

LoveHolidays to refund over £18 million for cancelled holidays

The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) has been investigating LoveHolidays after receiving hundreds of complaints that people were still awaiting refunds.

When customers contacted LoveHolidays to request a refund for a cancelled holiday, they were told they would only receive money back for their flights once the firm had received refunds from the respective airlines.

Under the Package Travel Regulations, online travel agents are legally bound to refund customers for package holidays cancelled due to coronavirus, regardless of whether or not the agent has received money back from suppliers, for example airlines.

Following CMA intervention, LoveHolidays has now signed formal commitments – known as undertakings – that ensure these customers receive all their money back.

In total, over £18 million will be refunded to 44,000 LoveHolidays customers. Of this, so far £7m has been refunded to 20,000 customers.

Having carefully reviewed LoveHolidays' financial information, and how quickly it can realistically repay customers, the CMA has accepted LoveHolidays' commitment to repay these customers in full by March 2021 at the latest. Insisting on earlier repayment would result in LoveHolidays dipping below its regulatory obligations.

In order for customers to receive their money back as quickly as possible, refunds will be made in two parts, for example:

Refunds for the cost of hotel accommodation and transfers:

- by 31 December 2020: customers will receive refunds for holidays cancelled before 1 November 2020
- cancellations from 1 January 2021: customers will receive refunds within 14 days of the holiday being cancelled

Refunds for the cost of flights:

- by 28 February 2021: customers will receive refunds for holidays cancelled before 24 August 2020
- by 31 March 2021: customers will receive refunds for holidays cancelled

between 24 August and 31 October 2020

Further details of the relevant payment dates can be found on the [CMA's package travel webpage](#).

To ensure that LoveHolidays adheres to its commitments, the company must provide the CMA with regular reports on the progress of its repayments.

If the firm fails to repay customers by these dates, the CMA is prepared to take the company to court.

Andrea Coscelli, Chief Executive of the CMA, said:

"Travel agents have a legal responsibility to make prompt refunds to customers whose holidays have been cancelled due to coronavirus.

"Our action today means that LoveHoliday's customers now have certainty over when they will receive their money back and they will receive this without undue delay.

"We are continuing to investigate package travel firms and where we find evidence that businesses are breaching consumer law, we will not hesitate to take enforcement action to protect consumers."

Today's announcement follows significant action by the CMA in relation to holiday cancellations. It has [written to over 100 package holiday firms to remind them of their obligations to comply with consumer protection law](#), and has already secured refund commitments from [Lastminute.com](#), [Virgin Holidays](#), [TUI UK](#), [Sykes Cottages](#) and [Vacation Rentals](#).

In order to help businesses to understand their legal obligations with regard to consumer protection law, the [CMA published a statement on its view of how the law relates to cancellations and refunds due to coronavirus](#).

Further information on this case can be found on the [COVID-19 cancellations: package holidays web page](#).

Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities: letter to the Minister for Equalities

The independent Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities has provided an update to the government and the sponsoring minister, Kemi Badenoch MP.

The update calls on the government to put social mobility at the heart of its

equalities agenda, and sets the Commission's report date.

Since its launch in July 2020, the Commission has taken evidence from a wide range of stakeholders representing thousands of people across the UK, and has conducted a deep dive into the latest disparities data. The evidence and data have unearthed the multiple, interacting factors driving life chances for people in the UK.

The Commission's chair, Dr Tony Sewell, says "the evidence is showing that many of the disparities are driven by differences in gender, age, class and geography", rather than race alone.

The impact of COVID-19, however, has made it difficult for the Commission to complete extensive and vital engagement activity with public, private and voluntary organisations, frontline staff and citizens in communities across the country. For example, the recent national restrictions coincided with the launch of the public call for evidence – issued at the end of October – and proved particularly disruptive to the work of the Commission.

With over 2,300 responses to the Commission's call for evidence, it is clear that the public wants the Commission and government to hear their views, and it is right that the Commission is able to review and consider all submissions in full. The Chair has therefore asked that the work of the Commission continue until February 2021, when it will then report to the Prime Minister.

In an update to the Minister for Equalities on its work so far, Dr Sewell recommends that the sponsorship of the Social Mobility Commission should be brought into the Cabinet Office's Equality Hub. The Commission believes the move would help the government take a more rounded view of inequalities and improve life chances for people, whatever their race or ethnicity, and whichever part of the UK they live in.

The [Social Mobility Commission](#) is a non-departmental public body, currently sponsored by the Department for Education. The government is considering the recommendation to bring the Social Mobility Commission under the work of the Equality Hub.

[November 2020 findings from COVID-19 study published](#)

- Over 160,000 volunteers tested in England between 13 November and 3 December as part of a significant COVID-19 study
- Prevalence rose in London from 98 per 10,000 people infected in mid-November to 121 per 10,000 infected by early December, the highest prevalence after Yorkshire and the Humber and the North East

- Adherence to the toughened tiering system is critical to continue to bring down the varying regional rates of infections

The [results from the seventh report](#) of one of the country's largest studies into COVID-19 infections in England have been published today by Imperial College London and Ipsos MORI. It follows the publication of the interim findings in November.

Over 160,000 volunteers were tested in England between 13 November and 3 December to examine the levels of infection in the general population. The findings show infections fell by 30% across England, bringing R below 1. There was regional variation with prevalence rising in London.

The main findings from the seventh REACT study show:

- prevalence fell from an average of 1.30% in mid-October to beginning November, to an average of 0.94% during the lockdown period, meaning it fell from 130 to 94 people infected per 10,000
- national R between 13 November and 3 December was estimated at 0.96
- prevalence rose in London from 98 per 10,000 people infected in mid-November to 121 per 10,000 infected by early December, the highest prevalence after Yorkshire and the Humber and the North East
- the average regional prevalence during lockdown compared with mid-October to beginning November was highest in Yorkshire and the Humber (1.35% down from 2.32%) followed by: West Midlands (1.24% down from 1.59%); East Midlands (1.19%, down from 1.25%); London (1.09% up from 0.97%); North West (1.02% down from 2.39%); North East (0.94% down from 1.49%); South East (0.73% up from 0.69%); South West (0.58% down from 0.80%); and East of England (0.58% down from 0.69%)
- during lockdown, comparing regional prevalence from 25 November – 3 December and 13-24 November, prevalence was highest in Yorkshire and the Humber (1.39% up from 1.17%) followed by: North East (1.26% up from 0.72%); London (1.21% up from 0.98%); East Midlands (1.04% down from 1.27%); North West (0.92% down from 1.08%); West Midlands (0.71% down from 1.55%); South East (0.75% up from 0.72%); East of England (0.59% up from 0.57%); and South West (0.53% down from 0.62%)
- regional R numbers during lockdown ranged from 0.60 for the West Midlands up to 1.27 for London

The study findings demonstrate a rise in infections among secondary school age children. To tackle this rise in London and surrounding areas, additional mobile testing units will be deployed in or near schools for staff, students and their families to be tested in the worst affected boroughs of London, in parts of Essex that border London and parts of Kent. It is vital that all school children aged 11 to 18 in these areas come forward to be tested, whether they have symptoms or not. Latest figures from the ONS showed almost 1 in 3 people in England show no symptoms of having the virus but are still able to pass it on.

Professor Paul Elliott, director of the programme at Imperial, said:

During the first half of lockdown our study showed that infections were on a clear downward trajectory, but we're now seeing a levelling off, driven by clusters of infections in certain regions and age groups. Behaviours and public health measures need to be guided by this fast-changing situation to prevent it from worsening, and everyone has a part to play in keeping this virus at bay, especially as we approach a relaxing of rules over Christmas.

While infections have fallen overall across England and the spread has slowed, there are clear differences in prevalence across the regions and infections remain high. Winter is always the most difficult time for the NHS and an increase in infections by the virus that causes COVID-19 is followed closely by a rise in hospitalisation levels. As infections begin to flatten, it is vital everyone plays their part by following the toughened, regional tiered system to bring down infections and reduce pressures on the NHS this winter.

Decisions on tiers are made by ministers based on public health recommendations. These are informed by a variety of criteria and not just prevalence including local context, pressure on the NHS as well as case detection rate, case rates in the over 60s, how quickly cases are changing, case rates in care homes and positivity in the general population. The government constantly monitors the data and has committed to reviewing the tiering system on 16 December.

Kelly Beaver, Managing Director- Public Affairs at Ipsos MORI said:

As we end the year, I would like to thank the well over a million people that have taken part in the REACT studies this year which have provided a key data stream for Government to track COVID-19 in real time across England. We are currently sending out letters asking people to volunteer for the next round of the study which will take place in the new year and I urge people to participate to contribute to this vital body of work.

This report is the latest from the REACT study which was commissioned by DHSC and carried out by a world-class team of scientists, clinicians and researchers at Imperial College London, Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust and Ipsos MORI.

[The pre-print report is available here](#) (Claim ID: cFqjaYxzTqCePpzC and Claim Passcode: nhbtPw7o3Jxz9TWD)

Read more [information on the Real-time Assessment of Community Transmission \(REACT\) programme of work](#)

This study falls under pillar 4 of the COVID-19 National Testing Programme, which focuses on mass surveillance in the general population.

Supporting the work of the IRMCT and ensuring impunity does not prevail

Thank you, Mr President. I would like to start by thanking the President, His Honour Judge Carmel Agius, and Prosecutor Brammertz for their briefings to the Security Council today and we welcome their re-appointment to the Mechanism.

On this day 25 years ago, the Dayton Peace Agreement was signed in Paris. Today, we remember the victims of that bitter conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and celebrate 25 years since its end. The International Criminal Tribunal for the former-Yugoslavia, and now the Mechanism, have brought justice to the victims and tirelessly pursued those responsible for this dark chapter in European history.

I would like to reiterate the UK's unwavering commitment to the Mechanism and reaffirm our willingness to assist it wherever possible in fulfilling its mandate and implementing its vision of being a small, temporary and effective organisation. We would like to take this opportunity to praise the work undertaken by the Mechanism and the results that have been achieved so far.

Mr President, throughout this reporting period COVID-19 continued to affect the entire world. We would like to commend the Mechanism on its valiant efforts to continue international justice even in the face of the challenges of the pandemic. While there are some delays to cases, the efforts of the Mechanism have ensured that many of them will be concluded in first half of 2021. The Mechanism has taken a huge step in showing that impunity is not and will not be allowed to prevail.

We welcome the Mechanism's increased presence within Rwanda, which fully displays its commitment to continue its work at full speed despite the challenging operational environment. We also welcome the renewed drive by the Mechanism to build upon the success of the arrest of Félicien Kabuga in order to bring the remaining alleged genocidaires to justice. We are pleased to see legal proceedings against Kabuga are being taken forward, working closely with the Government of Rwanda.

We would like to praise the Mechanism as a force for good. Its work is a reminder of how international justice can be achieved through international collaboration. We call on all Member States to assist the Mechanism; it is our collective responsibility to seek justice for victims and our obligation under the Charter of the United Nations to cooperate with the Mechanism.

We commend the Mechanism's efforts to progress and minimise delays the Mladić and Stanišić & Simatović cases. We note the progress made between countries of the Balkans region in the transfer of cases. However, regional judicial cooperation in the Western Balkans remains inadequate, which has direct

implications for achieving justice for victims. Furthermore, we echo the Prosecutors call to countries in the former Yugoslavia to register criminal convictions entered by the ICTY and the Mechanism into domestic criminal records. Honouring the commitments they made when they signed the Joint Declaration on War Crimes at the 2018 London Western Balkans Summit and committed themselves to “recognising and respecting verdicts from international and domestic courts relating to war crimes and other atrocity crimes”.

The UK remains deeply concerned that glorification of war criminals and denial continue. It is reprehensible that individuals and groups continue to deny these events, and in some cases glorify the perpetrators and instigators of these heinous acts. The UK will continue to condemn denial and glorification in all its forms. The road to reconciliation is difficult, but we must accept the truth of the past to move forwards.

Mr President, 2020 has been a significant year for us all, but it has also been a year we have remembered. Earlier this year we marked one of the gravest anniversaries in European history, 25 years on from the Srebrenica genocide. Today we mark the anniversary of the end of the conflicts in Bosnia and Herzegovina. And it was only last year we commemorated the 25th anniversary of the events in Rwanda. After 25 years we want those who suffered as a result of these events to know that they remain at the forefront of our thoughts: the survivors, the victims, and those still missing and their families remain a priority for the United Kingdom.

As time moves on we must all recommit to ensuring that impunity does not prevail. There is no time for complacency. There is still more work to be done by the Mechanism in relation to the awful events which took place in Rwanda and the territories of the former-Yugoslavia and States must continue to support it in that work.

Thank you, Mr President.

PHE investigating a novel strain of COVID-19

The strain was identified due to Public Health England's (PHE) proactive and enhanced monitoring following the increase in cases seen in Kent and London. The variant has been named 'VUI – 202012/01' (the first Variant Under Investigation in December 2020).

As of 13 December, 1,108 cases with this variant have been identified, predominantly in the South and East of England.

PHE is working with partners to investigate and plans to share its findings

over the next 2 weeks. There is currently no evidence to suggest that the strain has any impact on disease severity, antibody response or vaccine efficacy.

High numbers of cases of the variant virus have been observed in some areas where there is also a high incidence of COVID-19. It is not yet known whether the variant is responsible for these increased numbers of cases. PHE will monitor the impact of this in the coming days and weeks.

It is not uncommon for viruses to undergo mutations; seasonal influenza mutates every year. Variants of SARS-CoV-2 have been observed in other countries, such as Spain.

This variant includes a mutation in the 'spike' protein. Changes in this part of the spike protein may result in the virus becoming more infectious and spreading more easily between people.

Dr Susan Hopkins, Test and Trace and PHE Joint Medical Advisor, said:

We are investigating a new strain of SARS-CoV-2, predominantly in Kent and the surrounding areas. It is not unexpected that the virus should evolve and it's important that we spot any changes quickly to understand the potential risk any variant may pose. There is currently no evidence that this strain causes more severe illness, although it is being detected in a wide geography especially where there are increased cases being detected.

The best way to stop infection is to stick to the rules – wash our hands, wear a face covering and keep our distance from others.

The recommended control measures to limit the spread of the new variant continue to be testing, following the existing guidance and abiding by the restrictions, including 'Hands, Face, Space' and limiting your number of contacts.