



Airlines for America®  
We Connect the World

Nicholas E. Calio  
President and CEO

April 13, 2022

The Honorable Xavier Becerra  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Health and Human  
Services  
Hubert H. Humphrey Building  
200 Independence Ave., SW  
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dr. Rochelle Walensky  
Director  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
1600 Clifton Road  
Atlanta, GA 30329

Dear Secretary Becerra and Director Walensky:

I am writing to urge you to end the pre-departure testing requirement for international air travel and to end the mask mandate for travel on airplanes. Neither restriction is currently supported by data and science in today's public health environment.

Throughout the pandemic, the airline industry worked closely with the federal interagency working group and strongly supported federal policies necessary to mitigate risk and keep travel moving safely, including a vaccine requirement to restart international travel as well as pre-departure testing for entry into the U.S. and the federal mask mandate.

The public health environment has changed dramatically since those requirements were put into place, in large part due to the Administration's success in getting our population vaccinated. Hospitalizations and deaths have been falling since mid-January despite a recent uptick in cases in certain cities. These realities, along with the immunity provided by boosters and prior infections, coupled with effective treatments and the high level of safety onboard a plane due to effective ventilation and HEPA air filters provide rationale for lifting pre-departure testing and mask requirements for air travel.

Pre-departure testing is no longer an effective measure in protecting the United States from COVID-19. This requirement provides little health benefit, yet discourages travel by imposing an additional cost, as well as a fear of being stranded overseas. For these reasons, many foreign governments, including those of Canada, the United Kingdom and the European Commission, have eliminated this requirement for international air travel. Furthermore, since the federal government does not require negative tests for entry at our land-border ports of entry with Canada and Mexico, it no longer is logical to keep a pre-departure COVID-19 testing requirement in place for inbound international air travelers to the United States.

We continue to urge the Administration to lean into science and research, which clearly support lifting the mask mandate. The CDC has issued guidance that determined that over 99 percent of the U.S. population no longer needs to wear masks indoors. Numerous studies and public health experts have demonstrated that planes are among the safest indoor environments due to the superior ventilation and hospital grade air filters on commercial aircraft. It makes no sense to require masks on a plane when masks are not recommended in places like restaurants, bars or

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crowded sports facilities. Further, the burden of enforcing these requirements has fallen on airline employees for the past two years, oftentimes creating challenging situations with frustrated passengers. Across the country, effective masks are now widely available and those who would like an added layer of protection may continue to do so voluntarily.

If the federal mask mandate is extended, the Administration should publish the data and science used to reach that decision as it would be inconsistent with other research. It is very difficult to understand why masks are still required on airplanes, but not needed in crowded bars and restaurants; in packed sports arenas; in schools full of children; or at large indoor political gatherings. Simply put, an extension of the mask mandate does not make sense.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nicholas E. Calio". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Nicholas E. Calio