

# SpaceX aiming for night launch of 4 on 1st private flight

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Inspiration4 crew member Jared Isaacman, right, waves to family members before a trip to Kennedy Space Center's Launch Pad 39-A and a planned liftoff on a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket Wednesday, Sept. 15, 2021, in Cape Canaveral, Fla. For the first time in 60 years of human spaceflight, a rocket is poised to blast into orbit with no professional astronauts on board, only four tourists. Looking on is Dr. Sian Proctor, left. Credit: AP Photo/John Raoux

SpaceX aimed to blast a billionaire into orbit Wednesday night with his two contest winners and a health care worker who survived childhood cancer.

It's the first chartered passenger flight for Elon Musk's SpaceX and a big step in space tourism by a private company.

"It blows me away, honestly," SpaceX director Benji Reed said on the eve of launch from NASA's Kennedy Space Center. "It gives me goose bumps even right now to talk about it."

The Pennsylvania entrepreneur who is picking up the tab—Jared Isaacman—won't say how much he paid. He and his fellow passengers will spend three days orbiting Earth at an unusually high altitude of 357 miles (575 kilometers)—100 miles (160 kilometers) higher than the International Space Station—before splashing down off the Florida coast this weekend.

In July, Virgin Galactic's Richard Branson and Blue Origin's Jeff Bezos launched aboard their own rockets to spur ticket sales. Their flights barely skimmed space, though, and lasted just minutes.

Isaacman and the others—St. Jude physician assistant Hayley Arceneaux and sweepstake winners Chris Sembroski, a data engineer, and Sian Proctor, a community college educator—said on the eve of launch that they had few if any last-minute jitters. It will be the first time in 60 years of human spaceflight that no professional astronaut is aboard an orbit-bound rocket.



Inspiration4 crew member Dr. Sian Proctor, right, waves to family members as Chris Sembroski talks to a family member before a trip Kennedy Space Center's Launch Pad 39-A and a planned liftoff on a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket Wednesday, Sept. 15, 2021, in Cape Canaveral, Fla. For the first time in 60 years of human spaceflight, a rocket is poised to blast into orbit with no professional astronauts on board, only four tourists. Credit: AP Photo/John Raoux

With 2 1/2 hours remaining, all four were strapped in.

Their fully automated capsule has already been to orbit: It was used for SpaceX's second astronaut flight for NASA to the space station. The only significant change to the capsule, according to Reed, is the large domed window at the top in place of the usual space station docking mechanisms.



Isaacman—founder of a payment-processing company and an accomplished pilot—said Musk has assured him "the entire leadership team is solely focused on this mission and is very confident." He added: "That obviously inspires a lot of confidence in us as well."

Musk flew in for the launch, as did hundreds of SpaceX workers and representatives of St. Jude Children's Research Hospital. Isaacman is using the flight to try to raise \$200 million for St. Jude, half of that coming from his own pockets.



Sian Proctor, right, talks to a friend from a car window before a trip to Kennedy Space Center's Launch Pad 39-A and a planned liftoff on a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket Wednesday, Sept. 15, 2021, in Cape Canaveral, Fla. For the first time in 60 years of human spaceflight, a rocket is poised to blast into orbit with no professional astronauts on board, only four tourists. Credit: AP Photo/John

Raoux



A SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket sits on pad 39A at the Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, Fla., Wednesday, Sept. 15, 2021. For the first time in 60 years of human spaceflight, a rocket is poised to blast into orbit with no professional astronauts on board, only four tourists. Credit: AP Photo/John Raoux



A SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket, with the Crew Dragon capsule attached, sits on Kennedy Space Center's Launch Pad 39-A in Cape Canaveral, Fla., on Wednesday, Sept. 15, 2021. For the first time in 60 years of human spaceflight, a rocket is poised to blast into orbit with no professional astronauts on board, only four tourists. Credit: AP Photo/Chris O'Meara





Workers stand on the service structure for a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket at Kennedy Space Center's Launch Pad 39-A in Cape Canaveral, Fla., on Wednesday, Sept. 15, 2021. For the first time in 60 years of human spaceflight, a rocket is poised to blast into orbit with no professional astronauts on board, only four tourists.  
Credit: AP Photo/Chris O'Meara





Workers stand on the service structure as a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket sits on Kennedy Space Center's Launch Pad 39-A in Cape Canaveral, Fla., on Wednesday, Sept. 15, 2021. For the first time in 60 years of human spaceflight, a rocket is poised to blast into orbit with no professional astronauts on board, only four tourists. Credit: AP Photo/Chris O'Meara



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A SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket sits on Kennedy Space Center's Launch Pad 39-A Tuesday, Sept. 14, 2021, in Cape Canaveral, Fla. For the first time in 60 years of human spaceflight, a rocket is poised to blast into orbit with no professional astronauts on board, only four tourists. Credit: AP Photo/Chris O'Meara

While NASA has no role in the flight, its managers and astronauts are rooting for the flight, dubbed Inspiration4.

"To me, the more people involved in it, whether private or government, the better," said NASA astronaut Shane Kimbrough, who is nearing the end of his six-month space station stay.

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