



The Leader In Recreational Aviation

Chapter 736 Newsletter for May 2020

General Note from Mike Watson

Hello chapter friends,

I hope you are all doing ok in these crazy times. I wanted to reach out and get your thoughts on our fly-in this year. It seems like most all summer events have been cancelled including the Egg Festival. We should make up our minds soon about what we want to do. Personally, I don't see how we can do our event safely but wanted to get your opinions.

Something else to consider – I was approached by the folks at Charles Chase Memorial Field in Dover-Foxcroft about our chapter putting on a Young Eagles Rally there. Their fly-in late last year to save the field was a great success, and they want to build on that momentum. I didn't commit to anything, but perhaps we could consider this, especially if we cancel our event. They were talking about holding an event in conjunction with the Whoopie Pie Festival (<https://www.mainewhoopiepiefestival.com/>) which has been rescheduled to October 3rd.

On another note, we have \$300 worth of EAA Young Eagles credits available from kids we flew last year. EAA will reimburse us for items we purchase with these credits, and the credits expire if not used by the end of the year. The items need to be for our use in putting on a Young Eagle Rally. I have purchased a couple items I could think of, a pop-up canopy and four walkie-talkies. These items used approximately 1/2 of our credits. I was also thinking of ordering some EAA Young Eagles safety vests for us. Can anyone think of any other items we could use?

Please share your thoughts with the group.

Stay well,

Mike Watson

Return to flight guides released

The Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association and the AOPA Air Safety Institute have created two guides to help pilots safely return to flight as states modify social distancing restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The **Return-to-Flight Proficiency Plan** for individuals, sponsored by Hartzell Propeller, includes profiles for VFR and IFR pilots and is designed to give a clear step-by-step approach to

refreshing knowledge and sharpening skills that degrade after a period of inactivity, such as grounding due to local quarantine orders, according to AOPA officials.

Rusty pilots and dormant aircraft can be, by themselves, problematic. In combination, they present an expanded risk to aviation safety, AOPA officials note. AOPA's guidance takes these factors into consideration and aims to help ease the transition to reopening while maintaining a high standard of safety, officials explain.

The COVID-19 Flight Operations Guide is designed to help flight schools, flying clubs, FBOs, and other aircraft operators move from risk "avoidance" to risk management. The guide provides factors to consider when making the decision to open and offers suggestions on how to do so carefully while monitoring for signs of sustained operational wellness, according to AOPA officials.

"AOPA recognizes operators have some difficult choices to make under unprecedented circumstances," said Air Safety Institute Executive Director Richard McSpadden. "The COVID-19 guide offers them a framework for how to assess their situation and then some suggestions on steps they can take to resume and sustain operations."

For news and advocacy updates around the impacts of the coronavirus on GA, go to AOPA's [resource page](#).

DOT Sets Membership for Women Aviation Advisory Board

U.S. Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao selected **30 industry and academic leaders** to serve as members of the newly formed Women in Aviation Advisory Board (WIAAB). Congress called for the creation of the board in the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2018 to develop strategies and recommendations to bring more women and girls into aviation. The board will look at education, training, mentorship, outreach, and recruitment efforts.

Former U.S. Air Force Secretary Heather Wilson was selected as chair of WIAAB. An instrument-rated private pilot and aircraft owner, Wilson currently is president of The University of Texas at El Paso and had served as the 24th secretary of the Air Force, as well as a U.S. Congress member representing New Mexico.

"The Department welcomes Dr. Heather Wilson and these accomplished advisory board members, who share a commitment and passion for encouraging women to access opportunities in aviation," Chao said.

"Women are underrepresented in aviation and I look forward to working with Secretary Chao, the FAA, and the advisory board to develop strategies that will encourage more women to consider careers in the aviation industry," Wilson said.

Selected from nearly 200 applicant packages, the 30 members will serve for the duration of the WIAAB, which is believed to last at least two years. Members will meet up to two times a year.

DOCTORS REFINE ADVICE TO VOLUNTEER PILOT GROUPS

Volunteer medical transport flights have been curtailed for months in keeping with social distancing advisories, but as states begin to ease restrictions on the general population, physicians advising the Air Care Alliance said that resumption of high-priority flights may be indicated, with appropriate precautions and a mission-specific risk assessment.

Four physicians (including two who are active general aviation pilots) briefed participants in a May 4 webinar hosted by the **Air Care Alliance**. They advised volunteer pilot organizations and individual pilots to consider the ongoing pandemic as a set of risk factors to be weighed in much the same way as weather, aircraft condition, and pilot fitness before flight.

The risk of transmitting or contracting the coronavirus that causes COVID-19 cannot be eliminated until most people are vaccinated, but there is new evidence the risk may be reduced sufficiently with basic precautions, including facial covering, that some patients with urgent medical needs should be flown to treatment.

“I put this in the context of pilot in command responsibilities,” said Dr. H. Hunter Handsfield, a professor emeritus at the University of Washington School of Medicine, and a longtime volunteer pilot with (and past board member of) **Angel Flight West**. “We now need to add coronavirus prevention as another PIC responsibility.”

Various GA groups that specialize in humanitarian transportation of patients who might otherwise be unable to access advanced care for cancer and other illnesses are considering when and how to resume operations. Physicians said many of the patients served by these groups cannot afford to wait until the coronavirus risk subsides.

The medical advice was provided in the context of urgent needs, though much of it is broadly applicable to GA operations. The physicians suggested that organizations and pilots should weigh the importance of making any given flight against the known risks—including the prevalence of COVID-19 at each location where a given flight will connect.

Handsfield and Dr. Daniel Masys, a Van’s Aircraft RV-10 owner who also advises volunteer pilot organizations, each updated the guidance they previously **provided** to the Air Care Alliance in March, when the risks were considered too high to justify continuation of medical transport flights.

There now appears to be some room for high-priority flights, with a nuanced assessment of risks. Physical separation is never assured in typical GA aircraft, particularly nonpressurized aircraft often flown by volunteers. Patients known to be infected, those who have come in contact with people known to be infected, or anyone with any respiratory symptoms should not fly with others in small aircraft, the physicians advised in the May 4 webinar, as well as in updated written guidance that **Handsfield** and **Masys** each posted online. Pilots who are among those at higher risk from the coronavirus based on age or certain medical conditions take on significantly greater risk to themselves if they fly common GA aircraft with others.

Handsfield favors consideration of flight requests on a case-by-case basis, rather than any blanket policy applied to all. He also noted that the latest available evidence and data suggest simple face masks may offer more effective protection than many experts initially expected.

“In my personal opinion, volunteer pilot organizations and others should not have restrictions that are more stringent than those that otherwise apply to the people they serve,” Handsfield said, noting that as states relax stay-at-home and related advisories, many health care providers are already following suit and resuming nonemergency medical care and procedures.

Back in February and March, as states began to issue more restrictive social distancing advice and mandates, the details of exactly how the coronavirus, named SARS-CoV-2, infects people were presumed rather than proved.

“Now, I think we have confidence that the major mode of transmission of the virus is person to person, via respiratory pathways,” said Masys, a former U.S. Navy doctor, federal public health officer, and the current medical officer for the **California Disaster Airlift Response Team**.

Masys said it now appears likely that transmission of the virus between people usually results from comparatively large droplets of fluid being expelled when an infected individual coughs, sneezes, or talks. (Exposure and infection are not the same thing, and it remains unknown how duration of exposure, or the amount of virus transmitted, affects the severity of illness.) Smaller, finer, aerosolized fluids (tiny droplets of fluid that, by definition, remain airborne for some time) are less likely to cause infection, though aerosol exposure is not risk-free.

That could shift the risk analysis for a given flight, making the risk posed by COVID-19 more akin to the risk of flying through low IFR over mountains than the risk posed by supercell thunderstorms over the airport.

Masys noted that aeronautical decision making for pilots and GA organizations would be much easier if rapid and accurate tests for the virus were widely available. Passengers and crew alike could then be screened for infection definitively, immediately prior to departure.

“In the absence of that capability, a simple formula for knowing it is acceptable to conduct passenger operations, based on some set of quantitative measures such as current known prevalence of COVID-19 in a region or trends in new cases, does not appear to be in hand at this time, or available for the foreseeable future,” Masys wrote.

Dr. Daniel Slaim, regional medical director for the Americas at **International SOS**, expressed optimism that such on-demand, rapid testing will be available soon.

“When that comes then the whole calculation will change as well,” Slaim said, adding that reliable testing for antibodies and the ability to assess prior exposure and immunity, which may or may not exist for those who have recovered from an infection, will also simplify what are currently very complex and nuanced risk assessments.

In the meantime, screening passengers for fever, respiratory symptoms, and recent exposure (within 14 days) to anyone known to be infected, along with frequent hand-washing, avoidance of physical touching, and facial coverings (including surgical masks), combined with what is still a relatively low prevalence of known COVID-19 infection in the population, “probably provides a high degree of safety” for resumption of patient transport flights, Handsfield said. However, “a high degree does not mean zero risk,” he warned.

For many people, seven or eight weeks of staying home to “flatten the curve” has forced them to defer urgent medical needs, including chemotherapy or other cancer treatment, increasing the risk they will suffer harm or even die from illnesses unrelated to the pandemic.

“Access to care is a big concern,” said Dr. Shayma Kazmi, an oncologist and hematologist affiliated with Cancer Treatment Centers of America. She said that a patient’s oncologist (or other treating physician) will have a very useful perspective on the risk-benefit analysis that pilots and medical organizations now need to undertake on a case-by-case basis when deciding whether to dispatch a flight. Consulting the treating physician during the decision-making process, and documenting that decision, including the factors considered, would provide a level of reassurance, she added. “I think everyone might be better protected.”