

# MDA Air Travel Guide

**Traveling by air** can present unique challenges for individuals living with mobility challenges. However, with proactive planning and the right strategies, air travel can be a manageable and successful experience.

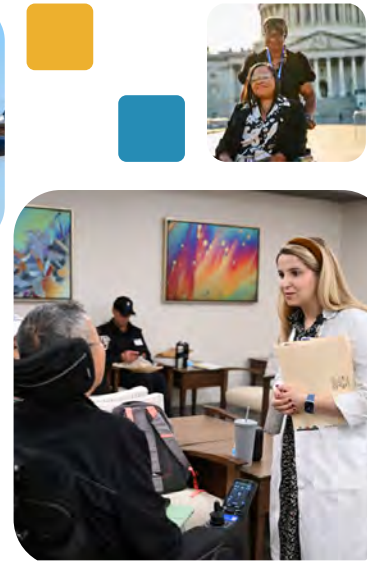
This guide is designed to provide individuals with the information and resources they need to navigate the complexities of airline travel, from preparation and day-of tips to understanding passenger rights and filing complaints if necessary.

Our goal is to empower travelers to advocate for their needs and ensure a smoother, more accessible journey.

## Traveler's Timeline

### 1. Booking your flight and pre-travel

- 1. Before booking a flight, measure the dimensions of your mobility device. If the device is collapsible, note these measurements. If possible, input this information during the booking process.
- 2. If your mobility device cannot be transported on your preferred flight, contact the airline for other flight options.
- 3. When booking the flight online, indicate what disability accommodations or services you will need, for example, an aisle chair to board the plane or seating accommodations. If you are unable to enter this information, immediately contact the airline.
- 4. If you are traveling with a service animal, check what documents are needed.
- 5. A week before your flight, contact the airline to confirm any needed assistance or accommodations.
- 6. If you will need assistance for security screenings, contact TSA Cares. ([See traveler's resources below.](#))
- 7. If you will be checking your mobility device, prepare written instructions on how to safely disassemble and reassemble the device.





## 2. Day of Travel

- Before leaving for the airport, check to make sure you have all necessary paperwork.
- Arrive 2-3 hours before your flight to provide sufficient time for any needed disability-related assistance.
- When checking-in, confirm with the airline staff that you will receive needed disability services or accommodations.
- If you will need preboarding, wheelchair assistance, or will need an aisle chair, reconfirm with airline personnel at the gate that you will receive these services.
- At the gate, before checking your mobility device, take pictures and videos of the device to show its condition.
- When airline personnel arrive to take and stow your mobility device, remove any easily removable parts and give them any prepared instructions.
- If you requested aisle chair assistance for boarding, give the personnel verbal instructions on how to best assist you with the transfers.

## 3. Post Travel

- Upon arrival, follow all crew instructions on deplaning. If your personal mobility device is not immediately available, request a status update.
- If you need aisle chair assistance to deplane, provide verbal instructions on how to best assist you with the transfer.
- When your device is returned, survey your mobility device for any damage, and take pictures or videos of the device to show the condition in which it was returned.
- If your mobility device was damaged, file a damage report with the airline. If the device is unusable, request a loaner wheelchair or scooter until the mobility device is repaired or replaced.
- If you believe the airline violated your rights as a passenger with a disability, [file a complaint](#) with the U.S. Department of Transportation on their online portal.

### Traveler's tips

- Book all travel companions, family members, and caregivers on the same airline reservation in case flights or itineraries need to be changed.
- During every step, confirm and reconfirm with airline staff that you will receive any requested disability services or accommodations.
- If you found you needed additional services or assistance, book these services for return, or future flights.
- If you have any issues with disability related services or accommodations at the airport, request to speak with a Complaint Resolution Official (CRO).
- If you feel that your rights were violated, document the incident. Request the names of people involved, take pictures of any damage to the mobility devices or of injuries, and write down everything you and others remember. This information can be important when filing complaints.
- Read the [Airline Passengers with Disabilities Bill of Rights](#) and research other resources on the rights of passengers with disabilities. These will provide information on what services and accommodations airlines are required to provide.
- Be an advocate. Know your rights, file complaints when necessary, and educate others on their rights by sharing helpful resources.



## Traveler's Rights

- **The Air Carrier Access Act (ACAA, 1986)** – Federal law that prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in air travel.
- **Nondiscrimination requirements** – An airline may not refuse transport except because of safety, nor cap the number of passengers with disabilities on a flight. If transport is denied, airlines must share why, in writing, within 10 days. They may not require you to travel with another person except in very limited situations and if they do, they **cannot** charge for the assistant's transportation.
- **Aircraft accessibility features** – All new aircraft and any aircraft undergoing replacement of cabin interiors, lavatories, or seats must meet certain accessibility requirements: related to seat rests, stowage, on board wheelchairs (OBWs), depending on the number of seats.
- **Advance notice requirements** – Air carriers may require up to 48 hours-advance notice for certain accommodations that require preparation time (e.g., respirator hook-up, transportation of an electric wheelchair on an aircraft with less than 60 seats).
- **Boarding and deplaning assistance** – Passengers identifying as a person with a disability at the gate needing additional time or assistance to board, be seated, or stow accessibility equipment, must be allowed to pre-board. Airlines must help in boarding, deplaning, making connections, and moving between gates.
- **Seating Accommodations** – Passengers with disabilities may not be excluded from sitting in any seat except as required by safety regulations. Airlines must provide upon request seats with movable armrests to those who use aisle chairs and can't transfer over a fixed armrest, as well as seats next to PCAs; and bulkhead or other appropriate seat for those with service animals or a fused or immobilized leg.
- **Service animals** – An airline must allow a service animal to accompany a passenger with a disability unless the animal presents a safety risk, is too large to be accommodated, or causes a significant disruption.
- **Stowage of Assistive Devices** – Airlines must allow wheelchairs to be surrendered and returned as close as possible to the aircraft door (i.e., jet bridge) and have priority over other luggage.
- **Training of Airline Personnel and Contractors** – Important element of ACAA. Airlines operating aircraft with 19+ seats must train 'to proficiency' all personnel and contractors who deal with traveling public on equipment and procedures that safeguard the safety and dignity of passengers with disabilities.
- **Passengers with Disabilities Bill of Rights** – In July 2022, DOT established the first Passengers with Disabilities Bill of Rights to help educate passengers with disabilities about their rights when they travel.
- **2024 Rulemaking from the DoT** – The recent rule from the DoT made significant improvements to regulations implementing the ACAA. While the rule went into effect on January 16, 2025, compliance dates vary by provision.



## Traveler's Resources

- **MDA Advocacy Team** – MDA is dedicated to doing everything in our power to advocate for public policies and programs that empower kids and adults living with neuromuscular disease.
- **MDA Access Workshop: Access to Travel and Transportation** – This workshop is designed to provide an overview of common considerations for traveler's living with a disability. Learners will review transportation legislation, protections for individuals living with disabilities, considerations for different modes of transportation, overcoming barriers, and more.
- **Paralyzed Veteran's of America** – The only nonprofit Veteran Service Organization dedicated solely to helping Veterans with spinal cord injuries and disorders (SCI/D) and diseases like MS and ALS.
- **All Wheel's Up** – A Grassroots nonprofit organization run 100% by volunteers with the goal of funding additional testing of wheelchairs and tie-down securement systems for commercial flight.
- **TSA Cares** – provides information on security procedures aimed to help passengers with disabilities, medical conditions and individuals needing additional assistance to better prepare for the security screening process.
- **U.S. Department of Transportation Airline Passengers with Disabilities Bill of Rights** – This Bill of Rights describes the fundamental rights of air travelers with disabilities under the Air Carrier Access Act.
- **Air Travel Complaints** – For the fastest resolution of many air service-related issues, contact an Airline or Ticket Agents' Customer Service Representative. You may also file a complaint with DOT if the issue could not be resolved to your satisfaction.

**MDA is here to support you. If you have questions, are looking for additional resources, or would like to connect with others in the neuromuscular community, please contact our Resource Center at 1-833-ASK-MDA1 (275-6321) or [resourcecenter@mdausa.org](mailto:resourcecenter@mdausa.org).**

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### Join the Community

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**TikTok:** @mdaorg  
**Twitter:** @MDAorg

**Advocacy Twitter:** @MDA\_Advocacy  
**LinkedIn:** Muscular Dystrophy Association  
**YouTube:** YouTube.com/MDA