



CARRY-ON RULES 2026

Your Complete Guide to Flying Without Fees or Delays

What's Inside:

- REAL ID enforcement and the new \$45 Confirm.ID fee
- Carry-on size limits for every major U.S. airline
- Lithium battery and smart luggage compliance rules
- Complete prohibited items reference — carry-on vs. checked
- Carrier-by-carrier gate check fee breakdown
- Printable pre-flight carry-on checklist

YouTube: @GovClarity

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Quick Reference Overview

2026 UPDATES



What changed in 2026

REAL ID is fully enforced, airlines are using automated bag-size scanners at gates, and FAA smart luggage rules have zero exceptions.



Your carry-on size limit

22 × 14 × 9 inches at most U.S. airlines – including wheels and handles.



Liquids rule

3.4 oz containers, 1 quart-sized zip bag, 1 bag per person. Waived at CT scanner airports.



Batteries

Spare lithium batteries and power banks must go in carry-on – never checked bags. Under 100 Wh travels freely.



Smart luggage

Battery must be removable by hand. Tool-required removal = bag is banned from all flights.



REAL ID fee

\$45 TSA Confirm.ID fee for non-compliant travelers, effective February 1, 2026. Takes 10–30 minutes and does not guarantee boarding.



Shoes

No longer required to be removed at U.S. checkpoints as of July 8, 2025.

Who This Guide Is For

This guide is for anyone flying in 2026 who wants to know exactly what they can bring on a plane, what's changed, and how to avoid fees and delays at the checkpoint and gate.

It is especially useful for travelers who haven't checked the rules recently, anyone with smart luggage or power banks, and frequent flyers who want a complete airline-by-airline reference.

- ❑ If you watched our video on carry-on rules, this guide expands every topic we covered – with the full prohibited items list, a carrier-by-carrier fee breakdown, a complete battery compliance reference, and a printable pre-flight checklist.



REAL ID — What You Need to Know

As of May 7, 2025, REAL ID is fully enforced for all domestic U.S. flights. Your state-issued driver's license must show a **gold or black star** in the upper corner — right or left depending on your state — or the words **REAL ID**.

Acceptable Alternatives to REAL ID

Document	Valid For
U.S. Passport (book or card)	Domestic + international
DHS Trusted Traveler card (Global Entry, TSA PreCheck, NEXUS, SENTRI)	Domestic
U.S. military ID	Domestic
Permanent Resident Card	Domestic
Enhanced Driver's License (select states)	Domestic + land/sea border

- ❑ If your license does not have a star and you have none of the above, you must use TSA Confirm.ID.

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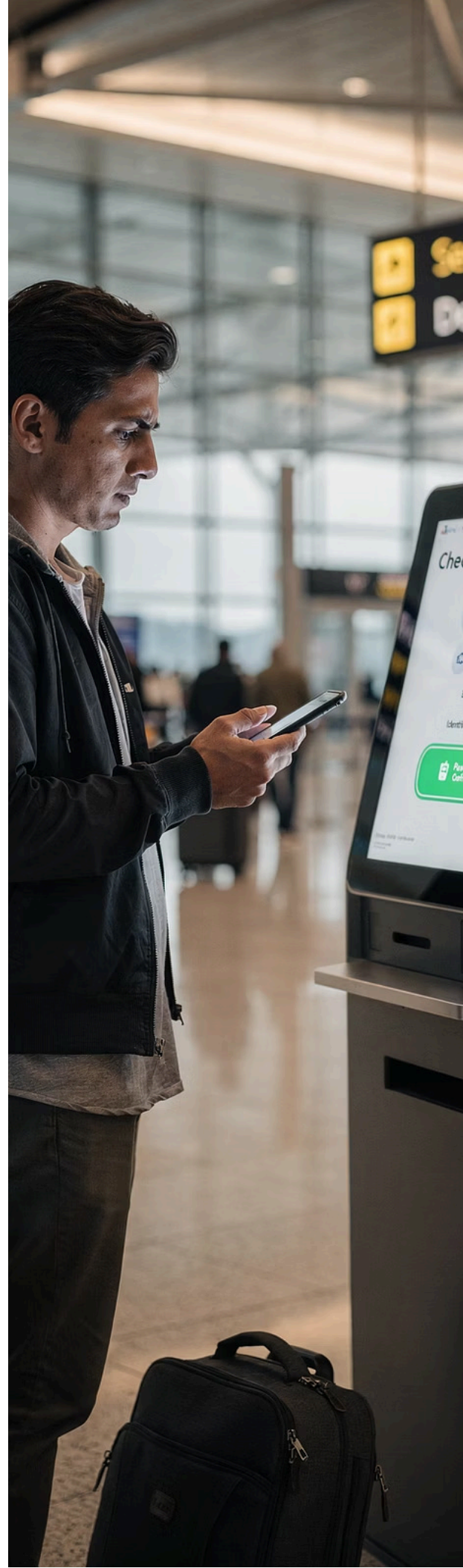
TSA Confirm.ID — The \$45 Verification Option

On February 1, 2026, TSA launched Confirm.ID — a paid identity verification program for travelers without REAL ID-compliant credentials.

Detail	Information
Fee	\$45 non-refundable
Validity	10 days from travel start date
Processing time	10–30 minutes average
Payment	Pay.gov
Guarantee	Does NOT guarantee boarding — if public records cannot be verified, you may be denied

Important: The 10-day window covers a round trip for most travelers. However, if your return flight falls after day 10, you pay another \$45. A family of four without compliant IDs faces **\$180 in fees** before reaching the gate.

The fix: Check your license for the star marking before your travel day. If there's no star, bring your passport. If neither is available, budget extra time and \$45 per person for Confirm.ID.



Carry-On Size Limits by Airline

All size limits include wheels and handles. These limits apply to the bag going in the overhead bin.

Airline	Max Dimensions (L × W × H)	Enforcement Level
American Airlines	22 × 14 × 9 in (56 × 36 × 23 cm)	Automated gate scanner
Delta Air Lines	22 × 14 × 9 in (56 × 36 × 23 cm)	Automated gate scanner
United Airlines	22 × 14 × 9 in (56 × 36 × 23 cm)	Automated gate scanner
JetBlue	22 × 14 × 9 in (56 × 36 × 23 cm)	High
Alaska Airlines	22 × 14 × 9 in (56 × 36 × 23 cm)	High
Southwest Airlines	24 × 16 × 10 in (61 × 41 × 25 cm)	Moderate
Spirit Airlines	22 × 18 × 10 in	Fee on basic fare
Frontier Airlines	24 × 16 × 10 in	Fee on basic fare

- ❑ **2026 enforcement change:** Airlines now use automated scanners at the gate – not visual estimates. If your bag fails the scan, you are gate-checked immediately. Measure at home before you leave.

Personal Item Size Limits

Most airlines allow one personal item (under-seat bag) in addition to your carry-on. The carry-on is what's being enforced.

Airline	Personal Item Max	Free?
American Airlines	18 × 14 × 8 in	Yes
Delta Air Lines	Must fit under seat	Yes
United Airlines	17 × 10 × 9 in	Yes
Southwest Airlines	18.5 × 8.5 × 13.5 in	Yes
JetBlue	17 × 13 × 8 in	Yes (Blue Basic: carry-on not included)
Spirit Airlines	18 × 14 × 8 in	Yes (carry-on is the paid upgrade)
Frontier Airlines	18 × 14 × 8 in	Yes (carry-on is the paid upgrade)

Gate Check Fees (2026)

Pre-paying at booking is always cheaper. Gate check fees are intentionally set higher to change behavior.

Airline	Gate Check Fee	Pre-Pay at Booking
American Airlines	~\$40	~\$35 first bag
Delta Air Lines	~\$40	~\$35 first bag
United Airlines	~\$40	~\$35 first bag
JetBlue (Blue Basic)	~\$65	Included in most fares
Spirit Airlines	\$55–\$65	Significantly cheaper online
Frontier Airlines	\$55–\$65	Significantly cheaper online

- ❑ **Rule of thumb:** Pre-paying at booking always saves money. Gate check fees are intentionally set higher to change behavior – they work.



Security Checkpoint — What to Expect

The checkpoint process changed in 2026. Here is the current procedure step by step.

What Still Applies



Remove belt and jacket — place in bin



Remove laptop — place in separate bin



Liquids in quart bag — remove from bag (unless CT scanner airport)

What Changed



Shoes: No longer required to be removed as of July 8, 2025



CT scanners: At equipped airports, liquids and electronics can stay in your bag — 3D imaging allows full-content review without unpacking

TSA PreCheck vs. Standard Lane

Checkpoint Step	Standard Lane	TSA PreCheck Lane
Shoes	Keep on	Keep on
Belt/jacket	Remove	Keep on
Laptop	Remove to bin	Stays in bag
Liquids bag	Remove to bin	Stays in bag
Wait time	Longer	Under 5 minutes (avg)
Cost	Free	\$85 / 5 years

TSA PreCheck has over 1,300 enrollment locations. Approval typically takes 3–5 days. Many premium credit cards cover the fee.

Liquids, Gels, and the 3-1-1 Rule

The 3-1-1 rule remains the national standard. At airports with CT scanners, liquids can stay in your bag – but the rule itself has not been eliminated.

The Rule

Element	Requirement
Container size	3.4 oz (100ml) or less per container
Bag	1 quart-sized clear zip-top bag
Per person	1 bag per traveler
Placement	Remove from carry-on at checkpoint (unless CT airport)


Exceptions — No Size Limit

- Prescription and over-the-counter medications (declare separately)
- Baby formula and breast milk
- Ice packs and gel packs for medications (must be frozen solid at screening)

What Counts as a Liquid

Many travelers underpack their quart bag because they don't realize these are all liquids:

- Toothpaste
- Gel deodorant
- Peanut butter
- Sunscreen
- Lotion and cream
- Hair gel and mousse
- Liquid makeup and foundation
- Mascara

 **Tip:** Switch to solid toiletries (solid shampoo bars, solid deodorant, dry toothpaste tablets) – they have no liquid restrictions whatsoever.

Lithium Battery Rules — Complete Reference

This is the most consistently misunderstood carry-on rule. **All spare batteries — regardless of size — must travel in your carry-on bag.**

Device	Typical Wh	Carry-On	Checked	Notes
Smartphone	10–18 Wh	✔ Free	✔ In device	
Laptop	45–100 Wh	✔ Free	✔ In device	
Power bank (10,000 mAh)	~37 Wh	✔ Free	✘ Never	
Power bank (26,800 mAh)	~99 Wh	✔ Free	✘ Never	
Large power bank (43,000 mAh)	~159 Wh	⚠ Airline approval	✘ Never	
E-bike / wheelchair battery	160+ Wh	✘ Not allowed	✘ Not allowed	
E-cigarette / vape	Varies	✔ Carry-on only	✘ Never	

How to Calculate Watt-Hours

Formula:

$$Wh = \frac{mAh}{1,000} \times Voltage$$

(Voltage is typically 3.7V)

Example: 20,000 mAh power bank

$$(20,000 \div 1,000) \times 3.7 = 74 Wh$$

Smart Luggage — The Compliance Test

Can you remove the battery with your bare hands in under 30 seconds?

✓ Yes

Compliant. Remove the battery before checking the bag. Carry it in the cabin.

✗ No (requires any tool)

Banned from the entire flight. No exceptions. No appeals at the gate.

Scenario	Rule
Carry-on, battery installed	✓ Allowed if battery is ≤ 100 Wh
Checked bag, battery removed and carried on	✓ Allowed
Checked bag, battery inside	✗ Never allowed
Battery non-removable by hand	✗ Banned from all flights
Battery requires tools to remove	✗ Banned from all flights



Prohibited Items — What You Cannot Carry On

Item	Carry-On	Checked	Notes
Pocket knife (any blade length)	✗	✓	Must be sheathed
Loose razor blades	✗	✓	Safety razor with cartridge head allowed in carry-on
Scissors (blades >4 in from pivot)	✗	✓	Blades ≤4 in allowed in carry-on
Baseball bat / sports clubs	✗	✓	
Tools >7 inches	✗	✓	Tools ≤7 in allowed in carry-on
Firearms	✗	✓	Unloaded, in locked hard case, declared
Ammunition	✗	✓	Securely packaged
Pepper spray	✗	✓	≤4 oz, ≤2% active ingredient
Marijuana	✗	✗	Federally prohibited regardless of state law
Spare lithium batteries	✓	✗	Must be in carry-on — never checked
E-cigarettes / vapes	✓	✗	Carry-on only; cannot be used or charged in-flight

For the complete searchable list: [TSA.gov](https://www.tsa.gov/what-can-i-bring) → **What Can I Bring**

International Carry-On Rules

Carrier	Max Size	Weight Limit	Notes
British Airways	22 × 18 × 10 in	No limit	Economy includes 1 bag
Lufthansa / Air France / KLM	21.5 × 15.5 × 9 in	17.6 lbs (8 kg)	Weight strictly enforced
Emirates / Qatar / Etihad	22 × 15 × 8 in	15.4 lbs (7 kg)	Economy
Air Canada	21.5 × 15.5 × 9 in	No published limit	Basic fare: carry-on not included
Ryanair / easyJet	~18 × 14 × 8 in	Varies	Basic fares: personal item only
Singapore Airlines / Cathay Pacific	22 × 14 × 10 in	15.4 lbs (7 kg)	Economy

IATA recommended maximum: **21.5 × 13.5 × 7.5 in** – smaller than most U.S. limits. Always verify with your carrier.

Common Mistakes — Baggage and Batteries

1

Measuring Without Wheels and Handles

Why it happens: People measure the shell. The scanner measures the whole object – wheels add 1–2 inches, handles add more.

Prevention: Measure with everything extended. Within 1 inch of the limit? Check the bag.

2

Power Bank in Checked Bag

Why it's serious: All spare lithium batteries are prohibited in checked luggage regardless of size. Your bag gets pulled from screening and you may miss your flight.

Prevention: Pack your power bank last, directly into your carry-on, every single time.

3

Outdated Smart Luggage

Why it happens: The bag flew fine before. Enforcement changed in 2026.

Prevention: Test battery removal by hand before leaving for the airport. Needs a screwdriver? The bag stays home. At the airport there are no exceptions.



Common Mistakes — Liquids and ID

1

Underestimating What Counts as a Liquid

Why it happens: People think liquids means water and shampoo. Gels, creams, pastes, and aerosols all count.

Prevention: Run through the list before packing: toothpaste, deodorant, sunscreen, lotion, hair products, liquid makeup. Every container must be 3.4 oz or less.

Better solution: Switch to solid toiletries — no restrictions, no quart bag needed.

2

Arriving Without an ID Plan

Why it happens: Travelers rush to the airport and realize at the checkpoint their license has no star.

Prevention: Check your license for the star this week. No star? Travel with your passport or apply for REAL ID at your DMV.

Already made it: \$45 per person, 30–45 extra minutes, Social Security number ready, payment through Pay.gov. Does not guarantee boarding.



Pre-Flight Carry-On Checklist

Before You Pack

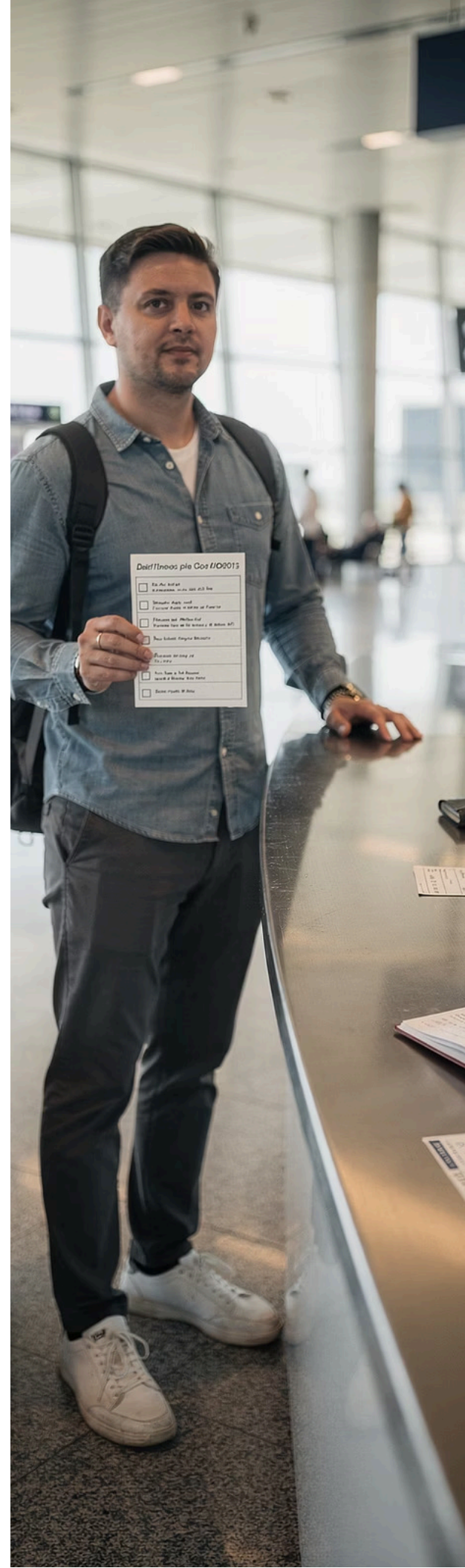
- Driver's license has gold or black star (REAL ID) – OR passport is packed
- Carry-on bag measured: ____ × ____ × ____ inches including wheels and handles
- Bag fits within airline limit (22 × 14 × 9 for most U.S. airlines)
- Smart luggage battery removable by hand – tested
- Power banks and spare batteries packed in carry-on (NOT in checked bag)
- Battery watt-hours verified: ____ Wh (must be ≤100 Wh for free carry-on)
- Liquids in 3.4 oz containers, packed in one quart-sized zip bag
- No prohibited items in carry-on

At the Checkpoint

- ID ready for officer
- Belt and jacket easy to remove
- Laptop in accessible pocket for bin
- Quart bag accessible (unless CT scanner airport)
- Shoes – no removal needed (July 2025 rule change)

At the Gate

- Bag fits in sizing frame if checked
- Personal item fits under seat
- Smart bag battery removed if checking the bag



Official Resources

TSA

- [TSA.gov/whatcanibring](https://www.tsa.gov/whatcanibring) – Searchable prohibited items database
- Phone: 1-866-289-9673 (Mon–Fri 8 AM–11 PM ET; weekends 9 AM–8 PM ET)
- Confirm.ID: [Pay.gov](https://www.pay.gov)
- PreCheck enrollment: [TSA.gov/precheck](https://www.tsa.gov/precheck)

FAA

- Battery guidance: [faa.gov/hazmat/lithium_batteries](https://www.faa.gov/hazmat/lithium_batteries)
- Smart luggage: [faa.gov/passengers/fly/baggage](https://www.faa.gov/passengers/fly/baggage)

REAL ID

- State status: [dhs.gov/real-id](https://www.dhs.gov/real-id)
- Find your DMV: [DMV.org](https://www.dmv.org)

Airline Baggage Pages

- American: [aa.com/baggage](https://www.aa.com/baggage)
- Delta: [delta.com/baggage](https://www.delta.com/baggage)
- United: [united.com/baggage](https://www.united.com/baggage)
- Southwest: [southwest.com/baggage](https://www.southwest.com/baggage)
- JetBlue: [jetblue.com/baggage](https://www.jetblue.com/baggage)



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New videos published weekly.

This guide is for informational purposes only. Rules are current as of March 2026 and are subject to change. Always verify with TSA.gov and your specific airline before travel.