

What you need to know: Airline cleanliness & hygiene: Middle East

November 24, 2020

In an effort to reassure travelers that they are doing all they can to protect them against COVID-19, airlines are implementing new and improved cleanliness and hygiene processes. In some cases, these measures may differ from the hygiene procedures implemented by individual airports.

This report summarizes what airlines in the Middle East have done.

Major carriers

Emirates

Emirates has implemented safety and hygiene measures to cover every step of a traveler's journey.¹

Check-in:

- Passengers using the chauffeur-drive service to arrive at the airport will need to wear a mask and possibly gloves too. Chauffeurs are similarly protected
- Passengers must pass through a thermal scanner to enter Dubai airport
- Check-in desks are fitted with protective antimicrobial screens
- Floor markers help everyone maintain a safe distance when queuing
- Every passenger receives a free hygiene kit comprising masks, gloves, antibacterial wipes and hand sanitizer
- Masks are mandatory within Dubai International Airport and on board Emirates' flights. Children under 6 years and passengers with certain medical conditions are exempt. Anyone in the latter group must complete a Medical Information Form (MEDIF) before the flight. Exemptions are normally granted only to passengers with cognitive, intellectual or sensory conditions and those with respiratory conditions
- Emirates' Business Class Lounge on Concourse B is open at Dubai; all other lounges globally are closed
- Lounge features floor markers, reduced capacity, QR code enabled menu ordering (First Class customers only). Washrooms are sanitized after each use and common touchpoints are frequently sanitized
- Blankets, pillows, newspapers and magazines have been removed

Boarding:

- Passengers board in small numbers by row starting from the back of the aircraft
- Boarding gates are deep cleaned and disinfected after each flight departure
- Boarding agents wear personal protective equipment (PPE)

On board:

- All cabin crew wear PPE. Emirates has added a cabin service assistant (CSA) to all flights over 1.5 hours to provide additional support. CSAs ensure toilets are cleaned every 45 minutes. Each toilet has hand sanitizing soap and hand washing instructions
- Printed reading material has been removed or replaced with single use material (menus)
- All comfort items (pillows, blankets, headphones) are hygienically sealed
- As hot meal service resumes, all cutlery and crockery will be sterilized

¹ [Emirates](#), Your safety is our highest priority

Aircraft:

- HEPA filters remove 99.97% of viruses and eliminate dust, allergens and germs
- After each journey, each aircraft undergoes enhanced cleaning and disinfection

Crew:

- Flight and cabin crew are transported by car to and from the airport
- Layovers in destination cities have been reduced
- On return to Dubai, all crew are tested for COVID-19. All crew members are mandated a 14-day quarantine at home after every flight, unless they are on duty

COVID-19 insurance

For travel up to October 31, 2020, Emirates offered free COVID-19 insurance for all passengers on its own flights and those of its codeshare partners.² Working with Allianz Partners member NEXTRCARE Claims Management, Emirates COVID-19 Assistance covered medical expenses of up to €150,000 (\$176,000) and quarantine costs of €100 per day for 14 days should passengers be diagnosed with COVID-19 during travel. Assistance was automatically effective from the first flown flight and valid for 31 days. Passengers were not required to use the service. Settlement was made directly with hospitals, with no direct payments made to passengers.

From December 1, 2020, Emirates automatically applied a new multi-risk travel insurance to all tickets, including those operated by partner airlines.³ Provided by AIG Travel, benefits of the cover include:

- Up to \$500,000 for overseas medical expenses and emergency evacuation
- Up to \$7,500 if a trip is cancelled due to contracting COVID-19 or for other reasons named in the policy
- Up to \$7,500 if a trip is cancelled or cut short if the school year is extended due to COVID-19 beyond the departure date, and the traveler or a relative is a full-time teacher, full-time employee, or a student at a primary or secondary school
- Up to \$7,500 if a trip is cut short due to the traveler or a relative falling ill overseas, including contracting COVID-19, and must return home
- Up to \$7,500 if the traveler abandons their trip for failing a COVID-19 test or airport medical screening
- \$150 per day, per person for up to 14 consecutive days if the traveler tests positive for COVID-19 and is unexpectedly placed into mandatory quarantine while overseas

Cover is valid for the duration of the trip, up to 365 days. For one-way trips, cover ends 48 hours after arrival at the final destination. Cover for emergency medical expenses and overseas quarantine allowance expire 31 days after arrival at final destination.

Etihad Airways

Etihad is taking extra steps to make sure passengers feel safe and well when traveling with the airline.⁴ It has enhanced cleaning procedures, provides complimentary wellness kits on board its aircraft and has set up a team of Wellness Ambassadors, who are available 24/7 to answer questions and share advice. Etihad has made a COVID-19 test mandatory before travel and includes COVID-19 global wellness insurance in every ticket.

² Cirium, July 28, 2020

³ [Emirates](#), Multi-risk travel insurance

⁴ [Etihad Airways](#), Etihad Wellness

COVID-19 tests

All passengers must take a COVID-19 PCR test not more than 96 hours before the flight departure time at a government accredited medical facility. Timings may differ for some destinations, while travelers flying from India and Pakistan must use a medical facility approved by Etihad. Exemptions from the testing requirement vary by destination.

Etihad has teamed up with private hospital group Mediclinic Middle East to offer its U.A.E.-based passengers a COVID-19 testing service in their own homes before travel. After booking an Etihad flight, passengers can arrange for a PCR swab test, with results back within 24 hours.

Only passengers with a negative result may check in for their flight.⁵ They should bring the test result with them for the entire trip. It must be presented at check-in for validation.

From August 1, 2020, all travelers flying with Etihad to Abu Dhabi, including transfer passengers, must provide a negative COVID-19 PCR test from a list of approved testing facilities along with their Identity and Citizenship (ICA) approval before flying.⁶ The test must be carried out within 96 hours before arrival in Abu Dhabi, with a negative certificate required to be able to fly. Passengers may also present their test result via the Al Hosn app.

Keeping passengers safe

Etihad provides passenger advice and has implemented a number of measures to keep passengers safe:

- Passengers should stay up to date with the latest travel advice and information
- Changes to the airport and onboard experience help promote social distancing
- Aircraft cabins have been refreshed with new seat covers and carpets
- Aircraft are equipped with HEPA filters capturing 99% of airborne microbes
- All aircraft are deep cleaned and sanitized after arrival at each destination
- Staff wear face masks and personal protective equipment at all times
- Extra deep cleaning and sanitization has been introduced at every stage in the passenger journey
- As they board the aircraft, passengers receive a Wellness Kit consisting of a face mask, gloves and hand gel
- Airport lounges have reopened only after enhanced safety measures have been introduced
- Transfer buses, coaches and cars are deep-cleaned and sanitized after every trip
- Meals are prepared in catering facilities subjected to rigorous hygiene testing.
- All onboard magazines have been removed to limit touchpoints within the aircraft

COVID-19 insurance

In September 2020, Etihad teamed up with insurance company Axa to offer free COVID-19 coverage to customers in the event that they contract the virus when they travel. All Etihad tickets, regardless of date of booking, for flights up to March 31, 2021, automatically include COVID-19 global wellness insurance cover.⁷ It's valid worldwide for 31 days from the first day of travel, covering up to €150,000 of medical expenses and up to €100 per day of quarantine cost for 14 days, should passengers be diagnosed with COVID-19.

⁵ Cirium, July 13, 2020

⁶ [Business Travel News](#), July 27, 2020

⁷ [Etihad Airways](#), COVID-19 global wellness insurance cover

Qatar Airways

Qatar Airways states that the safety, security and good health of its passengers and employees is its highest priority.⁸ The airline works closely with global and national authorities to implement the latest advice and guidance on COVID-19.

Aircraft are disinfected regularly as part of the normal cleaning process. Since September 2020, the airline has been using the Honeywell Ultraviolet Cabin System to treat aircraft seats and surfaces with UV light, which can inactivate certain viruses and bacteria.⁹ Qatar Airways has so far deployed six of the catering trolley-sized devices for use on all aircraft turnarounds at Doha.

Staff are trained in the latest hygiene protocols and cleaning procedures, using products recommended by IATA (International Air Transport Association) and WHO (World Health Organization). As it operates a modern fleet, many aircraft feature air filtration systems equipped with industrial-size HEPA filters capable of removing 99.97% of viral and bacterial contaminants from recirculated air.

All linen and blankets are washed at 90 degrees centigrade and pressed at 100 degrees. Cleaned items are handled wearing gloves and sealed into individual packaging. Headsets are carefully refurbished and sanitized, and then repacked by staff wearing hygienic disposable vinyl gloves.

Certified to ISO22000:2018 level by Bureau Veritas, Qatar Airways claims its catering facilities meet the highest standards. All utensils and cutlery are washed with detergents and rinsed with demineralized fresh water at temperatures that kill pathogenic bacteria. All sanitized equipment is handled by staff wearing hygienic disposable gloves, while cutlery is individually repacked.

In addition to face masks or coverings, economy class passengers must also wear face shields provided by the airline. Both must be worn throughout the flight, except during drink and meal services. Business class passengers are asked to wear the face shields at their own discretion, as they enjoy more space and privacy. All passengers receive a free protective kit comprising a single-use surgical face mask, large disposable gloves and an alcohol-based hand sanitizer gel. Face shields are handed out at check-in at Doha or at the gate at other airports.

Turkish Airlines

The safety and wellbeing of passengers and crew are Turkish Airlines' utmost priority.¹⁰

Staff have been briefed and trained on the measures needed to protect against COVID-19.¹¹ Any crew operating international services can be medically tested, if needed. On the advice of the Republic of Turkey Ministry of Health Science Committee, the number of masks, gloves and disinfectants available for flight and cabin crew has been increased.

After completing each flight, Turkish Airlines' aircraft undergo a thorough cleaning process in compliance with national and international civil aviation authority guidelines. Where there is found to be a potentially sick passenger onboard, the aircraft will be disinfected using chemicals approved by the World Health Organization. The passenger is referred to the health authority at the destination.

⁸ [Qatar Airways](#), COVID-19 (Coronavirus) Update

⁹ [Business Travel News](#), September 28, 2020

¹⁰ [Turkish Airlines](#), CEO statement, March 10, 2020

¹¹ [Turkish Airlines](#), Measures implemented against COVID-19

A special four-person team cleans all aircraft using disinfectants, giving attention to frequently touched surfaces in the aircraft cabin, including overhead bins, tray tables, armrests, seatbelt buckles and inflight entertainment screens. The same cleaning processes are applied to onboard toilets. All blankets, linen, headrest covers, bed sheets and headsets are replaced after each flight. During the flight, cabin air is refreshed 15 to 30 times per hour, filtered through hospital-grade HEPA systems.

Turkish Airlines has issued the following advice and support to travelers:¹²

Before the flight:

- Passengers are recommended to check in online
- Because of the extra time needed to navigate COVID-19 measures, passengers should arrive at the airport at least 3 hours before departure
- Other than personal items and valuables, all cabin baggage must be checked in
- Bring masks and hand wipes, ensuring enough masks to change every four hours
- Bring a personal waste bag for used masks

At the airport

- Wearing a mask is mandatory from the airport entrance
- Markers ensure a 1.5 meter physical distance is maintained
- Hand sanitizer stations are located throughout airports
- Body temperatures will be checked before boarding
- Screens protect staff at counters and service points
- All staff at the airport wear masks and other personal protective equipment
- Contactless check-in and baggage drop is available at most airports

Boarding

- Before each flight, crew have their temperatures checked and are provided with masks, gloves and personal protective equipment for in-flight use
- Masks must be worn when boarding
- Passengers board in small groups and must maintain physical distancing
- Aircraft are boarded from the last row

On board

- After each flight, all contact points, including tray tables, armrests, seatbelts, screens, side panels, windows, toilets, partitions, magazine racks and cabinets are thoroughly disinfected by special cleaning teams
- Aircraft are disinfected using a two-stage fogging process
- HEPA filters remove 99.97% of all particles
- Cabin air is constantly cleaned and renewed every 3 minutes
- Cabin crew on each flight include a Hygiene Expert, in charge of toilet disinfection and enforcement of all on-board hygiene and social distancing measures
- Mask wearing is mandatory, and masks should be changed every 4 hours
- Each passenger receives a hygiene kit consisting of a mask, an antiseptic tissue and hand sanitizer
- Pillow service has been discontinued while blankets are only available on flights of 4 hours or longer
- Printed publications are no longer carried on-board flights
- The Planet inflight entertainment system includes an “About COVID-19” section
- The “Companion” app allows travelers to control Planet content using their mobile phones

¹² [Turkish Airlines](#), Guidelines for safe travel

Disembarking

- Disembarkation is performed via air bridges. When transfer buses are used, social distancing measures will be applied
- Passengers disembark in groups of ten, with a 2 minute interval between each group
- New regulations ensure social distancing at baggage reclaim

Other airlines

El Al

The safety and hygiene changes that El Al has made are largely governed by instructions and guidelines issued by Israel's Ministry of Health.

At the airport (Tel Aviv)

- Only passengers may enter the airport terminal
- Passengers may only enter the terminal within 4 hours of departure
- Temperatures will be checked at the airport entrance
- Passengers must present a completed "State of a passenger departing from Israel" certificate at check-in
- A wristband may need to be worn to confirm passengers have been checked
- Face masks should be worn at all times
- Passengers must maintain a 2 meter physical distance
- All airport lounges are closed

On board

- Aircraft are thoroughly cleaned and disinfected
- Crew are equipped with protective equipment throughout the flight, including protective outer wear, gloves and a face mask
- Crew may not help passengers with their hand luggage
- Passengers receive a hygiene kit including a mask, antiseptic wipes and gel
- Wearing a mask is mandatory for all passengers over 6 years old, except when eating and/or drinking
- Disposable face masks should be replaced every 4 hours and discarded in a waste bag in the galley area
- Passenger should observe social distancing rules, try to remain seated and avoid crowding in the aisles, galleys and toilet areas
- Meals are served using disposable items
- On flights to North America, blankets and pillows are distributed to all passengers, but only those traveling in business and premium class receive them on flights to other destinations

Gulf Air

Bahrain's national carrier Gulf Air provides the following advice and support to passengers to enjoy they can travel safely.

Before the flight:

- Pack a personal hygiene kit containing several sets of masks and gloves
- Arrive at the airport at least 3 hours before the flight
- Do not travel if experiencing COVID-19 symptoms

At the airport

- Passengers should wear face masks and may have their temperatures checked

- As online check-in is disabled, passengers must keep 2 meters apart when queuing at check-in
- Lounges at Bahrain, Dubai and London have been closed
- Passengers should arrive at the departure gate early, where they will board aircraft by zones

On board

- Gulf Air complies with IATA's disinfectant procedures inside its aircraft
- Cabin crew are dressed in protective gear throughout the flight
- All aircraft are equipped with HEPA air filters
- Inflight dining menu reduced with meals available in disposable packages with disposable cutlery
- Newspapers and magazine have been withdrawn from all flights
- Pillows, blankets, mattresses and bedsheets are no longer available
- Hot and cold towels service is not available
- To help with social distancing, Gulf Air tries to modify seat arrangements when possible

Kuwait Airways

The safety, security and good health of its passengers and employees are Kuwait Airways' highest priorities.¹³ The airline has implemented extensive cleaning, disinfecting and sanitizing processes for all aircraft between flights. Its new fleet is equipped with the latest advanced air filtration systems, protecting against infection on board.

As precautionary measures, Kuwait Airways recommends passengers check in online, wear face masks while at the airport and on board flights, maintain social distancing and arrive at the airport at least 4 hours before scheduled departure.

Middle East Airlines (MEA)

In response to COVID-19, MEA has put in place new health measures to ensure the comfort and wellbeing of passengers. It also provides guidance and recommendations to passengers.

Before the flight:

- Passengers are advised to review the entry requirements of their destination and the measures and regulations at all airports in their itinerary
- MEA strongly recommends passengers check-in online or via its app
- Passengers should fill out the passenger locator forms requested by the authorities
- Check-in all luggage except small hand baggage able to fit under the seat
- Bring enough masks for the journey, replacing them every four hours

At the airport:

- Passengers must wear a face mask at all times while at the airport
- Passengers should bring their own hand sanitizer to disinfect surfaces
- Physical distance at 1.5 m at all times
- Protective panes have been installed at all counters
- Capacity has been reduced at MEA's Cedar and Beirut lounges. Catering has been modified

On board:

- Passengers are boarded by row sequence, starting from the rear of the aircraft
- Face masks must be worn throughout the flight and changed every four hours

¹³ [Kuwait Airways](#), COVID-19 Updates

- Passengers should bring their own hand sanitizer on board
- All aircraft are equipped with HEPA air filters
- Cabins are thoroughly cleaned and disinfected frequently

On arrival:

- MEA asks passengers to be considerate when disembarking and maintain social distancing
- Passengers should review and observe each destination's entry requirements

Oman Air

Ahead of the October 1, 2020, resumption of international services, Oman Air introduced a safety program applying throughout the journey to ensure that guests can fly with confidence.¹⁴ From check-in to boarding the aircraft and during the flight, Oman Air has enhanced preventative procedures and measures to protect passengers and crew. It has issued the following passenger safety guidelines:

- Passengers must submit a Health Declaration Form, available during self-check-in and at the airport, in electronic and printed formats
- Passengers must report to the airport at least 3 hours before their flight
- In most cases, only passengers are allowed to enter the airport
- People assisting passengers with disabilities are allowed to enter the airport
- Passengers' temperatures will be taken at all airports in Oman. Thermal screening will be conducted, and measures will be taken to ensure social distancing.
- Passengers are required to wear masks on all Oman Air flights
- To reduce inter-personal contact, online check-in, fast bag-drop and electronic boarding passes are available for passengers' use

Pegasus Airlines

Turkish low-cost carrier Pegasus has taken a number of precautionary measures against COVID-19.¹⁵ These include:

- Enhanced and more frequent cleaning and disinfection of all aircraft
- Regular replacement of headrest covers
- Public Health Passenger Inform Forms are handed out by cabin crew to all international passengers
- All flights carry protective masks for use by Pegasus cabin crew and passengers

Royal Jordanian

Regarding passenger safety as its top priority, Royal Jordanian has made some changes and makes some recommendations to keep travelers safe and well:¹⁶

At the airport

- Passengers should check in online to reduce social interaction at the airport
- Passengers should arrive at the airport at least 3 hours before departure
- Carry-on baggage is not allowed, but passengers may still bring on board valuable items, electronic devices and medication
- New self-check-in machines are being installed, with more drop off baggage counters added

¹⁴ [Oman Air](#), COVID-19 Safety Measures

¹⁵ [Pegasus Airlines](#), March 11, 2020

¹⁶ [MEA](#), Travel Guidelines

- Passengers must undergo all medical checks required by local authorities and face mandatory thermal screening at check in
- Spaced seating and a la carte dining has been introduced at the Royal Jordanian Crown Lounge at Amman's Queen Alia International Airport

On the plane

- All passengers must wear face masks
- Onboard services have been reduced to limit contact
- Blankets, pillows, magazines and newspapers are no longer available
- Crew has been trained to deal with suspected COVID-19 cases
- Aircraft are subject to enhanced disinfection, sanitization and deep cleaning before and after every flight
- Toilets more frequently cleaned
- A prepackaged catering offering for Economy class passengers, with a revised catering service with reduced contact developed for Crown class passengers

Note – HEPA filters

When outlining their safety and hygiene measures, many airlines refer to the use of HEPA filters onboard their aircraft. According to the European air filter efficiency classification, high efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filters can be any filter element rated between 85% and 99.995% removal efficiency.¹⁷ Aircraft manufacturers have chosen to install the higher efficiency filters, which are similar to those used in hospital operating theaters. Most modern, large commercial aircraft, which recirculate cabin air, use HEPA filters. Some older aircraft may use less-efficient filters.

Air filters can remove very small particles, such as bacteria and viruses. With an efficiency level of 99.995%, HEPA filters can remove virtually all viruses and bacteria.

Note

The COVID-19 situation is rapidly evolving, and the situation is changing on almost an hourly basis. The information presented in this report represents the latest view as at November 24, 2020. We have carefully researched and checked the information contained. However, we do not guarantee or warrant the correctness, completeness or topicality of this article and do not accept any liability for any damage or loss as a result of the use of the information contained within this article.

Do you have questions or comments regarding this report? Please email mike.eggleton@bcdtravel.co.uk to share your thoughts.

¹⁷ [IATA](#), Briefing Paper, Cabin air quality – Risk of communicable disease transmission