

11 countries removed from the UK's red list

- Pre-departure tests and PCR testing measures on or before day 2 remain in place, with a review of all travel measures in the new year
- Change comes as the government calls on all adults to come forward and Get Boosted Now

As the Health Secretary set out earlier today, Ministers have agreed to remove all 11 remaining countries from the UK's red list from 4am tomorrow (15 December), following review of the latest risk assessment from the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA).

Passengers returning from Angola, Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe will not have to stay in a managed quarantine hotel on arrival in England from this date.

As Omicron cases rise in the UK and in countries around the world, the travel red list is less effective in slowing the incursion of the variant from abroad and these temporary measures are no longer proportionate. The red list has served its purpose in delaying the spread of Omicron into the UK to buy time for the government to learn more about this variant and prepare for its potential impact.

All vaccinated passengers arriving in the UK must continue to take a pre-departure test (PCR or lateral flow) 2 days before they depart for the UK and must take a PCR test on or before day 2 and self-isolate until they receive a negative result. Unvaccinated passengers must also take a pre-departure test, PCR test on day 2 and 8, and self-isolate for 10 days. Test to release remains an option to shorten their self-isolation period.

These testing measures are vital in helping to prevent any additional cases of Omicron from entering the UK, stopping travellers from passing it on to others if they are infected, and in helping government to monitor the risk posed by overseas travel.

The government recognises the impact that temporary health measures have on the travel and aviation industry.

These measures – the red list, testing for arrivals and self-isolation requirements for vaccinated travellers – will be reviewed again early in the new year on 5 January.

The government would like to extend its thanks to South Africa once again for their early sharing of information and continued engagement which is helping the global community better understand the risks posed by Omicron.

Health and Social Care Secretary Sajid Javid said:

Now there is community transmission of Omicron in the UK and Omicron has spread so widely across the world the travel Red List is now less effective in slowing the incursion of Omicron from abroad.

Whilst we'll maintain our temporary testing measures for international travel, we will be removing all eleven countries from the travel Red List effective from 4am tomorrow morning.

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps said:

With community transmission here as well as similar rates around the world, it's right that we remove the 11 countries from our red list and these changes are the next sensible steps as we continue to tackle this variant.

We remain focused on meeting our booster target for all adults by the end of the year, and while we will keep our travel testing measures in place for now, we will review this position in the first week of January.

While all countries have now been removed from the red list, the managed quarantine hotel policy remains in place to act as a crucial line of defence against the importation of variants of concern. Restrictions will be re-imposed should there be a need to do so to protect public health.

Given early evidence of the reduced incubation period of the Omicron variant, passengers are advised to continue to take the pre-departure test as close as possible to their scheduled departure to the UK and no earlier than 2 days before departing.

Airlines must continue to check all passengers for pre-departure tests alongside their completed Passenger Locator Form, and passengers will not be allowed to board a flight without providing evidence of a negative test result.

In light of emerging data on vaccine effectiveness, the government is offering every adult who has had a second dose of the vaccine at least three months ago the chance to get their booster before the New Year.

The government will take further action if necessary to contain the virus and the new variant, as has been the case throughout the pandemic. The UKHSA continues to monitor the situation closely, in partnership with scientific and public health organisations across the world, and the government is working collaboratively with the World Health Organisation and countries around the world to better understand the new variant.

Background

- The Government took quick, decisive action to reduce the importation of

Omicron from the epicentre of the outbreak.

- Anyone who has tested positive will need to continue to stay in Managed Quarantine.
- We are working urgently to make arrangements for individuals' early release from Managed Quarantine. We will set out further guidance for the affected individuals imminently.
- Passengers who booked a hotel room in Managed Quarantine for after 4am Wednesday 15 December are entitled for a full refund and should contact their hotel operator or booking operator.