

## Considerations for Assisting Air Travel Passengers with Disabilities During the Coronavirus Pandemic

In response to the coronavirus pandemic, the undersigned organizations have developed the below considerations that air carriers should observe or implement to ensure that service to passengers with disabilities is provided in a safe and dignified manner in accordance with the Air Carrier Access Act (ACAA).

- Assistance for passengers with disabilities:
  - Air carrier personnel and contractors who assist passengers with disabilities must use appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and be trained on its use. This is particularly true for those providing hands-on transfer assistance to passengers with disabilities who use an aisle chair for boarding and deplaning the aircraft. Airport wheelchairs and aisle chairs must also be in good working condition, readily available, and regularly sanitized. Our recommendations are generally in line with those from the [Centers for Disease Control \(CDC\)—What Airport Passenger Assistance Workers Need to Know about COVID-19](#).
  - Air carriers must continue to assist passengers with disabilities from the curb, even if curbside check-in is not being provided due to a decrease in passenger travel.
- At the gate:
  - Seating in the gate area must allow social distancing, including in areas where passengers with disabilities are typically staged near the jetway prior to boarding.
  - Gate agents must stay attuned to communicating with passengers who are blind or low-vision about a flight's boarding process as it may be more difficult for them to rely on fellow passengers for information about the flight due to social distancing.
- Boarding/aircraft:
  - Passengers with disabilities are allowed to preboard but are not required to do so. Instead, passengers with disabilities may prefer to board last or as their row is boarded to avoid being in close proximity to other passengers during the boarding process. Upon arrival, aisle chair passengers and others needing wheelchair assistance should be given the opportunity to deplane first or as their row is called instead of having to wait until the flight is empty.
  - Passengers with disabilities who are high-risk for the virus should be allowed additional space such as no row mates, if requested and can be accommodated. This would prevent other passengers from climbing over passengers with disabilities who are unable to move from their seat during boarding, deplaning, and lavatory visits.
  - Air carriers must not implement physical access barriers in aircraft to assist with social distancing in a manner that prohibits access by people with disabilities, including those who use the aisle chair to board.

- Mask/Face Covering Considerations:
  - Air carriers should modify policies related to face mask or covering requirements for passengers as needed in line with the ACAA.
    - For example, [the CDC says that face coverings should not be used by people who have difficulty breathing or taking off their mask.](#)
  - Air carrier personnel and their contractors should use clear face masks when possible to communicate with passengers who are deaf or hard of hearing. In the alternative, white boards and markers should be available at all customer contact points, including the aircraft to facilitate communication.
  - Use of face shields instead of face masks/coverings should also be considered.

ALS Association

American Association of People with Disabilities

American Council of the Blind

Autistic Self Advocacy Network

Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law

Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation

Cure SMA

Epilepsy Foundation

Muscular Dystrophy Association (MDA)

National Association of the Deaf

National Council on Independent Living

National Disability Rights Network

National Multiple Sclerosis Society

Paralyzed Veterans of America

The Arc of the United States

United Spinal Association