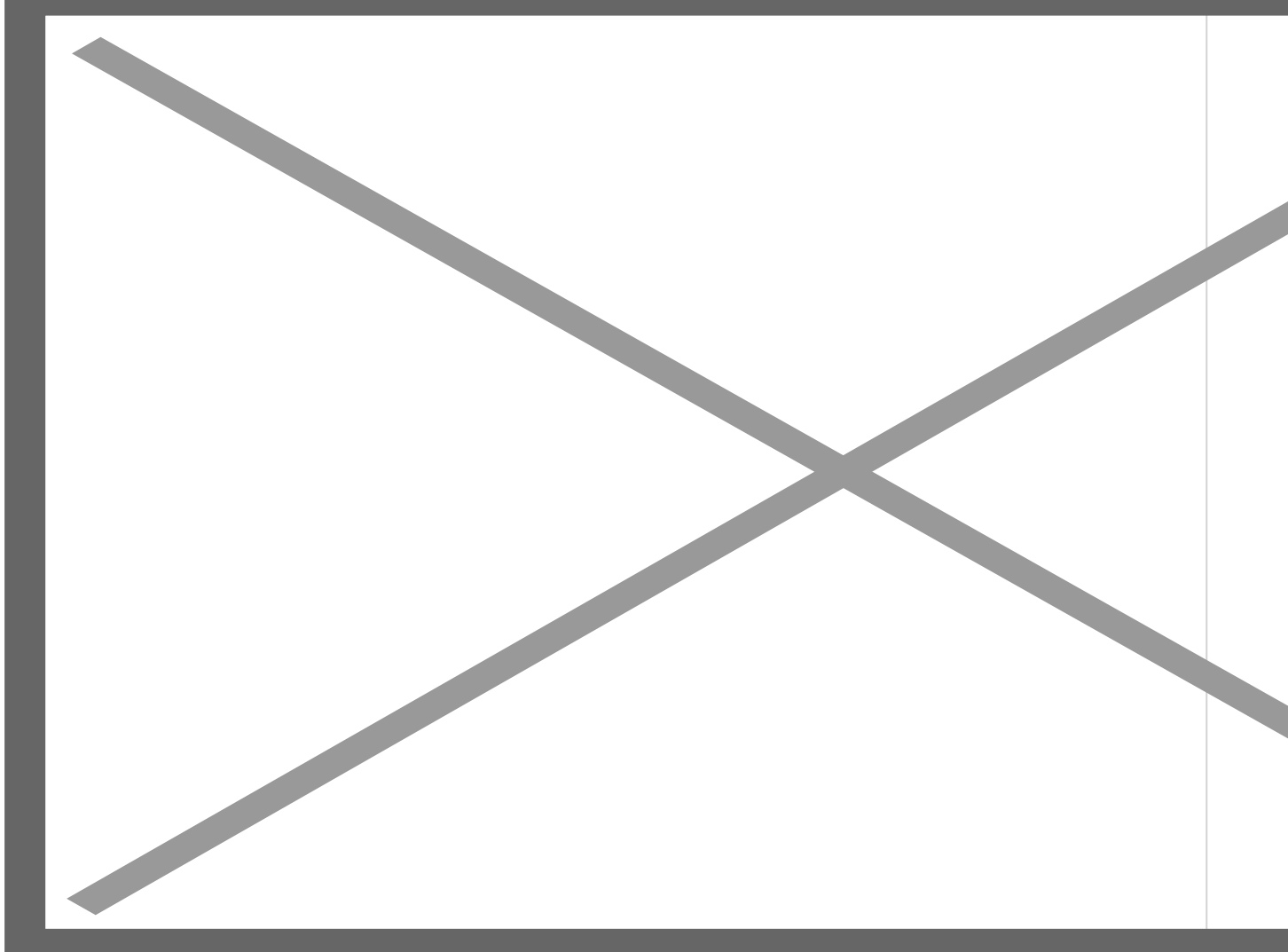


U.S. holiday travelers defy COVID-19 warnings ahead of Thanksgiving

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Signs warn travelers of COVID-19 in New York's LaGuardia Airport on November 24, 2020 in New York City. (Photo: AP)

New York, November 25 (RHC)-- Despite warnings from the government and politicians not to travel for the Thanksgiving holiday due to the COVID-19 pandemic, millions of Americans have been flying and driving to meet friends and family for the holiday.

Millions of Americans appeared to be disregarding public health warnings and traveling ahead of the Thanksgiving holiday, likely fueling an alarming surge in coronavirus infections before a series of promising new vaccines are expected to become widely available.

Although fewer in number than last year, US travelers were flocking to airports and highways against the advice of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the U.S. surgeon general and Dr. Anthony Fauci, the nation's top infectious disease expert.

As U.S. infections of the highly contagious respiratory virus continued to spread swiftly, hitting a new record of 168,000 new cases per day on average, many travelers expressed equal parts of determination and dread.

"I'm really scared, but seeing family is very important to me," Hannah Osnan, 18, a California State University Long Beach student waiting in line for a COVID-19 diagnostic test at Los Angeles International Airport, where she hoped to board a 22-hour flight to see family in Egypt for the first time in a year.

The long Thanksgiving holiday weekend, which begins on Thursday, is traditionally the busiest U.S. travel period of the year, and 2020 may prove to be no exception.

Some one million passengers passed through airport security gates on Sunday, the highest number since March. It was the second time in three days U.S. air travel screenings surpassed one million, though the numbers are down nearly 60% from the same time last year, the U.S. Transportation Security Administration said.

Likewise, the American Automobile Association has forecast that 45 million to 50 million people will take to the highways over the holiday, compared with 55 million in 2019. At the same time, rates of coronavirus infections, deaths and hospitalizations are soaring.

The seven-day rolling average number of US COVID-19 deaths climbed for a 12th straight day, reaching 1,500 as of Monday, according to a Reuters tally of official data, and coronavirus hospitalizations nationally have surged nearly 50% over the past two weeks.

To date, COVID-19 has killed more than 257,000 Americans, with over 12 million testing positive since the pandemic began.

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