



Written by [Veronika Kyrylenko](#) on March 24, 2022

CEOs of Major Airlines Ask Biden to Drop Covid Travel Restrictions

Face coverings for travel and pre-boarding Covid testing must go, said airline executives from several major passenger and cargo carriers in a letter to President Joe Biden. The CEOs asked the president to drop these requirements since they “no longer make sense in the current public health context.”

The federal face-mask mandate for travelers that has been in effect since January 2021 was [recently extended](#) by the Transportation Security Agency (TSA) to April 18.

The letter, signed by the heads of ten major airlines, including Delta Air Lines, Southwest Airlines, American Airlines, UPS Airlines, FedEx Express, and JetBlue Airways, urged the president to eliminate the policies that were put in place in a bid to curb the spread of Covid.

The executives reminded Biden that they worked diligently by going above and beyond the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendations concerning Covid. Even before the Covid-related travel regulations were formally put in place, the airlines voluntarily implemented such policies and procedures as mandating face coverings, requiring passenger health acknowledgments and contact-tracing information, and enhanced cleaning protocols. The airlines also complied with the federal requirement to check international travelers’ Covid vaccination status “in an attempt to slow the introduction of variants into the United States.”

All of these measures, however, “no longer make sense,” because the “consistent and steady decline in hospitalization and death rates” suggests that Covid is no longer a threat of the magnitude that required the measures in the first place.

“We strongly support your view that ‘COVID-19 need no longer control our lives,’” wrote the executives, citing President Biden’s recently introduced National COVID-19 [Preparedness Plan](#) for the next phase of the pandemic response. According to this plan, Covid will “no longer dictate how we live.”

Concerning the pre-departure testing requirement, the airline executives note that it puts American travel and tourism businesses at a disadvantage since the European Union, the U.K., and Canada have realized that this policy has “outlived its utility” and dropped it.

The letter also quoted the January 2022 recommendation of the World Health Organization (WHO) to reevaluate the travel restrictions since they proved ineffective in slowing the spread of new Covid variants.



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As for mask-wearing, the CEOs seemingly contradictorily noted that they knew all along that this measure was unnecessary in the plane setting because of the exceptionally effective air filters installed on all modern planes. They wrote,

Several studies completed before we had the added layer of widespread availability of vaccines ... have concluded that an airplane cabin is one of the safest indoor environments due to the combination of highly filtered air and constant air flow coupled with the downward direction of the air.

Travelers can safely stop wearing masks even at the airport, as was done in England, the letter continues. Those folks who wish to wear masks may continue to “protect themselves” by wearing the more-effective N95 respirators.

The letter also quotes the major [update](#) to the metric the CDC uses in recommending face coverings. The update was introduced on February 25, 2022. When evaluating Covid community levels, the agency has shifted from simply counting Covid cases to factoring in hospital beds being used, hospital admissions, and the total number of new Covid cases in an area. As a result, it appears that more than 90% of the U.S. population are living in areas with low or medium Covid community levels and do not need to wear a mask.

According to the letter, as of today, 99 percent of Americans live in areas with low transmission rates.

“It makes no sense that people are still required to wear masks on airplanes, yet are allowed to congregate in crowded restaurants, schools and at sporting events without masks, despite none of these venues having the protective air filtration system that aircraft do,” the letter said.

The letter referred to high efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filters. According to a [skyscanner.com report](#) from 2020, HEPA filters remove any impurities in the air, no matter how small. “A [New York Times report](#) and [this NASA study](#) show that this includes tiny COVID-19 microns,” per the outlet.

“On most planes, the air in the cabin is completely replaced every three minutes,” continues the report, and “40% of the cabin’s air is recycled through this system while 60% is taken from outside.”

The letter concludes,

Now is the time for the Administration to sunset federal transportation travel restrictions—including the international predeparture testing requirement and the federal mask mandate—that are no longer aligned with the realities of the current epidemiological environment.

The CEOs also urged the president to lift the restrictions “for the thousands of airline employees charged with enforcing a patchwork of now-outdated regulations.”

This week, a local union representing 16,000 flight attendants for Southwest Airlines said in a [letter](#) to Biden, Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg, FAA Administrator Stephen Dickson, and TSA Administrator David Pekosk, “Serving onboard during these contentious times and enforcing mask compliance is one of the most difficult jobs we have ever faced as flight attendants.”

Earlier in March, the U.S. Travel Association, whose members include big hotel chains, airlines, and



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tourism boards, similarly [urged](#) the Biden administration to lift the mask mandates and cancel the international Covid test requirement.

The association argued that “the travel industry continues to be challenged with a slow economic recovery,” and pleaded with the president “to send a clear message to the American public and the world that it is safe to travel again.”





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