Requirement for Proof of Negative COVID-19 Test or Recovery from COVID-19 for All Air Passengers Arriving in the United States- General FAQ

Updated July 6, 2021

If you plan to travel internationally, you will need to get tested no more than 3 days before you travel by air into the United States (US) and show your negative result to the airline before you board your flight, or be prepared to show documentation of recovery (proof of a recent positive viral test and a letter from your healthcare provider or a public health official stating that you were cleared to travel).

On January 12, 2021, CDC announced an Order requiring all air passengers arriving to the US from a foreign country to get tested no more than 3 days before their flight departs and to present the negative result or documentation of having recovered from COVID-19 to the airline before boarding the flight. Air passengers will also be required to confirm that the information they present is true in the form of an attestation. This Order is effective as of 12:01am EST (5:01am GMT) on January 26, 2021.

For the full list of requirements and exemptions, please review the language in the Order.

Frequently Asked Questions

General

Does this requirement apply to US citizens?

This Order applies to all air passengers, 2 years of age or older, traveling into the US, including US citizens and legal permanent residents.

Are noncitizens no longer subject to Presidential Proclamation travel restrictions if they can show a negative test or documentation of recovery?

The CDC order does not replace the Presidential proclamations. Therefore, a negative test result for COVID-19 or documentation of having recovered from COVID-19 to the airline before boarding the flight does not exempt a foreign national from the travel restrictions outlined in the Presidential proclamations.

With specific exceptions, several Presidential proclamations suspend and limit entry into the United States, as immigrants or nonimmigrants, all noncitizens who were physically present within specific countries during the 14-day period preceding their entry or attempted entry into the United States.

For a full list of countries and links to the proclamations on the White House website, visit Travelers Prohibited from Entry to the United States.

Are US territories considered foreign countries for the purposes of this Order?

No, the Order to present a documentation of a negative COVID-19 test or recovery from COVID-19 does not apply to air passengers flying from a US territory to a US state.

US territories include American Samoa, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, and the US Virgin Islands.

If I fly from a US state or territory to another US state or territory, but have to transit through a foreign country, am I still required to get a test before the first flight?

If you booked an itinerary from a US state or territory to another US state or territory and the itinerary has you taking a connecting flight through a foreign country, you do not need to be tested. An example of this situation is an itinerary booked between the Northern Mariana Islands (a US territory) and the US mainland via Japan.

For information about what to do if you have a short trip to a foreign country from the US, see FAQ Can a test taken before departure from the US be used to return within the 3-day timeframe? How will testing requirements be handled for short trips?

Why does the Order specify 3 days rather than 72 hours? What is considered 3 days?

The 3-day period is the 3 days before the flight’s departure. The Order uses a 3-day timeframe instead of 72 hours to provide more flexibility to the traveler. By using a 3-day window, test validity does not depend on the time of the flight or the time of day that the test was administered.

For example, if a passenger’s flight is at 1pm on a Friday, the passenger could board with a negative test that was taken any time on the prior Tuesday or after.

What is an attestation?

An attestation is a statement, writing, entry, or other representation under 18 U.S.C. § 1001 that confirms that the information provided is true.

Does this Order apply to land border crossings?

No, the requirements of this Order only apply to air travel into the US.

Who is checking to make sure that people have a negative test or documentation of recovery before they board a plane to the US?

The airline will confirm a COVID-19 negative test result or documentation of recovery for all passengers before boarding.

What types of SARS-CoV-2 test are acceptable under the Order?

Passengers must be tested with a viral test that could be either an antigen test or a nucleic acid amplification test (NAAT). Examples of available NAATs for SARS-CoV-2 include but are not restricted to reverse transcription polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR), reverse transcription loop-mediated isothermal amplification (RT-LAMP), transcription-mediated amplification (TMA), nicking enzyme amplification reaction (NEAR), and helicase-dependent amplification (HDA). The test used must be authorized for use by the relevant national authority for the detection of SARS-CoV-2 in the country where the test is administered. A viral test conducted for U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) personnel, including DOD contractors, dependents, and other U.S. government employees, and tested by a DOD laboratory located in a foreign country also meets the requirements of the Order.

Can I get a rapid test?

Rapid tests are acceptable as long as they are a viral test acceptable under the Order.

Does a self-test meet the conditions of the Order?

International air passengers traveling to the United States can use a self-test (sometimes referred to as home test) that meets the following criteria:

1. The test must be a SARS-CoV-2 viral test (nucleic acid amplification test [NAAT] or antigen test) with Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA).
2. The testing procedure must include a telehealth service affiliated with the manufacturer of the test that provides real-time supervision remotely through an audio and video connection. Some FDA-authorized self-tests that include a telehealth service may require a prescription.
3. The telehealth provider must confirm the person’s identity, observe the specimen collection and testing procedures, confirm the test result, and issue a report that meets the requirements of CDC’s Order (see “What information must be included in the test result?” below).
4. Airlines and other aircraft operators must be able to review and confirm the person’s identity and the test result details. The passenger must also be able to present the documentation of test results to U.S. officials at the port of entry and local/state health departments, if requested.

For travelers who test positive, CDC recommends the telehealth provider report positive test results to relevant public health authorities in the traveler’s location following local requirements. The telehealth provider should also counsel the traveler on what they and their close contacts should do. This would include not traveling until they complete isolation (if infected) or quarantine (if exposed), in accordance with local requirements.

Some countries may restrict importation of tests that are not authorized or registered there. Travelers who are considering bringing a U.S.-authorized test with them for use outside of the United States should contact authorities at their destination for information before they travel.

What information must be included on the test result?

A test result must be in the form of written documentation (paper or electronic copy). The documentation must include:

1. Type of test (indicating it is a NAAT or antigen test)
2. Entity issuing the result (e.g., laboratory, healthcare entity, or telehealth service)
3. Specimen collection date. A negative test result must show the specimen was collected within the 3 days before the flight. A positive test result for documentation of recovery from COVID-19 must show the specimen was collected within the 3 months before the flight.
4. Information that identifies the person (full name plus at least one other identifier such as date of birth or passport number)
5. Test Result

Does a negative test result or documentation of recovery need to be in English?

Airlines and other aircraft operators must be able to confirm the test result and review other required information, and should determine when translation is necessary for these purposes. Passengers whose documents are in a language other than English should check with their airline or aircraft operator before travel.

If a passenger has tested positive for COVID-19, and then tests negative, can that passenger travel?

Individuals with known or suspected COVID-19 should self-isolate and NOT travel until they have met CDC’s criteria for discontinuing isolation.

If a passenger has a negative test, but was a close contact of a known COVID case, can that passenger travel?

Individuals who are not fully vaccinated and have had close contact with a person with COVID-19 (i.e., who are considered exposed to COVID-19), should self-quarantine and NOT travel until they have met CDC criteria for discontinuing quarantine. Individuals who are fully vaccinated, or who have documentation of recovery from COVID-19 in the past 3 months, do not have to self-quarantine after exposure to a person with COVID-19 and can travel unless they have COVID-19 symptoms.

Do the requirements of this Order apply to diplomats and special visa holders?

Diplomats and special visa holders are not exempt from this Order.