

Pre-departure testing removed for vaccinated travellers

- A lateral flow test can be used instead of PCR tests for eligible fully vaccinated travellers and over 5s to take on or before day 2
- Eligible fully vaccinated travellers and under 18s will no longer have to take a pre-departure test or self-isolate on arrival in England – returning to the travel rules that were in place before Omicron
- Omicron is the dominant variant in the UK and is spreading widely among the community

From 4am on Sunday 9 January, eligible fully vaccinated travellers and over 5s will be able to take a lateral flow test instead of a PCR on or before day 2 of their arrival in England. Lateral flow tests for travel can be booked from Friday 7 January and taken upon arrival, by the end of day 2.

Eligible fully vaccinated passengers and under 18s will no longer need to take a pre-departure test or self-isolate on arrival in England from 4am on Friday 7 January but must continue to take their post-arrival tests.

As data shows Omicron is the dominant variant in the UK and spreading widely in the community it is now proportionate to cautiously reduce testing measures at the borders.

Anyone who receives a positive result on their lateral flow test must self-isolate immediately and order a NHS PCR test from gov.uk. Positive PCR tests for arrivals will be sequenced to understand if and where variants are emerging around the globe in order to protect the UK public.

Health and Social Care Secretary Sajid Javid said:

As we learn more about the Omicron variant it is right that we keep our testing and border measures under review to ensure they remain proportionate.

The steps we're taking will make travel easier for people while protecting the UK public from the virus.

Omicron continues to be a serious threat and it is important that travellers continue to get tested. The most important thing anyone can do if they haven't already is come forward for their vaccine.

Transport Secretary, Grant Shapps said:

I've always said that we won't keep international travel restrictions in place any longer than they are necessary to protect public health.

That's why we're removing the temporary, extra testing measures we introduced for Omicron in November, making travel easier and cheaper for fully vaccinated passengers and providing a big boost for the travel industry as we enter the peak new year booking period.

We want to provide more certainty to passengers and businesses, and will do a full review of our international travel measures for 2022 by the end of the month.

Dr Susan Hopkins UK Health Security Agency said:

It is vital anyone who receives a positive Day 2 lateral flow test self-isolates immediately and orders a PCR on gov.uk. All travel PCRs with high amounts of virus are sequenced to help us understand if any new variants are emerging around the world and entering the UK.

Everyone must continue to wear face coverings where required, wash hands regularly and work from home to help stop the spread of the virus and keep our loved ones and community safe.

Lateral flow tests for international travel must be purchased from a private provider as NHS Test and Trace lateral flow tests cannot be used for international travel. Passengers who have already bought a PCR to use for travel do not need to buy another test as PCRs can still be used.

Unvaccinated passengers must continue to take a pre-departure test, PCR test on or before Day 2 and on or after Day 8 and self-isolate for 10 days. 'Test to release' remains an option for unvaccinated people to shorten their self-isolation period.

Proof of vaccination from over 15 further countries and territories will be accepted for entry into England from 4am on Monday 10 January: Bhutan, Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Fiji, Iraq, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, north of Cyprus, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Solomon Islands, The Gambia and Uzbekistan.

The World Health Organisation has recently granted WHO Emergency Use List (EUL) authorisation to the two versions of the 'Novavax' vaccine named Covovax and Nuvaxovid. Therefore, eligible travellers who have received either version of this vaccine will be recognised for international travel into England from 4am on Monday 10 January.

No countries have been added to the UK travel red list, which remains on standby. A further review of all travel measures will be carried out later in the month, and our long-term goal remains to return to safe, restriction-free travel as soon as it's safe to do so.

Notes to editors:

- PCR tests can be accessed free of charge by ordering in the usual way through NHS Test and Trace – via nhs.uk/coronavirus or by calling 119. Test providers will be expected to advise people to self-isolate and direct people towards the NHS Test and Trace booking page.
- This is separate to the earlier decision made by the UK Health Security Agency to temporarily suspend confirmatory PCR tests in the community in the UK.
<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/confirmatory-pcr-tests-to-be-temporarily-suspended-for-positive-lateral-flow-test-results>
- Under the Test to Release scheme, unvaccinated travellers can choose to pay for a private COVID-19 test on day 5. If the result is negative (and the result of the day 2 test result is negative) they can end their quarantine.