

COVID-19: Answers to Frequently Asked Questions by British Nationals in Pakistan

We know that there are a large number of British nationals in Pakistan who want to return to the UK.

We are doing everything we can to help you right now – but please be aware we, like other High Commissions and Embassies, are experiencing a high number of enquiries right now during this global crisis.

What is the latest advice from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in London on travel abroad?

All British tourists and short-stay travellers currently abroad should return to the UK where commercial flight options are still available. If you are a permanent resident in Pakistan, you should stay and follow the advice of the local authorities.

What is the FC0 centrally doing to help?

The FC0 is working around the clock to support all British travellers come back to the UK. The UK government is working with airlines to keep routes open and is calling for international action to keep air routes open for a sufficient period of time to enable international travellers to return on commercial flights.

What is the latest situation in Pakistan on flight connections back to the UK? Are any commercial operators still flying from Pakistan?

On 21 March, the government of Pakistan announced the suspension of all international flights to Pakistan, until 2000 PST on 4 April. The government of Pakistan described the measure as a 'temporary suspension imposed due to exceptional circumstances'. We understand that the suspension applies also to international flights out of Pakistan.

Despite this suspension, Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) announced flights from Islamabad to the UK operating on 28 March. We understand that PIA has now cancelled these flights. The British High Commission is discussing this with the Government of Pakistan. Having already operated flights on 25 and 26 March, we understand Qatar Airways was planning to operate daily flights from Islamabad until 3 April, but these flights will now run only until 29 March. The last Qatar Airways flight is now QR633 at 0305 on 29 March. After this, all international flights out of Pakistan are suspended until 2000 PST on 4 April.

Will I be able to travel to the airport, due to internal travel restrictions

in Pakistan right now?

If you have a confirmed flight ticket and valid travel document, Provincial and Federal authorities have assured us that you will be able to travel to the airport. Some provinces have limited the number of people that can be in a vehicle and, excepting a driver, other non-travellers may not be allowed to travel.

What should I do about booking a flight after April 4?

The situation on the ground is changing all the time. We are in close contact with the Government of Pakistan and will update our guidance as soon as more information becomes available. Please also stay in contact with your airline.

My visa has expired as I couldn't get out of Pakistan. What should I do?

Foreign nationals of Pakistani origin are eligible for a free grace period for up to four weeks and this is processed at the airport upon departure. The Government of Pakistan has issued a notice that all foreign nationals whose visa has expired and who have overstayed should request a visa extension from an immigration officer at departures.

The information is changing so quickly. How do I keep updated?

Please sign up for alerts on [travel advice](#) and follow our social media channels [@ukinpakistan](#) for the latest information.

I need urgent help on a medical matter – what should I do?

If you are running out of medication or have medical needs, you should speak to your travel insurance company for advice and seek local medical assistance, including from pharmacies. Your GP / UK doctor may be able to advise of alternative medication if yours is not available in Pakistan.

What are the official guidelines now on social distancing in Pakistan now?

Pakistani authorities have introduced a number of measures to limit the spread of the virus including school closures, and banning public gatherings. Some provincial authorities are introducing additional measures, including requiring residents to stay at home, and closing shops and restaurants. Measures are particularly stringent in Sindh and Punjab.

On 25 March, Islamabad Capital Territory announced additional measures, including a ban on public transport, except taxis and the ICT Metro Bus, and a ban on public and private social and religious gatherings. British Nationals should follow the Federal and relevant Provincial guidance, and monitor local media for updates. Movements should be planned accordingly.

Will we be able to buy food, water, medicines or other essentials during the shutdown here?

The Government of Pakistan has announced that food, medicines and other necessary supplies will continue to remain available during the lockdown

period.

I can't get through to you on the phone. Why aren't you answering?

We are receiving a high volume of calls and are doing our best to answer all of them. If you are calling to ask about flights or about local restrictions, please sign up to our Travel Advice updates and keep in touch with your airline and travel agent. If you are in urgent need of assistance, please call us on +92 (0)51 2012000 or use this [link](#) to contact us in writing.

I have a very compelling case to get back to the UK but I have a visa issue. What should I do?

Customers with immigration questions, including questions about urgent, compelling, compassionate cases should contact: CIH@homeoffice.gov.uk

Culture at your fingertips from home

- Across the UK, arts organisations, museums and theatres are unveiling innovative digital plans to ensure culture and creativity is accessible for all
- Online offerings to the public set to increase over the coming weeks thanks to Arts Council England's £160m support package and the DCMS funded Digital Culture Network

Over the past week, arts and cultural organisations have launched a range of digital initiatives to ensure extraordinary national collections and performances can be enjoyed by everyone whilst following the latest guidance from public health experts to stay at home.

The range of online opportunities spans theatre, dance, opera, literature, museums and fine arts, all of which can be accessed at the click of a button, from the homes of millions of people across the UK and the rest of the world.

Culture Secretary, Oliver Dowden, said:

The UK's cultural sector is one of our great global calling cards, and these new digital initiatives are ensuring they will continue to be enjoyed by people across the country and around the globe in these difficult times.

Thanks to the innovation shown by our world class cultural institutions, we can continue to enjoy the fantastic work of UK artists as we all do our bit to stay at home, save lives and protect our incredible NHS.

Offers include:

- A number of DCMS-sponsored museums and galleries, including the British Museum and National Gallery, are offering virtual tours of their permanent displays, ensuring the national collection remains accessible for all.
- Under the hashtag, #ConnectedByArt, the Government Art Collection will be sharing images of artworks currently on display in government buildings around the world, helping to start important conversations around loneliness and isolation.
- Sadler's Wells is sharing new content on its "Digital Stage", including digital premieres of full-length dance performances, screendance – choreography designed for film – and new dance workshops that have been specially created for families with young children and the over 60s to take part in at home.
- The National Theatre's "National Theatre At Home", an initiative which makes a selection of much-loved National Theatre Live productions available to stream for free on YouTube.
- City Arts in Nottingham has developed a free app which features artworks and artefacts from collections across the UK, including the Yorkshire Sculpture Park, The Lowry and the Pitt Rivers Museum. The app, available on Apple and Android devices, also has special features for users with dementia.
- The Royal Opera House is offering a free programme of curated online broadcasts, musical masterclasses and cultural insights, as well as free, weekly ballet and opera productions streamed on demand via Facebook and YouTube.
- BFI Player is offering a 2 week free trial for everyone to enjoy the best classic and contemporary world cinema with curated selections from Parasite director Bong Joon-ho, Tilda Swinton and Mark Kermode, 1000's of free archive films through Britain on Film and a special BFI Flare at Home online festival from the 2020 edition, including filmmaker Q&A's and Spotify playlists
- The Southbank Centre's new weekly "Culture Fix" shares literature, music and visual arts content with subscribers. This week's edition included podcasts with Louis Theroux and Hilary Mantel as well as playlists and archive imagery of past Hayward Gallery exhibitions.
- Sage Gateshead is linking up with 25 concert halls as part of the European Concert Hall network to stream archive performances on social media every evening.
- From Monday 6 April, six rotating Shakespeare's Globe productions will be available to watch for free on the theatre's video-on-demand service, Globe Player. Featured films will be captioned to make sure they are as accessible as possible. The Globe Player will also host all 37 'Complete Walk' short films for free.
- Projects have been developed to inspire creativity in the home, for instance 64 Million Artists have set up 'Create to Connect' with daily creative challenges to participate in and Fun Palaces have set up Tiny Revolutions of Connection, looking at how to use creativity to support those who are self-isolating both online and offline.

The UK's cultural sector has been supported in developing its digital content over the last year through the support of the [Digital Tech Champions](#) network – a DCMS funded initiative as part of the Digital Culture Network. These champions are now working remotely and can provide cultural organisations with one-to-one support and resources on:

- working and collaborating remotely
- keeping up engagement with audiences
- strategies for generating income for the sector through online retail and donations
- digital strategy, data analysis, and search engine marketing

The Government will support digital content offerings to increase over the coming weeks, for instance by enabling funding to contribute to Arts Council England's (ACE) £160m support package, part of which is funding the development of creative responses to the Covid-19 crisis through participatory digital content for people self-isolating.

In addition, as part of BBC Arts' [Culture in Quarantine](#) initiative the BBC and ACE has created an artist fund that will commission and distribute around 25 new works by independent artists.

The Culture Diary is also compiling a list of online arts events which will be regularly updated during this period. You can view the full list [here](#).

Notes to Editors

The Chancellor announced that music venues and theatres, along with any other business in the hospitality and leisure sector with a rateable value of less than £51,000, will pay no business rates for 12 months and will be eligible for cash grants of up to £25,000 during this period.

Arts Council England (ACE) announced a £160 million emergency response fund, made possible by Government funding, to complement the package of financial support set out by the Chancellor. The ACE funding will focus on stabilising arts and cultural organisations, as well as supporting freelancers and individual artists.

This week, the BFI, PRS for Music and Musicians' Union all launched funds to provide further support to the creative industries.

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) and high blood pressure medication](#)

- Only go outside for food, health reasons or work (but only if you cannot work from home)

- If you go out, stay 2 metres (6ft) away from other people at all times
- Wash your hands as soon as you get home

Do not meet others, even friends or family.

You can spread the virus even if you don't have symptoms.

[PM call with President Trump: 27 March 2020](#)

Prime Minister Boris Johnson spoke with US President Donald Trump today.

The President wished the Prime Minister a speedy recovery from coronavirus.

They agreed to work together closely, along with the G7, the G20, and other international partners, to defeat the coronavirus pandemic.

[Government launches new drive on coronavirus tests for frontline NHS staff](#)

- Government working with industry, philanthropy and universities to significantly scale up testing.
- New partnership with Thermo Fisher Scientific, Amazon, Boots, Royal Mail and Randox, alongside the Wellcome Trust and top UK universities to boost testing capacity for frontline NHS staff.

Dozens of universities, research institutes and companies across Britain are lending their testing equipment to 3 new hub laboratories which will be set up for the duration of the crisis. No equipment already in use for coronavirus testing or other vital work will be taken.

All current coronavirus testing and research will continue, including at existing local NHS and Public Health England test laboratories, and this new programme will add significant new capacity.

Thermo Fisher Scientific and Randox, who make the equipment, are providing extensive logistical and technical support.

The first lab is now undergoing validation which is expected by tomorrow. Once approval is given, it is expected to enter operation over the weekend, initially on a fairly small scale, and processing around 800 samples.

It will be scaled up every week from then on, with 2 other hub laboratories being stocked with equipment and opening soon.

The first samples to be processed in the labs will be taken from frontline health workers. As the labs' capacity increases, other frontline workers will be tested. The samples will be taken at special sites set up around the country, initially in coronavirus hotspots such as London.

Work is also underway to source more of the kits needed to take samples from people – of which there is a worldwide shortage.

Health Secretary Matt Hancock said:

We want to save lives, protect the most vulnerable, and relieve pressure on our NHS.

Healthcare staff are key in our fight against the virus and I want to ensure that any frontline NHS or care worker who has symptoms of coronavirus or who has a family member with symptoms can be tested quickly and reliably.

I pay tribute to the generosity and public spirit of Britain's universities, research institutes and companies who have lent us their equipment without hesitation.

Dr Jenny Harries, Deputy Chief Medical Officer, said:

Laboratory-based testing on this scale is a little like building the medical equivalent of a car factory. We are assembling many different parts, some of them quite specialised and hard to find, then getting them to work accurately together in a highly coordinated process. There are bound to be teething problems, so we cannot switch on hundreds of thousands of lab tests overnight. But we hope that soon these hub laboratories will be operating round the clock, allowing us to significantly scale up our testing.

This new service, which will be free, will help end the uncertainty of whether NHS staff need to stay at home. Those who test negative for coronavirus will be able to return to work – enhancing the capacity of the NHS and social care to treat patients and care for those in community settings, with plans for a full roll-out for health, social care and other frontline workers.

Amazon and Royal Mail will help with logistics, while Boots has been supporting initial trials by supplying volunteer healthcare clinicians as testers. It will continue this support as the testing rolls out across the UK. Testing will not be done at Boots stores and these tests will not be available over the counter or for purchase online from any retailers.

Sebastian James, Managing Director, Boots UK and ROI said:

I am extremely proud that Boots is supporting COVID-19 testing for NHS workers. Boots has been at the heart of UK healthcare for 171 years and has always come forward to support the community in times of need. We will work with the NHS to recruit trained professionals – both Boots colleagues and from the wider community.

I am sure there will be many trained healthcare clinicians and students, who will step forward to support our dedicated NHS colleagues. Drive through test locations are being defined but will be spread across the UK; they will not however be in Boots stores, allowing our colleagues to focus on supporting our patients and customers.

Doug Gurr, UK Country Manager, Amazon, said:

We believe our role serving customers and the community during this time is a critical one, and we are committed to working closely with the Government to identify ways in which we can support efforts to respond to the crisis.

Mark Stevenson, executive vice president and chief operating officer, Thermo Fisher Scientific, said:

Our diagnostic test for COVID-19 will help to protect patients and enable medical staff to respond swiftly to treat those who are ill and prevent the spread of infection. This is closely aligned with Thermo Fisher's mission – to enable our customers to make the world healthier, cleaner and safer. In partnership with the UK government and our industry partners, we are committed to expanding the availability of diagnostic testing to prevent the spread of this virus.

Radox CEO Dr Peter FitzGerald said:

We are committed to this important initiative to support NHS frontline staff.

We have significant diagnostic capability and assets within the UK and, at this time of unparalleled national need, look forward to

working with collaborative partners to meet the Government's objectives.

Sir Jeremy Farrar, Director of Wellcome, said:

Widespread diagnostic testing during a pandemic is enormously important to controlling the spread of infection. This initiative is a substantial step forward in our ability to fight this disease that will save many lives.

Alongside other difficult but necessary public health measures such as physical distancing, cancelling mass gatherings, and school closures, testing is a critically important part of the response. Wellcome is extremely grateful to the government, Thermo Fisher Scientific, Amazon and Randox for joining this important partnership, and has been supporting this critical initiative.

Rico Back, Royal Mail Group Chief Executive Officer, said:

Royal Mail fully understands the devastating impact of the coronavirus outbreak on families, businesses and communities across the UK. We have a responsibility to help people stay connected, especially in this crisis when many are unable to leave their home.

The Universal Postal Service provides a lifeline for businesses and communities across the UK, and never more so than at this difficult time. We already deliver vital Government mail in relation to coronavirus. We are working closely with pharmacies and NHS trusts across the UK. And we are delivering many prescriptions and hospital appointments. This is of key importance for us. We will safely deliver these vital tests, a key step forward in the nation's battle against the virus.

Creating the new hub laboratories is one of 3 main strands to increase our testing programme. The other 2 are boosting the capacity of existing local NHS and Public Health England labs; and urgently analysing the reliability of home testing kits that do not need labs. These could be a game-changer – if they are reliable.