

Mass flight cancellations continue worldwide as Omicron spreads



Passengers line up at John F. Kennedy International Airport in New York City, December 26, 2021 © Reuters / Jeenah Moon

New York, December 27 (RHC)-- Airlines worldwide canceled more than 2,300 flights on Sunday, the third straight day of cancellations. Staff shortages due to positive tests for COVID-19 have been blamed for the holiday chaos.

Christmas Eve and Christmas Day saw more than 4,500 flights canceled and more than 11,000 delayed worldwide, with American and Chinese carriers responsible for the majority of the interruptions.

The disruptions continued on Sunday. According to flight tracking firm FlightAware, 2,323 flights were canceled as of late afternoon, and a further 8,327 were delayed. Of these delays, 2,187 – around a quarter – involved flights within, into, or out of the United States, as did 768 cancellations.

China Eastern, Air China, and Delta Airlines canceled the most flights, with several other Chinese, American, and Indonesian carriers coming in behind.

The weekend of cancellations, which threw Christmas travel plans into disarray for tens of thousands of passengers around the world, came amid a worldwide explosion in COVID-19 case numbers. In a statement on Christmas Day, Delta blamed the cancellations on “a combination of issues, including but not limited to inclement weather in some areas of the country and the impact of the Omicron variant.”

While the symptoms of the Omicron variant typically range from mild to moderate, those testing positive are still advised to stay at home and isolate themselves. For airlines, the resulting staff shortages can lead to flights being unable to take off.

“Like many businesses and organizations, we have seen an increasing number of sick calls from Omicron,” a spokesman for U.S. carrier JetBlue said in a statement to the press. “Despite our best efforts, we’ve had to cancel a number of flights, and additional flight cancellations and other delays remain a possibility as we see more Omicron community spread.”

According to figures from the American Automobile Association earlier this month, airlines expected to see a 184% increase in traffic between December 23 and January 2 from 2020. The U.S. Transportation Security Administration expected to screen nearly 30 million people between December 20th and January 3rd.

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