



COVID-19 Travel Restrictions

Timeline

By Casey Ryan | March 19, 2020

The respiratory disease known as COVID-19 – and commonly referred to as the “coronavirus” – is now impacting the United States and causing widespread panic among the public. As of March 16, 2020, there are more than 180,000 cases around the globe, and more than 7,000 victims have succumbed to the illness since it began to spread in December 2019. In the United States, the number of confirmed cases has now surpassed 4,000 with a rising death toll in its wake.¹ Fortunately, our federal officials acted quickly and appropriately in order to combat this outbreak:²

- President Trump invoked his authority under the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) to “suspend the entry of all aliens, or any class of aliens” who could prove to be “detrimental to the interests of the United States.”
- In *Trump v. Hawaii*, the Supreme Court ruled that the president has the authority to decide “when to suspend entry,” “whose entry to suspend,” “for how long,” and “on what conditions.”
- That authority is applicable to any foreign nationals whose entry would be detrimental to the interests of the United States.
- On January 31, 2020, President Trump suspended entry of foreign nationals who had traveled to or resided in mainland China within the past 14 days. Exceptions were made for immigrants lawfully in the United States, immediate relatives of U.S. citizens and lawful immigrants, and several smaller groups.
- On February 29, 2020, President Trump issued a similar suspension on the entry of foreign nationals who had been in Iran within the past 14 days.
- On March 11, 2020, President Trump issued a suspension of foreign nationals from a majority of Europe.³ He then extended this suspension to the United Kingdom and Ireland a few days later.⁴ Exemptions similar to those applicable to travelers from China and Iran also apply to Europe.
- U.S. citizens and certain foreigners with permission to reside long-term in the United States are being repatriated, subject to quarantine restrictions.
- All decisions regarding travel restrictions and border closures are being made in consultation with the Department of Homeland Security, Department of State and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

COVID-19 should be taken seriously as it is highly contagious and presents a particular threat to the elderly and those in poor health – although infected people across the age spectrum have experienced

severe symptoms. As this is a previously unencountered virus, scientific authorities are furnishing new information on an hourly basis. FAIR will update this document as necessary.

However, neither the COVID-19 outbreak nor its connection to global travel should have been a surprise to anyone working on border security. In 2017, FAIR stated that the U.S. must take the necessary steps in order to increase public health screenings because “a foreign visitor may unknowingly import an easily communicable disease.”⁵ While the spread of this coronavirus is likely a result of international travel by *both* U.S. residents and foreign nationals, if public health screening were a regular part of the immigration inspections process, federal officials might have been able to take even more rapid measures to mitigate the effects of an outbreak. Homeland Security officials have been aggressive in their efforts to fight COVID-19 and should continue to be vigilant as the situation develops.

¹ “COVID-19 CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK,” *Worldometer*, Accessed March 16, 2020, <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/>.

² “COVID-19: Current Travel Restrictions and Quarantine Measures,” *Congressional Research Service*, Accessed March 2020, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/LSB/LSB10415>.

³ White House, “Proclamation—Suspension of Entry as Immigrants and Nonimmigrants of Certain Additional Persons Who Pose a Risk of Transmitting 2019 Novel Coronavirus,” Accessed March 2020, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/proclamation-suspension-entry-immigrants-nonimmigrants-certain-additional-persons-pose-risk-transmitting-2019-novel-coronavirus/>.

⁴ Anne Gearan, Katie Mettler, Miriam Berger, and Christian Davenport, “U.S. expands coronavirus travel restrictions to include U.K. and Ireland,” *The Washington Post*, https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/us-expands-travel-restrictions-to-include-uk-and-ireland-to-combat-coronavirus-spread/2020/03/14/8c2d6bd6-65b2-11ea-acc8-80c22bbee96f_story.html.

⁵ “Is the U.S. Prepared for an Immigration-Related Outbreak of Communicable Disease?” *Federation for American Immigration Reform*, August 2017, https://www.fairus.org/sites/default/files/2017-08/IssueBrief_Immigration_and_Disease_Outbreak.pdf.