



The Consumer Council



COVID-19: Airline Refund Advice

If the airline cancels my flight

If your flight is cancelled the airline must provide you with the option of a full cash refund payable within seven days or an alternative flight. These are your rights under EU Regulation 261 and apply even if you are stranded in another country.

Consumers are advised to be alert to all contact (emails/text/telephone calls) from their airline and to contact the airline if they have not heard anything.

In the current unprecedented circumstances, many airlines are offering the option of vouchers that can be used to book flights in the future as an alternative to a cash refund.

Should I accept a voucher for my cancelled flight or insist on a refund?

Ultimately, this is a decision for you, taking into consideration all of your own personal circumstances and the current circumstances of the global pandemic.

Airlines are currently taking a long time to pay refunds. You should consider how important to you getting a cash refund is and, crucially, how urgently you need it?

If you do apply for a cash refund and there is a delay, The Consumer Council can help. Call us on 0800 121 6022 or email at contact@consumercouncil.org.uk.





In deciding whether to accept a voucher, here are some things that you should check out first

- What are the terms of the vouchers you are being offered? Do they cover your needs in the long run?
- Can the vouchers be redeemed for cash after a certain period? For example, with Ryanair, if you have not used the voucher after 12 months you can apply for cash refund, although this is not common practice.
- How long are the vouchers valid for?
- Is there any limit on the vouchers use?
- Will you have to pay the difference if the new flight costs more and will you be able to use the difference if it is less?
- Is there a financial incentive to take the voucher? For example, Aer Lingus are adding 10% of the value of the booked flights to its vouchers.
- If you have travel insurance or are planning on buying some, check it covers for airline insolvency (the term is usually called Scheduled Airline Failure Insurance or End Provider Failure Insurance).

In deciding whether to accept a voucher, here are some things that are uncertain right now but you should still keep in mind

- Will there be government restrictions in place, whether in the UK or at a foreign destination, which may restrict your ability to travel at the new time that you want to book new flights using the voucher?
- Will the airline still be flying to the original destination you had booked when it restarts its flights?
- Will the cost of flights increase, as you will probably have to pay the difference?

Travel vouchers and airline insolvency

Within your travel voucher, is there any mention of what will happen if the airline becomes insolvent? If it is not mentioned, you will almost certainly not get your money back from the airline as there is no statutory insolvency scheme





if you purchase an airline ticket from an airline or travel business and you receive a valid ticket in exchange for payment.

For more information on your protection under the ATOL insolvency protection scheme, click [here](#). However, you may be able to use your travel insurance or claim from your credit or debit card provider.

Key features of the vouchers currently being offered by the main airlines flying in and out of Northern Ireland

For more information on the key features of the vouchers being offered by airlines, visit our [COVID-19 Travel webpage](#). Before you accept a voucher you must always check the airline's full terms and conditions.

If you do not want to or cannot travel, but the flight has not been cancelled

You are not automatically entitled to a refund from your airline if you do not want to or cannot travel, but the flight has not been cancelled by the airline. This is the case even with the current UK and international restrictions on travel and movement.

However, many airlines have made arrangements to waive the usual fees if you want to rebook at a later date or they may be offering vouchers for use at a later date as an alternative.

You should consider very carefully whether to accept an alternative booking or a voucher.

You should consider the same issues around vouchers as described above in the 'If the airline cancels my flight' section and refer to the main Northern Ireland airline vouchers table [COVID-19 Travel webpage](#).

There is a very important difference between your rights when the airline cancels the flight and when you cancel the flight or simply do not travel.





The key difference is that if you do not accept a voucher or rebook and the flight goes ahead you will not be entitled to a refund and the airline can claim to have discharged its obligation to you and do not need to offer you a voucher after the event. Therefore, you may not get either a flight or a refund from the airline.

Furthermore, your travel insurance may not cover you for this. The Association of British Insurers says that travel insurance does not cover a ‘disinclination’ to travel. However, if UK government travel restrictions are still in place at the time of the flight your travel insurance is more likely to pay. You should check the terms of your travel insurance carefully. For more information see the [Travel insurance](#) section on our website.

It is also not certain that you will be able to claim the money back from your credit card company (Section 75 of the Consumer Credit) or debit card provider under the Chargeback scheme.

CMA guidance

The UK Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) issued guidance on the 30 April 2020, to help consumers understand their rights and to help businesses treat their customers fairly. This states that a consumer can expect a refund where a consumer cancels, or is prevented from receiving any services, because Government public health measures mean they are not allowed to use the services. The CMA has confirmed that this would apply in the case of flights.

You can use the CMA guidance to try to persuade the airline to refund you, or to persuade your credit or debit card provider to cover the cost of your flight. However, the CMA states this is its view on the law, but that only the courts can decide what the law is and that the CMA’s views are not a substitute for independent legal advice. More information is available [here](#).

Air Passenger Duty Refund

If you choose not to travel and the ticket is non-refundable, you can claim back the Air Passenger Duty (APD) that was part of the cost of the ticket you purchased. APD is essentially a government tax on flights departing from the UK.



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Unfortunately, airlines often charge an administration fee to do so, and as the majority of flights from Northern Ireland attract the short haul lower rate of APD (£13 for one way flight), this may be more than the amount of the APD you will get back.

However, in the case of long haul flights from the UK, the rate of APD is much higher (£78), and therefore it is worthwhile claiming it back. However, there is no long haul APD charge for flights from Northern Ireland. You should contact your airline to do this.

Further Information

Visit our dedicated [COVID-19 Travel webpage](#) for the latest information on how your consumer rights are affected, including airlines, ferries, package holidays, travel insurance, public transport and cancelled travel plans (including refunds).

The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) is providing useful information for travellers who have had their plans affected. You can view this information by clicking [here](#).

For more information on your general air passenger rights read our 'Plane Facts' guide [here](#).

