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## **Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic: advice for those returning from abroad**

### **Avoiding infection during your journey home and preventive measures to take on your return**

- **This updates the news of 10 June 2020**

Almost every country in the world has now reported cases of coronavirus (COVID-19) during the ongoing pandemic [1]. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) has updated its global advisory against 'all but essential' travel. From 4 July 2020 some destinations have been assessed as no longer presenting an unacceptably high risk to British nationals travelling abroad [2]. The list of [exempted countries and territories](#) is being kept under constant review [2].

Closure of airspace and other travel restrictions may result in delays or difficulties in returning to the UK. Travellers who wish to return should follow [updates and logistical advice from the GOV.UK website](#).

Travellers are advised to take precautions (see below) to reduce the risk of COVID-19 infection to themselves and others during their journey and to be aware of preventive measures that should be taken on their return to the UK.

### **Advice for travellers abroad**

The [FCO foreign travel advice](#) provides information on travel restrictions during the COVID-19 crisis for individual countries. For some countries, the foreign travel advice page may also contain information on options to return to the UK.

If you develop a high temperature, or a new continuous cough or a loss of, or change in, your normal sense of taste or smell (anosmia) whilst abroad, you should check where to get help locally, follow the advice of local authorities and contact your travel insurance provider. To reduce the risk of passing on infection, you should not travel on an aircraft if you are unwell. Exit screening, which may include having your temperature taken and/or being asked about your health and travel history, may be implemented at exit ports of some countries and you may be denied boarding if you are symptomatic.

[Social distancing measures](#) are in place for all individuals here in the UK (these vary in the different countries in the UK). These measures may be helpful in other countries reporting COVID-19 while you are waiting to return, but check local guidance also.

Those who may be at greater risk of severe illness are advised to be particularly stringent with social distancing measures. [Vulnerable groups](#) include those aged 70 or older (regardless of medical conditions), individuals under 70 years of age with an underlying health condition (i.e. anyone instructed to get a flu jab as an adult each year on medical grounds) and pregnant women [3]. Certain individuals who are thought to be extremely vulnerable from COVID-19 have been advised on [more stringent 'shielding' measures](#) to follow [3].

There are a number of factors to consider when planning travel. You should consider your individual circumstance and the range of information available to you, including the [FCO foreign travel advice](#) to decide what is right for you. Each of our [Country Information pages](#) have information on the risk of exposure to COVID-19 (high, moderate or low risk) based on currently available [information assessed by Public Health England and the National Travel Health Network and Centre](#).

If you are concerned about risks to your health, for example if you are [vulnerable or clinically extremely vulnerable](#) to COVID-19, you may wish to seek professional health advice locally or from your usual doctor in the UK to discuss the best options to reduce your risk.

If you chose to remain overseas, you should consider the availability of medical care where you are currently (which may be less accessible during the pandemic). Be aware that your travel insurance may be compromised if you extend your trip abroad or if you have travelled abroad against UK Government advice [4, 5]. You are advised to contact your insurance provider for further information.

Guidance for measures that are recommended aboard aircraft during and post the COVID-19 pandemic has been published [6, 7]. You should contact the airline bringing you home for information about special measures in place during the COVID-19 pandemic and follow their advice.

Note that from 15 June [face coverings will be mandatory for those using public transport](#) in England, [further details and advice for using public transport](#) are available on the [GOV.UK website](#). The rules for the other countries in the UK may vary.

## **Aboard the aircraft**

Air quality is carefully controlled, changed very frequently and passed through filters efficient at removing viruses. Aircraft ventilation systems are active throughout the flight [8].

[The International Aircraft Transport Association \(IATA\)](#) state that the risk of contracting a viral infection through the air circulated aboard an aircraft is lower than in an office environment [9]; research has shown there is very little risk of any communicable disease being transmitted on board an aircraft [8].

However, because the COVID-19 virus is found in respiratory droplets (i.e. secretions expelled during sneezing or coughing), transmission can occur either by direct person to person contact, or indirect contact with items or surfaces contaminated with potentially infected droplets [10].

It is essential, therefore, that you continue to take good hygiene measures, during and beyond your journey home, to minimise the risk of infection:

Be aware of the surfaces you touch [11]. [Wash hands regularly](#) with soap and running water for at least 20 seconds. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitiser that contains at least 60% alcohol if soap and water are not available.

- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in a bin and wash hands with soap and water.
- The use of a suitable [face covering](#) is (with some exceptions) mandatory in England on public transport from 15 June [11, 12]. The rules on face covering in other countries differ [11].

In addition:

- Ask your airline about physical distancing measures or other measures in place to reduce or limit physical contact with potentially infected passengers aboard the aircraft.
- Avoid moving from your seat unnecessarily, but exercise your legs (flex and extend the ankles) as much as possible to encourage blood flow from the lower leg.
- Use the designated toilet for your area only and wash your hands before leaving the toilet.
- If you are unwell on the flight please stay in your seat and follow any instructions provided during the flight, and contact the air crew as soon as possible.
- If you have been advised to shield, speak to your doctor, travel insurance company and airline before you travel.

## Arrival in the UK and travelling home

All travellers should read the guidance on entering the UK. From 8 June 2020, new rules are in place and travellers need to [provide their journey and contact details](#). Travellers are also required to self-isolate for 14 days on return (unless they are in a [group who are exempt from these requirements](#) or from 10 July 2020 are returning from countries covered by the [‘travel corridor’ exemption](#)).

On return to If you are in the UK and you are self-isolating, you will also need to self-isolate and arrange a COVID-19 test if with symptoms of COVID-19 develop (high temperature, or a new continuous cough or a loss of, or change in, your normal sense of taste or smell), following [Public Health England stay at home guidance](#).

## Advice for health professionals

During the current COVID-19 pandemic, many individuals present with a fever. In the returned traveller, some will have *Plasmodium falciparum* malaria, which can be fatal if not diagnosed and treated. All individuals being assessed for possible COVID-19 must be asked if they have **travelled abroad in the last six months**. If they visited a country where malaria occurs, they must have a blood test result for malaria on the same day [13].

## Resources

- [COVID-19 \(coronavirus\): general advice for travellers](#)
- [Foreign and Commonwealth Office \(FCO\): Travel advice - coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)
- [Public health England - Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): guidance](#)
- [UK transport and travel advice](#)

## References

1. [World Health Organization. Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) \[Accessed 9 July 2020\]](#)
2. [Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Travel advice: coronavirus \(COVID-19\). 4 July 2020 \[Accessed 9 July 2020\]](#)
3. [NHS. People at higher risk from coronavirus. \[Accessed 9 July 2020\]](#)
4. [Foreign and Commonwealth Office Foreign travel insurance. Last updated 3 July 2020 \[Accessed 9 July 2020\]](#)
5. [The Association of British Insurers \(ABI\). Travel Insurance: Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Information Hub. \[Accessed 9 July 2020\]](#)
6. [International Aircraft Transport Association \(IATA\). Guidance for Cabin Operations During and Post Pandemic Edition 3 – 5 2020. \[Accessed 9 July 2020\]](#)
7. [World Health Organization. Operational considerations for managing COVID-19 cases or outbreak in aviation: Interim guidance 18 March 2020 \[Accessed 9 July 2020\]](#)
8. [World Health Organization. Air travel advice Q&A. 27 April 2020. \[Accessed 9 July 2020\]](#)

9. [International Aircraft Transport Association, COVID-19 Coronavirus & travellers. 2020. \[Accessed 9 July 2020\]](#)
10. [World Health Organization, Modes of transmission of virus causing COVID-19: implications for IPC precaution recommendations. Scientific brief. 29 March 2020. \[Accessed 9 July 2020\]](#)
11. [UK Department of Transport, Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): safer travel guidance for passengers. Last updated 4 July 2020 \[Accessed 9 July 2020\]](#)
12. [UK Department of Transport, Face coverings to become mandatory on public transport. From 15 June, face coverings will be required while using public transport in England. 4 June 2020. \[Accessed 9 July 2020\]](#)
13. [Public Health England, Guidelines for malaria prevention in travellers from the UK 2019, September 2019. \[Accessed 9 July 2020\]](#)