

IN THE TIME OF COVID-19, HOW FIT TO FLY ARE YOU?

More than a quarter of New Zealand's population has had, or currently has, COVID-19. Flu season is also upon us.

When you're sick, coughing, and struggling to breathe, of course you're not going to fly. But during recovery, the effects of COVID-19 on your body can have more impact on your general functioning than you'd expect from similar viral illnesses.

There's increasing evidence that about 20 percent of people who've had COVID-19 suffer longer term effects, including 'brain fog' which can quite severely affect cognitive function. You may be wise to consult a medical examiner if you think you're affected in this way.

So, don't expect to bounce back in a hurry. Your ability to read your body and apply the *I'M SAFE* acronym becomes very important.

Have a look at the new updated *I'M SAFE* poster on the back cover of this issue of *Vector*, and run through it with possible COVID-19 symptoms in mind.

Are you completely free from the illness? For pilots who regularly fly at high altitude – for instance, glider pilots – it's also worth remembering that your body's ability to take in oxygen may be further reduced due to the lingering effects of the illness. But, for all pilots who've had COVID-19, symptoms of hypoxia may occur at lower levels than you would normally experience.

The stress of having forced time off work and isolating with your family may also be affecting you, as could lingering fatigue – some people report fatigue symptoms that last for weeks after a COVID-19 infection.

Don't risk it

You may be desperate to get back in the air and doing what you love, and it's even harder if you fly for a living.

But if you're not fit to fly, the outcome can be tragic.

In two recent accidents in New Zealand, it was concluded by safety investigators that the pilots' health may have had an influence on their fatal IIMC encounters.

One had been diagnosed with a condition, a common symptom of which is fatigue. Other people had had concerns about his health in the months leading up to the accident and one witness said the pilot had shown clear signs of fatigue on recent flights, and on at least one occasion, needed help to get out of the aircraft.

As the report states, "Threats such as fatigue increases the likelihood of errors, leading to degraded situational awareness."

In the second accident, the pilot had reported to others that he had been experiencing "hazy" eyesight, but had not at that time seen a doctor, although he was continuing to fly.

It was not, however, able to be determined if this vision problem had contributed to the accident.

Nevertheless, a pilot's personal health and wellbeing on the day should be a key factor in their go-don't go decision. 🛑

Our new updated *I'M SAFE* poster, on the back cover, has been perforated so you can remove the poster from the magazine. If you'd like more copies, go to aviation.govt.nz/education > order publications.

And go to aviation.govt.nz/covid-19 for guidance for medical examiners as well as participants.