



Written by [Veronika Kyrylenko](#) on March 11, 2022

TSA Extending Travel Mask Mandate for Another Month

The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) issued a brief statement that extended the requirement to wear face masks on public transportation and in transportation hubs through April 18, 2022. The previous requirement was set to expire on March 18. The recommendation goes against the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) recently updated guidance that made masks unnecessary for most Americans.

The [statement](#) issued on Thursday reads,

At CDC's recommendation, TSA will extend the security directive for mask use on public transportation and transportation hubs for one month, through April 18th.

During that time, CDC will work with government agencies to help inform a revised policy framework for when, and under what circumstances, masks should be required in the public transportation corridor. This revised framework will be based on the COVID-19 community levels, risk of new variants, national data, and the latest science. We will communicate any updates publicly if and/or when they change.



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According to the [CDC website](#), Covid cases, hospitalizations and deaths are on a steady decline nationwide.

"The reported new cases and seven-day moving average cases have dropped significantly since the height of the Omicron variant spread in January 2022. For comparison, on Jan. 13, 2022, CDC reported 899,603 new cases and a seven-day moving average of 806,550; March 9, 2022, the numbers reported were 49,710 new cases and a seven-day moving average of 37,149," [reported](#) *Mass Transit* on the matter.

During the month of February, the governors of deep-blue states including California, New York, Oregon, Delaware, Washington, Connecticut, and others have started easing and lifting indoor mask mandates even before the CDC eased the masking guidance on February 25.



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The agency [announced](#) the major changes to the metric it uses in recommending face coverings. When evaluating Covid community levels, the agency has shifted from simply counting Covid cases to factoring in hospital beds being used, hospital admissions, and the total number of new Covid cases in an area. As a result, more than 90 percent of the U.S. population now apparently lives in areas with low or medium Covid community level and does need to wear a mask.

While it all sounds very “science-y,” CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky [admitted](#) before updating the guidance that her agency simply wanted to “give people a break” from wearing masks.

Moreover, in January, the CDC practically [called](#) the commonly used cloth masks the “least protective” type of masks.

The CDC, however, continues to recommend wearing a mask when traveling, [arguing](#) that traveling “increases a person’s risk of getting and spreading COVID-19 by bringing people in close contact with others, often for prolonged periods, and exposing them to frequently touched surfaces.”

The TSA’s move received some pushback on Thursday, as 31 Republican senators urged President Biden to end the travel mask mandate now.

They [wrote](#) to Biden,

We believe current travel restrictions in place should be phased out, allowed to expire, or eliminated altogether. Lifting these restrictions is supported by the science, in particular the significant decline in COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations coupled with ever-increasing vaccination rates.

The senators also pointed to the highly effective air filters that keep the air inside the planes’ cabins clean and safe.

“Air travel in particular has proven safe without mask wearing, given the HEPA filters and constant recirculation of air in airplane cabins,” they noted.

HEPA stands for High Efficiency Particulate Air and is a common type of filter used on modern planes.

According to a skyscanner.com [report](#) from 2020, HEPA filters remove any impurities in the air, no matter how small. “A [New York Times report](#) and [this NASA study](#) show that this includes tiny COVID-19 microns,” per the outlet.

“On most planes, the air in the cabin is completely replaced every three minutes,” continues the report, noting that “40% of the cabin’s air is recycled through this system while 60% is taken from outside.”

The U.S. Travel Association, whose members include big hotel chains, airlines, and tourism boards, [urged](#) the Biden administration to lift the mask mandates and cancel the international Covid test requirement.

Stressing that “the travel industry continues to be challenged with a slow economic recovery,” the association stated that “the Biden administration urgently needs to send a clear message to the American public and the world that it is safe to travel again.”

In February, the State of Texas filed a lawsuit against the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the CDC, and their respective heads over the travel mask mandate. As [reported](#) by *The New American*, the plaintiffs argue that the federal agencies overstepped their authorities when issuing a travel mask mandate.



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The [travel mask mandate](#) was first issued on January 29, 2021 by Chief of Staff for the CDC Sherri A. Berger, and was repeatedly extended. The mandate requires people traveling by planes, trains, road vehicles, vessels, and other means of transport, including military, into and within the United States to wear masks over the nose and mouth. Travelers must also wear masks at travel hubs.

Failure to comply with the travel mask mandate carries criminal penalties. Violators may be charged \$500-\$1,000 for the first “offense” and \$1,000-\$3,000 for the second, per the [TSA](#).





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