

COMMUNITY/NATION



Tribune News Service photo

Repeated flight cancellations by Alaska Airlines over the past five weeks have wrecked the travel plans of tens of thousands of passengers.

Alaska Airlines suffers another spate of flight cancellations, infuriating passengers

By **DOMINIC GATES**
Tribune News Service

Alaska Airlines passengers suffered another bad run of flight cancellations over the weekend.

Internal data from Alaska, obtained by The Seattle Times, showed 47 flights were canceled on Friday and 41 more on Saturday, affecting the travel plans of 13,500 passengers.

Independent data from airline flight tracking firm FlightAware showed another 61 cancellations Sunday, 8% of Alaska's total scheduled flights.

And FlightAware showed the trouble bleeding into Monday, as planes out of position caused further cancellations. As of 9 a.m., Alaska had canceled 36 flights Monday, or 5% of its schedule.

Meanwhile, on Monday Alaska's pilot union emailed a strike authorization ballot to its members. The pilots have through May 25 to complete the ballot.

The cancellations caused more chaos for travelers and drew complaints about Alaska's service and support.

"Alaska is in meltdown," wrote Dale Christensen via email Saturday. "They're squandering years of customer goodwill."

On Friday, Alaska canceled his Sunday evening flight home from New Orleans to Seattle and offered no alternatives.

"Your flight was canceled and due to limited flight availability, our automated system was unable to find a new flight for you within the next couple of days," was Alaska's message. He was invited to

cancel and ask for a refund.

When he called the phone number provided, the wait time on hold was cited as "5 to 7 hours."

Christensen left New Orleans a day early, giving up one night at his Airbnb and a day at the jazz festival. He booked the only flight home he could get on short notice to be back for work Monday: an 11-hour journey via New York on Delta Air Lines.

Other passengers slammed Alaska on Twitter.

"Hey @AlaskaAir, is there any reason for me to keep flying with you at all?" wrote Bellingham resident Reece Williams after his flight from Seattle to Chicago was canceled Sunday.

And an Edmonds woman used the hashtag "#infuriating" after checking in online Sunday for a Monday morning flight from Boston to Seattle for her family of four, only to find it canceled.

She had received no email or text, and the hold time for a customer service agent on the phone was more than four hours. She said she got a \$500 refund and had to book a flight on another airline for \$545 for each passenger.

Alaska was alone among the major U.S. carriers with this level of canceled flights over the weekend. Rival airlines all showed less than 1% of scheduled flights canceled on Sunday, except for Delta at 2%.

The weekend cancellations followed even worse chaos in early April and at the beginning of this month. On both occasions, Alaska blamed a pilot shortage.

In response to those incidents,

Alaska management said it would reduce its schedule to match the number of available pilots so as to avoid last-minute cancellations.

On Monday, Alaska said in a statement that while its reductions in scheduled flights meant it had pre-canceled trips in advance where no pilot was available, it is "still exposed to daily cancellations related to absences, due to our limited reserves."

The statement said things will improve in June when more pilots graduate from its training school.

"We proactively reduced June flying to the same level flown in April, but we will have more first officers graduated from training and ready to fly," Alaska said.

Meanwhile however, the ongoing problem is clearly damaging the airline's reputation.

The impasse with the pilot union could be contributing to the problem; many pilots may be unwilling to volunteer for open flights beyond their normal schedule, even when the airline offers extra pay at 150% of the normal rate.

In a union message to the pilots Friday, Air Line Pilots Association Alaska unit chairman Will McQuillen called for a 100% strike vote to convey a message of resolve to management.

The union will hold informational gatherings about the vote to answer questions from pilots and their partners.

The ability of transport workers, including airline pilots, to strike is governed by the Railway Labor Act, which mandates a drawn-out mediation process before a strike could happen.



ALEX APPEL/Kodiak Daily Mirror

Kodiak Island Borough School District Nurse Coordinator Michelle Odlin.

NURSES

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Megan Kouremetis, and KHS nurse Krystle Dube.

In a normal year, the district nurses treat anything from bee stings to serious injuries; coordinate between parents, students and outside doctors; give lessons on puberty; and conduct regular health screenings, both in town and village schools.

During the pandemic, Odlin and her fellow nurses spent extra time testing students and contract tracing after school, she said. They were also subject to the uncomfortable and unprecedented role of being the "COVID police," or having to enforce COVID safety protocols, she said.

Odlin personally met weekly as a member of the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services's School Health Nurse Advisory Committee, she said. During those meetings, she discussed the status of COVID in schools and came back with information that informed Superintendent Larry LeDoux's decisions on COVID protocol policies in the district, LeDoux said.

During the toughest times, Odlin got through by reminding herself what was at stake: If an outbreak were to occur in the school district, it could overwhelm the island's health care infrastructure, she said. Odlin worked for Providence Kodiak Island Medical Center for four years when she first came to the island and said she knows how much work goes into caring for people with serious respiratory illnesses and into medevacating patients. Even though Odlin was not working at the hospital during the pandemic, she had an idea of how much strain COVID was causing the system, she said.

Even though the district has been rolling back on its COVID protocols, their work is far from over, according to Odlin. Now nurses are catching up on work that got pushed aside during the pandemic, like vision tests, following up on students with chronic conditions, and dealing with the day-to-day injuries and illnesses with students. This is a full year's worth of work that the nurses have been trying to complete during the last two months of the school year, she said.

"In my heart, I just want to make sure that all the nurses in our district are recognized," Odlin said. "I know how hard they've worked this year, the tears they cried and the stress they feel."

2020 saw most firearm deaths since 1994, CDC reports

By **JESSIE HELLMANN**
Tribune News Service

The first year of the COVID-19 pandemic saw the highest firearm homicide rates since 1994, with substantial increases among Black and American Indian/Alaska Native males and young adults, according to a new report released Tuesday by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

From 2019 to 2020, homicides involving firearms rose 35% to 6.1 per 100,000 people, with the

largest increase occurring among Black males between the ages of 10 and 44 and American Indian/Alaska Native males between the ages of 25 and 44.

The increase widened racial and ethnic disparities in firearm homicide deaths, the CDC said. From 2019 to 2020, the firearm homicide rate for Black people between the ages of 10 and 24 was more than 21 times higher than for white people in the same age group.

The overall firearm suicide rate remained rel-

atively unchanged from 2019 to 2020 at 8.1 per 100,000 people, but there were increases among some groups of people, including American Indian/Alaska Native males. In total, there were 24,000 firearm suicide deaths in 2020.

"The increases in firearm homicide rates and persistently high firearm suicide rates in 2020, combined with increases among populations that were already at high risk, have widened disparities and heightened the urgency of actions to pre-

vent violence," Thomas Simon, associate director for science at the CDC's Division of Violence Prevention, said in a call with reporters Tuesday.

The study did not examine the reasons for increasing rates, but Simon suggested the pandemic exacerbated long-standing inequities that contribute to gun violence and suicide

including poverty, housing instability, social isolation, job loss and structural racism. Other reasons could include increases in firearm purchases, intimate partner violence and strains in relationships between police and their communities.

In total, there were more than 19,350 firearm homicides in 2020 com-

pared with nearly 14,400 in 2019.

Firearms were involved in 79% of all homicides in 2020, an increase of between 4 and 6 percentage points over the past five years.

Firearm homicide rates increased across all populations, age groups and in both rural and metro areas.

ALUTIIQ NATION MAY FESTIVAL

Nani?
Near Island
Koniaq Building

Qaku?
Saturday, May 14th
11am-1pm

PRIZES, GAMES, LANGUAGE RESOURCES,
ALUTIIQ DANCERS, FRY BREAD & FUN!

ANA
ADMINISTRATION FOR
NATIVE AMERICANS

Brought to you by the
Sun'aq Tribe and ANA

ANA
ADMINISTRATION FOR
NATIVE AMERICANS



Kodiak Island Borough School District is HIRING!

Kodiak Island Borough School District is looking for motivated individuals ready to make a positive impact on Kodiak students!

We're looking for Maintenance Mechanics I-IV*. Pay Rate: \$21.13-\$39.37 per hour.

*Actual placement based on experience and education.

Apply online at www.kibsd.org.
Contact HR at 907-486-7542 with questions.

The Kodiak Island Borough School District is an Equal Opportunity Employer.