Travel Industry Update
January 25, 2021

**Delta plans to bring back 400 pilots, signaling optimism about future air travel**

- The airline plans to bring back some 400 pilots to active flying status by this summer
- Delta had planned to put more than 1,700 pilots on reduced pay, with no flying requirements, in exchange for avoiding furloughs.
- All pilots are back to full pay under the latest round of government aid.

**United Airlines CEO wants to make Covid vaccines mandatory for employees — and encourages other companies to do the same**

- United’s CEO wants to mandate Covid-19 vaccines for the company’s more than 60,000 employees.
- CEO Scott Kirby said other companies should adopt a similar stance.
- Airline workers are considered essential employees and are likely to receive vaccines before many in the general population.

**Lufthansa Group to ban “everyday masks” inflight**

- Lufthansa Group is to ban the use of cloth or “everyday” masks inflight, in favour of selected mask types which reach certain standards.
- From February 1 passengers will be required to wear “either a surgical mask or an FFP2 mask or mask with the KN95/N95 standard” during boarding, the flight and when leaving the aircraft.
- Customers will be informed of the changes by email, and the group will also post notifications on its websites and social media channels.
- Travellers with medical reasons why they cannot wear a mask need to present a medical certificate (issued on a form provided by Lufthansa), along with a negative Covid-19 test result not older than 48 hours prior to the scheduled start of their journey.

**KLM to keep long haul flights as COVID testing demands are softened**

- Dutch airline KLM will keep operating long haul flights, including for vaccine distribution, after agreeing with the government on softer demands for returning air crews to carry out rapid COVID-19 tests.
- The Dutch arm of Air France-KLM said earlier in the week it would cancel all its 270 weekly long-haul flights to the Netherlands as a result of new COVID-19 rules, requiring passengers and crew to show evidence of a negative rapid coronavirus test taken just before departure.
• KLM at the time said this would make it impossible to keep flying to countries with a high risk of coronavirus infections, as it would risk having to leave crew behind.

**EU says Alitalia brand must go in airline's revamp**

• Italy would have to drop the 75-year-old Alitalia brand if it wants the European Commission to approve plans to relaunch the airline, according to a letter published by L'Espresso magazine.
• Loss-making Alitalia has endured 11 years of turbulent private management and three failed restructuring attempts, with the government now seeking to nationalise and relaunch the ailing flag carrier after the coronavirus crisis scuppered plans to sell it.
• “The Alitalia brand should not be retained by the NewCo, since it is an emblematic indicator of continuity,” the European Union said in the letter published by L'Espresso.

**Are We Over Disinfecting Airports?**

• Some public health experts are asking if disinfectants are even needed.
• Further, because they are being used in such dramatically high volumes in airports and other facilities, with the potential to harm the user as well as building users, concerns are mounting that they may be causing more health-related problems than they are solving.
• Without question, disinfectants have helped protect health. They kill pathogens and microorganisms and are one of the most important chemical solutions available in the professional cleaning industry. In some facilities, such as hospitals, their use is required in certain areas of the facility.
• However, the Environmental Protection Agency classifies disinfectants as "pesticides." Pesticides are designed to kill not only pathogens but other living things as well. Their use, or overuse, in cleaning can prove harmful to both the user of the product and building users, in this case people in airports.
• As we mentioned earlier, due to anxiety about the pandemic, disinfectants are now being used much more frequently and just about everywhere. This is happening so much that a June 2020 article in Bloomberg Law, "Rush to Disinfect Offices Has Some Environmental Health Experts Worried," suggests we are overusing disinfectants to the point that it is replacing one problem with another.
• These are "hugely toxic chemicals," says Claudia Miller, an immunologist, allergist, and coauthor of the book Chemical Exposures: Low Levels and High Stakes. "We’re creating another problem for a whole group of people and I’m not sure we’re actually controlling infections."
• Almost from the beginning of the pandemic, studies have found that the coronavirus can live on surfaces for as much as five days. This means that during that time, if someone touches a contaminated surface and then touches their face, they can become infected.
• Most studies have concluded that the virus can live on glass for about five days; wood, about four days; and plastic and stainless-steel surfaces, three days.
• However, a study published in the British medical journal The Lancet suggests that those results are only accurate in the lab. In a real-life situation, the study argues, the virus may only live a few hours on surfaces, not a few days. If this is true, the excessive use of disinfectants can at least be minimized, if not eliminated.
• So where does this leave us? What should airport administrators do to keep their facilities healthy, but without over-disinfecting? According to Matt Morrison with Kaivac, developers of professional cleaning systems designed to help stop the spread of infection, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) may have the answer.
• "The CDC says that in most cases, all that is needed to stop the spread of COVID and many other diseases is effective cleaning." This is based on a May 7, 2020, directive issued by the CDC. The directive states:
• Normal routine cleaning with soap and water will decrease how much of the virus is on surfaces and objects, which reduces the risk of exposure.

Biden to impose South Africa travel ban to combat new COVID-19 variant - CDC

• President Joe Biden will impose a ban on most non-U.S. citizens entering the country who have recently been in South Africa starting Saturday in a bid to contain the spread of a new variant of COVID-19, a senior U.S. public health official told Reuters.
• Biden on Monday is also reimposing an entry ban on nearly all non-U.S. travelers who have been in Brazil, the United Kingdom, Ireland and 26 countries in Europe that allow travel across open borders.
• “We are adding South Africa to the restricted list because of the concerning variant present that has already spread beyond South Africa,” said Dr. Anne Schuchat, the CDC’s principal deputy director, in an interview Sunday.

Biden requires international travelers to quarantine upon arrival to US

• President Biden on Thursday signed an executive order to back up Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines recommending that international travelers quarantine for seven days after arriving in the United States.
• Biden’s executive order says travelers must comply with CDC orders that require a negative COVID-19 test to get into the country as well as a quarantine period upon arrival to the states.
• The order tasks the Secretary of Health and Human Services with coming up with a plan for implementing the requirement.
• Biden also signaled that he wants U.S. agencies to talk with Canada and Mexico about COVID-19 protocols at ports of entry to the country.
• “The Secretary of State, in consultation with the Secretary of HHS, the Secretary of Transportation, the Secretary of Homeland Security, and the Director of CDC, shall immediately commence diplomatic outreach to the governments of Canada and Mexico regarding public health protocols for land ports of entry,” the order states.
• Those agencies have two weeks to return to Biden with a plan for health measures they recommend at ports of entry.

World Tourism Organization Calls For Vaccine Passport

• The Global Tourism Crisis Committee, at a meeting in Madrid last week organized by the United Nations’ World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), is calling for a vaccine passport, saying it must become an essential travel document to help restart international tourism.
• “The rollout of vaccines is a step in the right direction, but the restart of tourism cannot wait,” UNWTO secretary-general Zurab Pololikashvili said, according to the British newspaper The Guardian. “Vaccines must be part of a wider, coordinated approach that includes certificates and passes for safe cross-border travel.”
• But achieving such a passport has its issues. The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), for instance, has already branded them discriminatory.
• “We’re at the very early stage of the vaccine rollout. If you make vaccines compulsory it will mean an awful lot of people won’t be able to fly, even if they are COVID-free,” a WTTC spokesperson told The Guardian. “It’s far better to have a test-and-release scheme where travelers test before travel to prove they are COVID-free.”
• But Dr. Richard Dawood, a specialist in travel medicine at the Fleet Street Clinic in London, said proof of vaccination in order to travel is inevitable.
• “It won’t really be our choice – [vaccine passports] will de facto be a requirement by individual countries to prove immunity,” he said. “The ground work has been laid. At the moment people in the UK are given a bit of paper once they’ve been vaccinated. It’s not exactly secure. There needs to be some fair consideration at some point to how we will keep records of vaccinations without burdening the National Health Service. [For health passports to work] we need a way to authenticate vaccines.”

**US Travel Association To Advocate for Travel Tax Credits**

• The U.S. Travel Association hopes to meet with the Biden administration soon to push the new President into authorizing tax credits to stimulate new travel, USTA president-CEO Roger Dow said during a virtual press conference.
• Dow said that “Things like tax credits for travel – personal and group – and stimulating travel” would be welcome to help stimulate the stagnant industry, which has suffered greatly in the last year due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
• A travel tax credit allows people to deduct a certain percentage of their domestic travel costs from their federal income taxes.
• "It used to be said, 'As goes General Motors so goes the U.S. economy,'” Dow said. "As we've seen in the last nine months, as goes travel goes the U.S. economy. When people are not moving, commerce is not moving."

**COVID-19 exposure on flights is more common than you think. The US doesn't share details, but Canada does**

• On the day after Christmas, passengers on a United Airlines flight from Denver to Calgary, Alberta, were potentially exposed to COVID-19.
• So were travelers on a Delta Air Lines flight from Detroit to Toronto, an Air Canada flight from Fort Lauderdale, Florida, to Montreal and 11 other international flights to Canada.
• The next day, another busy holiday travel day, more of the same: 14 flights to Canada from places including Boston; Chicago; Houston; Cancun, Mexico; and the Dominican Republic, all had at least one passenger on board who tested positive for COVID-19 shortly after the flight.
• The flights aren't outliers due to the holiday travel rush.
• Data from Canadian public health authorities show a near daily occurrence of flights where a passenger may have been infected while flying. From the start of the coronavirus pandemic in March through early January, the Public Health Agency of Canada has identified potential exposure on more than 1,600 international flights and more than 1,400 flights within Canada, for a total of more than 3,000 flights, including nearly 200 in the past two weeks alone.
On the list: U.S. carriers American, United, Delta, Alaska and Allegiant. The U.S. cities with the most affected flights on the list: Chicago, Phoenix, a magnet for Canadian visitors, and Denver.

The details aren't buried in some secret database. Canada has been posting public COVID-19 exposure alerts online for flights, trains and cruise ships throughout the pandemic. Flights are listed as soon as authorities receive word of a positive test of a recent traveler, regardless of where and when they might have been infected, factors that are hard to pinpoint in most COVID-19 cases.

The publicly available details on COVID-19 on Canada flights, which includes flight date; airline; flight number; origin and destination; and, where available, row numbers because passengers seated within a few rows of an infected passenger are most susceptible to exposure, are in stark contrast to disclosures about impacted flights in the United States.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention doesn't publish a list of affected flights, nor do U.S. airlines, who prefer to tout their pandemic safety protocols and studies that show a low risk of virus transmission on planes.

AHLA says half of U.S. hotel rooms will sit empty this year

Around half of all U.S. hotel rooms are projected to sit empty this year, according to a new report released by the American Hotel & Lodging Association (AHLA).

In its annual State of the Hotel Industry forecast, the trade group said it expects nationwide hotel occupancy to average 52.4% for 2021. Although that figure is above 2020’s annual average occupancy level of 44%, it remains well below 2019’s average of 66%.

Likewise, U.S. hotel room revenue for 2021 is predicted to remain 34% below 2019 levels, at around $110.5 billion.

The AHLA's report also draws attention to the industry's high unemployment rate, which was nearing 19% as of December. According to data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the pandemic is estimated to have erased more than 10 years of job growth within the accommodations sector.

"Job losses have been massive," said AHLA CEO Chip Rogers during a web forum hosted by the organization on Thursday. "And even though we'll see an uptick in jobs in our industry [this year], we're not going to be anywhere close to where we were in 2019."

While the AHLA expects the hotel sector to add 200,000 direct hotel operations jobs in 2021, the industry will still remain nearly 500,000 jobs below its pre-pandemic employment level of 2.3 million workers.

In terms of demand, the group projects that business travel for 2021 will be down 85% compared with 2019. Rogers called this year's expected dearth of business travel "the most damaging part of the economic impact we have seen so far."

IOC plans to vaccinate every Olympic athlete to save Tokyo Games: report

The International Olympic Committee is working with the World Health Organization to get all athletes vaccinated in a bid to save the Tokyo Games, The Telegraph reported on Friday.

Fast-tracking the COVID-19 vaccines to competitors where national programs are yet to begin is the main priority in the Olympic Committee’s plan, the report said.

Japan’s top government spokesman said Tuesday that the widespread distribution of coronavirus vaccines is not a prerequisite for going ahead with the games.
“We are considering comprehensive measures to hold a safe and secure games, even without making vaccines a condition,” Chief Cabinet Secretary Katsunobu Kato told a news conference.

**Japan likely to hit COVID-19 herd immunity in October, months after Olympics: researcher**

- Japan is likely to achieve herd immunity to COVID-19 through mass inoculations only months after the planned Tokyo Olympics, even though it has locked in the biggest quantity of vaccines in Asia, according to a London-based forecaster.
- That would be a blow to Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga who has pledged to have enough shots for the populace by the middle of 2021, as it trails most major economies in starting COVID-19 inoculations.
- “Japan looks to be quite late in the game,” Rasmus Bech Hansen, the founder of British research firm Airfinity, told Reuters. “They’re dependent on importing many (vaccines) from the U.S. And at the moment, it doesn’t seem very likely they will get very large quantities of for instance, the Pfizer vaccine.”
- Hansen said Japan will not reach a 75% inoculation rate, a benchmark for herd immunity, until around October, about two months after the close of the Summer Games.
- Japan has arranged to buy 314 million doses from Pfizer, Moderna Inc and AstraZeneca Plc, and that would be more than enough for its population of 126 million.
- But problems seen in vaccine rollouts elsewhere stir doubt that Japan will get those supplies on time.
- Taro Kono, Japan’s vaccine programme chief, said last week it would begin its first shots in February, starting with 10,000 medical workers, but he walked back on a goal to secure enough vaccine supplies by June.