

# Transport Secretary's statement on coronavirus: Friday 7 May 2021

Good afternoon.

Welcome to today's Downing Street press conference.

I'm pleased to be joined here today by Dr Jenny Harries, the Chief Executive of the UK Health Security Agency and Paul Lincoln, Director General of Border Force.

We've made enormous progress this year tackling the pandemic across Britain.

We're not at the end of it, but the signs are very hopeful.

That progress has been hard won.

Won by the speed and success of our NHS vaccination programme.

By the huge scale of our testing.

And by the sheer sacrifice and the discipline of the public.

And it's so important that we don't risk undermining all that, now.

Getting a vaccination feels like being given your life back.

The newly vaccinated thanking the wonderful volunteers.

People in tears of relief.

But as well as the joy, there is also concern about a resurgence of Covid.

And it's a caution we absolutely share as a government.

And it's why the only route out of this pandemic is a careful, prudent, responsible one.

Of course we're also a nation that thrives on travel, a nation with family ties across the globe.

Notably, nearly 1 in 3 new mothers in the UK was born overseas.

And, in 2019, UK residents took over 93 million trips abroad.

So, I'm glad to be standing here today (7 May 2021) [announcing the first, albeit tentative, steps towards unlocking international travel.](#)

We want a summer in which, with the help of vaccines and testing, we can reunite family and friends.

Travelling to places we love.

We want to start looking outward again.

Whilst Covid has isolated us, travel reunites us.

Even if video calls have kept us all connected during the lockdown, there's simply no substitute for human contact.

Travel is of course also crucial for rebuilding our economy.

Bringing long-awaited relief to hard-hit airlines, airports and the tourism sector, which taxpayers have spent £7 billion in supporting.

But I have to be straight with you.

Our success in combatting Covid here, with two thirds of adults now vaccinated, is not yet replicated in many places abroad.

We in this country have managed to construct a fortress against Covid.

But the disease is still prevalent in other parts of the world, most notably at the moment in India.

In fact, more new cases of Covid have been diagnosed around the world in the last 7 days than at any time since this pandemic began.

Nobody wants to go back into lockdown. Not Ever!

That is why today's announcement, removing the 'Stay in the UK' restriction from the 17 May (2021), is necessarily cautious.

We must make absolutely sure that the countries we reconnect with are safe.

That their infection rates are low, and their vaccination rates are high.

It means making sure that they are not incubating the most dangerous variants and that their data is reliable and trustworthy.

That is why our [Global Travel Taskforce](#) has come up with a [traffic light system classifying destinations by risk](#).

This is based on data by the Joint Biosecurity Centre, which will be published on gov.uk.

Red countries are those we should not be visiting except in the most extreme of circumstances, where repeated testing and isolation in designated government hotels on return is compulsory.

Non-UK residents who have been in a red country in the last 10 days will still be barred from entering the UK.

I have to tell you now that due to concerns about Covid rates and variants of concern, Turkey, the Maldives and Nepal must, regrettably, be added to the

red list.

Amber countries form the biggest group. As with Red list countries, you should not be travelling to these places right now

Returnees will have to test 3 times, once before departure and twice after arrival, and isolate in a place of their choosing for 10 days.

Finally, we have the green countries, which you will have the opportunity to visit no earlier than the 17th May (2021) so long as you take a pre-departure test before returning to England, and a second – PCR test – 2 days after your return.

And with these green countries, you do not need to quarantine.

Travellers will be glad to hear that we have been successful in driving down the cost of tests.

However, by necessity, this initial green list must be limited.

So, I am announcing today that from May 17th, you will be able to travel to 12 green list countries and territories including Portugal, Gibraltar and Israel.

I regret that favourite summer destinations, like France, Spain and Greece are not yet included.

But, every 3 weeks from reopening we will review countries to see if we can expand the green list.

So this is just a first step.

The signs overseas are now more promising as their vaccination programmes begin to crank up and as the summer progresses we hope that more traditional tourist destinations will be unlocked.

But we have to turn that key slowly, and green list countries will be placed on a “watchlist” if we start to have concerns.

And if it’s necessary, because of a new upswing in cases or a new variant, we will not hesitate to act fast and withdraw green status.

So it’s up to you to check thoroughly before travelling.

If you are thinking of booking a holiday in a green list destination, please check the restrictions applying to new arrivals.

You can get this information on gov.uk and it’s important because each country has its own restrictions.

Indeed, our strong advice is not to book any holiday which does not include a refund in the event of Covid-related cancellation.

And, I’m afraid, we do expect longer delays at the airport. Paul will say

more about that in a moment.

But all these measures are necessary to protect us from new variants, and guard against a resurgence of infections.

That is why the UK has now developed the most comprehensive testing regime on the planet. Testing up to 2 million people per day.

Mobilising our world-leading genome sequencing to spot mutations that can lead to new variants. These are the walls of our fortress.

Because the first duty of any government is to preserve the safety of its people.

But it's also our responsibility to show global leadership.

To work with other countries to create safe standards for international travel.

These were issues [I discussed with G7 Transport Secretaries when I chaired a meeting with them earlier this week.](#)

And I was able to set out our own traffic light system.

As part of this international leadership, the government is working to develop global standards for digital travel certification.

So from 17 May, English residents will be able to use their existing NHS health app to gain access to their vaccine records.

Alternatively, they will be able request a paper letter to verify their vaccination status.

Before I finish, let me make one final point.

I know there are many watching who might want restrictions to be lifted faster and to go further.

And there are, if anything, more people who prefer a slower pace.

But what unites us all is the belief that we do not want a return to the days of misery, suffering and loss.

We must keep our fortress, built at such huge cost to us all, secure.

Until brighter days, when unrestricted travel will allow us to meet the people who mean the most to us.

But for now, we must tread carefully – respecting the science that will guide us along the way.

I'd now like to turn to Jenny to cover the epidemiological position and then Paul to discuss the Border Force situation.