

Upcoming changes to COVID-19 international travel restrictions

It is less than 2 months since the first cases of Omicron were confirmed in the UK – the most infectious variant to emerge since the start of the pandemic. A real setback to our plans to safely reopen international travel.

But thanks once again to the nationwide army of medical staff and volunteers, and the huge public response to the booster programme, today (24 January 2022), with over 137 million jabs administered, including nearly 37 million boosters, Britain is one of the most vaccinated countries in the world. And Omicron is in retreat.

Thanks to the decisions taken by the Prime Minister, we have managed to turn the tide on the virus in remarkable time while keeping our domestic society one of the most open in the world.

Today, I can confirm to the House that our international travel regime will also now be liberalised, as part of our efforts to ensure that 2022 is the year in which restrictions on travel, lockdowns and limits on people's lives, are firmly in the past.

Mr Speaker, from 4am on the 11th February, and in time for the half-term break, eligible fully vaccinated passengers arriving in the UK will no longer have to take a post-arrival, lateral flow test.

That means that after months of pre-departure testing, post-arrival testing, self-isolation and additional expense, all that fully vaccinated people will now have to do to when they travel to the UK is verify their status via a [passenger locator form](#).

Mr Speaker, we promised we would not keep measures in place a day longer than necessary, and it is obvious to me now that border testing for vaccinated travellers has outlived its usefulness.

We are therefore scrapping all travel tests for vaccinated people. Not only making travel much easier, but also, of course, saving around £100 for the average family on visits abroad. Providing certainty to passengers, carriers, and our vital tourism sectors for the spring and summer seasons.

So Mr Speaker, let me explain to the House how this will actually work in practice.

For now, we will maintain our current definition of [fully vaccinated](#) for the purpose of inbound travel into the UK. That means 2 doses of an approved vaccination, or 1 dose of the Janssen vaccine.

And we will go further.

The measures for those arriving into the UK who do not qualify as fully

vaccinated have not changed since last March. So the time has come to review their position too.

Today I can announce that passengers who do not qualify as fully vaccinated will no longer be required to do a day 8 test after arrival or, indeed, to self-isolate. They will still need to fill out a passenger locator form to demonstrate proof of a negative COVID test taken 2 days before travel, and they must also take a post-arrival PCR test.

This is a proportionate system that moves us a step closer to normality while maintaining vital public health protections.

For kids, travelling to the UK under 18s will continue to be treated as eligible fully vaccinated passengers, which means they will not face any tests at the UK border. I am also pleased to confirm that, from 3 February, 12 to 15 year olds in England will be able to prove their vaccination status via the digital [NHS Pass](#) for international outbound travel.

Again – this should help families plan holidays for February half term.

Mr Speaker, reconnecting with key markets not only to boost the UK economy, but will also help our hard-hit aviation industry take back to the skies. So I can also confirm that from 4am on 11 February, we will recognise, at the UK border, vaccine certificates from a further 16 countries and territories. Including important nations like China and Mexico, bringing the vaccine recognition total to over 180 countries and territories worldwide.

Mr Speaker, one of the consequences of COVID, and of rapidly-changing infection patterns across the world, has been a border regime that, while necessary, has at times been complex, confusing and difficult to navigate. I know this has been something of a challenge for many travellers over the last 2 years.

So, we will simplify the passenger locator form, making it quicker and easier to complete. And from the end of February, we'll also make it more convenient by giving people an extra day to fill it out before they travel.

Whilst the option for a red list of countries will remain in place, to provide a first line of defence against future variants of concern arriving from other countries, we are looking to replace the managed quarantine system with other contingency measures, including home isolation, provided we can develop new ways to ensure high levels of compliance.

In the meantime, our contingency measures remain available – and as the House knows there are no countries on the red list currently. But I must make clear, these contingency measures are only to be applied if there's a variant of concern that poses a substantial risk. One which is even greater than Omicron.

The UK Health Security Agency will continue to monitor threats and will maintain our highly-effective surveillance capacity, monitoring COVID infections overseas.

But I can announce today that over time, we intend to move away from blanket border measures to a more sophisticated and targeted global surveillance system. I'm also committing today to the development of a full toolbox of contingency options to provide more certainty on how we will respond against future variants. The government will set out our strategy, including how we'll deal with any future new strains of the virus next month.

And we will continue to work with international partners, including the World Health Organization, to help all countries achieve a level of genomic sequencing to monitor variants, which is much closer to our own world-leading capacity.

Mr Speaker, we are moving into a new phase of the fight against COVID.

Instead of protecting the UK from a pandemic, our future depends on us living with endemic COVID. Just as we live with flu, for example. We will set out our strategy for that transition in the spring.

But as we navigate our recovery and our return to more normal travel next month our advice to all eligible adults who have not been vaccinated stays the same.

Please, get jabbed as soon as possible. And if you've had two jabs, please get boosted.

I've been speaking to my opposite numbers around the world recently and they've made it clear to me that regardless of what we do, they are very likely to require booster jabs from this summer. So my advice to anyone who wants to travel anywhere this summer, is don't leave it too late to get your booster, you're very likely to be required it by the third party country you are flying to.

Mr Speaker, we already have one of the most open economies and societies in Europe, with the result being that our GDP has outpaced that of other G7 neighbours.

With these changes today, we will have one of the most open travel sectors in the world. Of course we know COVID can spring surprises but everyone should feel confident about booking holidays, business trips and visits to families and friends abroad.

But be in no doubt, Mr Speaker, it is only because this government got the big calls right on vaccinations, on boosters, on dealing with Omicron that we can open up travel and declare Britain is open for business.

Today we are setting Britain free.

And I commend this statement to the House.