



March 16, 2021

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT

Covid-19 and Air Travel Restrictions

PRO POINTS

- **The CDC has recommended broadly that Americans avoid travel of any kind, citing clear scientific evidence that traveling increases the chance of being exposed to, or spreading, the coronavirus.**
- **Actual restrictions on air travel vary from state to state and country to country and have shifted continuously during the course of the pandemic. Airlines and passengers have had to adjust rapidly to new government directives, inside and outside the U.S., multiple times.**
- **After initial reluctance, U.S. health authorities have issued requirements for air travelers to wear masks on planes and in airports, and have mandated testing for passengers entering the country from abroad. There have been high-level discussions about requiring domestic pre-flight testing, but that proposal has yet to advance.**

HOW WE GOT HERE

From the early days of the pandemic, travel restrictions have been top of mind for both infectious disease experts and the government entities tasked with making decisions with huge impacts on the travel and airline sectors. In early 2020, airlines and President Donald Trump's administration clashed over who should administer and pay for systems to track airline passengers (a conflict that has yet to be truly resolved).

The first restrictions, on noncitizens entering the country from China, were issued in the first week of February 2020. That decision would later become a flashpoint in the presidential campaign. In the next few months, more restrictions were issued on travelers from Europe, the U.K., Brazil, Iran and South Africa.

Near the end of the Trump administration, in January 2021, the federal government imposed a mandate that all travelers arriving from abroad show proof of a negative Covid test within the past three days. Airlines had hoped the requirement would be paired with the lifting of the international travel restrictions such as quarantines, and the Trump administration initially announced it would. But upon taking office, President Joe Biden's administration promptly shot down the idea and has to this point maintained the restrictions on entry.

Since the start of the Biden administration, officials have weighed ramping up domestic travel restrictions, a repeat of early-pandemic rumors which raised alarms in the airline and travel industries. The idea has been shelved for the moment, but health officials have been clear that it remains in the toolkit.

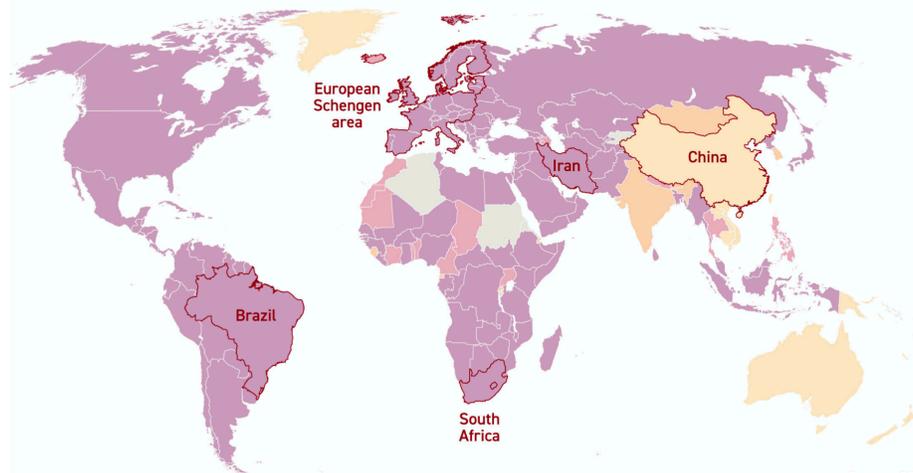


U.S. international travel restrictions

CDC's risk assessment level for Covid-19 AS OF MARCH 13



Travelers prohibited from entry into the U.S. (with some exceptions)



Source: CDC

WHAT'S NEXT

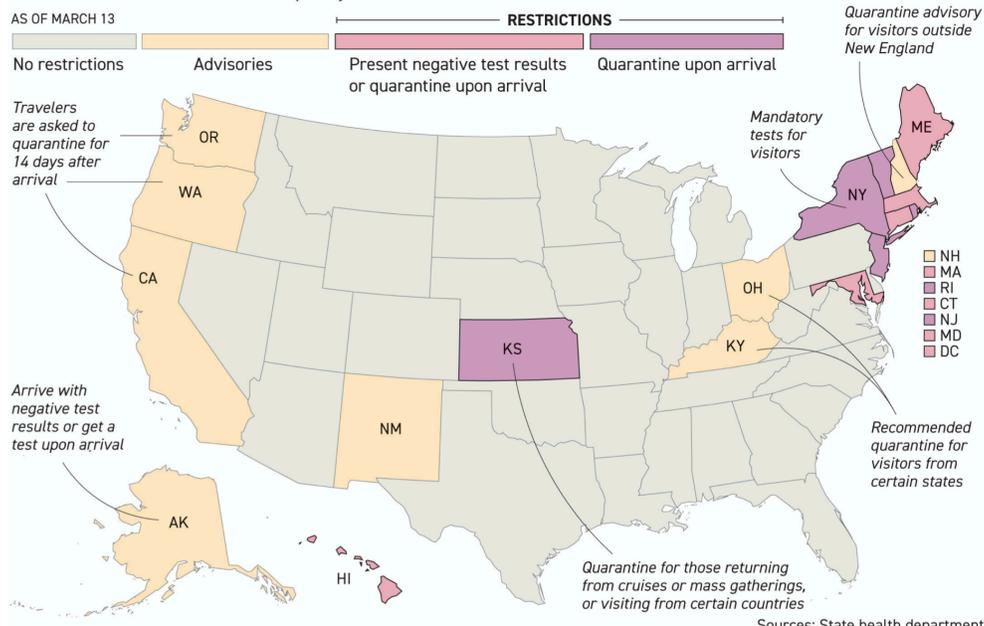
As increasing numbers of people are vaccinated against Covid-19, conversations about easing travel restrictions have grown. In particular, some have suggested creating a “vaccine passport” that would allow travelers to fly largely unimpeded.

But so far, the Biden administration has maintained that its focus is getting shots into arms and has shown a reluctance to wade into developments like vaccine passports or other health credentials that airlines have been pressing for.

Interstate travel restrictions and advisories

In some states requiring quarantines, exemptions may apply for residents of neighboring states, for people who have been fully vaccinated or for those who have completely recovered from Covid-19.

AS OF MARCH 13



Sources: State health departments



POWER PLAYERS

- **Nick Calio:** Calio is the head of Airlines for America, the biggest trade group for the U.S. airline industry. Throughout the pandemic, A4A has been pushing the federal government, in both administrations and in Congress, to take steps which both help airlines get their business back and also give direct financial relief to the carriers. Calio has been with the trade group for 10 years and has helped the airline industry remain highly influential in Washington, D.C.
- **Rochelle Walensky:** As the Biden administration's CDC director, Walensky has been outspoken in urging Americans not to travel. Her recent comments have even suggested that she would support mandating testing for all domestic airline travel, leading to frantic opposition from the travel industry and airlines. Such a requirement never came into fruition, but Walensky's agency has the authority to create one if health authorities find it warranted.
- **Alejandro Mayorkas:** DHS has the ultimate authority to deny entry to noncitizens from certain countries, and while Mayorkas is still getting his feet wet (and publicly has focused largely on immigration issues), the agency is a key part of internal administration talks about when to lift those restrictions or impose more if the pandemic were to take a turn for the worse.