

Canada's Westjet announces temporary layoffs, flight cancellations

January 8 2021



Westjet, Canada's second largest airline, announces temporary layoffs of as many as 1,000 staff as demand for flights dropped off with the sudden introduction of stricter Canadian entry rules to curb the spread of the novel coronavirus

Westjet, Canada's second largest airline, announced Friday temporary layoffs of as many as 1,000 staff as demand for flights dropped off with the sudden introduction of stricter Canadian entry rules to curb the spread of the novel coronavirus.

The carrier said it will have to cut 230 flights per week in February and March, reducing its capacity by almost one-third, citing "volatile demand" and "instability in the face of continuing [federal government](#) travel advisories and restrictions."

As of Thursday, air travellers have been required to show a negative test for the COVID-19 illness before being allowed to board a [flight](#) to Canada. They must also quarantine for 14 days upon arrival.

"Immediately following the federal government's inbound testing announcement on December 31, and with the continuation of the 14-day quarantine, we saw significant reductions in new bookings and unprecedented cancellations," Westjet president Ed Sims said in a statement.

He decried the new measure as "hasty" and "incoherent," and said it was "causing Canadian travellers unnecessary stress and confusion."

A handful of Canadians were reportedly denied boarding on the first flights from Cuba and Mexico since the rule came into effect.

Westjet said the staffing reductions impacting "the equivalent of 1,000 employees" would include furloughs, temporary layoffs, unpaid leaves and reduced hours.

It also announced a hiring freeze.

This is in addition to the cutting of half its workforce in March, and

subsequent reductions that left it with 5,700 active workers and 5,200 inactive prior to the latest cuts.

The Canadian [airline industry](#) has been asking for months for a bailout from the Canadian government.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said Friday those negotiations continue, outlining demands that passengers be reimbursed for cancelled flights and that regional routes be maintained.

He noted that the government has spent close to Can\$1.5 billion supporting Canadian airlines through wage subsidies and other aid.

"We know that the airline industry has been extremely hard-hit by the COVID-19 pandemic," Trudeau said. "People shouldn't be travelling and that of course is a direct challenge for the airline industry."

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