

This is a general summary of airline protocols for people traveling with ventilators and BiPAPs to follow in order to check in smoothly before their flight.

See the spreadsheet for full details of each airline's policies regarding medical devices.

For more information, visit the individual airline websites or contact the airline by phone.

Note that Air China and Sichuan Airlines do not allow medical devices on board their flights.

What are the necessary steps to take before traveling?

1. Contact the airline

Contact the airline by phone to inform them of your use of a medical device during the flight. While most airlines require that 48-hour to 14-day advance notice (depending on airline policies) be given to accommodate your medical device, it is best to call the airline promptly after you have booked your flight. It is recommended that you book your flight with a travel agent or on the phone, as you can immediately notify them of your medical condition and need for medical equipment during the flight. In fact, some airlines, including Delta Airlines, Philippine Airlines, and Scandinavian Airlines, require their passengers with special needs to inform the airline of their conditions at the time of booking. Some airlines want you to provide equipment details for approval on the phone, while other airlines ask that you provide these details on a medical clearance form – enquire as to the specific airline's procedures when contacting them. These details include the device's name, type, model number, specifications, size, weight, battery type, manufacturer's address and phone number, if the device is FAA approved, physician's name and phone number, if electrical power is needed, and if customized seating or a seat support device is needed. Also, inform them that you will need to use the device continuously and stress that you will not be able to turn it off without causing harm to yourself.

2. Medical Clearance

When contacting the airline, ask if you will need to fill out a medical clearance form (MEDIF or MEDA) or obtain a physician's note for your medical condition. Most airlines have their medical clearance forms online, but a few airlines ask that you request a form when contacting them. They will either fax or email the form to you to fill out. Some forms have multiple parts to fill out, while others simply consist of one page – make sure you fill out and submit all parts to avoid having to go through the submission process more than once. If the airline requires a physician's note, have your physician state your name, medical condition, fitness for travel, type of medication and/or medical equipment (plus size and weight) required, the necessity to use the device on board, precautions that must be taken for the condition, how long the equipment will be used during the flight, and that you can fly without risk to yourself and to other passengers. Submit also reservation information and equipment details. Date your medical clearance form or physician's note within ten to fourteen days of your departure. Most airlines ask that you submit by mail, fax, or email at least 48 hours to 14 days (depending on airline policies) before your departure, but it is best if you submit the form promptly after contacting the airline. Some airlines require both a form and a physician's note. Keep a copy of your medical clearance form or physician's note with you while traveling as airport check-in and security clearance may ask to see it.

Other information:

Air Canada has a different procedure – first fill out and submit the Fitness for Travel form, and then after you receive an authorization number by email or mail, call their Medical Assistance Desk to make arrangements, providing your authorization number and booking reference.

WestJet asks that passengers with medical device, before booking their flight, go to the airport in person with their equipment for visual inspection and approval. Do not wait until after you book your plane tickets, as there is a possibility that your equipment may not be approved for use on board.

Japan Airlines asks that a trained attendant travel with passengers with special needs.

**Would the device need to be approved by the airline company?
If so, what information would need to be provided?**

Provide the equipment details either when first contacting the airline or on the medical clearance form, depending on the airline's procedures. All airlines require that the device have a manufacturer's label stating FAA approval for use on board. Some airlines have a list of approved medical devices, and require that equipment details be given, for approval by engineers, if your device is not on the list. It is important to contact the airline well in advance because this approval may take up to two weeks. Some airlines may ask you to fax the device manual or manufacturer's label for further information. On board, the device must fit under the seat and comply with safety regulations, or an additional seat must be purchased for the equipment. Make sure that your equipment complies with carry-on baggage size and weight limits.

What is the procedure once they arrive at the airport?

Proceed to the airline's check-in counter, where the airline staff will make the necessary arrangements. Bring at least two copies of your medical clearance form or physician's note to the airport, and keep one of these copies with you at all times while traveling. Some airlines, at security checkpoints and at the departure gate, may verify your device specifications, manufacturer's label, number and packaging of batteries, and medical clearance form. At baggage screening, notify the screener if x-ray inspection will harm your equipment, and ask for the device to be visually and physically inspected instead. Most airports offer private screenings.

How many hours before their flight should they arrive to have enough time for check-in and security clearance?

The number of hours before departure to arrive at the airport for check-in depends on the airline company. While some airlines do not require more time than the advised normal check-in time, some airlines encourage that passengers with special needs arrive up to three hours before their departure time in order to make certain that they can undergo the check-in process and security clearance without problems.

Would BiPAPs follow the same regulations?

Most airlines have the same set of policies for all medical devices. You will also need to contact the airline company in advance for approval of your BiPAP for use on board. BiPAPs must be approved for electromagnetic interference standards, or else they may need to be turned off during takeoff and landing.

Is there onboard electrical power available during the flight?

Most airlines do not supply onboard electrical power. Therefore, most airlines only allow battery-operated devices to be used during the flight. For those airlines that do offer electrical power, the electricity may not be stable during the flight nor guaranteed on every aircraft. Also, some airlines only offer electrical power in First Class and Business Class. Advance notice is needed to use electrical power on board. The outlets that airlines provide are most often AC laptop outlets; however, some aircrafts only supply DC power, and a few airlines provide a separate medical outlet for the use of medical devices on board. The outlets often only support 2-pin European and USA plugs and 3-pin USA plugs – ask the airline company about their outlets when contacting them. Furthermore, the electrical power may be turned off during takeoff and landing. Hence, it is best to use batteries to power your device during the flight.

Air New Zealand requires a written statement from the device's manufacturer or local agent, stating the manufacturer's approval of the device's usage of 115V/400Hz power. Once this statement is sent to Air New Zealand, the approval process will take a minimum of two weeks.

China Eastern Airlines requires that batteries be removed during takeoff and landing, so the device must be plugged into the electrical power outlet, which is available during takeoff and landing. When contacting China Eastern Airlines, inform them that you will need to use the device continuously, and stress that you will not be able to turn it off without causing harm to yourself.

Are there any battery regulations?

Closer to the departure date, contact the airline to ask for the maximum flight duration in order to determine the required number of batteries to bring. Most airlines require that you have enough batteries to power the device for 150% of the maximum flight duration. However, some airlines have a maximum limit of two spare batteries. All spare batteries must be kept in carry-on baggage, and they must be packaged individually in a manner as to prevent short circuits and damage. It is best to use dry or gel cell (non-spillable) batteries, since wet cell (spillable) batteries are considered as "dangerous goods" by most airlines. Some airlines require that you label your batteries as "SPILLABLE" or "NON-SPILLABLE" to facilitate their inspection. Most airlines also have regulations for lithium metal and lithium ion batteries. Inform the airline company during the initial contact about your device's battery type. Additionally, test all batteries at home before traveling to inspect for adequate performance.

China Southern Airlines enforces very strict battery regulations. They require that you provide certification stating that your batteries are safe for air travel. This is due an incident where a laptop's batteries exploded and started a fire on board during flight.

Is there any other advice to ensure a smooth flight?

Remember to carry multiple copies of your medical clearance form or physician's note while traveling. Also, some airlines may not allow humidifiers or nebulisers on board. Always bring backup manually-operated supplies in your carry-on baggage in case of failure of your electronic equipment. If you are taking a connecting flight, remember to inform all airlines of your needs. Finally, before traveling, learn what to do in case of an emergency, where your device can be serviced or repaired, and who you can contact locally at your destination.

If you have further questions, what phone number should you contact?

See the spreadsheet for airline phone numbers. Some airlines have a separate Disability Desk or Medical Department phone number (these are highlighted on the spreadsheet). You may also contact the Canadian Transportation Agency or the USA Transportation Security Administration for further details regarding air travel for people with ventilators and BiPAPs.