

Policy on HLE-ASI Reduced Length Compulsory Isolation

Aims

To reduce or to remove the requirement for isolation / quarantine for travellers starting their journey from St Helena upon arrival at Ascension, whilst ensuring that the risk from COVID-19 remains effectively managed.

This policy refers to the following cohorts:

- UK-originating passengers travelling to St Helena (**UK–HLE passengers**);
- UK-originating passengers travelling to Ascension via St Helena (**UK–ASI passengers**);
- St Helena-originating passengers travelling to Ascension (**HLE–ASI passengers**);
- Ascension-originating passengers travelling to St Helena, including those who may be transiting St Helena en route to another destination (**ASI–HLE passengers**);
- Cabin crew.

This policy does not affect:

- the management of compulsory isolation in Ascension of non HLE – ASI passengers;
- the management in St Helena of UK-HLE passengers.

Background

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic both Ascension and St Helena have instigated robust measures to manage arrivals. These measures have been developed to prevent COVID-19 being introduced into the wider community. To do this, both Islands require all arrivals to spend a period in isolation / quarantine following their arrival. In doing so, both communities have been effective in preventing community spread and acquired COVID-19 occurring.

Motivations

Around three in every five people (61%) in Ascension has St Helenian status. As a result, the link between the two islands is important, both socially and economically.

Ascension is a working island with limited leisure options. Therefore off island leave, especially time spent with friends and family, is important for the health and wellbeing of those based in Ascension. The requirement for arrivals to observe a period of compulsory isolation also has a financial impact on Ascension employers who have to factor this time into their overall workforce planning. Whereas some employers currently do not treat time spent in isolation / quarantine as leave, other employers are treating this as leave, which conversely impacts their staff.

There are therefore clear social and economic benefits to reducing or removing the requirement for isolation on arrival at Ascension for HLE-ASI passengers, so long as it is done in a way that continues to manage effectively the risk of COVID-19 introduction to the community.

Principles

A decision to reduce the length of compulsory isolation, or to remove the requirement, must take account of the following principles:

1. The change to the compulsory isolation requirement does not increase the risk to the wider community from COVID-19;
2. The process of managing arrivals remains robust, observing agreed protocols to mitigate effectively the potential risk from COVID-19 in a precautionary way, until the Senior Medical Officer (SMO) is satisfied that no COVID-19 infection or contamination is likely to have occurred in transit.

Assumptions

The COVID-19 pandemic remains ongoing and poses a significant threat to the Ascension community.

Both Ascension and St Helena will continue to observe effective isolation / quarantine procedures for arrivals that have arrived from an affected area (e.g. UK).

Both territories will remain free from community spread of COVID-19. Should a territory have a case spread into the community (e.g. not someone currently undergoing isolation following arrival), then it is assumed that those departing the territory which has community spread will be treated as if they had arrived from an affected area and when arriving in the other territory.

Robust in-flight procedures will be implemented and strictly observed to manage infection / contamination risk from aircrew and passengers who have travelled from an affected area.

Measures to be applied to arrival cohorts

Cohort and route	Action
UK to Ascension (UK-ASI)	UK-ASI passengers to be separated from HLE-ASI pre-departure at terminal in St Helena and on the plane. Tested on arrival. Complete isolation / quarantine in accordance with current policy regardless of COVID-19 test results. This action is for risk reduction purposes.
UK to St Helena (UK-HLE)	As per St Helena's <i>Quarantine and Testing Policy</i> .
St Helena to Ascension (HLE-ASI)	Isolated on arrival for initial period whilst UK-ASI passengers and crew are tested. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If all UK-ASI passengers and crew results negative; released. - If any positive results from UK-ASI passengers and crew; all arriving passengers to remain in compulsory isolation in accordance with current policy (i.e. no early release).
Ascension to St Helena (ASI-HLE)	All passengers on the flight must have been on Ascension for 14 days prior to travel.
Crew	Tested on arrival to Ascension. This action is for risk reduction purposes.

Justification

The two legs of the inter-island service have different risk profiles due to the different cohorts of passengers on board each, that being:

HLE – ASI: UK-ASI passengers and HLE-ASI passengers

ASI – HLE: ASI-HLE passengers only

Both flights will have a crew which has travelled from the UK (currently an affected area) within the last 72 hours. As such actions are necessary in order to manage effectively the risk posed by any passengers who began their journey in the UK and by the crew.

In order to establish whether it is safe to permit HLE-ASI passengers to undergo a reduced period of compulsory isolation in Ascension, both the UK-ASI passengers and crew will be tested upon arrival at Ascension. Any positive results will lead to the continuation of compulsory isolation for all passengers who have arrived at Ascension (including HLE-ASI passengers) for a period determined by the SMO in accordance with current policy as outlined in AIGs *Policy on the Isolation on Arrival of Persons Travelling from Affected Areas*. This is because there is a risk that a positive person aboard the flight (person A) has the potential to infect / contaminate others aboard (person B), even if prior to the flight they (person B) had travelled from a territory free from COVID-19.

If results of tests on UK-ASI passengers and crew are negative, this will also provide assurance to St Helena authorities that there is no risk of COVID-19 exposure from ASI-HLE passengers upon their arrival at St Helena.

If a positive test result amongst the crew is returned, assuming they are fit to fly the air operator's procedures are to be followed. This will see the crew member put on appropriate PPE and be completely segregated from the ASI-HLE passengers and crew on board the flight. If the individual is not fit to fly then they will receive appropriate treatment at Georgetown Hospital.

Standard operating procedure (SOP)

Processing of passengers at St Helena Airport

1. Transit passengers from the UK will arrive after the St Helena passengers have been checked in and will proceed *through Security and Immigration* to the business lounge.
2. *Should the check-in process for St Helena passengers be on-going the Transit passenger will be kept segregated until all St Helena passengers have cleared security and immigration.*
3. They will then board the aircraft **first**, before the St Helena passengers. They will be seated in the rear of the aircraft separate from the other passengers. On Ascension they will be the **last** passengers to disembark.

All passengers on arrival

4. All passengers arriving on Ascension will initially be served with a CV08 notice (compulsory isolation) and will be briefed to undergo compulsory isolation in accordance with this notice.

HLE-ASI passengers

5. On arrival of the flight to Ascension, HLE-ASI passengers will disembark **first**, before UK-ASI passengers. They will be processed through arrivals within the terminal building, served with a CV08 notice (compulsory isolation), briefed to undergo compulsory isolation in accordance with this notice and will be transported to their compulsory isolation facilities as per the normal arrivals process.
6. Thereafter they will be transported to their compulsory isolation facility pending the outcome of arrival testing on the UK-ASI passengers and crew.
 - a. Passengers may remain in a secure facility at the airhead whilst they await the results COVID-19 testing on the other passengers and crew, rather than immediately travelling to their designated isolation accommodation.
 - b. Compulsory isolation facilities and support arrangements must be prepared and be suitable to accommodate a full isolation period if required.
 - c. Should the initial compulsory isolation facility be a shared (bubble) facility, as per the usual process and at the direction of the SMO it will be permissible to move passengers into single or family isolation, should this be required (e.g. if an individual within that bubble returns a positive result).

UK-ASI passengers

7. Once the HLE-ASI passengers have been processed, the UK-ASI passengers will disembark **last** and proceed to the terminal building for immediate arrival testing by the GTH medical team. This group will remain within the outside waiting area until called forward into the facility **after** the HLE-ASI passengers have departed the airhead.

In terms of timing, it is an essential requirement that contact between the HLE-ASI and UK-ASI passengers is avoided.

8. The UK-ASI passengers will be served with a CV08 notice (compulsory isolation), will be briefed to undergo compulsory isolation in accordance with this notice and will be transported to their compulsory isolation facilities as per the normal arrivals process.

Cabin crew

9. At the same time, by agreement with the airline, the RAF Medical team will conduct arrival tests on the cabin crew. This will be done at the aircraft, and the crew will remain on board the aircraft during this process.
 - d. These tests will be performed expeditiously using the lateral flow technique.
 - e. The results of these tests will be communicated to the crew and authorities on St Helena **before** the aircraft departs Ascension.

Return of negative test results from those tested

10. Once the arrival tests for the UK-ASI passengers and crew have been processed and if negative results are returned, the SMO will grant permission for HLE-ASI

passengers' compulsory isolation to end. The SMO, or GTH staff, will communicate this to SHPD officers verbally and follow-up in writing / by email.

11. On the instruction of the SMO, HLE-ASI passengers will be contacted by the SHPD and informed that they may leave isolation. When doing so, the SHPD will be required to record this on the CV09(DI), This process is estimated to require between 2-4 hours to complete.

Identification of a COVID-19 positive result

12. In the event that a crew member tests positive:

- f. A positive test will be confirmed immediately by GTH staff using either a second lateral flow, or a PCR test.
 - i. If the crew member is well and displays no symptoms, they will be placed in complete isolation from the passengers and other crew, wearing appropriate PPE, for the flight back to St Helena. The airline will follow their established protocols for this eventuality.
 - ii. In the event that a crew member displays symptoms, the situation will be managed in consultation with the airline in the best interests of the crew member involved.
- g. GTH to contact AIG Administrator, AIG Policy Officer, MOD Flight Ops, SHPD.
- h. In the event that a crew member tests positive, embarking ASI-HLE passengers will be informed by SHPD officers, supported by GTH medical staff, at the airhead. The passengers will be fully advised about the airline's mitigation measures that are in place and will be asked if they still want to travel on the flight.
- i. SHPD staff will telephone HR points of contact for each employing organisation and ask that they cascade the fact of the positive result to any of their staff and dependants that arrived on flight. This will then be followed with an email to HR points of contact confirming the positive result.
- j. SHPD officers will contact each disembarked HLE-ASI passenger to inform them of the positive result, and that they are now required to remain in isolation for a period determined by the SMO.

13. In the event that a UK-ASI passenger tests positive:

- k. A positive test will be confirmed immediately using a second PCR test.
- l. As a UK-ASI passenger, the individual will already be under isolation protocols and their situation will be assessed by GTH medical staff.
- m. GTH to contact AIG Administrator, AIG Policy Officer, MOD Flight Ops, SHPD and *Heads of Sheds*.

- n. SHPD staff will telephone HR point of contacts for each employing organisation and ask that they cascade the fact of the positive result to any of their staff and dependants that arrived on the flight. This will then be followed with an email to HR points of contact confirming the positive result.
- o. SHPD officers will contact each disembarked HLE-ASI passenger to inform them of the positive result, and that they are now required to remain in isolation for a period determined by the SMO.