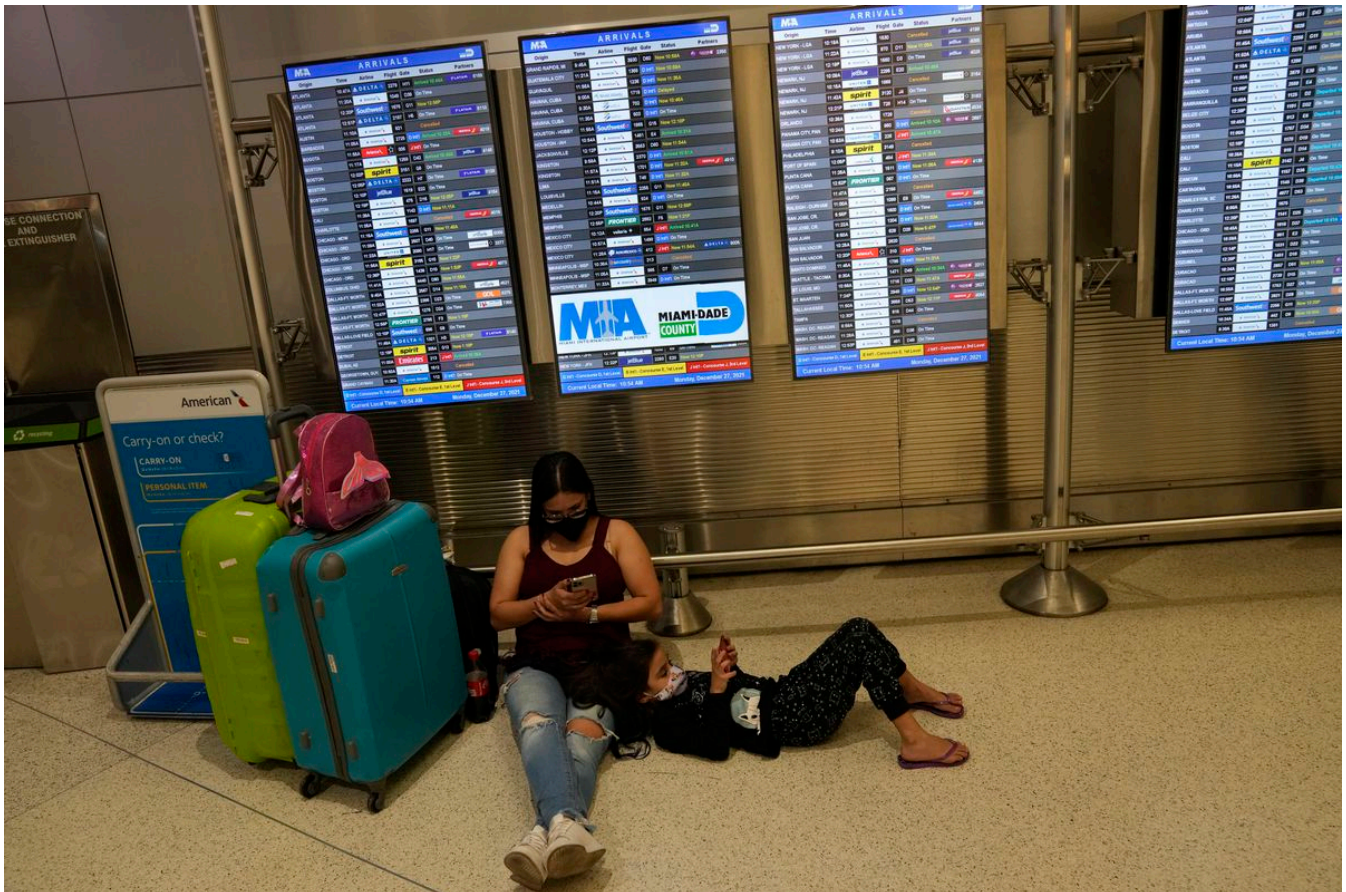


Over 2,500 flights canceled in US Saturday

- A Monitor Desk Report

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More than 2,500 flights across the United States have been canceled Saturday as Covid cases surge across the globe.

The cancellations mounted amid reports of bad weather, massive Covid surge and crew shortages.

The industry cancelled thousands of trips, about 5.7pc of all scheduled flights, in the week ended Friday, according to FlightAware, an aviation data provider.

Every major US carrier made deep cuts Saturday, too.

Nearly half the cancellations were concentrated at Chicago's two airports, where heavy snow and strong winds were expected throughout the day into Sunday.

Southwest Airlines said it planned to suspend operations at those airports Saturday afternoon. The airline cut over 470 flights nationwide, more than any other US carrier, accounting for about 13% of its schedule.

“As always, we have safety top-of-mind and, for us, that also means keeping people from driving to airports to wait on long-delayed flights whenever we can avoid that,” Southwest said in a statement.

Delta Air Lines scrubbed 9% of scheduled trips, while American and United Airlines each cut 7%. In a statement, United, which has its headquarters in Chicago, said that the nationwide spike in coronavirus cases had affected its ability to staff flights, too.

The cancellations contribute to a disappointing time for the industry, both to the end of the holiday season and to a convulsive year characterized by revival and setbacks.

Widespread vaccinations early in 2021 gave way to a summer travel boom that was then stifled somewhat by the delta virus variant. The industry recovery continued to build again in the fall, only to be slowed again by the omicron variant.