

Tests required before travel to UK and Nigeria added to red list

- Nigeria to be added to the travel red list from 4am Monday 6 December following 21 cases of Omicron reported in England which are linked to travel from this country, with 134 UK cases now reported in total
- In light of emerging evidence on the Omicron variant, from 4am on Tuesday 7 December anyone aged 12 and above wishing to travel to the UK will need to show a negative pre-departure test (LFD or PCR) as close as possible to departure and not more than 48 hours before to slow the importation of the new variant
- Government working at pace to expand Managed Quarantine Service capacity, but passengers are advised that hotel bookings may be limited as new hotels are onboarded
- These are temporary measures that have been introduced to prevent further Omicron cases from entering the UK, and will be examined at the three-week review point on 20 December

From 4am on Monday 6 December, UK and Irish citizens and residents arriving from Nigeria must isolate in a government-approved managed quarantine facility for 10 days, and receive two negative PCR tests, as further precautionary action is taken against the Omicron variant.

Currently, the vast majority of cases in the UK have clear links to overseas travel from South Africa and Nigeria, and over the past week, 21 Omicron cases reported in England originate from Nigeria.

A temporary travel ban will therefore be introduced for all non-UK and non-Irish citizens and residents who have been in Nigeria in the last 10 days, meaning they will be refused entry into the UK. This does not apply to those who have stayed airside and only transited through Nigeria while changing flights.

Last weekend, 10 countries were added to the red list and it was announced that all vaccinated passengers arriving in the UK must take a day two PCR tests and self-isolate until they receive a negative result. Since then, the geographical spread of Omicron has increased considerably, with 37 countries around the world now reporting Omicron cases and over 134 cases identified in the UK.

New analysis conducted by the UK Health and Security Agency (UKHSA) indicates that the window between infection and infectiousness may be shorter for the

Omicron variant, which increases the efficacy of pre-departure testing as it is more likely to identify positive cases before travel.

In light of this emerging evidence and the changing global picture with regards to the spread of Omicron, from 4am on Tuesday, anyone wishing to travel to the UK from countries and territories not on the red list must also show proof of a negative PCR or lateral flow (LFD) pre-departure test, taken no earlier than 48 hours before departure. This applies to vaccinated passengers and children aged 12 and above.

Airlines will be required to check for pre-departure tests alongside a completed passenger locator form, and passengers will not be allowed to board a flight without providing evidence of a negative test result. Given the reduced incubation period of the Omicron variant, passengers are advised to take the pre-departure test as close as possible to their scheduled departure to the UK and no earlier than 48 hours before travelling.

These additional measures are vital to delaying the import of additional cases and slow the rise in cases within the UK. However, as the Prime Minister set out on 27 November, all temporary measures will be reviewed after three weeks to ensure that they remain necessary and proportionate, and this will take place on 20 December.

Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, Sajid Javid, said:

We knew this winter would be challenging but the arrival of a new variant means we must further strengthen our defences.

As our world-leading scientists continue to understand more about the Omicron variant we are taking decisive action to protect public health and the progress of our COVID-19 vaccination programme.

I urge everyone to do their bit to slow the spread by following the new travel rules, wearing masks where mandatory and most importantly getting the booster jab when called.

Anyone arriving from Nigeria before 4am Monday [6 December] will be advised and strongly encouraged to isolate at home, and their household should also self-isolate for 10 days starting with their arrival in England.

Affected individuals will be contacted and offered free PCR tests to be taken on day 8 after their arrival.

Transport Secretary, Grant Shapps, said:

Following developments in the past week, the science shows that we must be cautious in guarding against this new variant and so, while

we appreciate this will be difficult for the travel sector, it's important we prioritise public health.

As we learn more about the Omicron variant, we will review these temporary measures to ensure they continue to be proportionate and necessary to protect public health.

Analysis by the UKHSA suggests there is strong indication of Omicron presence in Nigeria, and several cases identified in the UK are linked to travel from Nigeria. The country also has very strong travel links with South Africa, for example Nigeria is the second most popular flight destination from Johannesburg.

The UKHSA continues to monitor the situation closely, in partnership with scientific and public health organisations across the world, and government is working collaboratively with the WHO and countries around the world to better understand the new variant and possible mitigations.

Travellers should not attempt to travel to the UK from a red list country without a Managed Quarantine Service (MQS) booking, as they will not be able to board a flight and could be subject to a fixed penalty notice at the UK border. The government's advice is to keep checking the CTM website as there are significant number of cancellations happening which will free up rooms.

The MQS has contracted several new hotels to enter service this week, in response to the likely numbers of UK residents who will want to travel from Nigeria before Christmas.

British nationals in Nigeria should check Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) travel advice and follow local guidance. The FCDO will continue to offer tailored consular assistance to British nationals in country in need of support overseas on a 24/7.

The government is clear it will take further decisive action if necessary to contain the virus and new variant.

Background

- British and Irish citizens, or those with residence rights, arriving to England from countries on the red list must book a managed quarantine hotel in advance. The quarantine package will include a managed quarantine hotel, quarantine transport and a travel test package for COVID-19 tests on day 2 and day 8 of quarantine. Read more about booking and staying in a quarantine hotel
- Further information on international travel requirements can be found elsewhere on GOV.UK, including advice on transiting through red list countries.

- Arrivals to the UK will need to meet the UK's health and border requirements and comply with the relevant quarantine restrictions if coming from a red country or if not fully vaccinated. If you do not have the correct documentation ready to meet UK health and border requirements, you may delay yourself and others, be denied boarding, or face a fine.
- Today's announcement comes as countries around the world continue to strengthen their travel restrictions in response to the Omicron variant, with the US, France and Ireland all requiring passengers to take pre-departure tests.