

# Non-weather flight delays up in recent years at both O'Hare, Midway

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CHICAGO (WLS) -- Many people have travel plans for the holidays. If you do, listen up.

The ABC7 I-Team uncovered an increase in **non-weather** flight delays over the years.

So what are your rights and what can you do to avoid delays? More people are flying post-pandemic, and that could mean more delays, especially as the airline industry continues to fill vacant positions.

The I-Team found that delays are up in recent years for planes landing at both O'Hare and Midway.

"Every time I go on a flight I just cross my fingers," Paula Winiarski said. She said getting to O'Hare wasn't easy because her initial flight had several delays.

"The flight got canceled for mechanical issues, and we were not going to get out until the following day, which really puts a damper on things because we are all just trying to get home," she said.

She demanded that the airline put her on a new flight instead of waiting that extra day and paying for another hotel night. Her delay nightmare was an all too common story.

The ABC7 I-Team reviewed statistics from the U.S. Department of Transportation, which tracks arriving flights. The I-Team looked at non-weather-related delays, which have steadily increased at O'Hare and Midway since 2019.

As of August 2023, about 14% of flights arriving at O'Hare were delayed.

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The major airlines at O'Hare had similar numbers: United with 14%, American and Delta with 15% of flights delayed.

And the I-Team found that Midway passengers had it worse. As of August 2023, about 17% of flights arriving at Midway were delayed.

The major airlines at Midway had similar numbers: Southwest with 17%, Delta with 19% of flights delayed.

Eric Napoli of **AirHelp** explained what may be going on.

"There are staffing issues, especially after the pandemic. There's so many people flying. Airlines are selling more tickets, but they don't necessarily have all the capacity. So you have lots of congestion in the air right now," Napoli said.

Georgia Wilson and her family fly all of the time, and witness the problem.

"A lot of it is crew-related. If it's not staff, they've always been looking for their pilot or they're waiting for the crew to get in from another flight," Wilson said.

One delay can domino into other problems.

"A little short delay can also cause airline crews to have gone over their work limits, and not having additional crews ready to take their place," Napoli said.

The I-Team contacted each airline about the data.

United said that Department of Transportation data show they are O'Hare's most reliable airline.

"In 2022 and so far in 2023, we've performed better than all of our competitors in on-time departures and on-time arrivals," the airline said.

United also said it's hired more than 13,000 employees this year.

Delta said that the government data show "We have produced the number one ranking in on-time arrivals for U.S. domestic flights year-to-date."

Delta added that delays are reviewed to improve customer experience.

American Airlines said it's been "running the most reliable operation of any U.S. network carrier for the past 14 months. That includes the summer 2023 travel period."

Southwest Airlines said it's returned "historical levels of operational reliability" and that "we have improved on-time performance year over year."

The airline said it's completed about 99% of scheduled flights in 2023.

Experts say you can limit delays by taking the first flights out in the morning and take direct flights.

And remember, like Winiarski, you have to speak up!

"I think that you really have to advocate for yourself, and say 'this was my travel plan and because of your mechanical issue, it's really not a good enough excuse for us,'" she said.

**Government guidelines** say airline passengers are entitled to a cash refund if they choose not to fly, when their flight is canceled or is significantly delayed.

If you're on a flight with an excessive, non-weather delay you can also go to the airlines website and ask for credits.

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