

**Dr. Ashish Jha**

Incoming Covid Response Coordinator  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave., NW  
Washington, D.C. 20500

March 22, 2022

Dear Dr. Jha:

We are grateful that President Biden has selected you to serve as the next Covid Response Coordinator and we applaud Mr. Zients for his leadership to increase vaccination rates, boost testing capacity and navigate our nation's pandemic response.

Because of the progress that's been made, you are stepping into this role at a pivotal time where declining hospitalization rates, increased immunity, widely available vaccines and cutting-edge treatments will allow endemic-focused policies to replace pandemic-driven restrictions. To this end, we respectfully urge you to quickly focus on replacing pandemic-era travel advisories, requirements and restrictions with endemic-focused policies of a "new normal" that enable travel to resume fully, freely and safely.

Throughout the pandemic, we strongly supported federal policies that were necessary to combat COVID-19 and keep travel moving safely, including a vaccine requirement to restart international travel and the federal mask mandate.

Unfortunately, despite declining hospitalizations and infections, increased vaccination rates and immunity, and a more robust public health infrastructure to manage the virus, the vast majority of pandemic-driven federal travel policies are still in place. What's most concerning is that, while the public health benefits of these policies have greatly diminished, the economic consequences continue to grow. For example, in 2021, as many other sectors of the economy reached a full recovery:

- Business travel spending was still 56% below 2019 levels; and
- International travel spending was still down a staggering 78% compared to 2019.

Given travel's slow economic recovery, and in light of the improved public health metrics in the U.S. and medical advancements to prevent the worst outcomes of COVID-19, we encourage you to prioritize the removal of travel requirements that no longer fit with the current environment and to set clear timelines and metrics for when others will be lifted.

Importantly, upon stepping into the role, we encourage you to immediately remove the pre-departure testing requirement for vaccinated inbound international air travelers. Many foreign governments with similar infection, vaccination and hospitalization rates – including the United Kingdom, Germany and Canada – have eliminated pre-departure testing requirements. Further, it makes little sense to keep the pre-departure testing requirement in place for inbound air travelers when the U.S. government does not require negative tests at U.S.-Canada and U.S.-Mexico land border points of entry. Eliminating the pre-departure testing requirement would accelerate the return of international travel to and from the U.S. without increasing the spread of COVID-19.

Similarly, we encourage you to quickly work with relevant federal agencies to repeal the mask mandate for public transportation. This would better align mask-wearing policies for travel with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance for indoor mask wearing and encourage a faster return to business travel.

Please find attached a list of federal travel advisories, requirements and restrictions that we believe should be reevaluated, updated or removed. Of course, reasonable and effective risk-based policies can be reinstated at any time if new variants of concern emerge or if the public health situation deteriorates. However, we believe it is time for the administration to lead the country toward a new normal for travel and on a faster road to a full economic recovery.

Sincerely,



**Roger Dow**

President and CEO  
U.S. Travel Association

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A PATHWAY TO THE NEW NORMAL:**

- **Immediately remove the pre-departure testing requirement for all fully vaccinated inbound international arrivals.** Because of the pervasiveness of the omicron variant, increased immunity and higher vaccination in the U.S., the pre-departure testing requirement can be eliminated for fully vaccinated individuals without increasing the spread of COVID-19. Removing the pre-departure testing requirement will incentivize vaccination, increase demand for international travel to and from the U.S., and better align passenger aviation entry requirements with those at U.S. land border points of entry and other major travel-trade partners abroad (e.g., the United Kingdom and European Union).
- **By April 18, repeal the Federal mask mandate for public transportation.** The federal mask mandate for transportation networks is set to expire on April 18. The administration should use this date as a decision point for either repealing or announcing a plan and timeline to repeal the federal mask mandate within the subsequent 90 days. Airplanes are already equipped with advanced air filtration systems, and airports have made large investments in air filtration, sanitation and layouts. Once COVID-19 hospitalization rates have decreased, the mask mandate should be lifted to reflect the improved public health environment.
- **End “avoid travel” advisories and the use of travel bans.** The CDC should ensure that Americans are not dissuaded from traveling to any place with COVID-19 case rates that are equal to, or less than, the case rates prevailing in the U.S. As conditions continue to improve, the CDC should end all “avoid travel” advisories for vaccinated individuals. In the future, the Biden Administration should avoid the use of travel bans from specific countries, which are not recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO) and have proven to be an ineffective means of preventing the spread of COVID-19.
- **Work with other countries to normalize travel conditions and entry requirements.** As the pandemic abates and the Administration works to ease domestic and international travel requirements, it should encourage other nations to do the same and ensure that Americans are afforded the same travel privileges to other nations that their citizens have in the U.S. This should include an effort to align entry protocols with countries representing the top 20 inbound travel markets for the U.S., which include the United Kingdom and several nations in the European Union, as well as a coordinated effort within the State Department to resume routine visa processing in those aforementioned inbound travel markets. This will not only help avoid a confusing patchwork of different vaccination, testing and entry requirements across the globe, but it will also help the U.S. economy achieve the full recovery that it has been searching for since the pandemic’s beginning.
- **By June 1, develop benchmarks and timelines for a pathway to the new normal that repeals pandemic-focused travel restrictions.** As COVID-19 and its variants become no more deadly than many other illnesses which are not closely monitored—or for which there are no travel implications—all remaining restrictions, including international vaccine and testing mandates, as well as any remaining mask mandates, should be removed. We strongly encourage the Administration to chart a path to the new normal and announce a plan to replace pandemic-focused travel restrictions with more permanent travel policies.
- **Send a clear message to the American public and the world that it is safe to travel again, particularly for vaccinated individuals.** Nations around the world are delivering public messages from high-level government officials and investing in travel promotion campaigns to encourage the resumption of domestic and international travel. Since the start of the pandemic, the federal government’s advisories, policies and public messaging have focused on discouraging or actively restricting domestic and international travel. It is time for high-level officials within the Administration to publicly encourage travel to and within the U.S. Doing so would send a clear message to U.S. businesses, trading partners and travelers alike that America is once again open for business.