



American Society of
Travel Advisors

February 1, 2022

Mr. Jeffrey Zients
COVID-19 Recovery Team Coordinator
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. Zients:

On behalf of the 17,000 members of the American Society of Travel Advisors (ASTA), I write today to respectfully request modifications to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) current order requiring proof of a negative coronavirus (COVID-19) test or documentation of having recovered from COVID-19 for all air passengers, including U.S. citizens, arriving from a foreign country ("inbound testing order").¹

At ASTA, we are committed to working toward a travel industry restart with federal, state and international governments, our members, and the broader travel ecosystem in a way that puts the safety and health of U.S. citizens at its center. That said, while we understand the rationale behind the inbound testing order, it continues to present a number of practical challenges to our members and their clients. These challenges range from uncertainty as to the availability of timely testing in-destination to avoid disruption to their return trip to the financial and psychological burdens associated with being prevented from returning home due to a positive (or false positive) test result, to a general chilling effect on international travel bookings. The recent shortening of the testing window from 72 to 24 hours has only exacerbated these challenges.

In our view, the inbound testing order remains the single biggest barrier to the full recovery of the international travel system on which so many of our members, and their clients, rely for their livelihoods. As we enter the third year of the pandemic and reflect on how far the science related to COVID-19 mitigation has advanced since the order was first put in place in January 2021, we respectfully request that fully vaccinated U.S. citizens be exempted from the order.

According to the CDC, "the best way to slow the spread of COVID-19...is for individuals to get vaccinated...vaccinated individuals are 5 times less likely to be infected and 10 times less likely to experience hospitalization or death due to COVID-19 than unvaccinated individuals." Exempting the more than 200 million Americans who are fully vaccinated from the order would reflect the scientific consensus that widespread vaccinations are the single most important element of the fight against COVID-19 while allowing the travel industry's recovery to begin in

¹ U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2022, January). [Requirement for Proof of Negative COVID-19 Test or Documentation of Recovery from COVID-19](#).

earnest. It would also incentivize those who aren't vaccinated to consider becoming so, restoring an incentive that existed for a mere 28 days between the effective dates of the Administration's October 25 and December 2 updates to the order.²

Moreover, a growing number of countries have recently moved in the direction of removing the pre-departure test requirement for the fully vaccinated, including the United Kingdom (U.K.), Ireland, Sweden and others, and the European Union now recommends its member states not require vaccinated residents to undergo pre-departure tests.³ In the U.K. Prime Minister Boris Johnson said that while stricter travel restrictions were put in place in late November when the omicron variant was first identified, "now, omicron is so prevalent, these measures are having limited impact on the growth in cases, while continuing to pose significant costs on our travel industry," a sentiment we agree with wholeheartedly.⁴

To be clear, we do not as a general matter believe that vaccination should be a prerequisite to international travel. That said, we do believe a balance needs to be struck in terms of protecting public health without crippling the free flow of commerce and individuals across international borders. Exempting fully vaccinated U.S. citizens from the order is a way to appropriately strike that balance consistent with the Administration's stated desire for "an air travel policy that relies primarily on vaccination to advance the safe resumption of international air travel to the United States."⁵

Thank you for considering ASTA's views on this critical matter. If you or your staff has any questions about this or any related to the travel industry, don't hesitate to contact me or Eben Peck, ASTA's Executive Vice President of Advocacy, at (703) 739-6842 or epeck@asta.org.

Yours Sincerely,



Zane Kerby
President and Chief Executive Officer

² Effective November 8, 2021, unvaccinated U.S. citizens and permanent residents were to provide a negative test taken within one day of departure, while vaccinated travelers continued to require a negative test within 72 hours. In the wake of the omicron variant, effective December 6 that distinction was erased and all travelers were required to present a negative test within 24 hours.

³ Hardingham-Gill, Tamara. "[EU wants test-free travel for vaccinated residents.](#)" *CNN*. 25 January 2022.

⁴ Castle, Stephen. "[England will ease testing rules for travel as Omicron becomes widespread.](#)" *New York Times*. 5 January 2022.

⁵ The White House. (2021, October.) [A Proclamation on Advancing the Safe Resumption of Global Travel During the COVID-19 Pandemic.](#)