

U.S. flight cancellations pile up before busy New Year's weekend



By late morning on Thursday, total cancellations had already topped the 1,084 logged for all of Wednesday [File: Lindsey Wasson/Reuters]

New York, December 30 (RHC)-- Airline cancellations are already piling up in the United States, with 1,086 flights scrubbed as rising coronavirus cases hobbled staffing. Winter storms meanwhile threatened

to further disrupt travel over New Year's weekend.

JetBlue Airways Corp. scratched 175 flights, accounting for 17% of its schedule, by 11:37 a.m. Thursday in New York, according to FlightAware.com. Allegiant canceled 89 flights, or 18% of its service. United Airlines Holdings Inc. scrubbed 192 flights, representing 8% of its schedule. By late morning, total cancellations had already topped the 1,084 logged for all of Wednesday.

The disruptions come after thousands of flights were canceled over the Christmas holiday weekend and into early this week as winter storms combined with staffing shortages caused by the spread of coronavirus cases from the omicron variant.

"Like many businesses and organizations, we have seen a surge in the number of sick calls from Omicron," JetBlue said by e-mail. To give customers time to make other plans, the New York-based carrier pared its schedule through January 13th.

While federal guidance reducing the isolation period for many people testing positive to five days from 10 is expected to help staffing. "We expect the number of COVID cases in the Northeast — where most of our crew members are based — to continue to surge for the next week or two," JetBlue said.

United also cited omicron-related staff shortages, as did Allegiant Travel Co., which referred to security and air traffic control issues as well. The Transportation Security Administration said it screened 2.02 million people around the U.S. on Wednesday.

Atlanta was among the hardest hit for cancellations and delays Thursday morning, according to FlightAware. Heavy rains were developing in the Southeast and a flash flood warning was issued for the Atlanta area.

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