

### Airline Safety

The current pandemic has most of us avoiding airline travel—for obvious reasons. But if we absolutely must travel by air, which airlines have the safest policies and offer the most flexibility on your travel plans?

The website NerdWallet conducted a detailed analysis of the seven largest U.S.-based airlines, who collectively received over \$50 billion in federal emergency handouts earlier this spring. Each carrier received a “total grade,” and then a breakdown of that grade into a “flexibility” and “safety” assessment.

The winners. Southwest was the only carrier to receive an A+ overall grade. But it was closely followed by Alaska and Delta, each with A grades. JetBlue received a B-, Hawaiian Air a C+, United Airlines a C- and American Airlines—which has returned to booking middle seats where passengers share an armrest and packing its flights despite social distancing guidelines—received a D.

Purely from a health and safety standpoint, Southwest, Alaska and Delta all received A grades for requiring people to wear a mask and not booking their middle seats. Alaska Air caps all flights at 65% boarding capacity, and like Delta, the carrier changed its boarding procedures so that people board starting in the rear, in order to reduce contact. Southwest Airlines went one step further, and boards passengers in groups of 10 at a time. United also boards rear-to-forward, but only adjusts seat selections “where possible” to avoid customers sitting next to one another. However, on flights that are near full capacity, the airline allows passengers to rebook on a different flight or receive a travel credit.

Jetblue, Hawaiian and United all received C grades for safety, while American Airlines got a failing “F” grade. The article noted that American does require passengers to wear masks during its flights—but so do all the other airlines listed here.

Sources:

<https://www.nerdwallet.com/article/travel/airline-health-policies-during-covid-19-what-you-need-to-know?>

<https://www.nerdwallet.com/article/travel/ask-a-points-nerd-which-airline-should-i-fly-in-2020-and-beyond?>

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