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Guidance

Coronavirus (COVID-19): recreational general aviation

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Stay at home

- only go outside for food or health reasons or travelling to and from work, but only where you cannot work from home
- when outside, stay 2 metres (6 feet) away from other people
- wash your hands as soon as you get home

Recreational flying

Current government guidance on coronavirus precludes recreational GA flying.

This is being observed in practice by the vast majority of the GA community, and we are grateful to them for doing so. The message we are receiving from the GA community is that they fully appreciate the need for these restrictions, and observing them is being widely encouraged throughout the community. Again, we are grateful for this.

Because the directive to stay at home is being well observed, we do not perceive a need to introduce a specific ban on flying by visual flight rules (VFR) as seen in some European countries.

This will have the significant benefit of allowing flexibility, and allowing GA flights to resume as overarching restrictions on movement are lifted.

The above does not apply to search and rescue operations, or where it absolutely necessary to fly to, or for, work. In all of these activities, we expect public organisations and businesses to be socially responsible in the decisions they make, and to apply social distancing guidelines.

Maintenance workshops

Workshops which carry out essential maintenance are entitled to continue (in line with guidance regarding car workshops) provided PHE guidance is followed:

- follow social distancing advice (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-social-distancing-and-for-vulnerable-people/guidance-on-social-distancing-for-everyone-in-the-uk-and-protecting-older-people-and-vulnerable-adults>)
- frequently clean and disinfect objects and surfaces that are touched regularly (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-decontamination-in-non-healthcare-settings>), using your standard cleaning products

Return to business as usual

The general aviation sector is an important contributor to skills, jobs and growth. This government is committed to helping this important STEM sector back on its feet after restrictions are lifted.

The GA team in the Department for Transport is well aware of the structural threat this period of non-activity poses to recreational GA, including with regards to flight training (given that training flights are not currently possible due to directions on social distancing). We are therefore ramping up work to mitigate any long term negative consequences. Similarly, we are taking steps to ensure that when it is safe to do so, we will continue to fully support the GA sector.

As an example of this, we are supporting various GA stakeholders in their dialogue with the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) regarding extending both pilot medical deadlines, and developing short-term exemptions for those who would have required a flight with an instructor. The CAA's initial priority has been in developing these for professional pilots. They are now working on similar measures for private licence holders.

Risk of transmission

In some GA flights, the risk of transmission is undeniably negligible, for example where the flight is a solo flight, from a private airstrip, in which no ground travel is required to access the airstrip. Nevertheless, such flights should not take place, in light of the blanket nature of the directive above, and the risk of an accident resulting in the need for social distancing measures to be abandoned.

Air traffic management

Prior to the guidance to stay at home if possible, a large number of GA pilots were active.

This placed a strain on NATS, who are trying to limit the non-essential activities performed, including services to GA. This is to ensure the resilience of the critical air traffic management services while complying with current guidance by not having more people on site than necessary.

While most GA activity occurs in uncontrolled airspace, and therefore does not involve NATS, it is important to remember that, when GA activity resumes, it is likely that some restrictions will still be in place, and pilots should therefore be mindful of the strain their activity places on other essential services.

The lower airspace radar services which NATS provide are also offered on a when possible basis, so could be turned off if necessary. Similarly, access to Class D could also be simply refused by the relevant air navigation service provider.