Travel Industry Update

October 21, 2020

[Do Masks On Plane Flights Really Cut Your Risk Of Catching COVID-19?](#)

- Early in the coronavirus pandemic, air travel looked like a risky endeavor. Some scientists even worried that airplanes could be sites of superspreading events.
- Then in April, airlines shifted course. Many started requiring passengers to wear masks on planes — and some airlines even enforced the policy. Just on Monday, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said it now "strongly recommends" all passengers and crew members wear masks.
- So the big question is this: How well do the masks work? Do they make it safe to fly across the country for a family visit?
- Scientists are just beginning to answer that question. And their findings offer a glimmer of hope as well as fresh ideas about what's most important for protecting yourself on a plane.
- The new evidence comes largely from Hong Kong, where health officials have been meticulously testing — and tracking — all passengers who land in the city. "They test everybody by PCR on arrival, quarantine them in single rooms for 14 days and then test the passengers again," says infectious disease doctor David O. Freedman at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. So health officials there know which passengers boarded the plane while already infected with the virus and whether they could have infected anyone else on the plane.
- Freedman and his colleague have been analyzing these data, with a specific focus on one airline: Emirates.
- "Since April, Emirates has had a very rigid masking policy," Freedman says. Not only does the airline require passengers and crew members to wear masks, but flight attendants also make sure everyone keeps on their masks, as much as possible, throughout the entire flight.
- Freedman looked at all Emirates flights from Dubai to Hong Kong between June 16 and July 5. What he found is quite telling. During those three weeks, Emirates had five flights with seven or more infected passengers on each flight, for a total of 58 coronavirus-positive passengers flying on eight-hour trips. And yet, nobody else on the planes — none of the other 1,500 to 2,000 passengers — picked up the virus, Freedman and his colleague report in the Journal of Travel Medicine.
- "Those were flights with higher risk, and yet there was no transmission," Freedman says.
- On another Emirates flight, a whopping 27 coronavirus-positive people boarded the plane in Dubai. Guess how many other passengers were infected on the eight-hour flight?
- "There appear to have been two in-flight transmissions," Freedman says.
- Without the masks, he would have expected many more cases. Freedman and his colleague found several other high-risk flights with no transmission, including an executive jet that flew from Tokyo to Tel Aviv, Israel, with two of the 11 passengers infected with the coronavirus.

- "They were all sitting in a very small environment because it was an executive jet," Freedman says. "And yet again, there was no transmission because passengers were meticulously masked. The crew supervised the masking."
- In fact, since airlines have started to require masks, Freedman says, scientists have not documented one superspreading event on airlines. "Flights that had significant transmission documented were flights early on in the pandemic."
- All together, these data suggest masks are working — and working well. "There's encouraging evidence from a number of flights that masking does help greatly, but it would be nice to study it better," he says. "The circumstantial evidence is, your risk is low on a plane, if there is rigid masking."
- And that last part is key. To keep the risk low on planes, everyone needs to keep their mask on while riding the plane.
- Why? Planes have excellent air ventilation and filtration systems, which remove coronavirus particles from the air about every six minutes, the U.S. Transportation Command reported Thursday.
- "So the only opportunity to breathe the virus in comes from the air that passes by you before it goes through that ventilation system," says engineer Linsey Marr at Virginia Tech. "And so that's only going to happen if you're sitting close to the person who's sick."
- In other words, because of a plane's filtration systems, your risk of catching the coronavirus on a flight comes almost entirely from the people sitting around you. And that risk is lower when those fellow passengers wear masks.
- The mask will block some of the virus particles a person releases into the air around them. It will also reduce how much virus you breathe in. And it will prevent big drops of spit and saliva from hitting your nose and mouth, Marr says.
- For these reasons, Marr says, when she flies, she carefully chooses which mask to wear.
- "I save my best mask for the plane. It has a couple layers of HEPA filters that remove more than 99% of particles," she says. "It's not my everyday mask. I can't just hang it around my neck. It's more troublesome than that."
- You can't really buy N95 masks right now, but if you happen to have one, Marr recommends using it — or even a P100 respirator, which includes a plastic facepiece and particulate filters or cartridges that remove 99.97% of virus particles. "On the plane, you want the best there is," she reiterates. "But just make sure it fits well, and keep in mind, the mask doesn't protect your eyes. So you might want to consider wearing a face shield or goggles or some other kind of eye protection."
- Also remember to disinfect surfaces around your seat, such as the armrests, tray tables and seat backs. You can use hand sanitizer or bleach wipes, and try to do it regularly throughout the flight. Avoid touching your face as much as possible, Marr says. And keep chatter to a minimum. When you talk, you can emit 10 times the droplets and aerosols that you do when you're quiet.
- Finally, Freedman says, don't forget to wear a mask and socially distance throughout the travel process — while traveling to and from the airport, while waiting in the airport and while boarding and exiting the plane.
- "To me, one of the scariest parts [of flying] is the disembarkation process," Freedman says. "Airlines can control people getting onto a plane, but getting off can be chaos because everybody rushes off the plane."

[98% Of American Airlines' Passengers Are Happy To Fly On Full Planes](#)

- American Airlines has pulled a lot of capacity from its network for the winter. Nevertheless, some flights are operating almost full. Managing Director Rhett Workman

noted that, even though American notifies passengers when flights are approaching capacity, only 2% to 4% of people will choose to change to a different service.
- While total capacity is down 50% year on year, American Airlines is already seeing some full flights.

[United Airlines, Lufthansa to resume flying between Denver and Germany despite coronavirus restrictions](#)

- Denver International Airport officials announced Tuesday that nonstop service between Denver and Munich will resume next week, connecting the city with a European counterpart for the first time since the COVID-19 pandemic took hold in Colorado.
- "The resumption of service to Germany on both United and Lufthansa marks a significant milestone in our continued recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic," DIA CEO Kim Day said in a statement. "These flights will provide access for local passengers and travelers who need to connect through our large hub network."
- Connecting destinations will be key for U.S. travelers. Germany is among the European Union countries that are barring most U.S. citizens from entering the country. COVID-19 cases are spiking in Europe as well as in Denver.
- U.S. visitors are exempted from travel restrictions if they are passing through and plan to leave Germany immediately on their way to another destination. For the most part, American citizens are barred from entering the country unless they can demonstrate an urgent need for their visit as defined by the German government.

[British Airways CEO: Airline Industry May Never Recover From COVID-19](#)

- The airline industry may never be able to see beyond the Coronavirus crisis, if the problem of how people could travel again would not be addressed first, according to British Airways CEO, Sean Doyle.
- The British Airways CEO talked about the risk which faces the airline industry currently, and steps that should be taken in order to help this sector to recover from the Coronavirus crisis.
- Last week, the United Kingdom together with the United States announced that they are discussing the possibility of opening a travel corridor between London and New York by Christmas, in order to help people reunite for the year-end holiday season.
- "I cannot stress more greatly that air connectivity between the UK and the US is fundamental to supporting economic growth and trade on both sides of the Atlantic," Doyle pointed out.
- As for the testing process, which was discussed to be imposed for internationals arriving in the United Kingdom, the transport minister, Grant Shapps stressed that such a thing has not happened because the United Kingdom's chief medical officer clarified that it wouldn't capture sufficient information on those who are asymptomatically carrying the virus.
- In order to save the airline industry, the International Air Transport Association (IATA) called on European governments to impose a testing process instead of applying quarantine measures, to re-establish global air connectivity.
- The International Air Transport Association also called a failure the European Union Council's recommendation for coordinated travel restrictions among the Member States, adding that they are insufficient to revive the travel within the European Union.

Lufthansa loses 1.26 billion euros in third quarter

- German airline Lufthansa on Tuesday reported a loss of 1.26 billion euros ($1.49 billion) in the third quarter of 2020 as it struggles to bounce back from crippling coronavirus lockdowns.
- The sobering figure is a slight improvement on quarter two's loss of 1.5 billion euros "due to an expansion of the flight schedule in the summer months of July and August and considerable cost reductions", the airline said in a statement.
- But demand for air travel is expected to remain low in the coming months "due to the global evolution of the pandemic and the associated travel restrictions", it said. The group therefore plans to operate at just 25 percent capacity in the fourth quarter compared with the same period last year.

Hong Kong's Cathay Pacific Group Axes 8,500 Posts Amid Pandemic

- Hong Kong's Cathay Pacific Group announced on Wednesday it would be cutting 8,500 positions in an effort to save its airline businesses and will immediately cease operations of its regional subsidiary Cathay Dragon.
- Some 5,900 jobs are to be cut directly, while 2,600 currently open positions will not be filled, ultimately reducing the workforce by nearly a quarter.
- As part of a restructuring plan, which the group says it must undergo as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, Cathay Pacific will freeze in recruitment, and up to 5,300 Hong Kong based employees will be face redundancy.

The world's longest flight is back -- and now it's even longer

- At a mammoth 18 hours, it was the world's longest scheduled passenger flight, seen as a feat of endurance for those who dared book it.
- But Singapore Airlines' Singapore-Newark flight, which covered a staggering 9,534 miles, was an early victim of the Covid-19 pandemic, being put on hold on March 23.
- Now, however, it's ready to take off again, with flights scheduled to re-start on November 9 between Singapore and New York.
- There's just one difference -- the US airport will switch from Newark, NJ, to JFK. Which pushes the distance up to 9,536.5 miles.
- The airport switch will allow the airline to "better accommodate a mix of passenger and cargo... in the current operating climate," Singapore Airlines announced in a statement.
- While passenger numbers are down, the airline "anticipates significant cargo demand", including "pharmaceuticals, e-commerce and technology firms."
- It's uncertain how many regular passengers will be booking. Visitors are not currently allowed to enter Singapore, other than permanent residents, visa holders, or travelers from countries which qualify for an "Air Travel Pass" (Australia, Brunei Darussalam, New Zealand and Vietnam). Some provinces of China, plus Malaysia, Japan and the Republic of Korea may travel for work, if sponsored by a Singaporean company.
- The flight will run three times a week, using an Airbus A350-900 with 187 economy seats, plus 24 premium economy and 42 business class.

Disney slams California officials for 'unworkable' guidelines around theme park reopening

- The Walt Disney Company is ripping California's strict protocols for reopening its theme parks in Anaheim, arguing the "arbitrary guidelines" are "unworkable" and hold it to a "vastly different" standard than other businesses.
- Disneyland, which opened in July 1955, has been shuttered for seven months due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- On Tuesday, California Health and Human Services Agency announced the theme park can reopen, but only at a limited capacity of 25 percent.
- Disney pointed to its reopenings at Florida's Walt Disney World, France's Euro Disney and its parks in Asia as proof that its protocols were safe.
- "We have proven that we can responsibly reopen, with science-based health and safety protocols strictly enforced at our theme park properties around the world," Disneyland Resort President Ken Potrock said in a Tuesday statement. "The State of California continues to ignore this fact, instead mandating arbitrary guidelines that it knows are unworkable and that hold us to a standard vastly different from other reopened businesses."
- California Health and Human Services Secretary Mark Ghaly said the state recently sent observers to Walt Disney World in Orlando and found "random" mask wearing "concerning."
- Ghaly added that capacity could be amended depending on conditions and developments surrounding COVID-19.
- Disney announced last month plans to lay off about 28,000 employees across its domestic theme parks division, with two-thirds being part-time employees.

U.S. borders with Mexico and Canada to remain closed for non-essential travel as coronavirus infections rise

- The United States' borders with Mexico and Canada will remain closed for non-essential travel for another month as the country braces for what public health experts say will be a difficult winter battling the coronavirus pandemic.
- Acting Homeland Security Secretary Chad Wolf said Monday that the three countries will extend travel restrictions through November 21 in an effort to mitigate the spread of the coronavirus.
- Under the restrictions, a foreign national arriving in Canada from the U.S. must prove they are traveling for an essential purpose or are an immediate family member and are not showing symptoms of COVID-19. Travelers must also have a plan to quarantine for 14 days.
- Those traveling to Mexico from the U.S. may also be denied entry if their trip is considered non-essential, including for tourism and recreational purposes.