



# SAFETY BULLETIN

## "Food and Hygiene"

Cabin crew play a crucial role in creating an airline's image to the customer. It is, therefore, important for the service delivered by cabin crew to meet airline management's expected quality standards. Equally important is the need for cabin crew to ensure that food and beverages served on board meet the highest standards of hygiene and safety

### 1. Acceptance of Catering Supplies on Aircraft

Effective interaction between the caterer and cabin crew is particularly important. The Senior Cabin Crew Member (SCCM) acts as the interface with the caterer and should supervise the delivery of catering supplies onto the aircraft. It is important that the cabin crew be informed of the type of service (e.g., full uplift, top-up, etc.) and what is being delivered on board, so that they are in a position to ensure that the delivery corresponds to the Airline Catering Order (ACO). In cases when a full service is not carried out, the SCCM should be responsible for checking on missing supplies and communicating to the local station or caterer (as appropriate) regarding any additional items required.

The caterer should hand over to the SCCM a delivery sheet containing details of the meals uplifted and ensure that:

- ◆ Each item is placed in the correct location (this will vary depending on the aircraft, airline and flight involved);
- ◆ Food is well sealed and has been sufficiently protected against heat, dust and insects during loading;
- ◆ The time interval between when food was taken out of the refrigerator and loaded onto the aircraft remains within acceptable limits.

### 2. Crew Briefings

In order to ensure the smooth running of the inflight food service, it is recommended that the SCCM review the service plans for the flight with the crew, including:

- ◆ Time schedule for the meal service;
- ◆ Special meal requirements;
- ◆ Flight deck service;
- ◆ Crew meals.

### 3. Meal and Beverage Service to the Flight Crew

Airlines should establish a clear policy for serving meals and beverages to the flight crew in accordance with aviation regulations, as applicable. To prevent the remote possibility of both pilots being incapacitated at the same time, it is recommended that the PIC and other flight crew not eat the same meal at the same time, and avoid certain types of foods that are particularly liable to cause gastro-intestinal symptoms (e.g., shellfish, crustaceans, etc.) .

Beverages should be served separately from the meal in order to avoid spillage. No alcoholic beverages should be served to anyone in the flight deck at any time.

### 4. Food Safety and Hygiene

Food is responsible for the transmission of a large number of diseases. The subject of food sanitation and hygiene is sufficiently important that international health regulations govern the storing and handling of food. Various parties are involved in that responsibility and have an important role to play:

- ◆ National health administrations;
- ◆ Local health authorities;
- ◆ Airline catering companies;
- ◆ Airlines;
- ◆ Aircraft manufacturers;
- ◆ Catering equipment manufacturers.

It is important to recognize that, in view of the millions of passengers now travelling by air each year, the incidence of food-borne infections and allied disorders is remarkably small due to the vigilance of airlines and their catering departments and suppliers.

#### 4.1 Hygiene and Sanitation

The World Health Organization (WHO) *Guide to Hygiene and Sanitation* was developed with the cooperation of IATA

#### 4.2 Risks and Prevention

Poor hygiene or unsatisfactory disposal of food wastes can result in the contamination of food and, thus, influence safety on board, either directly or indirectly, in the following ways:

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- ♦ Sudden incapacitation or collapse of a member of the crew resulting from a short incubation type of food poisoning due to bacterial toxins;
- ♦ Subtle incapacitation of one member of the crew at a critical phase of flight, as may occur in cases where there is toxemia prior to the onset of gastro-intestinal symptoms (i.e., food poisoning);
- ♦ A suspected outbreak of acute food poisoning affecting a significant number of passengers; while in itself is a minimal safety risk, the scenario may influence the flight crew to divert to an alternative airport.

It is, therefore, essential that anyone engaged in the provision or handling of aircraft food be properly trained. Cabin crew should be trained in the proper safety, hygiene and handling of inflight food and meet the following minimum standards:

- ♦ Company regulations and procedures;
- ♦ Essentials of food hygiene;
- ♦ Risks and precautions;
- ♦ Health requirements of cabin crew;
- ♦ Cabin galley features and use of all equipment;
- ♦ Use of protective clothing;
- ♦ Code of practice in handling food, cooking times, chilling, etc.;
- ♦ Personal hygiene;
- ♦ Special meals;
- ♦ Airline Catering Orders (ACO);
- ♦ Acceptance of the delivery of food onto the aircraft;
- ♦ How to deal with cases of food poisoning.

### 5. Personal Hygiene

Cabin crew should follow the same code of practice as food handlers on the ground. Prior to commencing food service, hands should always be washed with soap (preferably a non-perfumed liquid soap solution from a dispenser) and plenty of warm water. In addition, they should wash their hands again if they have handled any article likely to be contaminated (e.g., an airsickness bag, waste, lavatories, etc.). Hands should be dried with a disposable towel: clothing should never be used to dry hands. Cabin crew should never touch food directly and handle only the trays and containers. Fingers should not be placed inside cups or glasses, and cutlery should be picked up only by the handle. Cabin crew with visible cuts/lesions should cover them with a waterproof dressing that is replaced regularly to keep clean. Crew should never sneeze or cough over food, utensils or galley working surfaces.

It is recommended that all cabin crew should be medically screened before employment. Airlines should give cabin crew the responsibility of confirming that they are in good health when signing on for duty, particularly when a staff member has suffered from sickness related to a gastro-intestinal disease or other food-related disease.

The SCCM should supervise other cabin crew to ensure that they are following food safety and hygiene procedures.

### 6. Delayed Flights

In the case of unexpected delays, after the food has been loaded onto the aircraft, the length of the delay will determine the course of action to be taken.

The responsibility for determining the course of action will depend on individual airline policies and the prevailing circumstances. However, once the crew has accepted a delivery of food, it becomes the responsibility of the airline. In the event of a delay of several hours, and if cabin crew have any doubts as to safety of the food, the caterer should be asked to examine the food and, if necessary, arrange for off-loading of the food and re-catering of the flight with completely fresh meals.

### 7. Suspected Food Poisoning

In the event a passenger or crew member becomes ill during the flight due to suspected food poisoning, a Medical Incident Report form should be completed. Cabin crew should be appropriately trained in dealing with such cases.

### 8. Special Cleaning

There are occasions when special cleaning is needed during a flight (e.g., when a sick passenger soils seats or carpets). This sickness might be the result of an infection and, apart from the nuisance caused to other passengers, there might be a health hazard. Since a major cleaning, involving the replacement of soiled seat covers cannot be undertaken until arrival at the next airport, the cabin crew should be supplied with appropriate materials to decontaminate the area. Where possible, passengers should be re-seated. Crew should contact the next airport of call to arrange for special cleaning beforehand. Thus, any delays can be minimized.

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## 9. Insects

Insects are a source of contamination, and one of the most common foreign objects found in aircraft meals. Cabin crew should keep a careful watch for insects and report their presence on board immediately to the PIC. Local regulations and individual airline policies will determine the action to be taken in this respect

## 10. Special Meals

A passenger's special meal needs should be handled at the time of reservation, and reflected on the PIL. The cabin crew should be familiar with the characteristics of the different meal types in order to be able to identify such meals and respond appropriately to passenger needs.

Special meals should be identified by the caterer by attaching a special meal tag or label to the cart or container that the meals are in. The number and types of special meals are listed on the Aircraft Catering Order (ACO). Crew should verify that the appropriate numbers of meals have been delivered and the passenger's name and seat number correspond to the information provided on the PIL.

## 11. Galley Equipment and Hygiene

Food is stored in the galleys which vary depending on the size and type of aircraft. Cabin crew should be trained in the proper use of all galley equipment in use on the aircraft.

It is the responsibility of cabin crew to ensure that the galley, equipment and utensils are kept clean and organized during the flight, including:

- ◆ Galley tops;
- ◆ Stowage drawers and units.

Used items (e.g., glasses, trays, etc.) should be kept separate from clean items at all times.

Galley checks must be performed during flight preparation. Cabin crew should identify and report any defective galley equipment immediately. It should be off-loaded, repaired and returned to service as soon as possible.

## 12 . Potable Water and Ice

Airlines should take into account the length of the flight and ensure that there is sufficient potable water on board. The quality standards and sanitary regulations regarding the potable water systems on board aircraft are published by the World Health Organization (WHO).

Only ice cubes manufactured from potable water and delivered to the aircraft in sealed polyethylene bags should be put into drinks. Broken block ice should only be used for chilling bottles and cans. Ice should be served by proper tongs, and never handled by hand.

### 12.1 IATA Drinking-Water Quality Pool

The IATA Drinking-Water Quality Pool (IDQP) was created by a number of airlines to share audits on drinking water quality around the world. The IDQP also developed its own procedures for conducting airfield inspections, using the highest quality standards.

Benefits include:

- ◆ Safeguards the on-board health of passengers and crew by using the highest standards to ensure water quality;
- ◆ Avoids multiple audits of the same provider at the same location;
- ◆ Promotes substantial financial savings from reductions of airport inspection workloads and associated costs.

To avoid illnesses, all water for drinking and other personal use made available to crew and passengers must be free from harmful chemical substances and micro-organisms. The WHO and local authorities have, therefore, issued sanitary requirements for the chlorination and handling of potable water.

## 13. Feedback from Passengers and Crew

Cabin crew are able to provide valuable feedback regarding their airline catering service. Should a passenger or crew member have a comment regarding any item of food, cabin crew should be encouraged to complete a report providing details. In the event of a complaint involving a foreign object in a food item, or suspected food poisoning, crew should retain samples of the suspect dish for analysis and hand it over at the arrival station for investigation.

## 14. Reporting of Service Delivery Irregularities

Cabin crew are airline management's link with the performance of the caterer. It is, therefore, essential that they report any discrepancies with respect to the delivery and quality of catering supplies. This will allow airlines to review problems with the caterer in order to avoid a recurrence.

Food should not be served if the cabin crew has any doubts with respect to the quality of the food (e.g., abnormal smell, texture, etc.). A standard report should be available to cabin crew on board to report feedback to airline management.

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