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

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Passengers FAQ

What if I have had a COVID-19 vaccine or have tested positive for antibodies? Do I still need a negative COVID-19 test or documentation of recovery from COVID-19?

Yes, at this time all air passengers traveling to the US, regardless of vaccination or antibody status, are required to provide a negative COVID-19 test result or documentation of recovery.

When do I need to get a test to travel to the US and what kind of test do I need?

Get tested no more than 3 days before your flight to the US departs. Make sure to be tested with a viral test (NAAT or antigen test) to determine if you are currently infected with COVID-19. Also make sure that you receive your results before your flight departs and have documentation of your results to show the airline.

Do state and local governments in the US have separate testing requirements for air passengers?

Federal testing requirements must be met to board a plane to the US. Some state and local governments may have similar or more restrictive testing requirements for air passengers arriving in their jurisdictions. Always check and follow state and local recommendations or requirements related to travel in addition to federal requirements.

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?

If a trip is shorter than 3 days, a viral test taken in the United States can be used to fulfill the requirements of the Order as long as the specimen was taken no more than three days before the return flight to the US departs. If the return travel is delayed longer than 3 days after the test, the passenger will need to be retested before the return flight.

Travelers considering this option should additionally consider the availability of appropriate testing capacity at their destinations, and the time frame needed to obtain results, as a contingency when making plans for travel.

What if I recently recovered from COVID-19?

CDC does not recommend getting tested again in the three months after a positive viral test, as long as you do not have symptoms of COVID-19. If you have had a positive viral test in the past 3 months, and you have met the criteria to end isolation, you may travel instead with documentation of your positive viral test results and a letter from your healthcare provider or a public health official that states you have been cleared for travel. The positive test result and letter together are referred to as "documentation of recovery."

A letter from your healthcare provider or a public health official that clears you to end isolation, e.g., to return to work or school, can be used to show you are cleared to travel, even if travel isn’t specifically mentioned in the letter.

What happens if I don’t take a test and want to travel to the US?

Air passengers traveling to the US are required to present a negative COVID-19 test result or documentation of recovery. Airlines must confirm the negative test result or documentation of recovery for all passengers before boarding. If a passenger chooses not to present a test result or documentation of recovery, the airline must deny boarding to the passenger.

What if I am overseas and can’t get a test before my flight?

Passengers should contact the airline regarding options for changing their departure date to allow time for a test, see if the airline has identified options for testing, or if there are options available for changing their flights to transit through a location where they can get tested before boarding their final flight to the United States.

I am unable to find a testing site that has a turnaround time of 1-3 days abroad. What should I do?

Travelers should consider the availability of appropriate testing capacity at their destinations, and the time frame needed to obtain results, as a contingency when making plans for travel.

For more information on where to obtain a test overseas, travelers should review the relevant U.S. Embassy website. Travelers may need to consider a routing change to a different country or city in order to meet the testing requirement.

What happens if I test positive?

People should self-isolate and delay their travel if symptoms develop or a pre-departure test result is positive until they have recovered from COVID-19. Airlines must refuse to board anyone who does not present a negative test result for COVID-19 or documentation of recovery.

What kind of documentation of my test result or documentation of recovery do I need to present?

Before boarding a flight to the US, you will need to show a paper or electronic copy of your negative test result for review by the airline and for review upon request by public health officials after you arrive in the US.

If you are traveling with documentation of recovery, you must present paper or electronic copies of your positive test result (dated no more than 90 days ago) and a signed letter, on official letterhead that contains the name, address, and phone number of a licensed healthcare provider or public health official, stating that you have been cleared to end isolation and therefore can travel. A letter that states that you have been cleared to end isolation to return to work or school is also acceptable. The letter does not have to specifically mention travel.

What personally identifying information is required to confirm negative test result or documentation of recovery? Does it need to be in English?

Airlines and other aircraft operators must be able to confirm the test result and review other required information. There should be sufficient personally identifiable information on the test result or documentation of recovery to ensure a match with the person’s passport or other travel information. This could include but is not limited to name, date or birth, age, passport number, etc.

Airlines and other aircraft operators should determine when translation of results or documentation of recovery 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.

See also, What kind of documentation of my test result or documentation of recovery do I need to present?

Can I get an exemption or waiver to the testing requirement?

Exemptions may be granted on an extremely limited basis when emergency travel (like an emergency medical evacuation) must occur to preserve someone’s life, health against a serious danger, or physical safety and testing cannot be completed before travel.

Can I apply for a humanitarian exemption?

CDC may grant a humanitarian exemption in limited circumstances only when an individual must travel to the United States to preserve health and safety (e.g. emergency medical evacuations) and is unable to access or complete the testing requirement before travel. Individuals and organizations sponsoring individuals who fit the exemption criteria described in CDC’s Order should contact the U.S. embassy or consulate in the country from which they are departing for the United States. The embassy will then transmit this information to the CDC for consideration.

You can contact the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate, or call these numbers at the U.S. Department of State headquarters: From the United States and Canada: 888-407-4747; from overseas: 202-501-4444

NOTE: A humanitarian exemption is not needed for people who need to travel via private or medical transport to the United States after testing positive for COVID-19. People who test positive for COVID-19 and have not met CDC criteria to end isolation are exempt from the requirements under the Order if they travel via private or medical transport to the United States. The aircraft operator transporting the person must adhere to CDC’s Interim Guidance for Transporting or Arranging Transportation by Air into, from, or within the United States of People with COVID-19 or COVID-19 Exposure. CDC’s guidance states that other passengers who do not have COVID-19 should not be transported with infected passengers. If a parent or caregiver is required to accompany a minor or other infected person needing assistance during travel, that person must apply for a humanitarian exemption if unable to be tested within 3 days of the medivac departure.

To facilitate the review of a humanitarian exemption request, the following information should be provided to the embassy or consulate for transmission to the CDC:

- For each passenger: Name (family name/username, given name), Passport number and Nationality
- Cell phone, including country code, of passenger or head of household if family unit
- Email of passenger or head of household if family unit
- U.S. destination address
  - Is U.S. destination home address?
  - Department date and flight itinerary, including any connecting flights
  - Name of submitting entity if different from passenger
    - Name of company submitting on behalf of passenger(s) (if applicable)
    - Name of point of contact (POC) submitting on behalf of passenger(s) (if applicable)
    - Phone and email address for POC submitting exemption request on behalf of passenger(s) (if applicable)
- Purpose of travel to the United States (provide brief explanation of why urgent travel is needed, and how travel will contribute to health and safety of passengers)
- Justification for testing exemption (e.g. no testing available, impact on health and safety)
- Documentation to support justification for test exemption (e.g. medical records or orders for medical evacuation)

See the Department of State’s website for more information on assistance for U.S. citizens overseas.

Do passengers also need to have a copy of their attestation as well as the airline retaining it?

Passengers are only required to retain a paper or electronic copy of their negative test result or documentation of recovery for the entirety of their itinerary. The attestation should be submitted to and retained by the airline or aircraft operator.

Should passengers retain proof of a negative test or documentation of recovery?

Yes, passengers must still retain a paper or electronic copy of the necessary documentation as federal public health officials may request to see these documents at the port of entry. State, territorial, tribal and/or local health departments in the United States may also request them under their own public health authorities.

If I am connecting through the US to another country, do I still need to get tested?

Yes. Any flight entering the US, even for a connection, will require testing before departure.

If I have one or more connecting flights to the US, does the 3-day period apply to the first flight or the last one? Do I need to get another test if I have a connecting flight?

If your itinerary has you arriving to the US via one or more connecting flights, your test can be taken within the 3 days before the departure of the first flight.

If the 3-day testing period expires before one of your connecting flights, you only need to get retested before boarding connecting flights if:

- You planned an itinerary incorporating one or more overnight stays en route to the US. (NOTE: You do not need to be retested if the itinerary requires an overnight connection because of limitations in flight availability.), OR
- The connecting flight is delayed past the 3-day limit of testing due to a situation outside of your control (e.g., delays because of severe weather or aircraft mechanical problem), and that delay is more than 48 hours past the 3-day limit for testing.

What happens if my flight (or first flight if itinerary includes connecting flights) is delayed past the 3-day limit for testing?

If the initial departing flight in your trip is delayed past the 3-day limit of testing due to a situation outside of your control (e.g., delays because of severe weather or aircraft mechanical problem), and that delay is 24 hours or less past the 3-day limit for testing, you do not need to be retested. If the delay is more than 24 hours past the 3-day limit, then you will need to be retested.

What happens if my connecting flight is delayed past the 3-day limit for testing?

If the connecting flight in your trip is delayed past the 3-day limit of testing due to a situation outside of your control (e.g., delays because of severe weather or aircraft mechanical problem), and that delay is less than 48 hours past the 3-day limit for testing, you do not need to be retested. If the delay is more than 48 hours past the 3-day limit, then you will need to be retested.

See also if I have one or more connecting flights to the US, does the 3-day period apply to the first flight or the last one? Do I need to get another test if I have a connecting flight?

If I tested negative before my flight, do I need to get another test when I get to the US?

CDC recommends that travelers get tested 3-5 days after travel AND stay home or otherwise self-quarantine for 7 days after travel. Even if you test negative, stay home for the full 7 days. If you don’t get tested, it’s safest to stay home for 10 days. Always follow state and local recommendations or requirements related to travel.

All travelers (including those who have recovered from COVID-19) should remember to wear a mask, stay at least 6 feet apart from people who are not in your household, and wash their hands; often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds after blowing their nose, coughing, or sneezing and before eating. Travelers should look for symptoms of COVID-19, and take your temperature if you feel sick. Anyone sick with symptoms of COVID-19 should self-isolate and delay further travel.

For more information, visit After You Travel.

Do I need to get a test before leaving the US?

At this time, CDC does not have a testing requirement for outbound travelers, but recommends that you get tested with a viral test (NAAT or antigen) 1-3 days before you travel internationally. Travelers should check with international destinations for their entry requirements.

What is the justification for letting people who recently recovered from COVID-19 travel without a negative test? What about reinfections?

People who have recovered from COVID-19 can continue to test positive for up to 3 months after their infection. CDC does not recommend retesting within 3 months after a person with COVID-19 first developed symptoms (or the date of their first positive viral diagnostic test if their infection was asymptomatic). Even if they have recovered from COVID-19, people who develop symptoms of COVID-19 should not travel and should seek care for testing and evaluation. This guidance may be updated as additional information about people who have recovered from COVID-19 becomes available.

Can CDC help me get a refund for travel expenses if I have to cancel or delay travel because of testing requirements for air passengers flying to the US?

CDC does not reimburse and is unable to help travelers get reimbursements for travel expenses as a result of canceled or delayed travel because of COVID-19 or testing requirements for air passengers flying to the US. While some companies may base their policies on CDC’s travel recommendations or requirements, each company establishes its own refund policies.

In some cases, trip cancellation insurance can protect your financial investment in a trip if you need to change your itinerary in the event of an international outbreak. Visit CDC’s Travelers’ Health website if you would like to learn more about travel insurance, including trip cancellation insurance.

Will CDC reimburse me for the cost of a COVID-19 test?

CDC is not able to reimburse travelers for COVID-19 testing fees. You may wish to contact your insurance provider or the location that provided your test about payment options.