

Debrief

AFA DEBRIEF – JANUARY 11, 2022

- A Thoughtful Approach to Service During Omicron
- Long Hold Times for Calling on Sick Leave
- Deadhead Deviation Reminder

A Thoughtful Approach to Service During Omicron

In response to the advocacy of AFA, Alaska Airlines management will reduce some of its scheduled inflight services through the end of January. The decision of Alaska Airlines management addressed the concerns of Flight Attendants during the past few weeks where the spread of the Omicron variant has been overwhelming.

As we are learning, the new Omicron variant is less severe than either the original COVID-19 or Delta variants, but is much more transmissible, even among those who are fully vaccinated and boosted. First hand we've seen that it has led to a record number of positive cases around the world, including among airline workers, resulting in higher than average sick calls and flight delays and cancellations.

The AFA leadership of the Alaska Airlines MEC expressed reservations about Omicron and its high transmissibility rate to management at Alaska Airlines. AFA advocated to reduce the amount of time Flight Attendants interacted with passengers in order to reduce opportunities for potential transmission of the virus. In response, the carrier decided to limit in-flight services to one beverage service in the main cabin on all flights, and no meal service at all on medium-haul trips through January at which time it will be re-evaluated.

In a similar manner, the AFA leadership of the United Airlines MEC has advocated for a number of items. In response to United management's decision to return services including pre-departure beverage services and other component enhancements to the inflight service that increase Flight Attendant interaction with passengers, the United MEC officers approached United management about curtailing services in an ongoing effort to reduce

opportunities for transmission of the virus. Management is currently reviewing our request as part of an overall safety risk assessment. It should be noted, United management led the industry in delaying implementation of reducing from ten (10) days to five (5) days, the quarantine period following a positive COVID test.

While we understand United's desire to "lead the pack" and we can get behind and fully support the decision to delay shortening the quarantine period because this serves *both* our passengers and Flight Attendants, greater enhancements to service components amidst one of the most severe COVID surges to date, is something that needs to be challenged. And, we are challenging the thought process behind this decision-making especially as instances of positive COVID tests are on the rise.

Perhaps a matter of bad timing, these decisions stand in stark contrast during a period when management has raised concern about increased sick leave calls, all the while Flight Attendants are on hold for excessive periods of time to address calling on sick leave, for reassignments resulting from cancellations and a myriad of other issues.

Taking things even one step further, United has also announced a trial for an expanded meal service starting next month in select markets. The details of what those "modifications" look like have not been revealed, but the message from United is "With the help of the team's outstanding collaboration and feedback, we've made modifications to the service and will be doing live tests on select markets starting February 1. These live tests will give us detailed, in-the-moment data for our final service." While we can all agree that increasing the level of service for our passengers needs to be a priority, priorities can and should be weighed against other external factors. We are hopeful that United's assessment of the risks associated with the continued introduction of these service enhancements at this time outweighs their introduction during this period of increasing COVID transmission.

Long Hold Times for Calling on Sick Leave

We know, first hand, that many of us are experiencing long call wait times when calling on Sick Leave to the same extent as when trying to get through to Crew Scheduling to get our concerns addressed. All of this adversity is a

direct result of the increased infection rates due to the Omicron variant not only among Flight Attendants, but among everyone at our company.

While not intending for this to be an excuse, we do need remember that the variant is affecting all departments across the company and, increasingly, those departments on which we rely and interact on a daily basis. Having said this, we know that you need some direction on what to do when you are unable to reach the company to let them know you are not going to be able to take a flight assignment. This is especially important when you are outside the window of being able to use the automated systems to place yourself on sick leave.

When you need to place yourself on sick leave less than 8 hours prior to check-in, and the automated system in CCS is unavailable, you need to place a call to the Flight Attendant Support Team. When you are unwell and these call times become excessive ultimately jeopardizing the on-time departure of the flight to which you are assigned, you can take steps to adequately and responsibly call in sick while, at the same time, ensuring you get the rest you need to return to health and flying.

In those instances where you are unable to reach someone at FAST to assist in placing yourself on sick leave after a reasonable amount of time, we remind you that you have various alternatives to notify the company that you will not be available to fly. Consider the following alternatives:

1. **Are you able to get through to the Crew Desk?** If you are able to get through, advise of your inability to reach someone at FAST to place yourself on sick leave. Explain your concern about not being able to take your flight and your concern to provide adequate time for the crew desk to call out a replacement.
2. **Is your call during a period when there is a supervisor available in the base?** If so, call the supervisor to advise of the difficulty you are experiencing to enlist their assistance being certain to point out your concern about having a replacement available for departure time.
3. As a last ditch effort, using the menu available from FLTLINE, reach out to the Inflight Duty Manager (IFDM) to request assistance and to

alert the company that you will be unable to take your flight assignment.

In every instance where this surge in calls impacts our ability to notify the company of our inability to take a flight assignment, we must advocate for ourselves and act to ensure we are both supporting the operation while receiving the necessary rest to return to health.

Deadhead Deviation Reminder

With the recent increase in flight cancellations and changes to our schedule, there have also been greater pairings containing deadhead segments as the company repositions Flight Attendants due to the changes in the company aircraft schedule.

When you wish to deviate from a deadhead segment, you must contact the crew desk and follow the procedures described below. Understanding that there are significantly long wait times may be frustrating when you wish to deviate, nevertheless; you should not make the decision to do so without the documented concurrence of inflight scheduling.

The Contract provisions for deadhead deviation are contained in Sections 3.I.12. and 3.I.13. of our Contract. Keep in mind that front end and back end deviation are handled differently. There are specific procedures that must be followed based on whether you are first segment or last segment deviating and based on your status as a lineholder or a Reserve.

When deviating on the back end, it is important to understand there is a difference with a distinction when you are a “deviating” and when you are asking to be scheduled to “return home early.” If the company rebooks you to deadhead home early, your pairing will be updated and your duty rigs will be recalculated based on your early arrival home. When requesting to “return home early,” you are waiving your duty period to be sent home ahead of schedule and your pay will be re-calculated based on the revised duty period.

If, on the other hand, you are simply “deviating,” you will be paid for the duty rig for the pairing based on your scheduled arrival back to base.

Depending on whether you are flying domestic or international, lineholders may be required to “provide notice” to or require approval from Crew Scheduling. In every instance, a Flight Attendant serving Reserve requires Crew Scheduling approval to deviate.

Section 3.I.12. and 3.I.13. of our Contract, covers first and last segment deadhead deviations.

Additional information can be referenced in our [AFA E-Lines publication, dated March 24, 2017](#) and this includes the detailed steps a Flight Attendant must follow when deviating from the first or last segment of a pairing whether a lineholder or a Reserve.

REMINDERS:

JAN 17 – Martin Luther King, Jr Day

JAN 25 – United MEC Meeting

JAN 26 – United MEC Meeting

JAN 29 – Winter Trimester CQ CBT Due

JAN 31 – Union Plus Scholarship Application Due