

# Strengthening our health protection at the border

Mr Speaker, with permission, I'd like to make a statement on new measures to keep this country safe from coronavirus.

Thanks to our collective efforts, we're turning a corner.

Cases of coronavirus have fallen 47% in the last 2 weeks, and they're falling in all parts of the UK.

But we're not there yet. Hospitalisations are falling, but there are still many more people in hospital than at the April or November peaks, and the number of deaths, whilst falling, is still far too high.

Our vaccination programme is growing every day.

We've now protected over 12.2 million people – almost 1 in 4 adults in the United Kingdom, including:

- 91.4% of people aged 80 and above
- 95.9% of those aged between 75 and 79
- 77.2% of those aged between 70 and 74, who were the most recent group to have been invited

And we've also vaccinated 93.5% of eligible care home residents.

We've made such progress in protecting the most vulnerable that we're now asking people who live in England, who are aged 70 and over, and haven't yet had an appointment to come forward and contact the NHS.

And you can do that by going online to NHS.UK or dialling 119, contacting your local GP practice.

So we can make sure that we reach the remaining people in these groups even as we expand the offer of a vaccine to younger ages.

Mr Speaker, these are huge steps forward for us all.

And we must protect this hard-fought progress, by making sure we stay vigilant and secure the nation against new variants of coronavirus that put at the risk the great advances we've made.

## **New variants**

Mr Speaker, coronavirus, just like flu and all other viruses, mutates over time.

And so responding to new variants as soon as they arise is mission-critical to protect ourselves for the long term.

We've already built firm foundations.

Like our genomic sequencing, which allows us to identify new variants, our testing capacity, which allows us to bring in enhanced testing whenever and wherever we find a new variant of concern, and our work to secure vaccines that can be quickly adapted as new strains are identified.

Our strategy to tackle new variants has 4 parts.

First, the lower the case numbers here, the fewer new variants we get.

So the work to lower case numbers domestically is crucial.

Second, as I set out to the House last week, is enhanced contact tracing, surge testing and genomic sequencing.

We are putting this in place wherever a new variant is found in the community – like in Bristol, Liverpool and, as of today, Manchester.

Third, is the work on vaccines to tackle variants, as set out yesterday by Professor Van-Tam.

And fourth, health protection at the border to increase our security against new variants of concern arriving from abroad.

## **Borders**

Mr Speaker, I'd like to set out to the House the new system of health measures at the border that will come into force on Monday.

The new measures build on the tough action that we've already taken.

It is of course illegal to travel abroad without a legally permitted reason to do so. So it's illegal to travel abroad for holidays and other leisure purposes.

For the minority who are travelling for exceptional purposes, they will be subject to a specific compliance regime and end-to-end checks throughout the journey here.

Every passenger must demonstrate a negative test result 72 hours before they travel to the UK.

And every passenger must quarantine for 10 days.

Arriving in this country involves a 2-week process for all.

We've already banned travellers altogether from the 33 most concerning countries on our red list, where the risk of a new variant is greatest, unless they're resident here. But even with these tough measures in place, we must strengthen our defences yet further.

I appreciate what a significant challenge this is.

We've been working to get this right, across government, and with airport operators, passenger carriers and operational partners, including Border Force and the police.

I want to thank them all for their work so far.

And we've been taking advice from our Australian colleagues, both at ministerial level and from their leading authorities on quarantine.

The message is: everyone has a part to play in making our borders safe.

I know this is a very difficult time for both airlines and ports, and I'm grateful to them for working so closely with us.

You have such an important role to play in protecting this country and putting in place a system so that we can securely restart travel when the time is right.

The whole team at the borders working together.

Mr Speaker, let me set out the 3 elements of the strengthened end-to-end system for international arrivals coming into force on 15 February.

This new system is for England.

And we're working on similarly tough schemes with the devolved administrations.

And working with the Irish Government to put in place a system that works across the Common Travel Area.

The 3 parts are as follows. Hotel quarantine, testing and enforcement.

## **Hotel quarantine**

First, Mr Speaker, we're setting up a new system of hotel quarantine for UK and Irish residents who've been in red list countries in the last 10 days.

In short, this means that any returning residents from these countries will have to quarantine in an assigned hotel room for 10 days from the time of arrival.

Before they travel, they will have to book, through an online platform, and pay for a quarantine package, costing £1,750 for an individual travelling alone, which includes the hotel, transport and testing.

This booking system will go live on Thursday, when we will also publish the full detailed guidance.

Passengers will only be able to enter the UK through a small number of ports that currently account for the vast majority of passenger arrivals.

When they arrive, they'll be escorted to a designated hotel, which will be

closed to guests who aren't quarantining, for 10 days or for longer if they test positive for COVID-19 during their stay.

We've contracted 16 hotels, for an initial 4,600 rooms, and we will secure more as they are needed.

People will need to remain in their rooms, and of course will not be allowed to mix with other guests.

And there will be visible security in place to ensure compliance, alongside necessary support – so even as we protect public health, we can look after the people in our care.

## **Testing**

Second, Mr Speaker, we're strengthening testing.

All passengers are already required to take a pre-departure test, and cannot travel to this country if it is positive.

From Monday, all international arrivals, whether under home quarantine or hotel quarantine, will be required by law to take further PCR tests on day 2 and day 8 of that quarantine.

Passengers will have to book these tests through our online portal before they travel.

Anyone planning to travel to the UK, from Monday, needs to book these tests.

The online portal will go live on Thursday.

If either of these post-arrival tests comes back positive, they'll have to quarantine for a further 10 days from the date of the test, and will of course be offered any NHS treatment that is necessary.

Any positive result will automatically undergo genomic sequencing to confirm whether they have a variant of concern.

Under home quarantining, the existing Test to Release scheme, which my right Honourable Friend, the Transport Secretary has built so effectively, can still be used from day 5, but this would be in addition to the mandatory 2 tests.

The combination of enhanced testing and sequencing has been a powerful weapon throughout this pandemic.

And we'll be bringing it to bear so we can find positive cases, break the chains of transmission, and prevent new cases, and new variants, from putting us at risk.

## **Enforcement**

Third, we'll be backing this new system with strong enforcement of both home quarantine and hotel quarantine.

People who flout these rules are putting us all at risk.

Passenger carriers will have a duty in law to make sure that passengers have signed up for these new arrangements before they travel, and will be fined if they don't.

And we'll be putting in place tough fines for people who don't comply.

This includes:

- a £1,000 penalty for any international arrival who fails to take a mandatory test
- a £2,000 penalty to any international arrival who fails to take the second mandatory test, as well as automatically extending their quarantine period to 14 days
- and a £5,000 fixed penalty notice, rising to £10,000, for arrivals who fail to quarantine in a designated hotel

We're also coming down hard on people who provide false information on the passenger locator form.

Anyone who lies on a passenger locator form, and tries to conceal that they've been in a country on our red list in the 10 days before arrival here, will face a prison sentence of up to 10 years.

These measures will be put into law this week, and I have been working with the Home Secretary, the Border Force, and the police to make sure more resources are being put into enforcing these measures.

I make no apologies for the strength of these measures.

Because we're dealing with one of the strongest threats to our public health that we've faced as a nation.

I know that most people have been doing their bit, making huge sacrifices as part of the national effort.

And these new enforcement powers will make sure their hard work and sacrifice isn't undermined by a minority who don't want to follow the rules.

## **Conclusion**

Mr Speaker, in short, we are strengthening our health protection at the border in 3 crucial ways:

- hotel quarantine for UK and Irish residents who have visited a red list country in the past 10 days, and home quarantine for all passengers from

any other country

- a 3-test regime for all arrivals
- and firm enforcement of pre-departure tests and the passenger locator form

Our fight against this virus has many fronts.

And just as we're attacking this virus through our vaccination programme, which is protecting more people each day, we're buttressing our defences through these vital measures so we can protect the progress that we've worked together so hard to accomplish.

I commend this statement to the House.