remember, we're a union. We look out for one another. It's critical that we continue to do that. That's what unity means to me, that we take the concerns of everybody into our thought process there. So please keep it up, look out for one another and take those steps that Don talked about.

Captain Bill Hubbell It's even more so important right now. I mean, in times past, nobody likes showing up to the plane and having somebody over there coughing and sneezing. And, you know, that's always been a problem. But I've talked to multiple pilots this week that are really sick. They're not just positive. They are symptomatic. They're concerned. And like Dave said, you know, you never know what's going on at another pilot's home. If they have immunocompromised people in their house, maybe they're cancer survivors. It goes way beyond our own individual circumstances. So again, I'll double down on what he said and just do your best to take care of yourself and each other. And if everyone does a little bit, every little bit counts, and the sooner we'll be out of this.

Captain Chris Lee We've been informed recently that in the December bid, Hong Kong layovers will start back up.

Captain Dave Chase The way we found out was a call from our Scheduling Chairman who'd seen it in the preliminary pairings for December. So it's important the pilots understand the Company made this decision without input from the Association. When the officers were informed, we immediately called for a meeting with flight management. We had a fairly productive meeting where they laid out parts of their plan. I would say that not all of their plan is fully formed. I find that concerning that the details are not ironed out. But the pairings are already being built at such a critical time of year for our business and during the middle of a global pandemic that we don't have ironclad procedures laid out and how we're going to handle the situations. But at the same time, it does require flexibility. It doesn't lend itself to a bargained solution because of the complexities and the individual desires of certain pilots. So we are approaching this cautiously and with concern. And I would ask all the pilots to stay tuned and we're going to be communicating. We were very clear with the company that if you're asking pilots to reenter this situation and you're going to make a decision that this is operationally safe and that you have a sound plan that you communicate the entire plan to the pilot group and those pilots that are forced to do that. Now, let's not forget, we have pilots who live in Hong Kong. We know that and family members, and we've implored them to include them in this plan. We feel it's very important that just because they live in Hong Kong, they're doing that in support of the corporation and that any type of movement of a pilot who's deemed a close contact or a medical positive should be taken into account the needs to move them out as well. I think that message was received.

Captain Bill Hubbell Another example of where they need to provide very crystal clear, black and white, plain-language guidance to what a pilot can expect when they are going to have them operate back into Hong Kong. This is exactly what we spoke of earlier. They have a great opportunity here and a responsibility to give the pilots the operational, the information they need to make good decisions when they go back into this situation.

First Officer Don Loepke And the one thing Captain Chase made very clear to the Company that we have not moved off our position, and that's that the quarantine facilities in Hong Kong that we experienced in the summer are in no way acceptable to the pilot group.

Captain Chris Lee Thanks, guys, for the update. Any final thoughts?

Captain Dave Chase Well, thank you, Chris. Without going back through everything we've just said, it's also peak. Normally we talk about the stress of missing out on some family events and flying a little tougher schedule. That's still here this year. And I want everybody to focus on taking care of themselves and their families. At the same time, we've been

pretty fortunate this year. We haven't faced some of the challenges other airlines have in terms of furloughs and some of those other things. And I'd ask each and every FedEx pilot and their family to consider giving a donation to the [FedEx pilots Charitable Fund](#) so please look out for that in the Positive Rate or find a way to give back. And we appreciate everything that our crew members do every day and the support we receive.

Captain Chris Lee Well, thanks again, and thanks for coming. If you have any questions, please go to our website, fdx.alpa.org, and utilize the [PDR link](#). As always, be safe out there and we'll see you next time.