U.S. drops Covid testing requirement for international travelers

Posted on June 10, 2022 by Business Editor

The Biden administration will drop the Covid-19 testing requirement for inbound air travelers from abroad on Sunday, ending one of the longest-running travel restrictions of the pandemic.

The rule, put in place by the Trump administration in early 2021 and later tightened by the Biden administration, most recently required inbound travelers, including U.S. citizens, to show proof of a negative Covid test a day before boarding U.S.-bound flights. Travelers entering the U.S. at land border crossings were exempt.

The change takes effect at 12:01 a.m. ET on Sunday.

Airlines and others in the travel industry had repeatedly pushed the administration to drop the requirement, arguing it was hurting demand for international trips. The travel industry has been one of the hardest hit by the pandemic.

American Airlines CEO Robert Isom told an industry conference last week that he met with politicians in Washington, D.C., to discuss the testing requirement, a rule he called "nonsensical."

"We're really frustrated," he said.

Other countries, including the U.K., had previously abandoned Covid testing entry rules.

"The Biden administration is to be commended for this action, which will welcome back visitors from around the world and accelerate the recovery of the U.S. travel industry," Roger Dow, president of the U.S. Travel Association, said in a statement. "International inbound travel is vitally important to businesses and workers across the country who have struggled to regain losses from this valuable sector."

For its part, the Travel Technology Association's vice president of government relations, Mike Liptak, said in a statement that travel and tourism are key to the economic recovery from the pandemic. Nick Calio, CEO of Airlines for America, the lobbying group for the largest U.S. carriers, said the industry looks "forward to continuing to work with the Administration to prioritize the safety and wellbeing of the traveling public and to ensure that air travel policies are guided by science."

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention will reassess the decision in 90 days, according to a senior Biden administration official.

"If there is a need to reinstate a pre-departure testing requirement — including due to a new, concerning

variant — CDC will not hesitate to act," the official said.

The travel industry clashed with both the Biden and Trump administrations throughout the pandemic over rules aimed at curbing the spread of Covid-19, including a strict ban on most foreign visitors into the U.S., which was eventually lifted in November. Most noncitizen visitors to the U.S. will still have to show proof of Covid-19 vaccination before flying to the U.S., a White House spokesman said.

Separately, in April, a Trump-appointed federal judge struck down another contentious rule that aimed to curb the spread of Covid-19: the Biden administration's federal mandate that travelers wear masks on planes and other forms of public transportation. The Department of Justice has appealed the ruling.

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