

# EasyJet seeks to reassure over flights amid wave of staff sickness

**Mark Sweney**

The chief executive of easyJet insisted yesterday that the great summer getaway would not be ruined despite up to a fifth of its staff being off work through sickness in a wave of Covid-19, causing hundreds of flight cancellations.

Johan Lundgren, the CEO, said the airline had recruited 1,100 staff in preparation for a summer bookings surge and expected the number of easyJet flights to be back to near pre-pandemic levels later this year.

However, easyJet is facing weeks of delays processing paperwork for new employees. "It is true there is a lag on vetting," he said.

"We have about 100 people today awaiting ID clearance from the Department for Transport. I reckon there is a delay on that of roughly three weeks ... but I know the government and aviation industry is looking to fast-track and speed up the process," said Lundgren.

He said about 58 flights had been pre-emptively cancelled yesterday across the European network, with 38 of those scheduled from the UK, well down on the 120 to 130 daily cancellations last weekend.

"[The number of cancellations] has halved, but that doesn't change the fact that the crew absence levels, driven by Covid, are pretty much the same," he said.

Before Covid, he said, the typical absence rate among easyJet's 8,100 crew and 4,300 pilots was about 6%; protocols allowed the firm to cope with up to 14%.

However, absence rates had been as high as 20%.

EasyJet said that despite the severe disruption to flights in the past week it had flown 94% of the planned schedule, adding that flight volumes of about 1,500 a day were four times those at the same time last year.

"This is despite the recent increase in crew testing positive for Covid-19, together with normal operational disruption such as weather delays," said the firm, adding that the majority of its customers could "rebook on to flights departing the same day".