

Cabin Crew

The reality for the thousands of women working as cabin crew is a long way from the glamorous images portrayed by some of the media.

Cabin crew work is both physically and emotionally demanding and yet for the majority of the time cabin crew are not protected by the same regulatory laws as many other workers.

Violence

An increase in the number of "air rage" and "ground rage" attacks illustrates how vulnerable this group of workers are and what many members of the public forget is that they are primarily there to ensure passenger safety.

Cosmic Radiation

Cabin crew may also be endangered by exposure to cosmic radiation which is about 100 times higher at typical cruise altitudes than on the ground. This ionising radiation is very harmful to health. It can cause cancer, and is particularly dangerous to unborn children.

See next page for **Hazards of Cabin Crew Work & Action Checklist**

Some Relevant Law

The law quoted applies when air cabin crew are on the ground in the UK. Other laws may apply whilst they are in the air, and will be different again outside the UK. There is insufficient space to include this law here. However it is important to bear this in mind in the unfortunate event of injury at work, as different rules may apply about time limits to bring a claim, depending on the incident and where it occurred.

Medical requirements governing cabin crew are also outside the scope of this leaflet.

Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999

Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992

Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002

Some Further information

Department of Transport : Protection of air crew from cosmic radiation: Guidance Material

HSE leaflet: Working safely with Ionising Radiation: Guidelines for expectant or breastfeeding mothers INDG 334 – free

HSE leaflet: Violence at Work. A guide for employers INDG69(rev) - free

HSE Air Transport Sheet No1 Personal Protective Equipment (PPE): High visibility clothing for airport workers- free

HSE Air Transport Sheet No 2 Manual Handling Operations: Baggage Handling at Airports - free

HSE leaflet Blood-borne Viruses in the Workplace INDG342 - Free

Hazards of Cabin Crew Work

- Long working hours leading to stress, and fatigue. Jet lag can cause circadian dysrhythmia which may affect sleep, digestion, and hormone rhythms.
- Lifting and stowing of baggage, lifting bar boxes, pushing and pulling trolleys and opening aircraft doors can lead to back, neck, lower limb and shoulder injuries.
- Abusive and intoxicated passengers present a risk of physical violence and verbal threats which, as well as injury, can lead to post traumatic stress disorder.
- Poor air quality inside planes
- can lead to hypoxia and other respiratory effects, nausea, headaches, dryness, fainting and fatigue. Possibility of chemical contamination of air from lubricating oils and hydraulic fluids and infectious diseases such as TB.
- Cabin crew are often exposed to body fluids such as blood and spittle and could be at risk of contracting infectious diseases such as Hepatitis B.
- Pesticide sprays - regular exposure to pesticide sprays has been linked to certain health problems.
- Cosmic radiation on long haul flights may present a risk of cancer or reproductive harm.
- Poor temperature controls can lead to discomfort.

Action Checklist

1. Does your airline have an effective stress policy which is reviewed regularly?
2. Does your airline have a policy to manage actively jet lag and work patterns?
3. Are trolleys regularly maintained and defects remedied? Are crew trained in safe manual handling techniques?
4. Does your airline have a policy for dealing with violent and abusive passengers and are crew given training in how to deal with this issue?
5. Does your airline monitor air quality and put in place measures to prevent or minimise the risks to health?
6. Are cabin crew trained in infection risks? Are crew vaccinated against infectious diseases?
Is protective equipment such as waterproof gloves provided to handle passenger body fluids?
7. Does the airline do, and act upon, a risk assessment re possible pesticide exposure?
8. Does the airline do and act upon risk assessments relating to radiation exposure?
9. Does the airline monitor air temperature and take remedial steps?

Pregnancy Hazards:

Radiation, pesticides, biohazards, passive smoking, stress, long working hours, jet lag, violence, heavy repetitive work, and standing for long periods