

U.S. to lift Canada, Mexico land border restrictions in Nov for vaccinated visitors

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He said in a statement since

WASHINGTON, Oct 12 (Reuters) - The United States will lift restrictions at its land borders with Canada and Mexico for fully vaccinated foreign nationals in early November, ending historic curbs on non-essential travelers in place since March 2020 to address the COVID-19 pandemic.

U.S. Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas said in a statement the administration next month "will begin allowing travelers from Mexico and Canada who are fully vaccinated for COVID-19 to enter the United States for non-essential purposes, including to visit friends and family or for tourism, via land and ferry border crossings."

The new rules are similar but not identical to planned requirements announced last month for international air travelers, U.S. officials said in a call earlier with reporters.

Lawmakers from U.S border states praised the move to lift the unprecedented restrictions which harmed the economies of local communities and has prevented visits to friends and families for 19 months.

"Since the beginning of the pandemic, members of our shared cross-border community have felt the pain and economic hardship of the land border closures. That pain is about to end," Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer said in a statement.

Unvaccinated visitors will still be barred from entering the United States from Canada or Mexico at land borders.

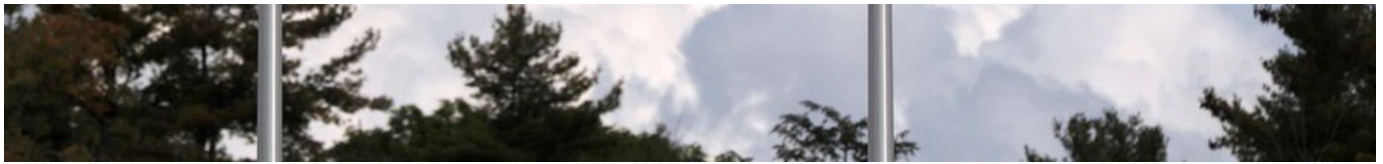
The officials from President Joe Biden's administration emphasized that the White House would not lift the "Title 42" order put in place by former President Donald Trump's administration that has essentially cut off access to asylum for hundreds of thousands of migrants seeking to enter from Mexico.

The precise date in early November when the restrictions will be lifted on both land and air travel will be announced "very soon," one of the officials said.

Homeland Security said the administration was creating "consistent, stringent protocols for all foreign nationals traveling to the United States – whether by air, land, or ferry."

Canada on Aug. 9 began allowing fully vaccinated U.S. visitors for non-essential travel.





A U.S. and a Canadian flag flutter at the Canada-United States border crossing at the Thousand Islands Bridge, which remains closed to non-essential traffic to combat the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in Lansdowne, Ontario, Canada September 28, 2020. REUTERS/Lars Hagberg/File Photo

'GREAT RELIEF'

Once the U.S. curbs are lifted, non-essential foreign visitors crossing U.S. land borders, such as tourists, will be able to visit if they are vaccinated. In early January, the United States will require essential visitors, like truck drivers or healthcare workers, to be vaccinated to cross land borders, the officials said.

U.S. lawmakers have been pushing the White House to lift restrictions that have barred non-essential travel by Canadians across the northern U.S. border since March 2020, and many border communities have been hit hard by the closure. Mexico has also pressed the Biden administration to ease restrictions.

Senator Maria Cantwell said the announcement "will provide great relief to those waiting to see friends and loved ones from Canada."

The White House announced on Sept. 20 that the United States in early November would lift travel restrictions on air travelers from 33 countries including China, India, Brazil and most of Europe who are fully vaccinated against COVID-19. It also said it would extend the vaccine requirements to foreign air travelers from all other countries.

Foreign visitors crossing into the United States by land or ferry will need to be vaccinated but will not necessarily need to show proof of vaccination unless they are referred by U.S. Customs and Border Patrol for secondary inspections.

By contrast, all non-U.S. air travelers will need to show proof of vaccination before boarding a flight, and will need to show proof of a recent negative COVID-19 test. Foreign visitors crossing a land border will not need to show proof of a recent negative COVID-19 test.

On Friday, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said the United States would accept the use by international visitors of COVID-19 vaccines authorized by U.S. regulators or the World Health Organization.

One question unanswered is whether the United States will accept vaccines from visitors who received doses of two different COVID-19 vaccines.

The U.S. land border restrictions have not barred U.S. citizens from returning home.