

Omicron surge saps united airline staff

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Over 3,000 United Airlines employees have tested positive for COVID-19, thus impacting the company's finances, during a usually peak holiday travel season.

In one day, almost 33pc of United employees in Newark, New Jersey, called in sick, according to a letter to employees by United chief executive Scott Kirby.

“The Omicron surge has put a strain on our operation, resulting in customer disruptions during a busy holiday season,” Kirby wrote.

The statistic reveals the breadth of the staffing issues that airlines are fighting since a growing surge of cases from the Covid-19 Omicron variant began to sweep across the US in January.

JetBlue Airways and United have both reduced their flight schedules to cope with the reduction in staff. JetBlue cut 1,280 flights from 30 December through 13 January, according to data from FlightAware.

United said that it is not currently providing specific numbers on how many flights will be cancelled.

In the past week alone, there have been 5.2mn new cases of Covid-19 in the US, according to Johns Hopkins University data. Airline employees are highly susceptible to the virus due to the close contact with large groups of people that airline service work requires.

Overall, flight cancellations across the US have declined over the past few days following large winter storms in the MidAtlantic region that caused hundreds of flights to be cancelled. But if Covid-19 cases continue to climb, more airlines are expected to take on reduced schedules.

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