

UK aid supporting the fight against coronavirus in the Middle East

The United Kingdom is working together with countries across the Middle East to tackle coronavirus and protect the most vulnerable, UK Minister for the Middle East James Cleverly said today (22 May) as Muslims around the world celebrate Eid al Fitr.

He called, at this time of celebration and reflection, to consider how we have come together to address the unprecedented global challenge of responding to coronavirus, and continue to work side-by-side.

The UK has to date dedicated £764 million to the global fight against coronavirus. It is also leading international efforts to develop a safe, workable coronavirus vaccine that will be available throughout the world, and is the biggest country donor to the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) to find one.

No one country can respond to the devastating impact of this invisible killer, which means the UK's long-standing partnership with the Middle East is now even more important. We are grateful for the work by regional leaders to combat coronavirus, making generous bilateral pledges to the regional and global effort to support healthcare systems and find a vaccine.

Communities across the Middle East are in need of humanitarian assistance, particularly those affected by ongoing conflict in Syria and Yemen, and in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

Many people are also forced to celebrate Eid away from their homes whilst taking refuge in Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon and beyond.

The UK Government has pledged support of more than £30 million over the last few months to life-saving programmes across the region, providing essential medical equipment to treat critical care patients and train frontline medics. This is on top of the UK's funding to the many international agencies and charities providing direct support in this part of the world.

It will also tackle the wider impact of the virus and make sure people have safe access to water and sanitation, children can continue to receive an education and vulnerable families can buy essentials such as food and medicines.

Minister for the Middle East, James Cleverly, said:

"This has been one of the most challenging months of Ramadan the world has ever seen. I wish the Muslim community around the world Eid Mubarak. I am proud UK aid will provide life-saving support to people most in need across the Middle East and beyond.

"I am also grateful for the cooperation to-date with Gulf leaders to combat

the coronavirus, making generous donations, responding to global appeals, and funding vaccine research. Working side by side is the only way to stop this virus. No one is safe until we are all safe.

“Our strong partnership with our allies allows us to share expertise and resources to better tackle this pandemic so together we can stop its spread and help stop future waves of infection.”

To support the most vulnerable communities in the region in this crisis, UK aid in recent months includes £24 million to help people in Syria and £11.1 million the UK allocated earlier this month to help Iraq, Lebanon and the Occupied Palestinian Territories to tackle the virus. If coronavirus is left to spread in developing countries, this could increase and prolong the spread of the virus globally.

At the Yemen pledging conference on 2 June, 2020, the UK is also expected to make a commitment. The ‘High-level Pledging Event for the Humanitarian Crisis in Yemen’ will help to feed millions of Yemenis and reduce the impact of coronavirus.

The UK is also increasing the impact of its support through working with Gulf partners and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation in the Islamic Development Bank’s Lives and Livelihoods fund. The £1.3 million support to date will help the poorest Muslim nations in the world, which are particularly vulnerable to the effects of coronavirus.

[Letters on COVID-19 planning and coordination](#)

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Up to £15 million to support the Citizens Advice service during COVID-19 pandemic

- Citizens Advice and Citizens Advice Scotland have experienced an unprecedented rise in demand during the pandemic
- up to £15 million funding will help them provide advice and information on a range of financial, legal and consumer issues
- part of a £750 million package set out by the Chancellor for frontline charities

Citizens Advice and Citizens Advice Scotland will receive a funding boost of up to £15 million to help them deal with increased demand for advice and information from the public during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Consumer Affairs Minister Paul Scully has announced (23 May 2020).

The funding will allow them to increase their capacity so they can continue to deliver advice on a range of issues, such as if a person cannot pay their bills due to coronavirus, or how they can protect themselves from or report a coronavirus-related scam.

The money is part of a £750 million pot announced by the Chancellor Rishi Sunak to help frontline charities continue their vital work during the outbreak.

In line with government advice on social distancing, Citizens Advice, which operates in England and Wales, and Citizens Advice Scotland have temporarily closed their 331 offices, suspended outreach services and shifted their advice services online and over the phone.

They have since seen a significant increase in demand for telephone advice and webchats, and this funding will help them to continue to deliver their services remotely as well as ensuring their online content reflects the most up to date advice.

The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport has led the allocation of funding to support charities providing key services to help vulnerable people during the crisis.

Consumer Affairs Minister Paul Scully said:

Citizens Advice and Citizens Advice Scotland have continued to provide an invaluable service to the public throughout this deeply unsettling period.

Now more than ever, it is imperative people have access to free, confidential advice on money, legal and consumer problems.

This funding will ensure Citizens Advice and Citizens Advice Scotland have the right resources to provide people with the support they need, when they need it most.

UK government Minister for Scotland Douglas Ross said:

I welcome this funding for Citizens Advice Scotland who provide a vital service that is needed even more during these uncertain times.

The £15 million package of support from the UK government will ensure they continue to meet the rise in demand to help people across Scotland with their financial, legal and consumer concerns.

As we all continue to cope with the struggles COVID-19 has brought, it is crucial we work together to make sure we are equipped with the best support to see us through.

UK government Minister for Wales David TC Davies said:

Citizens Advice provides vital support to people in Wales on a range of issues, many of which will have been exacerbated by the current pandemic.

The UK government's £15 million funding boost will allow them to meet growing demand and provide essential advice on financial and legal issues to people across Wales.

Culture Secretary Oliver Dowden said:

In these challenging times, it is vital the British people have access to all the information they need to stay safe and well. This funding will mean those who need advice can get it – whether it's about finances, employment or the measures we are taking to help protect the public and our NHS.

This investment is part of a wider government support package for charities on the front line so that they can continue to help those in need.

Dame Gillian Guy, Chief Executive of Citizens Advice, said:

During this pandemic we've seen a surge in people coming to us for advice. We expect this demand will carry on as people's lives continue to be affected by the economic impact of COVID-19.

This funding will allow us to increase the support we can provide over the phone and online – especially to those who need it most.

The effects of COVID-19 will continue to be felt for a long time. Support for Citizens Advice and other charities is crucial to making sure that everyone has access to the help they need at this incredibly challenging time.

Citizens Advice Scotland Chief Executive Derek Mitchell said:

This additional support for the Citizens Advice network is hugely welcome. All across Scotland individual bureaux staff and volunteers have done incredible work transitioning to remote working to ensure people are still getting the advice and support they need.

The Citizens Advice network was born in the shadow of the Second World War, we've always adapted to the changing challenges of the time. This funding will help ensure our network can adapt to meet the challenges presented by COVID-19, and continue to deliver the advice people need.

Transport Secretary announces new measures to “keep passengers safe now and level up for the future”

- additional funding to increase frequency and capacity of bus, tram and light rail services, to help people travel safely
- further investment in railways to regenerate local economies and level up Britain
- preferred route announced for £1 billion upgrade to major road link which runs across Northern Powerhouse, from Teeside to Cumbria

Further funding to protect and increase transport services, level up infrastructure and regenerate local economies after coronavirus (COVID-19) has been announced by the Transport Secretary Grant Shapps today (23 May 2020).

A further £283 million has been made available to increase the number of bus and light rail services as quickly as possible so that people who need to travel, including critical workers in the NHS, can do so safely.

The funding – amounting to £254 million for buses and £29 million for trams and light rail – will help protect and increase services, allowing people travelling to hospitals, supermarkets or their place of work to get to their destination safely and quickly, while helping ensure there is enough space for them to observe social distancing guidelines. The funding will be kept under review to ensure that full services can be up and running as quickly as possible.

In addition to the funding, 3,400 people including British Transport Police officers, Network Rail and train operator staff have been deployed at stations to advise passengers and make sure people can follow the guidance put in place. From 1 June 2020 at the earliest, twice that many will start to be deployed with the assistance of groups like the charity Volunteering Matters.

Rail passengers across the country will also now benefit from a personalised information service to help them stagger their journeys. Passenger Connect from British tech start-up ZipAbout will tell passengers how disruption and crowding may affect their journey, providing alternatives and helping people maintain social distancing when they need to travel. The service has been successfully piloted by National Rail over the last 12 months and can now support millions of rail users with personalised updates to keep them on the move.

To make it easier for people to choose alternatives to public transport, a series of measures are being rolled out to encourage more people to cycle instead, including:

- allocating local authorities a share of £225 million, announced earlier this month, to create pop up and permanent cycle lanes and reallocate road space
- [amending laws to reduce red tape and halve the time it takes for councils to get these schemes up and running](#)
- committing £25 million from the emergency active travel fund to help people get their bikes repaired so that they can get back to cycling
- investing £2.5 million to provide 1,180 cycle parking spaces at 30 railway stations across England to help encourage people to incorporate cycling as part of a longer journey

The government is also working with local authorities and private car park owners to make it easier for people commuting by car to get closer to their place of work and finish their journey on foot or by bike without the need to take public transport. Plans will focus on developing new schemes at car parks near, but not in, city centres from where drivers could collect a bike – or use their own – and follow new cycling or walking routes which would be colour coded by distance.

Transport Secretary and Minister for the Northern Powerhouse, Grant Shapps said:

From NHS staff to transport and shop workers, teachers,

volunteers and all those staying at home, people across the country are all sharing the same public-spirited approach to tackling the spread of this virus and keeping others safe.

To make sure people can travel safely when they need to, we are increasing capacity on buses and light rail, as well as helping local authorities fast-track plans to support cyclists and pedestrians, further reducing pressure on our transport network.

These measures will help keep passengers safe now, but we must also prepare for what comes next. Strengthening vital road and railway connections, as well as encouraging cycling and walking, will be essential to our ambition to level up the country, secure a green legacy, and kickstart regional economies, as we build out of COVID-19 and look to the future.”

Looking to the future, the Transport Secretary has also laid out further plans to transform the country’s transport infrastructure to help the country ‘build out’ of COVID-19, supporting the nation’s economy, and delivering on the government’s key agenda of levelling up the country. The government has today announced the [preferred route for the £1 billion A66 Transpennine upgrade](#), which will provide vital improvements to a key regional link which helps to connect Glasgow and Edinburgh with Leeds, Sheffield and Norwich, improving journey times, reliability and resilience for communities across the North. The new scheme will dual the 5 remaining single carriageway sections of the route and upgrade key junctions, speeding up journeys, easing congestion and boosting growth. The road is an important link across the Pennines and is a key connection used on routes between ports around the country, meaning that the wider UK economy will benefit from improvements and faster journeys.

Ten bids have also been announced today to receive a share of a £500,000 [Restoring Your Railways ‘Ideas Fund’](#) to develop proposals to build or reopen railway lines and stations, including those closed following the Beeching cuts of the 1960s. MPs and local authorities were invited to bid for a share of the fund to help reconnect communities across the country, levelling up opportunities for people in isolated areas by increasing their access to jobs and training which will be crucial as the country recovers from coronavirus.

[Home Secretary’s opening statement to the government’s daily briefing on](#)

coronavirus

Coronavirus press conference (22 May 2020)

Good afternoon, welcome to the government's daily briefing on coronavirus.

I am pleased to be joined by Paul Lincoln, Director General of our Border Force, and Patrick Vallance, our Chief Scientific Advisor.

First, I will update you on the latest daily figures.

- 3,231,921 tests for coronavirus have now been carried out in the UK, including 140,497 tests carried out yesterday.
- 254,195 people have tested positive, that's an increase of 3287 cases since yesterday.
- 9,307 people are currently in hospital with coronavirus, down 14% from 10,781 this time last week.
- And sadly, of those tested positive for coronavirus, across all settings, 36 393 have now died. That's an increase of 351 fatalities since yesterday.

All our thoughts, prayers and deepest sympathies remain with all those who have lost loved ones.

At this time of national emergency, it is crucial that we remain alert to save countless more lives.

That means doing everything in our power to control this terrible disease – taking the right action, at the right time, to prevent a deadly second wave.

That is why I am today announcing the next step in our cross-government approach – and these include temporary public health restrictions at the border.

Let me explain why we are bringing forward these measures as other restrictions finally start to ease, following two hard months of lockdown.

The answer why is simple: it is to protect that hard-won progress and prevent a devastating resurgence and a second wave of the virus.

We are following the science and introducing public health measures that are supported by SAGE.

This will require international arrivals to self-isolate for 14 days – that is the incubation period of the virus – so that if people have become infected overseas, we can limit the spread of the virus at home.

And as we are taking this action, we are taking it at a time when it will be most effective.

Passenger arrivals have been down by 99% compared to the previous year.

Now we are past the peak of this virus, we must take steps to guard against imported cases, triggering a resurgence of this deadly disease.

As the transmission rate across the UK falls, and the number of travellers arriving in the UK begins to increase, imported cases could begin to pose a larger and increased threat.

This is because they could become a higher proportion of the overall number of infections in the UK and therefore increase the spread of the disease.

So, with far fewer people being infected in this country and the public having worked so hard to bring the R number down, any new arrivals entering the country with the disease during this next phase will have a much bigger impact – potentially causing a second wave.

This is of course a different story from when domestic transmission was at its peak and when overseas travel was at an all time low.

Led by the Prime Minister, the whole government has worked together across all departments including with the devolved administrations to develop these measures.

We do not take these steps lightly.

This is extremely challenging and these are difficult times for the entire nation as our freedoms have been sadly, but necessarily, curtailed.

We do not underestimate how hard the new restrictions will be for people up and down the country, and also those who have already sacrificed so much to help beat and drive down the spread of coronavirus.

I know that families both at home and abroad are desperate to be reunited.

But, by taking these steps, we could save many more lives – making it possible for more friends and family to be safely together in the future.

We also recognise how hard these changes will be for our travel and leisure sectors who are already struggling in these unprecedented times.

Across government, we continue to work with them and support what is an incredibly dynamic sector to find new ways to reopen international travel and tourism in a safe and responsible way.

We will review these temporary public health measures every three weeks to ensure they remain the right ones for our road map to recovery.

And these measures will be introduced from 8 June, so that people arriving into the UK will be required to self-isolate for 14 days, except those on a short list of exemptions.

Arrivals will also be required to provide contact and address details to help trace them should we need to.

And given the amazing public spirit and the level of compliance we have seen so far we expect the vast majority of people to do the right thing and comply with these new requirements.

We know that the vast majority of people will continue to play their part and act responsibly, to control the spread of this virus and stop a second wave.

But we will not allow a small, reckless minority to endanger us all – so there will be penalties for those who break these mandatory measures.

Border Force will be on the frontline of implementing the changes with spot checks as people arrive in the UK.

Paul Lincoln, Director General of Border Force, will shortly provide an update on the steps people will need to take.

I'd also like to take this opportunity to thank our border officers and staff for the role they will play, and for all they are doing to protect our nation at this deeply challenging time.

We are working across all four nations of the UK to make these public health measures work, but I will now turn to the enforcement approach that is being taken here in England.

We will conduct spot checks by mid June to ensure people are self-isolating.

And those from overseas who refuse to comply, could be refused entry.

Public Health England will set up an assurance service to contact people at random to ensure they understand the requirements and are self-isolating.

And our outstanding police will continue as they have done so diligently across the country, to engage, explain and encourage people to follow the rules.

We will empower them to use enforcement as a last resort.

So anyone breaking their 14-day quarantine could face a one thousand pound fixed penalty notice.

And, ultimately, there could be potential prosecution and an unlimited fine for failure to comply with these sanctions.

We will keep these penalties under review and will be unafraid to increase them if that is required.

But have no doubt: we are taking these measures at the right time because we are serious about saving lives and controlling the virus.

We will be guided by the science and the health of the public and the country will always come first, which is why we are implementing these restrictions at the border now.

Our absolute priority remains to stop the spread of this infection, to save

lives and to stop and prevent a dangerous second wave of this virus.

That also means supporting our NHS and making short-term sacrifices together, to stop coronavirus taking more lives.

I will now handover to Paul Lincoln, from Border Force, who will provide an operational update and also talk about the measures and how they will be implemented.