

Is it safe to fly during the solar eclipse? Here's what experts have to say

April 3 2024, by Alexandra Skores, The Dallas Morning News



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If you need to fly in the afternoon of April 8, you might want to grab a pair of solar eclipse glasses.

Airlines and government officials say it is safe to travel during the April 8 once-in-a-lifetime event. The Federal Aviation Administration is forecasting 47,137 flights to operate on April 8.

Health officials are warning eclipse viewers to wear protective eyewear, and that doesn't rule out travelers. The sun's intense brightness can damage eyes in seconds. It'll be damaged even quicker at more than 30,000 feet in the air, said Eric Christian, a senior research scientist at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center and an eclipse expert.

"The sun will be a little bit brighter, but you shouldn't ever look at it except during totality without either approved eclipse glasses or in the correct pinhole camera," Christian said. "Even the smallest little piece of the sun sticking out can actually damage your retina. Be very careful."

Experts say travelers flying along the path of totality, from Mexico into the northeastern United States and Canada, may experience a longer eclipse from the clouds based on how much closer they are to the sun. Totality in Dallas will last just under 4 minutes, though the exact duration depends on location. Christian estimates travelers flying along the path of totality to receive roughly 10 minutes of totality, and a longer partial eclipse.

Several airlines have announced and marketed "solar eclipse flights" which are special flights flying along the path of totality and have the highest chances of a great view from the clouds. Among these airlines is Dallas-based Southwest Airlines, Delta Air Lines and Dallas' JSX.

Christian said when it comes to photographing the eclipse, it is recommended that passengers leave that to the professionals.

"The eclipse is a really unique thing and the best thing to do is to watch it during totality, and let your eyes get accustomed to it," he said.

According to Southwest, its operational teams—anyone from pilots, [flight attendants](#), tech operations, ground operations and network operations control workers—are in full communication regarding the eclipse. Employees are all advised to wear protective eyewear. The FAA has also offered guidance to commercial planes and private aircraft ahead of flights.

"In advance of a solar eclipse, the FAA asks airlines and pilots flying under [air traffic control](#) to plan ahead and file a preferred route," the FAA said in an emailed statement. "Advanced planning will minimize route changes and help the FAA better manage the flow of traffic in busy airspace, resulting in fewer delays."

The FAA is also advising pilots flying on April 8 that regular activities like practice approaches and pilot training operations at airports in the eclipse path will be limited and possibly prohibited during the event.

All Southwest flights flying through the path of totality will have eclipse viewing glasses. Delta is providing solar eclipse glasses, a partnership with retailer Warby Parker, for its two path of totality flights.

Southwest's air traffic management team has also been meeting regularly with the Federal Aviation Administration and doesn't anticipate any widespread effect on operations. However, the forecast isn't looking very bright for the millions of people looking forward to the event. The National Weather Service in Fort Worth predicted North Texas would be "cloudier than normal."

Christian said flights along the path of totality "won't be able to avoid all the serious weather." He said light fluffy, high-altitude clouds tend not to be very much of a problem, but it's the low-lying heavy clouds that matter for viewing purposes.

All in all, Christian said it is safe to fly during the eclipse. Pilots, aviation officials and those involved with flights on April 8 won't compromise safety to get the best views.

"Plane travel is very safe and they're not going to risk people's lives to get a little more of the eclipse," Christian said.

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Citation: Is it safe to fly during the solar eclipse? Here's what experts have to say (2024, April 3) retrieved 12 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2024-04-safe-fly-solar-eclipse-experts.html>

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