

18 March 2020

House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

King Charles Street
London SW1A 2AH

Secretary of State

Dear Colleagues,

As the Prime Minister has said, the Coronavirus pandemic 'is the worst public health crisis for a generation.' Much international travel is being disrupted as individual countries impose measures to contain the virus. The speed and range of those measures across other countries is unprecedented. In some cases, even in countries or particular areas where cases of Covid-19 have not yet been reported, local authorities have nonetheless imposed restrictions on movement, and done so with little or no notice at all.

Today, based on fast-changing international circumstances on Covid-19, I made the decision to advise British nationals against non-essential travel globally for an initial period of 30 days, effective immediately, and subject to review.

As set out in my statement to the House, this will not include international freight services, such as shipping and haulage, which is vital for ensuring the continuity of essential food, goods and materials. The Department for Transport will be working with the freight sector to minimise disruption.

Support for British Nationals Abroad during Covid-19

I know that many of you will be concerned about how your constituents and their families will be affected by Covid-19 if they are travelling or living abroad. I wanted to set out what support we can provide to British nationals abroad, whether they are directly affected by Covid-19, or concerned about continuity of routine consular support by our network of 205 consular posts around the world.

Constituents who choose to travel during the pandemic, or who are overseas, must be realistic about the level of disruption they are willing and able to endure, and to make decisions in light of the unprecedented conditions we face. That includes the risk they may not be able to get home, if travel restrictions are put in place.

Constituents must also be realistic about our capacity to repatriate people from abroad. We have taken action where necessary, but repatriation is costly and complicated to coordinate. So, as has been the case thus far, Government-supported repatriations must only be undertaken in exceptional circumstances.

Covid-19 Consular Services

If in difficulty overseas, your constituents can get in touch with our consular staff 24 hours a day, 365 days a year by telephoning their nearest Embassy, High Commission or Consulate for the price of a local phone call. All phone numbers can be found through a quick search on our Gov.UK “Find an Embassy ...” page. Anyone in the UK calling about a family member or friend overseas should call the main FCO switchboard any time of day or night on 020 7008 1500.

In many instances, your constituents’ difficulties can be resolved over the phone. When that is not the case, they will be referred to consular teams at the FCO in London or to local consular team for further support.

Our publication “Support for British nationals abroad: A guide” explains how the FCO can support British people in difficulty overseas, as well as explaining what the FCO cannot do. This publication is available online at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/support-for-british-nationals-abroad-a-guide>

Some of our usual services, including face-to-face support, will be restricted during Covid-19. Nonetheless, the FCO’s professional and dedicated consular staff will continue to provide tailored support to vulnerable customers in line with our guide on “Support for British nationals abroad”, if necessary by phone, using their local expertise to help British people navigate another country’s systems, access services or to make contact with their family.

Travel Advice

Our FCO Travel Advice provides information and advice to help British nationals make informed decisions about their travel and safety abroad (www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice). As a matter of course we review the information in our travel advice regularly and update it following any significant incident that might affect British nationals visiting or living in the area. In a developing crisis, such as the Covid-19 pandemic we have reinforced our travel advice team and are issuing updates on local measures and quarantine arrangements, if necessary, several times a day.

The FCO also provides travel advice specifically about Covid-19 at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/travel-advice-novel-coronavirus>. You and your constituents can sign up to receive email updates as travel advice is amended for specific countries via gov.uk, Twitter and Facebook:

FCO Travel Advice <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice>

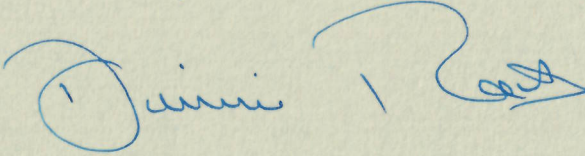
FCO Travel on Twitter <https://twitter.com/FCOtravel>

FCO Travel on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/fcotravel>

Hotline for Parliamentarians

As a Member of Parliament, I know how important it is that you are able to support your constituents. That is why my officials run a specific hotline for Parliamentarians to contact us on 020 7008 0999. I recommend you call the hotline in the first instance as it allows a rapid response to any urgent or complex cases.

My Foreign Office Ministerial colleagues and I will always respond promptly to letters and email queries from colleagues on behalf of your constituents, providing individual replies with updates and details of our support in each case.

Yours sincerely,


THE RT HON DOMINIC RAAB MP