

# Americans return to long waits for screenings at US airports

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In this photo provided by Austin Boschen, people wait in line to go through the customs at Dallas Fort Worth International Airport in Grapevine, Texas, Saturday, March 14, 2020. International travelers reported long lines at the customs at the airport Saturday as staff took extra precautions to guard against the new coronavirus, The Dallas Morning News reports. Boschen said it took him at least 4 hours to go through the customs. (Austin Boschen via AP)

As weary travelers returned to the U.S. amid coronavirus-related travel restrictions, they were greeted with packed, hourslong waits for required medical screenings at airports.

Posts on [social media](#) indicated passengers at Chicago's O'Hare International Airports waited upwards of four hours in winding lines, eliciting criticism from elected Illinois officials.

Gov. J.B. Pritzker tweeted at President Donald Trump and Vice President Mike Pence, noting that the customs process is under federal jurisdiction and demanding they take action to address the crowds. His concerns were echoed on Twitter by his fellow Democrats, Illinois Sens. Dick Durbin and Tammy Duckworth.

"This is unacceptable, counterproductive and exactly the opposite of what we need to do to prevent #COVID19," Duckworth tweeted. "The Trump Administration must send more support to O'Hare immediately."

While U.S. citizens, green card holders and some others are allowed to return home, travelers from Europe are being funneled to one of 13 U.S. airports where they're subject to health screenings and quarantine orders.

Acknowledging the long lines at those airports in tweets posted just after midnight, the Department of Homeland Security's acting secretary said the screenings take about a minute per passenger.



Colorado National Guard medical personnel perform coronavirus test on a motorist at a drive-through testing site outside the Denver Coliseum Saturday, March 14, 2020, in Denver. Officials planned to administer 150 tests but the line of vehicles wrapped around three city blocks. For most people, the new coronavirus causes only mild or moderate symptoms. For some it can cause more severe illness. (AP Photo/David Zalubowski)

"Right now we are working to add additional screening capacity and working with the airlines to expedite the process," Chad Wolf tweeted. "I understand this is very stressful. In these unprecedented times, we ask for your patience."

The dense crowds at the selected airports—among the busiest across the



country—formed even as public health officials call for "social distancing" to stem the spread of the virus.

"I'm less concerned about having to stand here for the amount of time that I am, and more concerned about where the people are traveling from that are around me and what they may or may not have been exposed to," Dorothy Lowe told WFAA-TV at Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport, where some waits stretched to three hours.

The airport's Twitter account responded to passengers who raised concerns about the cramped conditions, saying its customer experience team was taking "extra precautions" and that hand sanitizer was available in all terminals. Meanwhile, O'Hare and Chicago police offered queuers bottled water and snacks, according to the airport's Twitter account.



Denise Arnold, an early voting election official with the Chicago Board of Elections sanitizes a voting machine inside the Cook County Jail as eligible inmates participate in early voting for the March 17, Illinois primary, Saturday, March 14, 2020, in Chicago. (AP Photo/Charles Rex Arbogast)

For most people, the new coronavirus causes only mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough. For some, especially [older adults](#) and people with existing health problems, it can cause more [severe illness](#), including pneumonia.

The vast majority of people recover from the new virus. According to the World Health Organization, people with mild illness recover in about two weeks, while those with more severe illness may take three to six weeks to recover.

Travelers from restricted countries in Europe, China and Iran are being advised to self-quarantine for 14 days after reaching their final destination in the U.S.

"If you don't have to travel, I wouldn't do it," Trump said.

The worldwide outbreak has sickened more than 156,000 people and left more than 5,800 dead, with thousands of new cases confirmed each day. The [death toll](#) in the United States climbed to 57, while infections neared 3,000.



President Donald Trump speaks during a news conference about the coronavirus in the James Brady Briefing Room at the White House, Saturday, March 14, 2020, in Washington. (AP Photo/Alex Brandon)





The Auburn fan section got creative by placing paper plate faces on the seats during the Class 1C boys high school basketball tournament championship game against Ogallala at Pinnacle Bank Arena, Saturday, March 14, 2020, in Lincoln, Neb. Crowds were limited to staff and immediate family due to concerns over the coronavirus. For most people, the new coronavirus causes only mild or moderate symptoms. For some it can cause more severe illness, especially in older adults and people with existing health problems. (Chris Machian/Omaha World-Herald via AP)



A man wears a face mask as he visits the National Mall in Washington, Saturday, March 14, 2020. For most people, the new coronavirus causes only mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia. (AP Photo/Patrick Semansky)





A member of the media, right, gets their temperature taken by member of the White House physicians office, over concerns about the coronavirus outside the James Brady Briefing Room at the White House, Saturday, March 14, 2020, in Washington. The White House announced Saturday that it is now conducting temperature checks on anyone who is in close contact with President Donald Trump and Vice President Mike Pence. The vast majority of people recover from the new coronavirus. According to the World Health Organization, most people recover in about two to six weeks, depending on the severity of the illness.(AP Photo/Alex Brandon)



Colorado National Guard medical personnel suit up to perform coronavirus tests on motorists at a drive-through testing site outside the Denver Coliseum Saturday, March 14, 2020, in Denver. Officials planned to administer 150 tests but the line of vehicles wrapped around three city blocks. For most people, the new coronavirus causes only mild or moderate symptoms. For some it can cause more severe illness. (AP Photo/David Zalubowski)

Hospitals across the U.S. are working to expand bed capacity and staffing to keep from becoming overwhelmed as the caseload continues to mount.

"We have not reached our peak," said Dr. Anthony Fauci of the National Institutes of Health. "We will see more cases, and we will see more suffering and death."

Millions of Americans braced for the week ahead with no school for their children for many days to come, no clue how to effectively do their jobs without child care, and a growing sense of dread about how to stay safe and sane amid the relentless spread of the [coronavirus](#).

Tens of millions of students nationwide have been sent home from school amid a wave of closings that include all of Ohio, Maryland, Oregon, Washington state, Florida and Illinois along with big-city districts like Los Angeles, San Francisco and Washington, D.C. Some schools announced they will close for three weeks, others for up to six.

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