

COVID-19: Council updates recommendation on travel restrictions from third countries into the EU



The Council today adopted a recommendation amending the recommendation on the temporary restriction on non-essential travel into the EU and the possible lifting of such restriction.

Criteria to lift restrictions

Under the new rules, the following epidemiological criteria should be taken into account to determine the countries for which the restriction on non essential travel should be lifted:

- not more than 25 new COVID-19 cases per 100 000 inhabitants over the last 14 days
- a stable or decreasing trend of new cases over this period in comparison to the previous 14 days
- more than 300 tests per 100 000 inhabitants in the previous 7 days, if the data is available to ECDC
- not more than 4% positive tests among all COVID-19 tests carried out in the previous 7 days, if the data is available to ECDC
- the nature of the virus present in a country, in particular whether variants of concern of the virus have been detected

In addition, the overall response to COVID-19 may be taken into account, in particular available information on aspects such as surveillance, contact tracing, containment, treatment and reporting as well as the reliability of available information and data sources and, if needed, the total average score across all dimensions for International Health Regulations (IHR).

Reciprocity should continue to be taken into account on a case by case basis.

Reintroduction of restrictions

Where the epidemiological situation worsens quickly and, in particular, where a high incidence of variants of concern of the virus is detected, travel restrictions for non-essential travel may be rapidly reintroduced. In the same circumstances, member states may also limit temporarily the categories of essential travellers. Travel justified by compelling reasons should still remain possible.

Measures for travellers

Member states should require persons travelling for any essential or non-essential reason, with the exception of transport and frontier workers, to

have a negative PCR test taken at the earliest 72 hours before departure.

In addition, they may require self-isolation, quarantine and contact tracing for a period of up to 14 days, as well as further COVID-19 testing as needed during the same period. Quarantine and additional testing upon or after arrival should be imposed in particular to those travellers arriving from a third country where a variant of concern of the virus has been detected.

As regards essential travel, member states may decide, in a coordinated way, to waive some of the above measures in those cases where they would impede the very purpose of the travel. For transport personnel, seafarers and frontier workers, member states should not require more than a negative rapid antigen test on arrival. For transport personnel coming from a country where a high incidence of variants of concern is detected, member states may require a negative rapid antigen tests before departure.

Background information

On 16 March 2020, the Commission adopted a communication recommending a temporary restriction of all non-essential travel from third countries into the EU for one month, which was further extended on 8 April, 8 May and 11 June.

On 30 June 2020, the Council adopted a recommendation on the gradual lifting of the temporary restrictions on non-essential travel into the EU. Travel restrictions should be lifted for countries listed in the recommendation, with this list being reviewed and, as the case may be, updated every two weeks.

On 25 January 2021 the European Commission proposed amendments to this recommendation, following the EU leaders videoconference of 21 January. The amendments are a coordinated response to the rise of infections and the risks posed by the more transmissible new variants of the virus within and outside the EU. They follow the recommendation by the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) to avoid non-essential travel, in order to slow down the importation and spread of the new variants of concern.

The Council recommendation is not a legally binding instrument. The authorities of the member states remain responsible for implementing its content.