

# Flying with Type 1 Diabetes

*A guide to USA airline regulations for people with type 1 diabetes*

This document summarizes the rights and eligibilities of travelers flying with type 1 diabetes (T1D). The overview highlights the important things to know. The pages that follow provide the relevant text and corresponding references for guidance, policy, and legislation provided by the US government and its agencies.

This resource is brought to you by friend of CDN and T1D Travel Expert, Brandon Arbiter. The College Diabetes Network (CDN) is proud to work with experts like Brandon to better inform you of your rights as travelers. Brandon's original posting can be found [here](#).

## Overview

### Recognition:

The US government recognizes Endocrine disorders as disabilities. T1D is an endocrine disorder and is thus a recognized disability with privileges while traveling.

### Seat Assignments:

When a person with T1D is traveling with another person who may assist in delivering therapy (blood glucose testing, insulin delivery, locating or feeding rescue carbs, administering glucagon, etc), the airline must provide neighboring seats when requested more than 24 hours in advance. If requested less than 24 hours prior to the flight, the airline is not required to move another passenger to accommodate the request. However, if two seats are available together, the airline is required to accommodate neighboring seats.

### Pre-boarding:

If an airline does not offer assigned seating (e.g. Southwest Airlines), travelers with T1D are eligible for pre-boarding to select a "specific seat."

If an airline does offer assigned seating, travelers with T1D are still eligible for pre-boarding. Specifically, travelers with T1D have medical equipment (backup insulin supplies, SMBG meter, CGM, rescue carbs, etc) that must be immediately accessible during flight. To ensure accessibility, the traveler may require:

- first choice of overhead storage to stow equipment in close proximity to the traveler's seat; or,
- extra time to remove equipment from luggage during the boarding process to be stored in the seat back pocket where it is immediately accessible during the flight.

Either scenario qualifies the traveler for pre-boarding, regardless of the airline.

### Additional Carry-On Luggage:

A bag containing diabetes equipment does not count toward the airline's carry-on limit.

### TSA Security:

Through the TSA Cares program, travelers with T1D can call the TSA 72 hours prior to flying and request a "Passenger Support" specialist to stay with them during the entire security screening process. If flying with liquids or medical devices, those items will still be subject to standard inspection parameters. If the traveler does not wish to go through the x-ray, s/he will still be subject to "pat down".

## Recognition

Endocrine disorders qualifies as an FAA recognized disability. Type 1 diabetes ("T1D") is an endocrine disorder, thus, is a recognized disability.

### Official Text

§ 382.1 Purpose.

The purpose of this part is to implement the Air Carrier Access Act of 1986 (49 U.S.C. 41705), which provides that no air carrier may discriminate against any otherwise qualified individual with a disability, by reason of such disability, in the provision of air transportation.

§ 382.5 Definitions.

Individual with a disability means any individual who has a physical or mental impairment that, on a permanent or temporary basis, substantially limits one or more major life activities, has a record of such an impairment, or is regarded as having such an impairment. As used in this definition, the phrase: (a) Physical or mental impairment means: (1) any physiological disorder or condition, cosmetic disfigurement, or anatomical loss affecting one or more of the following body systems: neurological, musculoskeletal, special sense organs, respiratory including speech organs, cardio-vascular, reproductive, digestive, genitourinary, hemic and lymphatic, skin, and **endocrine**;

### Citation

*U.S. Department of Transportation*

*14 CFR Part 382: Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Disability in Air Travel*

*TITLE 14 -- AERONAUTICS AND SPACE*

*CHAPTER II -- OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION*

*PART 382 -- NONDISCRIMINATION ON THE BASIS OF DISABILITY IN AIR TRAVEL*

§ 382.1 Purpose.

§ 382.5 Definitions.

<http://airconsumer.dot.gov/rules/382short.pdf>

## Seat Assignments

If a person with T1D is traveling with another person who may assist in delivering therapy (blood glucose testing, insulin delivery, locating or feeding rescue carbs, administering glucagon, etc), when given more than 24 hours notice, the airline must provide neighboring seats. If given less than 24 hours notice, the airline is not required to move another passenger to accommodate, but if two seats together are available, the airline is required to accommodate neighboring seats.

### Official Text

(2) The carrier shall provide a seat next to a passenger traveling with a disability for a person assisting the individual in the following circumstances:

(i) When an individual with a disability is traveling with a personal care attendant who will be performing a function for the individual during the flight that airline personnel are not required to perform (e.g., assistance with eating);

(b) A carrier that provides advance seat assignments shall comply with the requirements of paragraph (a) of this section by any of the following methods:

(1) The carrier may “block” an adequate number of the seats used to provide the seating accommodations required by this section.

(i) The carrier shall not assign these seats to passengers not needing seating accommodations provided under this paragraph until 24 hours before the scheduled departure of the flight.

(ii) At any time up until 24 hours before the scheduled departure of the flight, the carrier shall assign a seat meeting the requirements of this section to an individual who requests it.

(iii) If an individual with a disability does not make a request at least 24 hours before the scheduled departure of the flight, the carrier shall meet the individual’s request to the extent practicable, but is not required to reassign a seat assigned to another passenger in order to do so.

### Citation

*U.S. Department of Transportation*

*14 CFR Part 382: Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Disability in Air Travel*

*TITLE 14 -- AERONAUTICS AND SPACE*

*CHAPTER II -- OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION*

*PART 382 -- NONDISCRIMINATION ON THE BASIS OF DISABILITY IN AIR TRAVEL*

*§ 382.38 Seating accommodations.*

<http://airconsumer.dot.gov/rules/382short.pdf>

## **Pre-Boarding (No Assigned Seats)**

If an airline does not offer assigned seating, such as Southwest, travelers with T1D are eligible for pre-boarding. (Note: Travelers with T1D can always pre-board regardless of assigned seating. Flights with assigned seating are addressed below.)

### **Official Text**

(d) A carrier that does not provide advance seat assignments shall provide seating accommodations for persons described in paragraphs (a) and (c) of this section by allowing them to board the aircraft before other passengers, including including other "pre-boarded" passengers, so that the individuals needing seating accommodations can select seats that best meet their needs if they have taken advantage of the of the opportunity to pre-board.

### **Citation**

U.S. Department of Transportation  
14 CFR Part 382: Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Disability in Air Travel

*TITLE 14 -- AERONAUTICS AND SPACE*  
*CHAPTER II -- OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION*  
*PART 382 -- NONDISCRIMINATION ON THE BASIS OF DISABILITY IN AIR TRAVEL*  
§ 382.38 Seating accommodations  
<http://airconsumer.dot.gov/rules/382short.pdf>

## Pre-Boarding (with Assigned Seats)

Travelers with T1D are eligible for pre-boarding. Specifically, travelers with T1D have medical equipment (backup insulin supplies, SMBG meter, CGM, rescue carbs, etc) that must be immediately accessible during flight. To ensure accessibility, the traveler may require:

- first choice of overhead storage to stow equipment in close proximity to their seat; or,
- extra time to remove equipment from luggage during the boarding process to be stored in the seat back pocket where it is immediately accessible during the flight.

In either case, this qualifies for pre-boarding eligibility, regardless of the airline or whether assigned seats are offered.

### Official Text

In the revised final rule published on May 13, 2008, the Department expanded the preboarding requirement to cover not only people who need a specific seat assignment or who need to stow their personal folding wheelchairs, but also to cover passengers that “need additional time or assistance to board, stow accessibility equipment, or be seated.” For a passenger to be entitled to preboarding, that passenger must self-identify at the gate as being a person with a disability that needs to preboard for one of the above-listed reasons. In the section-by-section analysis of the preamble to the final rule, the Department noted that the obligation to preboard passengers with disabilities “exists regardless of the carriers’ preboarding policies for other persons (e.g., families with small children).”

It is the Enforcement Office’s view that section 382.93 requires carriers to board passengers with disabilities who self-identify at the gate as needing to preboard for one of the listed reasons...

### Citation

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION, OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY, WASHINGTON, DC

“ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE ON THE APPLICATION OF PREBOARDING REQUIREMENTS FOR AIR TRAVELERS WITH DISABILITIES”

<http://www.dot.gov/sites/dot.gov/files/docs/Preboarding%20Notice%20Final.pdf>

## **Additional Carry-On Luggage**

A bag containing diabetes equipment does not count toward the airline's carry-on limit.

### **Official Text**

(d) Carriers shall not, in implementing their carry-on baggage policies, count toward a limit on carry-on items any assistive device brought into the cabin by a qualified individual with a disability.

### **Citation**

*U.S. Department of Transportation*

*14 CFR Part 382: Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Disability in Air Travel*

*TITLE 14 -- AERONAUTICS AND SPACE*

*CHAPTER II -- OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION*

*PART 382 -- NONDISCRIMINATION ON THE BASIS OF DISABILITY IN AIR TRAVEL*

§ 382.41 Stowage of personal equipment.

<http://airconsumer.dot.gov/rules/382short.pdf>

## TSA Security

Through the TSA Cares program, travelers with T1D can call the TSA 72 hours prior to flying and request a "Passenger Support" specialist to stay with them during the entire security screening process. If flying with liquids or medical devices, those items will still be subject to standard inspection parameters. If the traveler does not wish to go through the x-ray, s/he will still be subject to "pat down".

### Official Text

Passenger Support Specialists receive specialized disability training provided by TSA's Office of Civil Rights and Liberties, Ombudsman and Traveler Engagement. Training for Passenger Support Specialists include how to assist with individuals with special needs, how to communicate with passengers by listening and explaining, and disability etiquette and disability civil rights.

Travelers requiring special accommodations or concerned about checkpoint screening may ask a checkpoint officer or supervisor for a Passenger Support Specialist who will provide on-the-spot assistance. Passengers with special circumstances may include [travelers with disabilities or medical conditions](#), [Wounded Warriors](#), passengers who wear specific [religious clothing or head coverings](#) and passengers struggling with understanding checkpoint procedures.

Travelers may also request a Passenger Support specialist ahead of time by calling the TSA Cares hotline at [1-855-787-2227](tel:1-855-787-2227).

TSA recommends that passengers call approximately 72 hours ahead of travel so that TSA Cares has the opportunity to coordinate checkpoint support with a TSA Customer Service Manager located at the airport when necessary.

### Citation

<http://www.tsa.gov/traveler-information/passengers-diabetes>