

News

Biden's Executive Orders Elicit Praise, Concern from U.S. Travel

The new commander in chief will reinstate travel restrictions on non-U.S. travelers from about 30 countries, including the United Kingdom, Brazil and South Africa.



by [Sarah J.F. Braley](#)

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President Joseph Biden got to work immediately last week by signing 15 executive orders on his first day, a number of which will affect travel. The new administration has reversed Trump's ban on travelers from several majority-Muslim nations. Another executive order requires that people wear masks on federal property, and masks will soon also be mandated for travel – in airports and on planes, ships, intercity buses, trains and public transportation. Travelers arriving from outside the country will need to show a negative Covid-19 test before departure and then quarantine upon arrival in the U.S.

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According to the Associated Press, President Biden today plans to reinstate Covid-19 travel restrictions on non-U.S. travelers from Brazil, Ireland, the United Kingdom and 26 other European countries that allow travel across open borders. White House officials, speaking on the condition of anonymity, also confirmed Sunday that South Africa would be added to the restricted list because of concerns about a variant of the virus that has spread beyond its borders.

The new administration's top priority, according to White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki, is to get the Covid-19 virus under control, and deal with the effects of the pandemic.

Travel industry leaders wasted no time in welcoming President Joseph R. Biden Jr. as his term began — and reminding him of the toll the pandemic has taken on the economy in general and the travel industry in particular. Shortly before taking office, Biden announced a [plan for relief](#) that addresses both. And he has wasted no time in signing executive orders that will affect travel.

Biden's proposed \$1.9 trillion stimulus package, which has been praised by the travel industry, earmarks \$20 billion for a national vaccination program and \$15 billion for a new grant program for small business owners that will be separate from the Paycheck Protection Program. That plan will need to be approved by Congress.



Roger Dow, president and CEO of the U.S. Travel Association

"We welcome the president's focus on policies that will encourage safe travel and help restore the millions of U.S. travel jobs that were lost last year," said [Roger Dow](#), president and CEO of the [U.S. Travel Association](#), in a statement. He praised in particular the new policy of requiring negative Covid-19 tests for international travelers. "The CDC's inbound testing requirement is the key to reopening international travel and it adds another important layer of safety. If the testing requirement is going to work on a global scale, it has to be flexible and reflect where testing resources are

available and where they're not. The executive order would allow for flexibility if it's needed.

"We also strongly support the president's mask mandate for interstate travel, which is in line with the industry's health and safety guidance and consistent with what countless travel businesses are already doing to protect travelers and workers," Dow added.



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He went on to address the new orders with respect to logistics and the importance of international inbound travel to the industry. "The repeal of the travel ban from certain Muslim-majority countries is the right move," he commented. "The CDC testing requirement for international travelers should also pave the way to ease other travel restrictions, including those on the U.K., the E.U., and Brazil, in the near term. However, the executive order on travel also leaves many important questions unanswered. We believe a mandatory quarantine requirement for international travelers could be extremely difficult to enforce – and unnecessary in light of required testing and the many other protections now in place. In the domestic environment, where there aren't defined ports of entry for travelers, mandatory testing and other requirements are also impractical and could divert scarce public health resources away from other priorities."

Dow called for a practical approach to new policy. "We look forward to working with the Biden administration to develop realistic and effective risk-based policies," he said, "and to educate travelers on additional recommendations, to help continue the safe reopening of travel."



Chip Rogers, president and CEO of the American Hotel & Lodging Association

[Chip Rogers](#), president and CEO of the [American Hotel & Lodging Association](#), likewise congratulated Biden and Harris on behalf of his hotel-industry members – while calling attention to his constituents' struggles and needs. "As an industry, we continue to face historically [low occupancy rates](#), [massive job loss, and record hotel closures](#)," he said. "Our industry needs help to retain and rehire our associates, revive our local communities and restart our economy. While the vaccine rollout has begun, it will likely take months to widely distribute, and travel is not

expected to return to 2019 levels until 2023. We urge Congress and the new administration to come together on a longer-term stimulus package that will ensure our industry survives so that the men and women who are the backbone and heart of hospitality can get back to work and unleash the power of the American dream."

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