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Wheelchair and Guided Assistance

Assistance at the Airport

When a passenger with a disability requests assistance from an airline to move through the airport, the airline is required to **promptly** provide the requested assistance. This assistance may be guide assistance for an individual who is blind or wheelchair assistance for an individual with a mobility impairment. To receive such assistance, the passenger must self-identify to airline staff at the airport as the person with a disability needing this service.

Providing Assistance Throughout the Airport

Airlines are required to provide assistance to passengers with a disability as they navigate through different portions of the airport, this includes:

- Assisting you from the terminal entrance (or vehicle drop-off point) to the gate location where your flight is departing, including the security checkpoint, and onto the aircraft to your seat; and
- Assisting you from your aircraft seat on an arriving flight through the airport to the gate location of your connecting flight (if you have a connection); and
- Assisting you from the gate location of your connecting flight to your seat on the aircraft; and
- Assisting you from your aircraft seat on an arriving flight through the airport to the baggage claim area, terminal entrance, or vehicle pick-up location.

Providing Assistance in the Key Function Areas of the Airport

When providing assistance to passengers with disabilities who are navigating the airport, airlines are also required to provide assistance to passengers in the key function areas of the airport (ex. ticket counters, baggage claim, etc.).

Providing Baggage Assistance to Passenger with Disabilities

When providing assistance to passengers with disabilities who are navigating the airport, airlines are required to assist passengers in carrying their gate-checked or carry-on luggage when passengers are unable to carry the luggage due to their disability.

Leaving a Passenger with a Disability Unattended

When an airline is providing assistance to a passenger who is not independently mobile because of a disability, the airline must not leave the passenger unattended for more than 30 minutes. This requirement applies even if another person is accompanying the passenger, unless the passenger explicitly states that it is okay for the airline to leave them unattended for more than 30 minutes.

Things to Know

If I have a disability, am I allowed to board the airplane before passengers without disabilities?

- Yes. If you self-identify as a passenger with a disability who needs additional time or assistance to board the airplane, the airline must allow you to board the airplane before other passengers.

Are airlines required to allow me to stop at the bathroom when assisting me to my flight?

- Yes. If you request to stop at the bathroom on your way to a departing flight, the airline personnel assisting you is required to stop at the entrance to a bathroom. However, the airline personnel is required to stop only if the bathroom is on the way to your destination and the stop can be made without an unreasonable delay.

Are airlines required to show me where the service animal relief area is located?

- Yes. Upon request, airline personnel are required to escort you and your service animal to the service animal relief area.

Are airlines required to provide me with assistance as soon as I arrive at the curbside area of the terminal entrance?

- No. Airlines are required to provide you with assistance in a timely fashion after you self-identify to airport personnel as an individual who needs assistance.

If a passenger requests wheelchair assistance with getting through the airport and the carrier has reason to believe that the passenger is misusing the service, how can a carrier confirm the need for wheelchair service and when can the carrier deny providing the service?

- The Air Carrier Access Act (ACAA) prohibits U.S. and foreign carriers from discriminating against an otherwise qualified individual because the individual has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, has a record of such an impairment, or is regarded as having such an impairment. The ACAA does not obligate carriers to provide assistance to a passenger when such services do not assist with the passenger's disability or if the passenger does not have a disability.
- In situations where there is uncertainty about the access needs of a passenger, a carrier may ask the passenger for credible verbal assurance that the passenger needs the service and how the service assists with the passenger's disability. This inquiry of the passenger would take place at the airport and must not be focused on the nature of the passenger's disability. For example, a carrier may ask the passenger: "How does the requested wheelchair service assist with your disability?"
- If the passenger does not have a disability, the carrier may refuse to provide the wheelchair service. A carrier is not obligated to provide wheelchair assistance to passengers who do not have reduced mobility but are interested in obtaining priority access through security or immigration or passengers with a language barrier who need interpretation assistance.
- If a passenger has a disability but the wheelchair service does not assist with the passenger's disability, the carrier may propose other assistance services to support the passenger with his or her needs (e.g., a passenger who has difficulty walking long distances but is able to climb up and down stairs may be provided assistance to the gate through the use of a cart instead of a wheelchair, a passenger who is blind or low vision and needs wayfinding assistance should be provided guide assistance and not wheelchair service).

Wheelchair and Guided Assistance Tips

Before Your Trip

- You should make reservations as early as possible and advise the airline what type of assistance you will need. For example, you should indicate whether you need wheelchair assistance or guided assistance.
- Request an airport wheelchair when you make your reservation if you are unable to walk long distances.
- If you travel with a battery-powered wheelchair, you must arrive at the airport 1 hour prior to the normal check-in time.
- Confirm your accessibility needs with all airlines involved in your journey.

At the airport

- Arrive at the airport as early as possible to allow time to check any baggage, go through the security screening, and board the plane.
- When you arrive at the airport, it is important that you self-identify as a passenger with a disability needing assistance. Although the airline may have notated in your reservation that you need assistance, the airline will not know that you are the person who requested that assistance if you do not self-identify.
- Be alert to gate and flight time changes and notify airline personnel of your need to move to a different gate, if necessary.
- Advise airline personnel at the boarding gate of any assistance you may need (e.g. pre-board, assistance with carry-on luggage or moving within the aircraft)
- You are entitled to stay in your own wheelchair until you get to the gate. At the gate, your wheelchair will be taken from you. If you cannot walk, you will be transported to your aircraft seat in an aisle chair. Your wheelchair will be returned to you at the gate once you reach your destination.

On the aircraft

- Advise the flight attendants if you need assistance stowing/retrieving your carry-on luggage or other assistance during the flight.
- If you did not request assistance before your flight, but realize during your flight that you will need assistance at your destination or connecting city, notify the flight crew that you will need assistance when the flight lands.
- If you need wheelchair assistance to get off of the aircraft, you should know that airlines generally provide this assistance after all other passengers have deplaned.

Encounter A Problem?

If you believe your rights under the Air Carrier Access Act are being or have been violated, ask to speak with a Complaints Resolution Official (CRO). A CRO is the airline’s expert on disability accommodation issues. Airlines are required to make one available to you, at no cost, in person at the airport or by telephone during the times they are operating.



Last updated: Monday, April 10, 2023

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