

Omicron fears hitting flight bookings, warns easyJet

By **Hannah Boland**

FLIGHT bookings have already slowed as fears of the omicron variant and new restrictions prompt travellers to change their plans, the chief executive of easyJet has warned.

Johan Lundgren said the airline had experienced “some softening of trading” for flights in the first quarter of next year and an increase in customers moving existing bookings.

Mr Lundgren said: “It’s not the same drop off and softening [of demand] that we’ve seen in other cases where restrictions have been introduced, it has been less than that and if people are taking action, they’re moving flights around.”

He said beach holidays had been less affected than city breaks and there had so far been no dampening of demand for next summer, with bookings still above pre-pandemic levels.

The UK has suspended travel from southern African countries over concerns the strain, first identified in the region, could spread faster and evade existing vaccines. The Government is also requiring everyone arriving in the UK to take a PCR test and isolate until they receive a negative result.

Mr Lundgren attacked the new PCR test rules, which he said were “more hassle” than lateral flow tests and “clearly make it more expensive, which

means privileged and wealthy people will have very little problem paying for the tests but less well-off families will”.

He questioned why Britons were still able to go to large events without any restrictions but now once again need to take PCR tests following travel overseas. “I don’t think it’s necessarily proven it’s an effective way of reducing infections,” Mr Lundgren said.

“Clearly the fact that you can still go to large scale events in the UK, big hospitality events or Premier League games without having to demonstrate a negative test, but at the same time, you can travel in from a country with no recorded cases of omicron and have to take an expensive PCR test – that raises questions around whether they are proportionate.”

Mr Lundgren was commenting as easyJet reported a loss of £1.1bn for the year to September, compared with a loss of £835m in the previous year, when the pandemic only affected the second half. Revenue had slumped 52pc after it flew less than half the number of passengers over the year.

Separately yesterday, the president of Emirates airline Tim Clark warned over “significant traumas in the business, certainly the aviation business and the periphery” if the omicron variant meant fewer people were travelling during December.

