

Secretary of State for Transport delivers daily coronavirus update (24 April 2020)

Good afternoon, and welcome to today's Downing Street press conference.

I'm pleased to be joined today by Dr Jenny Harries.

Latest data

Before I talk about the latest steps we are taking to defeat coronavirus, let me update you on the latest information from the COBR data file.

I can report that through the government's monitoring and testing programme, as of today (24 April 2020)

- 612,031 tests for coronavirus have now been carried out in the UK, including 28,532 tests yesterday
- 143,464 people have tested positive, that's an increase of 5,386 cases since yesterday
- 17,049 people are currently in hospital with coronavirus in the UK, down from 17,615 on 22 April and down 10% on last week
- and sadly, of those in hospital with the virus, 19,506 have now died – that's an increase of 684 fatalities since yesterday

We express our deepest condolences to the families and friends of these victims.

We must not forget that each of these statistics represents a personal tragedy.

Transport importance

Despite the continued challenges ahead, as we prepare for the next stage in our battle to beat this pandemic, there are tentative signs we are making progress.

The main reason for that is the way Britain has responded to the guidance to stay at home and maintain social distancing over the past few weeks.

By respecting these measures, the whole country is slowing the spread of the virus. And by avoiding public transport, you're freeing up space for critical workers who rely on buses and trains to travel safely.

The continued operation of both passenger and freight transport is critically important to our resilience as a country.

So today I'm announcing a new package of measures to ensure transport boosts

our national response to COVID-19.

Freight

First, we're announcing a far-reaching package to safeguard the flow of essential goods into – and across – the country.

I can announce the government has secured a [trilateral agreement along with the French and Irish governments](#) which commits our nations to keeping freight routes open throughout the crisis...

Bringing in life-saving medicines, food and many other essential goods....

Allowing us to meet the needs of our countries during this difficult time.

Operators on many of these routes have been under rising financial pressures due to falling demand.

Since many of them bring in crucial goods like medicines, raw materials and chemicals to purify water, it is important to guarantee the continuation of services.

So, we're protecting ferry routes between Great Britain and Northern Ireland with [funding of up to £17 million](#).

We're also taking action to secure services around the United Kingdom, including up to [£10.5 million for links to the Isle of Wight and the Scilly Isles](#), allowing critical freight to continue to support families in every part of our country.

And we're making sure that air links to Belfast and Derry-Londonderry in Northern Ireland will also continue – these routes are particularly important for critical workers.

Thanks to the [measures I've announced today](#), we are safeguarding 5 ferry and 2 air routes between Great Britain and Northern Ireland; and 26 different freight routes between Britain, France, Belgium, Spain, the Netherlands, Denmark, Germany, Norway and Sweden.

Transport Support Unit

Second, we have launched a Transport Support Unit (TSU) dedicated to fighting this pandemic.

At the beginning of this crisis we reduced services like rail and buses, whilst securing their continuation to enable critical workers and others to make essential journeys.

Lower ridership means we have spare transport capacity which I have directed to be used for logistical tasks in the fight against this virus.

By making use of the people and the resources of the Department for

Transport, its agencies and arm's length bodies, we will be helping NHS trusts and local resilience groups to fight the pandemic.

We now have over 8,500 specialist volunteers from across the transport sector.

And around 9,000 vehicles which can support the national effort.

This includes 4 fixed-wing aircraft owned by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (one of them a Boeing 737), helicopters, ships and trains.

Together they will help move emergency patients and medical supplies, deliver personal protective equipment (PPE) to hospitals, and distribute food parcels to vulnerable people.

And vehicles from Highways England will act as mobile COVID-19 testing centres.

Network Rail is also making available its 7 regional distribution centres which can be used to support the effort.

This work is underway and I would like to thank all those taking part, like the Network Rail engineers who helped fit out the Nightingale hospital in Manchester.

As the country works hard to beat this virus, it's vital we come together and help each other.

So, the Transport Support Unit is getting to work, helping frontline staff, and making full use of the significant resources at its disposal.

Drones

I have also given the green light to trials of drones delivering medical supplies.

Earlier this year, we awarded £28 million to Southampton and Portsmouth to develop a Future Transport Zone.

As part of that initiative, £8 million was earmarked for testing drones, and how they might be used for delivering goods in the years and decades ahead.

Of course, now we have an urgent need, so we're making use of that testing programme as part of our response to COVID-19.

As a result, I have fast-tracked trials to begin next week to carry medical supplies and equipment to St Mary's Hospital, near Newport on the Isle of Wight.

Trams

Finally, we have made funding available today to keep England's trams operating.

This will keep open 5 light rail networks in Greater Manchester, Sheffield, Nottingham, West Midlands and Tyne and Wear...

Allowing essential local routes to remain open.

Once again ensuring that critical workers can travel during this crisis.

Transport workers

All these new initiatives build on the very considerable work we've seen across transport since this crisis began.

The government has taken widespread action to support the industry.

For example, we've stepped in to keep trains operating...

And to keep buses running.

We've worked with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and airlines to bring thousands of Britons home from abroad.

As of today, I can also confirm there are no British holidaymakers left stranded on cruise ships anywhere in the world.

To help motorists we've waived MOT renewals until the end of the outbreak, ensuring that vulnerable people are able to stay at home without the worry.

But I want to pay particular tribute to the transport critical workers who have gone above and beyond to keep vital freight and passenger services running...

To keep hospitals and chemists supplied with medical goods...

To ensure supermarkets are stocked with fresh food...

And to maintain deliveries of essential energy and fuel supplies.

From hauliers and train drivers to those keeping our ports and airports open.

Each and every one of us depends on the transport lifeline they provide.

They are part of the army of critical workers helping to fight this terrible scourge.

Five tests

But before we consider it safe to amend the guidance, we must be satisfied we have met the 5 tests set by the First Secretary.

To ensure....

1. That the NHS can continue to cope
2. That the daily death rate falls sustainably and consistently

3. That the rate of infection is falling
4. That the operational challenges have been met
5. And, most importantly, that there is no risk of a second peak

We don't yet know when that day will come, but I do know it will arrive sooner if motorists and others continue to only make essential journeys.

The actions I've announced today will ensure that transport can continue to serve the nation during this crisis....

Keep us supplied with everything we need to stay at home.

Yet also ensure that the infrastructure required to emerge from this pandemic stands-ready to serve us all when the time comes.

[Secretary of State for Transport delivers daily coronavirus update \(24 April 2020\)](#)

G20 Labor and Employment Ministers' summit on COVID-19

Below is the speech given by the Secretary of State. Following the virtual meeting, the Ministers issued an [agreed statement](#)

Thank you Minister and good afternoon everyone.

Thank you for bringing us together today. I believe that we, as G20 Labour and Employment Ministers, have a responsibility to provide a strong and coordinated response to the impact of COVID-19 on our labour markets.

This pandemic highlights the importance of the global family and our shared commitment to the multilateral framework. In just a few months, everyday life has changed dramatically across the world and we have all felt the profound impact of this virus on our countries and communities. The UK shares the deep sadness caused by the tragic loss of life and the suffering faced by people across the world. I reiterate the commitment made by our leaders during the G20 summit in March, that tackling the pandemic should be our absolute priority. I welcome the adoption of the G20 Action Plan by our finance ministers last week, and in particular the commitments made to protect our workers.

I also applaud the G20 presidency on their pledge of \$500 million that Saudi Arabia have announced to the global effort to combat COVID-19. It's a great example for us all.

I thank the ILO, OECD and the World Bank for your detailed analysis of the

impact of COVID-19 on our labour markets. I also thank the B20 and L20 for their contributions.

We share the same objectives – to protect workers and businesses, while enabling everyone to return to a strong working economy as quickly as possible.

During this emergency, the UK government has and will continue to take every step to ensure that no-one – whatever the status of their employment – is penalised for doing the right thing in protecting themselves, their families and their communities.

Like many others around this table, we have announced an unprecedented package of measures to protect people's jobs and incomes.

Firstly, we have introduced a COVID-19 Job Retention Scheme under which employers are eligible to apply for a government grant of 80% of a worker's salary up to £2,500 a month. Already, after 3 days of registration, over 2.8 million jobs have been saved.

While many UK companies already offer generous sick pay packages, to ensure we have a safety net of support for those who have symptoms or have actually contracted the virus and are unable to work we have ensured that the UK's legal minimum Statutory Sick Pay provisions are now available from day one, providing workers who are unwell with continuous financial certainty.

For the self-employed, the UK has introduced a scheme for eligible workers to receive up to £2,500 per month for at least 3 months.

For those on low incomes, the UK has announced a package of temporary welfare measures worth over £6.5 billion.

We kept schools open for the children of those parents designated as key workers, including public sector workers and those supporting welfare and critical supply chains. Many online courses are being provided for free for people of all ages. We are extending our antigen testing to key workers or someone in their household who show symptoms.

It is vital that our occupational health and safety measures continue to protect those still working, whether that be our frontline health and care workers or the people keeping food supply going from field to fork. Our Health and Safety Executive Agencies are working closely with Public Health agencies on this on safe working practice guidance.

The UK will continue to support those who are most vulnerable. We must ensure that our measures continue to protect all workers in need, regardless of employment status, age or gender. We recognise that the impacts of the crisis are felt significantly by women, particularly as they make up a large percentage of frontline care workers and also continue to do the majority of unpaid care work. We retain our ambition of an economy where everyone has the opportunity to enter work and progress, while being supported by the welfare system in their time of need.

I am grateful for the opportunity to share the UK's actions and for the opportunity to learn from the approaches taken in your countries.

The UK strongly supports the statement we are making today. We are now in the midst of our critical period of response. We should also consider the longer term consequences and how together we can act for a sustainable and inclusive recovery of the global economy. I encourage close alignment and engagement with the other G20 tracks.

Minister, I thank your Presidency for your speed in action in setting up this meeting and I look forward to further debate today and in September.

Thank you.

Update on SLC Customer Contact Services

Applications for full time undergraduate student finance

We want to reassure students already at university and those planning to start in September that applications for student finance for the academic year 20/21 are proceeding as normal. If you haven't already done so, you should apply online now.

If you are considering going to University this year but have not yet decided on your chosen University or course you should apply for finance now and can alter details later.

Payment of maintenance and tuition fees

We are continuing to process Maintenance and Tuition Fee payments as normal for the summer term. Students will receive an e-mail or SMS to confirm when their payment is on its way.

Most SLC staff are now working remotely and we are all focused on providing help and support where it is most needed. However, our contact centre staff are receiving a lot of calls and we ask people wherever possible to seek information online.

PLEASE read down – most of the information you need can be found online, and you will be greatly assisting our team in being able to answer essential, time-critical questions for customers.

With thanks for your patience and co-operation.

Information is available online for new and returning students in [England](#) and [Wales](#) who have questions in relation to recent applications for funding for academic year 20/21.

Customers can also contact us on Twitter [@SF_England](#), [@SF_Wales](#) or [@SLC_Repayment](#) and on Facebook at [Student Finance England](#), [Student Finance Wales](#) and [SLC Repayment](#) for help with funding and repayment queries. This can often be much quicker than calling.

Please save the telephone for essential enquiries but be assured that we are here to help if you can't find the information you need.

We have compiled a list of frequently asked questions (FAQs) for; [Prospective Students](#), [Current Students](#) and [Customers in Repayment](#).

Here are some of the most common questions we are being asked at the moment:

Will I still get my next student finance payment?

Students will receive their scheduled or next instalment of their Maintenance Loan at the planned start of their summer term, regardless of whether their university or provider has made alternative arrangements for teaching.

Can I still apply for student finance?

If you're studying at the moment or you'll be starting a full-time, undergraduate course after 1 August 2020, you should apply online for student finance as normal.

What if I cannot post the evidence you've asked for because I'm self isolating or unwell?

Don't worry about sending evidence just now if you're not able to. Our priority is your safety and well-being so stay at home. If you send us evidence later than normal we'll make sure you don't lose out on student finance because of this.

Will you still take student loan repayments if I can't work due to COVID-19?

We are still collecting repayments where appropriate but remember, – repayments to your student loan are only taken when you're earning over the repayment threshold for your repayment plan. This means that if you stop working, or your income drops below the threshold, your repayments will automatically stop too. Find out about the repayment thresholds for Plan 1, Plan 2 and Postgraduate Loans.

I have recently graduated. Can you confirm when my repayments will start?

You become eligible to repay in the April after graduating from your course but you will only repay once your earnings reach the threshold for your plan type. This happens automatically through HMRC and you need take no action at this point.

How can I update my details?

If you want to update your details, change your password or make a change to your application you can do this by logging in to your student finance account.

We will continue to provide further updates for customers here and on our social media channels.

Other useful sources of information:

Student Finance England

For general information, please check:

Full-time and part-time undergraduate students

0300 100 0607

Open Monday to Friday from 10:00am to 5:30pm

Postgraduate Master's and Doctoral Loans

0300 100 0031

Open Monday to Friday from 10:00am to 5:30pm

Advanced Learner Loan

0300 100 0619

Open Monday to Friday from 10:00am to 5:30pm

Student Finance Wales

For general information, please check:

Full-time and part-time undergraduate students

0300 200 4050

Open Monday to Friday from 10:00am to 5:30pm (except bank holidays)

Postgraduate Master's and Doctoral Loans

0300 100 0494

Open Monday to Friday from 10:00am to 5:30pm (except bank holidays)

Education Maintenance Allowance and Welsh Government Learning Grant FE

0300 200 4050

Open Monday to Friday from 10:00am to 5:30pm (except bank holidays)

Student Finance Northern Ireland

For general information, you can check www.studentfinancenir.co.uk

Full-time and part-time undergraduate students

0300 100 0077

Open Monday to Friday from 10:00am to 5:30pm

Postgraduate Master's Loan

0300 100 0493

Open Monday to Friday from 10:00am to 5:30pm

Education Maintenance Allowance

0300 200 7089

Open Monday to Friday from 10:00am to 5:30pm

EU students

Student Finance Services

0141 243 3570

Open Monday to Friday from 10:00am to 5:30pm

Please note, this line is only for students who can't get student finance through Student Finance England, Student Finance Wales or Student Finance Northern Ireland.

If you're not sure if this is you, and you normally live in:

Repayments

For general information please check:

General repayment enquiries

0300 100 0611

Open Monday to Friday from 10:00am to 5:30pm (except bank holidays)

Customers with an arrears balance or an overpayment

Our lines are currently closed due to the COVID-19 outbreak. We're working hard to get the lines open as soon as possible.

Customer Relations

Our lines are currently closed due to the COVID-19 outbreak. We're working hard to get the lines open as soon as possible.

Report Suspected Fraud

Counter Fraud Services

0300 100 0059

Open Monday to Friday from 10:00am to 5:30pm (except bank holidays)

[Contact tracing: letters to directors of public health](#)

- 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.

Statement on Global Vaccine Summit

News story

The UK hosted Global Vaccine Summit on June 4 will now be an entirely virtual event.



The UK is hosting Global Vaccine Summit on June 4.

The UK hosted Global Vaccine Summit on June 4 will now be an entirely virtual event.

The Summit is an important milestone to secure support for Gavi's five-year strategy, which will immunise 300 million children and save up to 8 million lives by 2025, and for Gavi's vital work to strengthen health systems around the world and help to tackle coronavirus in some of the world's poorest countries. This will help stop future waves of infection spreading globally, including coming to the UK.

The UK government and Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, are working with partners to finalise plans for the Summit programme and format, which will be shared with partners in due course.

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