Delta And Alaska Airlines Won’t Make Staff Get Vaccinated

- Last week, United Airlines’ CEO Scott Kirby asked other carriers to join him in requiring airline employees to receive the COVID-19 vaccination. Now, two major airlines have come out and said they would not force staff to be vaccinated. Delta Air Lines and Alaska Airlines have both said they will encourage vaccination, but will not enforce it.
- On Thursday of last week, Kirby recognized his statement’s controversy but insisted the vaccine was safe and, therefore, should be trusted. According to CNBC, the reasoning behind his insistence he claims was, “The worst thing that I believe I will ever do in my career is the letters that I have written to the surviving family members of coworkers that we have lost to the coronavirus.”
- But for Kirby, vaccinating United employees is not enough. Kirby said other airlines should step up and follow his example. He believes that airlines should show leadership at this time and encourage vaccination to help get life and travel back to normal as quickly as possible.
- However, Delta and Alaska Airlines have said they will not follow Kirby’s example. Just one day after Kirby’s announcement, Alaska shared a statement with the Business Journal confirming that neither Alaska nor its subsidiary Horizon would require employees to be vaccinated. The statement said that the airline would “strongly encourage” staff to accept the vaccine and help staff by providing easy access to the vaccine if they would like it.
- Delta CEO Ed Bastian also said he would “strongly encourage” Delta employees to receive the vaccination but said the vaccine would not be mandatory. Bastian confirmed he would be getting the vaccine as soon as possible and sided with Kirby saying airline staff should be considered front-line workers and get priority access.
- Despite the differing opinions of airline bosses, employees may end up not having a choice anyway. Several countries have already said that all passengers must be vaccinated to travel in the future. Not only that, but holiday cruise companies have also said proof of vaccination will be required for future holidays.
- It is highly likely, therefore, that cabin crew and pilots will also need to be vaccinated to operate flights into other countries. Turnaround flights may not need vaccinated crew, but any flights with stopovers where crew leave the plane may well need to be operated by vaccinated crew in order to abide by other countries’ laws.
- While many are pushing for so-called vaccine passports, including the European Union, The World Health Organisation has said it opposes mandatory vaccination for travel because of equity issues.
- The other issue facing those calling for a vaccine passport is distribution problems. It is not fair to prioritize vaccine distribution to leisure travelers in some areas and not others. This is only compounded when considering places where tourism is more crucial for the economy than others.
- With vaccines high in demand, there is an ethical issue surrounding who should be prioritized. For many countries, vaccination efforts will not step up until 2022, meaning
there will not be a coordinated, global vaccination effort for travel purposes, either for passengers or crew members.

Southwest Airlines makes new voluntary leave offer to cut costs

- Southwest Airlines Co said late on Tuesday it was offering employees another round of voluntary leave as its staffing levels remain high and the coronavirus outbreak crimps travel.
- “Southwest remains overstaffed in many areas. As a result, some departments will be offering additional opportunities for Employees to take Extended Time Off (ExTO) beginning in March 2021, based upon projected staffing levels”, the company said in an email to Reuters.
- “The additional opportunities for leave align with the period when some Employees will return from previously-awarded, six-month leaves on March 1, 2021”, the company added.
- Last month, the company said it had issued notices to 6,828 employees warning them that they could be furloughed.

United Airlines Launches New Travel-Ready Center

- United Airlines launched a new digital solution that allows travelers to review COVID-19 entry requirements, find local testing options and upload any required records for domestic and international travel.
- The carrier’s Travel-Ready Center is available through United’s mobile app and website, making it the first airline in the United States to integrate all these features into one program.
- The digital solution will add more features over the coming weeks to make navigating evolving entry requirements more manageable, including scheduling COVID-19 tests, accessing the Agent on Demand feature and viewing details about visa requirements for other countries.
- United’s Travel-Ready Center will provide details for all travelers 18 and older, with status indicators noting if they are travel-ready based on specific requirements each individual needs to meet to board their flight, including any additional requirements for connecting flights.
- Documents uploaded by a passenger will be reviewed by designated personnel for verification, who will then approve them in the app and allow travelers to complete the check-in process. Customers should still bring the physical documents to the airport if further inspection is needed along their journey.

United Offering Employees New Buyout Packages

- Just weeks after bringing back thousands of employees who were furloughed last year, United Airlines is now offering a new set of incentives to convince workers to take a buyout package and leave the company.
- The Chicago-based carrier is finding that the effects of the coronavirus pandemic are still cutting a wide swath into the travel industry, with airline capacity still under 50 percent compared to what it was in 2019. And United is also finding, like American Airlines has found out, that despite two federal government relief packages it simply does not have enough work for all the employees it has hired back.
United is looking to reduce headcount and cut costs as it awaits a rebound in pandemic-hit travel demand. The offers to employees included pay and health benefits for a certain amount of time in exchange for a voluntary leave, part of an effort to cut about $2 billion of annual costs through 2023.

Alaska Airlines Reports $1.3bn Annual Loss But Sees Brighter Days Ahead

- Alaska Airlines reported its financial results for both the final quarter of 2020 and for the whole year. As expected, the situation is not good, with a full-year loss running to $1.3 billion. Over the final quarter, the airline lost $430 million. Nevertheless, CEO Brad Tilden has remained optimistic, saying that there are ‘signs of brighter days ahead’.
- Overall, Alaska lodged a full-year loss of $1.3 billion for 2020. That’s in stark contrast to its 2019 filing of a $769 million profit. For the fourth quarter of 2020, the airline lost $430 million, compared to income of $181 million in the same quarter last year.
- However, there were some bright spots in the report, in particular in regard to its debt. Despite the challenging year and a decline in operating revenues of some 59%, Alaska’s net debt remained flat from December 2019, at $1.7 billion. Thanks to the efforts of the airline to secure new liquidity, totaling approximately $5 billion over the year, it finished 2020 with $3.3 billion in unrestricted cash and marketable securities in the bank.

Hawaiian Airlines to welcome back some furloughed employees

- Despite experiencing a fourth quarter net loss of $162 million, Hawaiian Airlines announced Monday that it is optimistic for 2021.
- The airline says it has turned a page and expects to operate at 75 to 85 percent of its 2019 capacity by summer of 2021.
- In addition, the company also said they have sent out recall notices to a number of employees who were furloughed between Oct. 1, 2020 and Jan. 15, 2021.

Singapore Airlines launches one-stop online solution for COVID19 pre-departure testing

- Singapore Airlines’ customers will be able to book their pre-departure COVID19 polymerase chain reaction (PCR) and serology tests, and receive their results on a one-stop online portal, as part of a new pilot service.
- The pre-departure test service is currently available to Singapore Airlines and SilkAir passengers departing from Singapore, Jakarta and Medan, as part of this pilot test phase.
- There are plans to expand this service to more cities in the SIA and SilkAir network over the next few months if the pilot is successful.

Hotel Industry Damage Laid Bare

- A figure released this week from STR puts a concrete number to the hotel industry carnage in 2020: Overall room occupancy was just 44 percent, compared to 66 percent in 2019—a 33 percent decline. Further, the occupancy rate from groups fell 67 percent, to 7.4 percent of all room-nights.
- Now, the American Hotel & Lodging Association’s 2021 State of the Industry cites Oxford Economics’ estimate that 2021 occupancy will come in at about 53 percent, and
about 62 percent for 2022, though the figures will likely be lower for full-service properties in urban areas. The report points out that “while some full-service hotels begin breaking even [on operating costs] at 50 percent occupancy, this does not account for mortgage-service debt costs, leaving most hotels well below their true break-even point.” And from their workers’ perspective, hotel-industry unemployment is nearly triple the overall rate for the country: 19.8 percent versus 6.7 percent.

- Among buyers, though, there is eagerness to get back on the road and also a bit of optimism. In the January 2021 AHLA survey, 42 percent of frequent business travelers said they are already comfortable staying in a hotel, while 52 percent say their comfort staying in a hotel is connected to vaccination. And among all respondents, 34 percent said they are comfortable staying in a hotel right now, while 48 percent said their comfort is tied to vaccinations in some way:
  - 11 percent will feel comfortable when COVID-19 vaccines are widely available to the general public.
  - 20 percent will feel comfortable staying in a hotel again when a majority of Americans have received a COVID-19 vaccine.
  - 17 percent will feel comfortable when they are personally vaccinated.

- Full AHLA report here.

**Hyatt to offer free COVID-19 testing at resorts in Mexico, Caribbean, South America**

- As a new U.S. requirement goes into effect for travelers on international flights to present a negative COVID-19 test before boarding their flight, concern has brewed over how and where travelers might get tested abroad.
- Hyatt Hotels announced Tuesday, the same day the requirement took effect, that it would offer free COVID-19 testing at 19 of its resorts in Mexico, Costa Rica, the Caribbean and South America for guests traveling to the U.S. The company claimed to be the first major hotel chain to offer widespread free testing, though other individual international hotels and some smaller hotel chains have announced similar measures.
- Hyatt also announced in a news release it would offer 50% off room rates and 30% off food to guests who can’t travel due to the testing requirement.
- All passengers ages 2 and older must present a negative coronavirus test taken no more than three days before their flight or proof they recovered from the virus within the past three months. Those who don’t will be denied boarding.
- U.S. citizens are subject to the new rules, and travelers aren’t exempt if they’ve had a COVID-19 vaccine.

**Walt Disney World Updates Face Covering Requirements for Water Parks**

- Walt Disney World has updated their face covering requirements for water parks ahead of Blizzard Beach reopening March 7, 2021.
- Face coverings will be required in designated areas for each Guest age 2 and up, including but not limited to the park entrance and exit, retail areas, and food and beverage ordering areas.
- Face coverings will not be permitted while experiencing water slides or in the water. You may also remove your face covering while actively eating or drinking, but you should be stationary and maintain appropriate physical distancing.
Mexico and Caribbean beach resorts offer Covid tests for new U.S. travel requirements

- Beach resorts and small hotels alike throughout Mexico and the Caribbean are racing to ensure guests have access to Covid tests as new travel requirements take effect.
- Starting Tuesday, the U.S. government will require travelers over age 2, including U.S. citizens, to show proof of a recent, negative Covid-19 test result before boarding flights to the United States.
- Hyatt Hotels on Tuesday said its 19 resorts in Latin America will offer free, onsite Covid-19 tests for up to two guests per room through May 31.
- Marriott International said many of its hotels in Mexico and the Caribbean offer testing onsite and it’s working to expand access to tests because of the new U.S. rules.
- Hilton Worldwide Holdings also said several of its resorts in Latin America and the Caribbean are offering Covid tests or access to tests. Its Canopy hotel in Cancun doesn’t offer tests at the property but it’s providing free transportation for guests to be tested at facilities in the city.
- For some smaller hotels, providing access to tests is a matter of survival.