

Six African countries added to red list to protect public health as UK designates new Variant under Investigation

- From midday Friday 26 November, South Africa, Botswana, Lesotho, Eswatini, Zimbabwe and Namibia will be added to the UK's travel red list
- Passengers arriving from 4am Sunday in England will be required to book and pay for a government-approved hotel quarantine facility for 10 days
- British nationals arriving from these six countries between midday Friday and 4am Sunday, and who have been in these countries within the last 10 days, must quarantine at home for 10 days and take NHS PCR tests on Day 2 and Day 8, even if they already have a lateral flow test booking
- Direct flights from the six countries will be banned from midday Friday until hotel quarantine is up and running from 4am Sunday 28 November
- Precautionary move follows designation of a new Variant under Investigation by the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA)

The government is taking decisive precautionary action against a new COVID-19 variant by introducing travel restrictions on arrivals from South Africa, Botswana, Lesotho, Eswatini, Zimbabwe and Namibia from midday tomorrow (Friday 26 November).

It comes as Variant B.1.1.529 is declared a Variant under Investigation (VuI) by the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA).

The variant includes a large number of spike protein mutations as well as mutations in other parts of the viral genome. These are potentially biologically significant mutations which may change the behaviour of the virus with regards to vaccines, treatments and transmissibility. More investigation is required.

No cases have been identified in the UK. We are taking these precautionary measures to protect public health and the progress we've made so far through our successful vaccination programme.

From midday on Friday 26 November, non-UK and Irish residents who have been in these countries in the previous 10 days will be refused entry into England. This does not apply to those who have stayed airside and only transited through any of these countries while changing flights.

UK and Irish residents arriving between midday Friday 26 November and 4am Sunday 28 November from these six countries will be required to self-isolate at home for 10 days. They must take PCR tests on Day 2 and Day 8 post-arrival. These can be NHS PCR tests and passengers should take them even if they have already booked or taken their lateral flow test.

UK and Irish residents arriving from 4am Sunday must isolate in a government-approved facility for 10 days. During their stay, they will be required to take a coronavirus test on day 2 and day 8.

A temporary ban on commercial and private planes travelling from the six countries will also come into force at midday on Friday until 4am Sunday to reduce the risk of importing this new variant under investigation while hotel quarantine is stood up. This excludes cargo and freight without passengers.

The UK government thanks the government of South Africa for its surveillance of this variant and its transparency. Meanwhile the UKHSA continues to monitor the situation closely, in partnership with scientific and public health organisations across the world, and we will offer to work collaboratively with the six countries that have been currently placed on the UK red list to understand the virus and possible mitigations.

Secretary of State for Health and Social Care Sajid Javid said:

As part of our close surveillance of variants across the world, we have become aware of the spread of a new potentially concerning variant, which UKHSA has designated a Variant under Investigation.

We are taking precautionary action to protect public health and the progress of our vaccine rollout at a critical moment as we enter winter, and we are monitoring the situation closely.

I want to pay tribute to our world-leading scientists who are working constantly to keep our country safe, and I urge everyone to keep doing their bit by the getting the jab and following public health guidance.

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps said:

We've always maintained public safety is our number one priority, which is why we've kept in place measures which allow us to protect the UK from new variants.

We're taking this early precautionary action now to protect the progress made across the country, and will continue to keep a close eye on the situation as we continue into the winter.

Dr Jenny Harries, UKHSA Chief Executive, said:

Scientists at UKHSA are in constant close collaboration with colleagues around the world to identify and assess variants as soon as they emerge. This is the most significant variant we have encountered to date and urgent research is underway to learn more about its transmissibility, severity and vaccine-susceptibility. The results of these investigations will determine what public health actions may limit the impact of B.1.1.529

This is a clear reminder to everyone that this pandemic is not over, and we all have a responsibility to do what we can to limit transmission and reduce the infection rate and prevent the emergence of new variants. This means coming forward for vaccination as soon as possible and following public health advice. Wear a face covering in crowded places where it's difficult to avoid coming into close contact with others, try to meet people in well-ventilated areas and seek a test immediately if you have symptoms.

The first genomes of this variant were uploaded to the international GISAID database on 22 November. Genomes have now been uploaded from South Africa, Botswana and Hong Kong but the extent of spread is not yet determined.

The government has been clear it will take decisive action if necessary to contain the virus and has taken the decision to add these destinations to the red list.

We continue to work with the hospitality sector to ensure it is ready to meet any increased demand – with hundreds of rooms on standby which can be made available to book as needed.

British nationals in these countries should check Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) travel advice and follow local guidance. The FCDO will continue to offer tailored consular assistance to British nationals in country in need of support overseas on a 24/7 basis.

The UKHSA produces risk assessments of the spread of Variants of Concern or Variants under Investigation internationally. These risk assessments cover a range of factors for each country including assessment of surveillance and sequencing capability, available surveillance and genome sequencing data, evidence of in-country community transmission of COVID-19 variants, evidence of exportation of new variants to the UK or other countries and travel connectivity with the UK.

Background

- British and Irish citizens, or those with residence rights, arriving to England from countries on the red list must book a managed quarantine hotel in advance. The quarantine package will include a managed quarantine hotel, quarantine transport and a travel test package for COVID-19 tests on day 2 and day 8 of quarantine. [More detail here](#)

- Further information on international travel requirements can be found elsewhere on GOV.UK, including advice on transiting through red list countries.
- Arrivals to the UK will need to meet the UK's health and border requirements and comply with the relevant quarantine restrictions if coming from a red country or if not fully vaccinated. If you do not have the correct documentation ready to meet UK health and border requirements, you may delay yourself and others, be denied boarding, or face a fine.
- Passengers arriving after 4am Sunday 28 November will be required to book a MQS quarantine hotel. Bookings will open from midday Friday 26 November.