



Covid-19 outbreak: guidance to ETOA members, 02 March 2020

The Covid-19 outbreak is posing extraordinary difficulties for the European Inbound travel industry, which is just starting its main operating season. While tours are continuing and clients are travelling, confidence is falling rapidly. This has occurred even though, barring a small part of northern Italy, COVID-19 has had a very low level of incidence and transmission in Europe to date. Risk to clients travelling through Europe is equally low, well within the normal hazards of daily life if they chose to stay at home. What is unusual about Covid-19 is that it is new, and it gives rise to new anxiety. This fear is the biggest risk.

It is essential that normal business continues while sensible precautions are taken. There is growing pressure to take action that exceeds recommendations made by the World Health Organisation and other competent authorities.¹ Within this context the European Tourism Association (ETOA) has issued the following statement:

- Tour operators must act with clients' safety uppermost in mind. This requires risk-assessment and adaptation based on evidence and official guidance from clients' country of origin and their destination.
- It also requires appropriate consultation with insurers and other stakeholders.
- Operators' clients may have themselves a wider duty of care, e.g. parents, employers, clubs, schools and universities, and require appropriate reassurance.
- Our current appraisal of the situation and related guidance is as follows:
 1. In the absence of official advice or restrictions, or specific factors indicating heightened risk to the tour in question, tours operations should continue.
 2. Cross-border travel within Europe is not subject to restriction.
 3. Low-level risks in terms of individual incidence and impact should not become the basis for widespread business disruption and travel cancellation: this is both irrational and damaging.
 4. Where there is knowledge of heightened risk, e.g. employees or students returning from holiday in affected areas who are displaying symptoms, then extra precautions are merited.
 5. Cancellations are matters to be resolved between operators and clients. Without express terms to the contrary, cancellation charges are not waived unless cancellation is a result of government warning not to travel, or there are extraordinary circumstances in destination that would significantly affect performance.
 6. The suspension of large gatherings and events, e.g. sports fixtures, concerts and trade fairs, have arisen from an abundance of caution and do not provide a sound basis for restricting normal travel flows.
 7. Given the volume of intra-European travel (approximately 85% of all international arrivals within Europe come from elsewhere in the region) it is essential that European national and local governments collaborate effectively in:
 - Collecting and sharing information
 - Promoting best practice in public health management
 - Maintaining public transport infrastructure and operations
 - Facilitating cross-border travel

¹ <https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/27-02-2020-a-joint-statement-on-tourism-and-covid-19---unwto-and-who-call-for-responsibility-and-coordination>