

United States Senate

June 25, 2021

Rochelle Walensky, M.D., MPH
Director, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
1600 Clifton Road
Atlanta, GA 30329

David P. Pekoske
Administrator, Transportation Security Administration
601 South 12th Street
Arlington, VA 22202

Dear Dr. Walensky and Administrator Pekoske:

We are writing regarding the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) order and the Transportation Security Administration's (TSA) security directive to require the wearing of masks by individuals on public transportation conveyances—such as airplanes, buses, and trains—or at transportation hubs to prevent the spread of the virus that causes COVID-19. We support measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and end the pandemic as soon as possible, but we also support steps to safely lift restrictions when appropriate.

We understand that CDC and TSA issued and have maintained the mask requirement for travel for several reasons, including that public transportation conveyances and transportation hubs are locations where many people gather, physical distancing can be difficult, and the option to get off or move to another area is not always available. In addition, people may need to take public transportation for their livelihoods, and individuals working or traveling on transportation conveyances may be unvaccinated or at increased risk of severe illness.¹

The CDC's guidance on face masks for fully vaccinated people has evolved as new data have become available and as more individuals are vaccinated. In May, the CDC announced new guidance that fully vaccinated individuals could resume activities without wearing a mask or staying six feet apart. At that time, the CDC said that it would continue to update its guidance for travel as the science emerges and that it would need to collaborate with other agencies as the face mask requirement is an interagency policy.²

As there has not yet been any change in the requirement for masks while traveling, we request an update on the CDC's and TSA's process for updating the mask requirement for fully vaccinated individuals and what the science is showing about the transmission of COVID-19 for fully vaccinated individuals while traveling. Specifically, we request answers by no later than July 12, 2021, to the following questions:

1. What has the CDC learned about the transmission of COVID-19 on airplanes and other forms of transportation for fully vaccinated individuals?
2. What additional factors beyond how COVID-19 spreads, such as the impact on flight attendants or airline operations, are informing the mask requirement for travel?

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/face-masks-public-transportation.html>.

² <https://www.npr.org/2021/05/13/996617539/once-you-are-fully-vaccinated-2-weeks-after-your-last-dose-you-can-shed-your-mas>; <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/press-briefings/2021/05/13/press-briefing-by-white-house-covid-19-response-team-and-public-health-officials-36/>.

3. Would removing the mask requirement for travel for fully vaccinated people encourage vaccination against COVID-19?
4. Would lifting the mask requirement for fully vaccinated travelers create administrability challenges?
5. What steps have the CDC, TSA, and other relevant federal agencies taken together to update the travel guidance and mask requirement?

If the requirement for wearing masks while traveling can be safely lifted and would serve the public health interest, then we believe it would benefit the traveling public. We appreciate your prompt attention to this matter and hard work in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sincerely,



BRIAN SCHATZ
United States Senator



ROGER F. WICKER
United States Senator



AMY KLOBUCHAR
United States Senator



SUSAN M. COLLINS
United States Senator



JERRY MORAN
United States Senator