



Travel Industry Update

December 21, 2020

Holiday rush begins: More than 2 million travelers have passed through TSA checkpoints

- The Transportation Security Administration screened more than 2 million travelers on Friday and Saturday combined as vacations from school and work began.
- The TSA screened 1,073,563 people on Saturday and 1,066,747 travelers on Friday, according to a daily tally it began posting to track pandemic passenger trends. It is the first time since March that screenings have topped 1 million on consecutive days, TSA spokeswoman Lisa Farbstein said.
- The numbers are still down significantly from a year ago, nearly 60% on each day.
- But this is only the sixth and seventh time passenger counts topped 1 million since travel demand plummeted in mid-March. The low point came on April 14, with just 87,534 passengers screened.

TSA managers told to plead with local health departments for early coronavirus vaccine access

- The Transportation Security Administration's chief medical officer instructed field managers this week to plead with local health departments and airport authorities to give the agency's employees priority access to coronavirus vaccines since the Department of Homeland Security was not included in plans to give shots to federal employees under Operation Warp Speed.
- Fabrice Czarnecki, the medical officer, said in a memo that the managers, called federal security directors, should underscore that the agency's security officers process thousands of travelers each day and that officers needed vaccines "as soon as possible after front line health care workers."
- Czarnecki said the security directors should also encourage officers who are veterans, military reservists or members of the National Guard to try to get vaccinated by the Department of Veterans Affairs or the Defense Department.
- "My goal is [to] leverage all options to get vaccine access to TSA's front line employees as TSA continues to pursue other avenues for vaccine access," he said in the memo, which was obtained by The Washington Post.
- The virus has taken a heavy toll on the agency, with more than 4,000 employees testing positive and more than 800 of its staff now sick. Eleven employees have died, including a security officer in Honolulu on Dec. 12, who had worked at the agency since 2002.
- Despite the number of cases and the urgency Czarnecki conveyed in the memo, agency officials say that in most cases the virus appears to be spreading to TSA employees outside of work.
- Nonetheless, the memo shows how the agency is scrambling to get access to the vaccine for a group of employees who have continued to work at airports throughout the

pandemic. Relying on local health agencies to prioritize TSA officers could lead to a patchy rollout of vaccinations.

- Three TSA officials, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to speak publicly, said field leaders are effectively on their own to navigate a patchwork of health departments and airport authorities to get front-line workers vaccinated, rather than any centralized and coordinated federal effort.
- The number of infections at the TSA have multiplied in the weeks since Thanksgiving, mirroring a rise among the general population. About 1,000 officers have tested positive in the past three weeks. At some airports, the rise in cases has been especially dramatic.
- Miami International Airport is the most affected, according to agency disclosures, with 211 employees testing positive for the virus and two dying of it. Almost a quarter of the cases were logged in the past three weeks.

U.S. Airlines and Hotels to Receive Long-Awaited Relief as Part of New \$900 Billion Aid Package

- Leaders of both houses of Congress Sunday night signaled they averted further gridlock and struck a deal in providing \$900 billion in additional coronavirus economic relief.
- While the airline industry is the travel sector's largest beneficiary from the potential deal, hotels are also on track to get their biggest aid request.
- Congress reached a deal for \$15 billion in additional payroll relief to the airline industry. While \$10 billion less than requested, the package is as close to a so-called "clean extension" of the initial funds included in the relief measure from earlier this year as could be expected after more than two-months of wrangling in Washington.
- Carriers who take the funds must reinstate all of the staff they furloughed after Oct. 1. Airline staffing fell by nearly 37,000 people in October compared to the month before, though not all of those employees were laid off or involuntarily furloughed. Recalled staff will receive back pay from Dec. 1.
- The hotel industry was never expected to get industry-targeted aid in this relief package, but roughly \$280 billion was flagged to reopen the Paycheck Protection Program of small business loans — the top item hotel trade groups lobbied Congress for in recent months.

Hurting US Travel Industry Welcomes COVID Relief Deal

- U.S. Travel Association President and CEO Roger Dow issued the following statement on the announced bipartisan agreement on a COVID relief package:
- "Washington is delivering a huge holiday gift to U.S. businesses and workers after an incredibly challenging year.
- "It's been a difficult road to get another round of much-needed legislative relief moving in Washington. We applaud the bipartisan group of senators that drove progress forward, and the congressional leadership for striking a bipartisan agreement to produce this desperately needed assistance. The agreed-upon provisions will give many suffering businesses a bridge to 2021.
- "More will be needed to restore the 4.5 million travel jobs lost in the travel and tourism industry, but the process that produced this agreement is hopefully a positive sign for what will be possible to achieve in the next Congress. We urge swift action on this important legislation."

More and more nations banning flights from U.K. due to new coronavirus strain

- A growing number of European Union nations, Canada and others barred travel from the United Kingdom Sunday and others were considering similar action in a bid to block a new strain of coronavirus that's been sweeping across southern England from spreading. France, Germany, Italy, Russia, India and Canada announced restrictions on U.K. travel, as did the Netherlands, Denmark, Poland, Belgium, Austria, Ireland, Norway, Bulgaria, Israel and Hong Kong, among others.
- The announcements came in the wake of British Prime Minister Boris Johnson saying Christmas shopping and gatherings in southern England must be canceled because of rapidly spreading infections blamed on the new coronavirus variant. Johnson immediately placed those regions under a strict new Tier 4 restriction level, upending Christmas plans for millions.
- France banned all travel from the U.K. for 48 hours from midnight Sunday, including trucks carrying freight through the tunnel under the English Channel or from the port of Dover on England's south coast. French officials said the pause would buy time to find a "common doctrine" on how to deal with the threat, but it threw the busy cross-channel route used by thousands of trucks each day into chaos.
- The Port of Dover tweeted Sunday night that its ferry terminal was "closed to all accompanied traffic leaving the UK until further notice due to border restrictions in France."
- Eurostar passenger trains from London to Paris, Brussels and Amsterdam were also halted.
- Germany said all flights coming from Britain, except cargo flights, were no longer allowed to land starting midnight Sunday. It didn't immediately say how long the flight ban would last.
- Denmark suspended flights from Britain to Denmark for 48 hours starting Monday, according to the Reuters news service.