

Body scanning at security – Frequently Asked Questions

How Do Body Scanners Work?

The body scanning system uses millimetre wave imaging to locate objects on a person that are concealed under clothing. Millimetre wave imaging offers a superior approach for screening people compared to existing methods such as metal detectors with hand search. It works by bouncing millimetre waves off an individual's skin to produce an outline image of the person's body, showing any concealed, potentially dangerous objects. The scanner displays an indication of possible threat areas on a featureless body outline image. Security staff use this information to determine if a physical search is required. This feature eliminates the need for any person to view any scanned images, which then eliminates any concerns passengers may have about privacy issues. The images are analysed within the equipment, so the millimetre wave image of the passenger is never seen, stored, printed or transmitted. The scanner is deliberately programmed so that no image can be retained, printed or transmitted.

What Happens When I'm Scanned?

Using body scanners is a much less intrusive process than a physical hand search. Selected passengers are asked to stand in a particular position in the equipment. The whole process only takes a matter of seconds.

Who Has To Go Through Security Scanners?

Passengers are not selected on personal appearance, characteristics or their destination of travel. Those selected must be able to stand unaided in the scanner. If this not the case, then a physical search will take place instead.

How Will My Privacy Be Protected?

Extensive safeguards have been built into security scanners and the processes themselves. No images can be saved or retrieved later. The UK Department for Transport has produced a code of practice, which Airports in the UK and the Crown Dependencies must follow to ensure the implementation, and application of security scanners will be proportionate to individuals' privacy rights.

Are Security Scanners Safe?

Yes. UK Government health and safety regulators have assessed a number of different security scanner technologies and the tests have concluded the dose received is much less than using a mobile phone. It is completely safe for pregnant women, children and anyone with medical implants.

Are Children And Under 18's Exempt?

No. UK Department for Transport directives, which authorise the use of security scanners by airports in the UK and the Crown Dependencies, does not exempt children or under 18's because this would undermine the effectiveness of these new security measures.

Can I Opt Out Of Going Through The Security Scanners?

If you do not wish to be screened by a security scanner, you will need to have an enhanced physical search carried out in a private room. This will involve the removal of outer clothing and the loosening and/or removal of other garments. Please be aware this alternative screening method will take significantly longer than going through a security scanner due to additional staff resources that need to be made available.