

SpaceX flight to ISS could be late March: NASA

February 2 2012



The SpaceX Dragon spacecraft, bearing brown and black scorch marks from its fiery tour in orbit, is pictured in 2011. The first test flight of a commercial spacecraft to the International Space Station could happen in late March, NASA said on Thursday. The Dragon spacecraft, owned by US company SpaceX, could launch no earlier than March 20.

The first test flight of a commercial spacecraft to the International Space Station could happen in late March, NASA said on Thursday.

The Dragon spacecraft, owned by US company [SpaceX](#), could launch no earlier than March 20 but a more fixed date would follow in the next couple of weeks, NASA spokesman Mike Suffredini told reporters.

The launch, the first-ever bid by a private company to dock at the

orbiting lab, had been set for February but was postponed for technical reasons.

SpaceX -- owned by Elon Musk, an Internet entrepreneur and founder of PayPal -- made history with its Dragon launch in December 2010, becoming the first commercial outfit to send a spacecraft into orbit and back.

SpaceX and several other companies are competing to build and operate a private capsule that could tote astronauts and cargo to the ISS, after US space agency NASA retired its [space shuttle program](#) last year.

The main goals of SpaceX's next flight include a fly-by of the ISS at a distance of two miles (three kilometers) and a berthing operation in which the Dragon will approach the ISS and the crew aboard the orbiting outpost will use the ISS [robotic arm](#) to help it latch on.

After the test docking, the Dragon aims to detach from the station for its return to Earth and eventually splash down in the Pacific off the coast of California.

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Citation: SpaceX flight to ISS could be late March: NASA (2012, February 2) retrieved 20 March 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2012-02-spacex-flight-iss-late-nasa.html>

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