

## **TSA Airport Screening**

Secretary Napolitano addressed TSA's airport screening methods on Monday in an op-ed in [USA Today](#): "Our best defense against such threats remains a risk-based, layered security approach that utilizes a range of measures, both seen and unseen, including law enforcement, advanced technology, intelligence, watch-list checks and international collaboration... And we ask the American people to play an important part of our layered defense. We ask for cooperation, patience and a commitment to vigilance in the face of a determined enemy."

The truth is, the vast majority of Americans are willing partners in their own security. In fact, on Monday, CBS released a poll saying 4 out of 5 approve of AIT machines. USA Today and Gallup did a poll earlier this year that found 78 percent of Americans support AIT. Clearly, despite recent media attention, the public needle is not moving on this.

TSA will continue to deploy its layered security approach using risk-based, intelligence driven security measures. The thwarted Christmas Day plot and the recent attempt by terrorists to ship explosives aboard an aircraft headed for the United States reminds us that current terrorist threats are serious and evolving. So, too, are our security measures, which reflect our commitment to stay ahead of our adversaries.

Below, we have outlined a number of the **myths** surrounding TSA's important work at our nation's airports, followed by the **facts** that tell the real story about what travelers should know and expect when they fly this holiday season, and all year round. More information can be found at [www.tsa.gov](http://www.tsa.gov).

### ***Pat-downs: Myths & Facts***

**Myth:** All children will receive pat-downs.

**Fact:** TSA officers are trained to work with parents to ensure a respectful screening process for the entire family, while providing the best possible security for all travelers. Children 12 years old and under who require extra screening will receive a modified pat down.

**Myth:** The TSA pat-down is invasive

**Fact:** Only passengers who alarm a walk through metal detector or AIT machine or opt out of the AIT receive a pat-down. For this reason, it is designed to be thorough in order to detect any potential threats and keep the traveling public safe. Pat-downs are performed by same-gender officers and all passengers have the right to a private screening with a travel companion at any time.

**Myth:** The pat-down is a punishment for opting out of the AIT.

**Fact:** There's [nothing punitive about it](#) - it just makes good security sense. And the weapons and other dangerous and prohibited items we've found during pat downs speak to this.

**Myth:** Everyone who travels will receive a pat-down.

**Fact:** Only passengers who alarm a walk through metal detector or AIT machine or opt out of the AIT receive a pat-down. It is one layer in our tool kit to address the nonmetallic explosives threat. In [yesterday's hearing](#), Administrator Pistole said: "The bottom line is few people in the overall scheme of things will actually receive those pat downs. Now, we've heard some examples,

and obviously, there's a vocal group out there who have experienced this for the first time, and, rightfully so, raising concerns, what's behind this. And the bottom line is we, the transportation security officers in particular, are trying to work in partnership with the traveling public to say we want to ensure that you are safe on this flight. Work with us in a partnership to provide the best possible security. And that's what it comes down to.”

**Myth:** Complaints about the pat-downs are extremely high.

**Fact:** Only a small percentage of the traveling public receives a pat down as they travel through the security checkpoint. Approximately 2 million people fly in the United States every day. The number of complaints is extremely low.

**Myth:** Pat downs for certain individuals are limited to the head and neck.

**Fact:** No one is exempt. Everyone is subject to the same screening. TSA is sensitive to [religious and cultural needs](#), but everyone must be screened effectively.

Administrator Pistole echoed those sentiments on MSNBC's Hardball recently. [\(4:42\)](#)

**MR. SMERCONISH:** All right, here's another one that I hear from radio callers, the Muslim guard exception. You may not even know what I'm talking about. But if someone approaches a TSA checkpoint and they're wearing, by way of example, a burka, what's the drill?

**MR. PISTOLE:** Everybody goes through the same process. So whatever their ethnicity or religious beliefs, which I'm sensitive to and appreciate, the bottom line is people are treated the same in terms of either going through the advanced imaging technology if that's available or to walk through the metal detector. And if they alert, then they would have to have that alert resolved. And the best way of doing that is through a pat-down.

**MR. SMERCONISH:** No free rides, right, Mr. Pistole?

**MR. PISTOLE:** That's correct.

## ***AIT: Myths & Facts***

**Myth:** AIT is not safe.

**Fact:** Backscatter technology is safe for all passenger and [has been evaluated](#) by the Food and Drug Administration, National Institute for Standards and Technology and Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory. All results confirm that the radiation dose is well below the standard for safety set by the American national Standards Institute. The technology is safe. A person receives more radiation naturally each hour than from one screening with a backscatter unit. In fact a traveler is exposed to less radiation from one AIT scan than from 2 minutes of an airline flight.

**Myth:** There has been an overwhelming public outcry against AIT.

**Fact:** A recent [CBS News Poll found that 4 in 5 Support Full-Body Airport Scanners](#)

**Myth:** AIT cannot detect powdered explosives.

**Fact:** This is false. Advanced imaging technology is deployed specifically because of its ability to detect both metallic threats – which a metal detector would pick up – and non-metallic threats – which a metal detector would not pick up. This includes explosive material that can take the form of powders, liquids and gels and be used in an improvised explosive device made up completely of non-metallic material.

**Myth:** Everybody who travels must undergo AIT screening.

**Fact:** Advanced imaging technology is optional – anybody can choose to opt out and receive alternate screening, which will include a pat down.

**Myth:** TSA Advanced Imaging Technology (AIT) images can be stored on the AIT machines located in our airports.

**Fact:** Completely false – TSA’s machines should not be confused with the recent stories about the U.S. Marshals Service. The machines used by TSA at our airports cannot store, print or transmit images. They simply don’t have that ability. Administrator Pistole also addressed this on Hardball. ([At 6:03 on the clip](#))

**Myth:** TSA Officers are sharing AIT images they are taking with their cell phones.

**Fact:** Our officers are prohibited from bringing electronic devices such as cell phones into the AIT viewing room. This is a fireable offense and no such reports have been substantiated.

**Myth:** The AIT images shared by TSA are proof the images can be stored.

**Fact:** The images shared by TSA are either from the vendor, or were photographed by the media at a press event where an example of the technology was shown.

**Myth:** Children must be screened by the AIT.

**Fact:** Anybody can opt out of AIT, [including children](#).

## **Miscellaneous Myths & Facts**

**Myth:** Airports can opt-out of TSA screening.

**Fact:** All commercial airports are regulated by TSA whether the actual screening is performed by TSA or private companies. So TSA’s policies – including advanced imaging technology and pat downs – are in place at all domestic airports.

**Myth:** Radio Host Meg McLain was handcuffed to a chair after choosing not to undergo AIT screening.

**Fact:** She was never handcuffed to a chair and many of her outlandish claims were [proven to be unfounded](#).

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