Travel Industry Update
January 22, 2021

No Mask, No Fly: Biden Signs Order Requiring Face Coverings On Planes

- Mask up or you won’t be allowed to board a plane, train or bus. President Biden signed an executive order Thursday, requiring passengers to wear face coverings during interstate travel.
- It's one of 10 executive orders signed by the president today aimed at addressing the COVID-19 pandemic, which has killed more than 400,000 Americans.
- Airlines and their employees have been seeking such a federal mask mandate almost since the pandemic began, as they’ve struggled to deal with score of passengers who refuse to follow the airlines' own mask-wearing rules.
- "People coming on board don't find masks to be essential and they have challenged mask compliance across the board, partly because it has been made a political issue," says Taylor Garland, spokeswoman for the Association of Flight Attendants, the union representing 50,000 flight attendants at United and several other airlines.
- She says while some passengers refuse to wear masks even before boarding, many mask resisters take them off mid-flight to flaunt airlines' rules, and when asked to put their masks back on, Garland says the passengers often become verbally abusive and threaten flight attendants.
- "And that is concerning when you're up in the air 30,000 ft or above and don’t have all the tools (and support from law enforcement) that you typically do on the ground," Garland says.
- The U.S. Department of Transportation has received more than 150 safety complaints over passengers violating airline mask requirements. And the airlines themselves have banned thousands of passengers from flying with them again for refusing to wear masks. Among them, Delta has prohibited more than 880 passengers, United has banned more than 600, and Alaska more than 300.
- But despite such actions, many airline passengers continue to refuse to comply with the airlines' mask rules, which is why Garland says a federal mask mandate is needed for air travel.
- "When the government establishes a requirement or a law, people listen," Garland says. "People will respond to the law, more so than a specific airline policy or a flight attendant asking."
- She adds that federal penalties, including hefty fines of up to $35,000 or even jail time for passengers who assault other passengers or crew, carry much more weight than being banned from flying on a certain airline.

Southwest Airlines to give employees COVID-19 vaccine for free

- Southwest Airlines has revealed that it will give employees the coronavirus vaccine for free, once the inoculation is widely available in the U.S., Reuters reports.
• The major carrier announced the news on Thursday. When the time comes, workers will be "strongly encouraged" to receive the vaccine in the fight against the viral disease.
• "We have teams working to identify third parties who can provide vaccines to our employees as soon as they are able to do so – likely during later phases in the vaccine roll-out plan," Southwest said in a statement.
• More specifically, the airline will foot the bill for administrative fees through its company health plan. The vaccine itself is funded by the federal government.

**United Airlines tumbles after posting another big loss, warning about weak demand**

• The airline posted a $1.9 billion loss after the market closed on Wednesday, marking its fourth quarterly loss in a row.
• CEO Scott Kirby said a “critical mass” of people need to be vaccinated before there’s a recovery.

**United Airlines launches new employee exit deals with pay, memo shows**

• United Airlines has offered employees fresh deals with pay and health benefits to leave the company, according to a memo seen by Reuters, part of a drive to reduce headcount and cut costs as it awaits a rebound in pandemic-hit travel demand.
• Chicago-based United said on Wednesday that it planned to offer voluntary leave options for employees as part of an effort to cut about $2 billion of annual costs through 2023, but did not provide details.
• United offered a series of voluntary exit packages for frontline employees last year but they did not include pay.

**KLM cancels long-haul flights, lays off workers after Netherlands' proposed flight ban**

• Dutch airline KLM will reportedly cancel all 270 of its long-haul flights after the government proposed new travel restrictions to slow the spread of the coronavirus.
• On Wednesday, Netherlands Prime Minister Mark Rutte announced a one-month ban on flights from the U.K., South Africa and many South American countries, which is set to begin on Saturday. The Dutch government was expected to debate the restrictions -- along with a nationwide curfew -- on Thursday.
• In response to the flight ban, KLM has reportedly decided to halt all its long-haul flights and several flights from Europe starting Friday, Reuters reported.

**Etihad, Emirates Launch Health Passport With International Air Transport Association**

• A pair of airlines from the United Arab Emirates will launch a health passport developed by the International Air Transport Association (IATA) in an effort to streamline travel and help passengers have required COVID-19 testing documentation all in one place.
• Etihad Airways and Emirates became the first airlines in the world to partner with the IATA Travel Pass, a mobile app that will generate QR codes to share relevant
information with authorities. Authorized labs and test centers will also be able to securely send medical information directly to passengers.

- Etihad will launch its trial program during the first quarter of 2021 on flights from Abu Dhabi, the airline shared with Travel + Leisure this week. If deemed a success, the program will be expanded to other destinations within the airline's network.
- Emirates expects to launch the app in April on flights out of Dubai to validate COVID-19 PCR tests before departure. Passengers will be able to share their test status before arriving at the airport and the app will then auto-populate their details in the check-in system, according to the carrier.

**Hartsfield-Jackson Considers On-Site COVID Testing for Employees**

- On-site COVID-19 testing soon might be offered to employees of Hartsfield-Jackson International.
- Though no decision has been made, Atlanta airport officials have asked vendors for information on providing testing at the airport and are studying whether it's feasible.
- Other airports have opened COVID-19 testing sites for the public. But Hartsfield-Jackson has not made a decision on whether to offer testing for travelers.

**First Cruise Line Officially Requires Vaccines — Will Others Follow?**

- One cruise line has notified passengers that as of May 2021, vaccinations will be required before they can set sail. This, of course, raises the question: Will other cruise lines soon follow suit, and will the legality of such a move be challenged?
- British-based Saga Cruises which has become the first line to officially make vaccination a pre-sailing requirement.
- In making the announcement this week, Saga Cruises said that passengers must have received both doses of the vaccine at least 14 days before they are set to board.
- Despite the new rule having come down on January 20, 2021, the company made clear that it applies to any bookings made before that date as well.

**Here's What Happens If You Have Covid At Disney World**

- Walt Disney World has been open since July. While the coronavirus pandemic continues to be an issue across the country and the world, many have chosen to visit the theme park resort. For its part, Walt Disney world has taken a many steps to try to keep guests safe, and from all accounts, they've worked. But what happens if somebody actually does test positive for the virus while at Walt Disney World? While such things have been rare, they have apparently happened, but it seems there's a plan for when that takes place, and Disney World is using Fort Wilderness as a place for quarantine.
- Fort Wilderness is Walt Disney World's campground, but it also has cabins for guests who want to vacation in slightly less rough conditions. According to Bloomberg, the cabins are being used as a place to let people stay who actually test positive for COVID-19 while at the resort. It's the perfect location. The cabins create more distance between guests than any hotel room would, and they don't share ventilation systems, so people can truly be isolated while they wait out the virus.