



March 22, 2021

Mr. Jeffrey Zients  
 COVID-19 Response Team Coordinator  
 The White House  
 1600 Pennsylvania Ave., NW  
 Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. Zients,

Thank you for your leadership to strengthen the U.S. response to the COVID-19 pandemic. As representatives of America’s aviation, travel and tourism industries, we share President Biden’s commitment to public health measures that save lives and allow travel and economic growth to safely resume.

**With these goals in mind, we respectfully urge the federal government to partner with us to develop, by May 1, 2021, a risk-based, data-driven roadmap to rescind inbound international travel restrictions issued under section 212(f) of the Immigration and National Act (INA).**

By developing clear metrics, benchmarks, and a timeline for rescinding entry restrictions on international travelers, the COVID-19 response team can:

- Maintain strong risk-based protections against the spread of COVID-19 and importation of new variants;
- Encourage business and leisure travelers to prepare for and comply with requirements for a safe reopening of inbound and outbound international travel by the summer of 2021; and
- Accelerate rehiring and economic recovery in the travel and aviation industries.

We commend the Biden-Harris Administration for making substantial progress towards defeating the virus. The American Rescue Plan Act invests billions of dollars to increase the availability of COVID-19 vaccines, expand testing capacity, and bolster the public health system’s ability to respond to the virus. The inbound international testing requirement and the Federal mask mandate have further reduced the risk of COVID-19 transmission during international travel and

strengthened protections against the importation of new COVID-19 variants. Similarly, President Biden's recent directive for States to make vaccinations available to all American adults by May 1 means that hundreds-of-millions of Americans will be protected against the virus in the near future. We are working to assist in the race for the vaccine to beat the virus by utilizing airports as a location for vaccinating critical aviation infrastructure workers.

These Federal efforts strengthen the public health protections that airlines, airports, unions, hotels, theme parks and countless other travel businesses have also put in place. Data and scientific research show that these layered measures, including universal mask wearing, physical distancing, contact tracing systems, state-of-the-art air filtration and more, have significantly reduced the risk of COVID-19 transmission throughout the entire travel process.

At the same time, key epidemiological indicators have steadily improved. The seven-day average of new infections, the weekly number of COVID-related deaths, and the weekly number of COVID-19 hospital admissions have all declined since January 2021. Moreover, more than one-in-ten American adults (13%) are now fully vaccinated against the virus, with the millions more receiving vaccinations each day.<sup>1</sup>

Taken together, these factors paint a clear picture. The risk of COVID-19 transmission while flying is low. Vaccination rates and immunity are increasing rapidly throughout the U.S. The burden of the virus on our nation's public health system is decreasing. Travel-related businesses, such as airlines, airports, hotels, car rental and black car providers have invested heavily to put the right protections and strategies in place to mitigate risk. We are ready to welcome back travelers and keep them safe. And the time to plan for and chart a defined roadmap to reopen international travel is now.

To be clear, at this time, we do not support removal or easing of core public health protections, such as the universal mask mandate, inbound international testing requirement, physical distancing or other measures that have made travel safer and reduced transmission of the virus. However, the data and science demonstrate that the right public health measures are now in place to effectively mitigate risk and allow for the safe removal of entry restrictions.

With these factors in mind, we strongly urge the COVID-19 response team and relevant Federal agencies to partner with airlines, airports, unions, hotels, theme parks and other key stakeholders to develop a data-driven, risk-based roadmap for reopening international travel. The roadmap to safely reopen international travel should be finalized before May 1, 2021, so that a plan is in place to reopen by the summer of 2021 if vaccine distribution and epidemiological trends continue in a positive direction. Elements of a roadmap should include:

- **Maintain the inbound international testing mandate and other key mitigation measures, which obviates the need for mandatory quarantines upon arrival.** The testing mandate and the multi-layered measures in place today provide strong protections against importation of the virus and enable effective mitigation against new variants. The

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/covid-data/covidview/index.html>

World Health Organization (WHO) does not recommend quarantines of travelers or “any travel or trade restrictions based on available evidence.”<sup>2</sup>

- **Exempt vaccinated individuals from the international testing requirements, while avoiding vaccine requirements as a prerequisite to travel.** The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) should update its international testing mandate to exempt vaccinated individuals. A growing body of scientific research indicates that vaccinated individuals are unlikely to spread COVID-19.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, the WHO and International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) do not support vaccine requirements for international travel.
- **Update CDC guidance to state that vaccinated individuals can travel safely.** The CDC should immediately update its guidance to state that vaccinated individuals can travel safely. Further, so long as vaccinated and non-vaccinated individuals are required to comply with Federal mask mandates, physical distancing and other safety measures, the risk of vaccinated individuals transmitting the virus during travel is exceptionally low.
- **Develop uniform Federal principles for COVID-19 health credentials (CHCs).** The CDC should provide global leadership by ensuring the wide array of CHC technologies can securely validate both test results and vaccination history, protect personal data, comply with applicable privacy laws, and operate across local, state and international jurisdictions.
- **Quickly begin bilateral negotiations to ease travel restrictions through public health corridors.** The administration could fast track a risk-based approach by immediately engaging in bilateral consultations to develop a public health corridor as endorsed by ICAO. The Department of Transportation, Federal Aviation Administration and CDC played a key role in developing ICAO’s strong foundational framework that can create the basis for a travel corridor pilots and accelerate our ability to open travel in safe and efficient manner.
- **Develop clear benchmarks and a transparent framework for determining when all inbound international travel restrictions can be lifted.**
- **Prioritize the resumption of international travel on the agenda of the upcoming G-7 Meeting.** Pre-pandemic, travel and tourism accounted for 330 million jobs and approximately 10% of global GDP. The G-7 governments previously supported the ICAO recommendations and the June G-7 meeting offers them the opportunity to publicly endorse and implement the associated principles and measures in support of the safe return of international air travel.
- **Once 212(f) entry restrictions are lifted, consistently review on a monthly basis whether the inbound international testing mandate and other safety precautions are still needed.**

The need for a data-driven, risk-based roadmap to reopen international travel is urgent. In 2020, overseas travel to the U.S. declined by 81%, while travel from Mexico was down by 62% and Canada by 77%—causing a loss of \$146 billion to the U.S. economy. If nothing is done to lift international travel bans and bring back demand, the U.S. Travel Association estimates that a total of a 1.1 million American jobs will not be restored and \$262 billion in export spending will be lost by the end of 2021.

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<sup>2</sup><https://www.who.int/news-room/articles-detail/key-considerations-for-repatriation-and-quarantine-of-travellers-in-relation-to-the-outbreak-of-novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.businessinsider.com/fauci-vaccines-may-decrease-spread-of-covid-lower-viral-load-2021-2>

However, if travel from the top inbound markets to the U.S is able to safely resume by July 4, 2021 and reach an average of 40% of 2019 levels for the remainder this year, it would accelerate economic recovery by adding \$30 billion in incremental spending and bringing back 225,000 American jobs.

We are committed to continuing our partnership with the COVID-19 response team and relevant federal agencies to develop and implement risk-based, data-driven public health measures that enhance the safety of flying. We hope you will continue to look to us to provide input from aviation and travel stakeholders as you develop additional measures to ensure that implementation will be timely, smooth, and effective. We understand that any plan to restore international travel is dependent on maintaining the current positive trends in public health outcomes.

Again, thank you for your focus on protecting the United States from the health and economic damage inflicted by COVID-19. We look forward to continuing our work together to safely and responsibly restore domestic and international air travel.

Sincerely,

Aerospace Industries Association  
Airlines for America  
Airports Council International – North America  
American Association of Airport Executives  
American Hotel & Lodging Association  
American Society of Travel Advisors  
Association of Flight Attendants – CWA  
Bizly  
Coalition of Airline Pilots Association  
Global Business Travel Association  
International Air Transport Association  
International Association of Airport Executives  
National Air Carrier Association

National Air Transportation Association  
National Limousine Association  
Regional Airlines Association  
Radio Technical Commission for Aeronautics  
Southwest Airline Pilots Association  
The Airline Passenger Experience  
Travel Again  
Travel Management Coalition  
Travel Technologies  
United States Tour Operators Association  
US Chamber of Commerce  
US Travel Association  
Valerie Wilson Travel

cc: Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas, Department Homeland Security  
Secretary Gina Raimondo, Department of Commerce  
Secretary Pete Buttigieg, Department of Transportation  
Secretary Xavier Becerra, Department of Health and Human Services