Hysterical Hinduphobia? Biden Bans Travel From India Amid COVID Surge

On Friday, President Joe Biden signed a [proclamation](#) that imposes new travel restrictions on India in light of its surging COVID-19 cases, barring most non-U.S. citizens of Indian descent from entering the United States.

The new restrictions, which take effect Tuesday, May 4, at 12:01 a.m. Eastern Time, are on the advice of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and are "required to protect the Nation's public health" and "taken in the interest of the United States," according to the text.

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"On the advice of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Administration will restrict travel from India starting immediately," White House press secretary Jen Psaki [said](#) in a statement on Friday.

The densely populated subcontinent recorded 386,452 COVID-19 cases on Friday, another record daily cases count, [according](#) to the Indian Ministry of Health. Friday's tally was the ninth day in a row the country has added more than 300,000 cases, bringing the total number to more than 18.7 million. Multiple other strains of the virus are [reportedly](#) circulating in India, too.

A day before the upcoming travel restrictions on India were announced, India's national airline, Air India, had [announced](#) it was planning to reintroduce a near pre-pandemic frequency of direct flights to the United States in the first half of May. A number of [countries](#) — including the United Kingdom, Germany, Belgium, Netherlands, France, Italy, UAE, and Canada — have placed travel restrictions, ranging from quarantines to outright bans on travel from India.

On Wednesday, the World Health Organization (WHO) said that India accounted for 38 percent of global coronavirus cases recorded in the week leading up to April 25.

India now joins [the list](#) of countries whose residents are prohibited from entry to the United States that includes China and Iran — which were put on the list by the Trump administration — as well as the European Schengen area, the U.K., Ireland, Brazil, and South Africa — which were added to the list by President Biden.

Until recently, President Biden was a fierce opponent of travel restrictions, which he considered unproductive in containing the spread of COVID. Regarding President Trump's travel ban on China imposed last February, then-candidate Biden [tweeted](#): "We are in the midst of a crisis with the coronavirus. We need to lead the way with science — not Donald Trump's record of hysteria, xenophobia and fear-mongering. He is the worst possible person to lead our country through a global health emergency." Biden [repeated](#) these words during a campaign appearance in Iowa.

As Trump pursued more travel bans to curb the spread of the coronavirus, including shutting down U.S.-European travel in March of 2020, Biden continued to condemn the measures as ineffective.

"Banning all travel from Europe — or any other part of the world — will not stop it," Biden wrote. "A wall will not stop the coronavirus…. This disease could impact every nation and any person on the planet — and we need a plan to combat it."

As the infection rate rose abroad and the cases started to appear in the United States, Americans were overwhelmingly supportive of the protective travel bans on the affected countries. A Pew Research Center survey showed that 95 percent of Americans agreed that "restricting international travel to the U.S." was the most necessary step in stopping the spread of the coronavirus. This is when then-candidate Biden switched his position, pivoting to support travel bans. Biden's deputy campaign manager, Kate Bedingfield, told CNN: "Joe Biden supports travel bans that are guided by medical experts, advocated by public health officials, and backed by a full strategy…. Science supported this ban, therefore he did too." Bedingfield equivocated when asked to explain Biden's comments, saying that the "xenophobia" allegation referred to Trump calling it the "Chinese virus," not the travel ban. The statement, however, appears to be fallible since Trump only referred to COVID-19 as "Chinese virus" on March 17, 2020, well after the travel ban on China was imposed.

Back then, Trump's travel restrictions sparked severe backlash from the liberal media. The restrictions were arguably "emotional," and "not effective," and the media put the blame on "conservative lawmakers and far-right supporters of the president." The WHO's recommendation against travel restrictions were quoted often. Dr. Fauci himself spoke against the travel restrictions from China, only to praise them later.

Biden now appears to embrace the policies he once vilified, banning travel from India as the coronavirus spike there develops into a humanitarian crisis. No doubt he will get a much different treatment from his party and the media than his predecessor.

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