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GUIDANCE TO FLIGHT CREW
ON PREVENTING IN-FLIGHT INCAPACITATION

1. Pilot in-flight incapacitation generally refers to the reduction of medical fitness of flight crew members to a degree that the in-flight operational duties are no longer be able to be discharged.
2. Although in-flight incapacitation of the flight crew members may not always affect the safe conduct of flights, the problem remains a concern on flight operations. It is therefore essential for members of the flight crew to understand the common causes of in-flight incapacitation and how to prevent it.

Gastrointestinal Problems Being the Most Common Causes

3. While an in-flight incapacitation can result from different reasons, the most common causes of sudden in-flight incapacitation as reported in Hong Kong are related to gastrointestinal (GI) problems. This is consistent to what ICAO¹ and EASA² have identified.

Prevention of Sudden Incapacitation Due to Acute GI Problems

4. Besides the general rules for preventing foodborne diseases, members of the flight crew are particularly advised to take the following steps to prevent in-flight incapacitation due to acute GI problems:
 - Be aware of your body condition, especially food allergies or food intolerance.
 - Be careful of the food and drink you are going to consume, especially during layovers in unfamiliar or remote areas.
 - Avoid food and drinks from unknown sources.
 - Avoid consuming the same food or drink with other members of the flight crew prior and during flight.
 - Eat at a different time with other members of the flight crew, if practicable.

¹ ICAO Doc 8984 Manual of Civil Aviation Medicine Part I Chapter 3 Table I-3-1

² EASA Final Report EASA_REP_RESEA_2017_1 “Age Limitations Commercial Air Transport Pilots” Table 2.4

Other Causes

5. Other causes of in-flight incapacitation are varied, ranging from conditions such as eye irritation and shortness of breath (which may result in subtle incapacitation) to cardiac problem, such as palpitation or chest pain (which may lead to obvious incapacitation).

Reduce the Risk of In-flight Incapacitation

6. To reduce the risk of in-flight incapacitation, members of the flight crew should take note of the following:
 - When feeling unwell prior to work, report it and consult a doctor.
 - Advise the doctor of your occupation and follow doctor's advice on your fitness to operate as a member of the flight crew.
 - Holders of a flight crew licence who suffer any personal injury involving incapacity to undertake licence functions, or illness (including surgery) involving incapacity to undertake licence functions throughout a period of 20 days or more must inform the Civil Aviation Department (CAD) in writing; and obtain medical clearance from an Approved Medical Assessor (AMA), via an Approved Medical Examiner (AME), before resuming flying duties. Please refer to AIC on "Notification of Unfitness by Flight Crew" in CAD website (<https://www.cad.gov.hk/english/aeromedical.html>).
7. The CAD has established a "Health Promotion for Licence Holder" section in the CAD website, which will be regularly updated with health information for flight crew (and air traffic controller). Please refer to section (d) at the link above for general health information.
8. For enquiry, please contact the HKCAD Personnel Licensing Office.
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