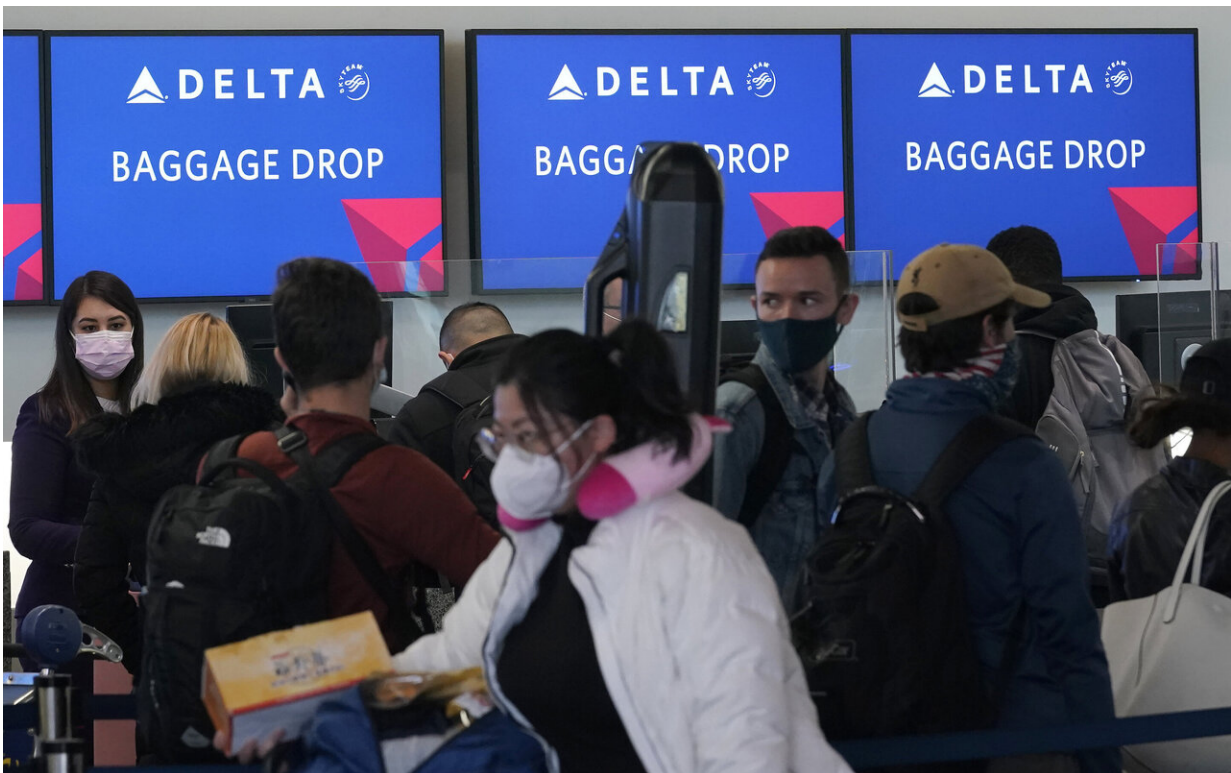


# Airlines push White House to reject testing for US flights

February 12 2021, by Zeke Miller and David Koenig

---



In this Dec. 22, 2020 file photo, people wait in line at a Delta Air Lines gate at San Francisco International Airport during the coronavirus pandemic in San Francisco. U.S. airlines are pressing their case against requiring coronavirus testing of passengers on domestic flights. The CEOs of several major airlines met Friday, Feb. 12, 2021 with the White House's coronavirus-response coordinator to lobby against a testing requirement. (AP Photo/Jeff Chiu, file)

Leaders of several major U.S. airlines met online Friday with White House officials to press their case against requiring coronavirus tests for passengers on domestic flights, saying it would undermine the already fragile industry.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki downplayed speculation that the Biden administration could soon impose a requirement that passengers on domestic flights first pass a COVID-19 test. But she stopped short of taking the idea off the table.

"Reports that there is an intention to put in place new requirements such as testing are not accurate," Psaki said. She described the meeting with CEOs as "brief."

A person familiar with the discussions said the airline CEOs talked with White House coronavirus-response coordinator Jeff Zients, according to the person, who spoke anonymously to discuss a private meeting.

The CEOs of American, United, Southwest, Alaska and JetBlue all took part in the meeting, according to industry officials.

The meeting was arranged after Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg and Rochelle Walensky, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, said that a testing requirement before domestic flights was under consideration.

"We had a very positive, constructive conversation focused on our shared commitment to science-based policies as we work together to end the pandemic, restore air travel and lead our nation toward recovery," Nick Calio, head of the trade group Airlines for America, said in a statement.



In this Feb. 2, 2021 file photo, a traveler walks through Terminal B of LaGuardia Airport in New York. U.S. airlines are pressing their case against requiring coronavirus testing of passengers on domestic flights. The CEOs of several major airlines met Friday, Feb. 12, with the White House's coronavirus-response coordinator to lobby against a testing requirement. They say it would further undermine air travel, which is still running at less than half its pre-pandemic level. (AP Photo/Frank Franklin II, File)

Since late January, the CDC has required that international travelers show a negative COVID-19 test or recovery from the virus before they board a flight to the U.S. The airline industry generally supports that rule, believing that testing could eventually replace tougher international travel restrictions, such as quarantines.

Airlines reacted with alarm, however, when CDC officials raised the possibility of testing the much larger number of passengers on domestic flights. Airlines officials say that would further devastate air travel, which has still not returned even to half its pre-pandemic level. They worry that the additional cost of a test would discourage people from taking shorter trips.

The airlines also argue that there isn't enough testing capacity to test every passenger. More than 1 million people went through checkpoints at U.S. airports on Thursday, according to figures from the Transportation Security Administration.

They also say that requiring people to take a coronavirus test before flights would cause more people to drive—merely shifting the risk of spreading the virus from planes to cars.

Airline unions have joined the push against testing domestic passengers. On Friday, the Southwest Airlines pilots' union said a testing mandate "would decimate domestic air travel demand, put aviation jobs at risk, and create serious unintended consequences."

© 2021 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed without permission.

Citation: Airlines push White House to reject testing for US flights (2021, February 12) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://techxplore.com/news/2021-02-airlines-white-house-flights.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.