

Chancellor waives duties and VAT on vital medical imports

- goods arriving from outside the EU will not be subject to customs duty or import VAT
- move will reduce red tape to ensure frontline health workers get vital equipment quickly and removes barriers to those who want to donate supplies to the NHS

The Chancellor has waived import taxes on medical equipment crucial to the fight against coronavirus – reducing red tape to ensure equipment gets to frontline health workers faster.

NHS suppliers will no longer have to pay customs duty and import VAT on specific medical goods coming from outside the EU, including ventilators, coronavirus testing kits and protective clothing.

The removal of the tariffs, which can be up to 12 per cent on the price of these goods, will mean more vital supplies are flowing into the UK to help the brave frontline workers treating patients with coronavirus.

Chancellor Rishi Sunak said:

We are taking decisive action to ensure our NHS has everything it needs to fight this outbreak.

Waiving import taxes on vital medical equipment such as ventilators will speed up and increase the supply of critical items going to our frontline health workers.

Dealing with coronavirus is a collective national effort and I will do everything I can to help us win this battle.

The changes, which were introduced last Friday, will also make the UK more attractive to companies who want to produce or donate supplies to fight coronavirus.

The move helps deliver on the Chancellor's promise to do whatever extra resources the NHS needs to cope with the outbreak

The list of goods exempt from import taxes includes ventilators, COVID-19 testing kits, face masks, protective garments and eye protectors, amongst hundreds of other vital products to tackle the outbreak of coronavirus. The types of goods covered by the UK's new duty-free rules was created by the Department of Health.

Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock said:

We are working around the clock to ensure that our heroic frontline NHS and social care staff have all they need to tackle coronavirus.

The removal of import taxes for these goods will help clear the way for even more equipment to reach the frontline.

International Trade Secretary, Liz Truss said:

We are removing tariffs and barriers on essential medical supplies imported into the UK to ensure our front line workers have everything they need to treat people suffering from Covid-19.

As I agreed with my G20 trade minister counterparts this Monday, we will work together to keep trade flowing and ensure the supply of essential goods and services.

Notes

- Under the current rules, importers require a duty deferment account with HMRC backed by a guarantee. Importers of these critical goods would need to increase the level of their guarantee to cover any additional duty due.
- This new approach, in place until 31 July 2020, will allow companies to import goods critical for our fight against coronavirus at a faster rate and reduce costs significantly.
- The relief can be claimed from HMRC immediately by state organisations, including state bodies, public bodies and other bodies governed by public law who are supplying the NHS. Other approved organisations wanting to supply the NHS can also apply to HMRC
- [HMRC has published new guidance about the import relief on GOV.UK](#). Only organisations supplying the NHS can utilise this relief.
- All imports will continue to arrive through the same channels and face the same checks as before, so there is minimal chance of fraud. Companies benefiting from the relief also need to first be approved by HMRC.
- The EU's disaster relief regulation can be used in relation to COVID-19. This allows certain items that are needed to deal with C-19 to be imported free of VAT and customs duties.

[General licences introduced for the humane trapping of stoats](#)

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Do not meet others, even friends or family.

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

Addressing human rights and peace negotiations in Afghanistan

Thank you very much Jun, and thank you for the briefing Ingrid. Let me begin, as others have done, welcome the appointment of Deborah Lyons as SRSG, and thank Special Representative Yamamoto for all his work.

Let me start with COVID-19, an issue, I think, of concern for all of us and not just on Afghanistan, but on a number of the issues – or all of the issues – on the Security Council's agenda. So we are, of course, concerned globally, but also in Afghanistan in particular. And for our part, we are looking at our options of scaling up humanitarian action in response to the pandemic. And we'll work closely with our partners in doing so. But it makes it even more important that firstly, the Taliban ceases its attacks in line with the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire to confront the spread of the disease. And secondly, that Afghan political leaders come together so that the government can lead the necessary response. And I'm going to stay a bit more about both those later on. But a question for later for Ingrid: you talked about some of the concerns and the risks in Afghanistan, but it would be interesting to hear from you what actions you think the UN should be taking – and it's the UN family – and how members of the Council can support that.

So moving on to the political side, I think it's vital that we see quick progress towards intra-Afghan negotiations and ensure that momentum isn't lost. We've seen some positive moments, including talks between the Afghan government and Taliban on prisoner releases and the announcement of an Afghan negotiation team.

But challenges clearly remain. And while it's for Afghans themselves to work out the structures and formats of intra-Afghan negotiations, the UN and the international community should be flexible and ready to support, however is needed. The Taliban must negotiate with the Afghan government team in good faith. Only a negotiated and inclusive settlement will bring peace and the Taliban must end violence. That's a clear demand from all Afghans. But we're disappointed that leaders in Kabul have been unable to unite ahead of negotiations with the Taliban.

Now, Jun, is the time for them to follow through on their promises, set aside

their differences and form a genuinely unified government. The Afghan people expect and deserve nothing less, and their political leaders must not squander this moment. And in particular, we want to ensure that we protect and build on the gains made in the lives of women and girls over the last 18 years.

Let me finish my remarks, Mr President, by saying a few words on Afghans development needs. We know that Afghanistan is one the deadliest conflicts in the world, with over 10,000 casualties recorded in 2019. Years of displacement and hardship arising from conflict, severe drought and flooding, as well as sluggish economic performance, have left over 80 percent of Afghans below the international poverty line. Over 14 million people are in crisis or emergency levels of food insecurity, and that adds to the vulnerability to COVID-19. Now, the UK has committed in this financial year \$362 million. We are ready to work with Finland as co-hosts and other international donors as we look forward to the 2020 Pledging Conference in Geneva. The coordination between development, security and political actors is more crucial than ever.

Let me sign off by saying that we have a tendency, all of us, to talk about the fact that we're at a critical moment in many situations on our agenda. But it seems to me particularly true now and particularly true of Afghanistan. There are many risks ahead of us and around us, but we need the key decision makers in Afghanistan from all parties, from all areas, to hold their nerve and to do the right thing and to come together for peace and for the people and to tackle the pandemic.

Thank you.

[Supporting disabled people through the coronavirus outbreak](#)

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MHRA approves new life-saving breathing aid to help keep coronavirus (COVID-19) patients out of intensive care

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