

UK lifts Covid-19 test requirements for vaccinated international travelers

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LONDON: British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said Monday his government will remove coronavirus testing requirements for vaccinated people arriving in England, news hailed by the travel industry as a big step back to normality.

Johnson said that "to show that this country is open for business, open for travelers, you will see changes so that people arriving no longer have to take tests if they have been vaccinated, if they have been double vaccinated."

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps is due to give details of the rule change later.

Tim Alderslade, chief executive of airline industry body Airlines U.K., said it was "a landmark day."

"Nearly two years since the initial COVID restrictions were introduced, today's announcement brings international travel towards near-normality for the fully vaccinated, and at last into line with hospitality and the domestic economy," he said.

Currently, travelers who have had at least two vaccine doses must take a rapid coronavirus test within two days of arriving in the U.K. Those who are unvaccinated face stricter testing and quarantine rules.

The government had already eased travel rules earlier this month, removing the need to take a test before traveling to Britain and replacing lab-confirmed post-arrival PCR tests with cheaper rapid lateral flow tests.

Monday's announcement applies to England. The other parts of the U.K. — Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland — set their own public health policies but have generally adopted the same travel rules as England.

Coronavirus cases in Britain soared in December, driven by the extremely transmissible omicron variant, though hospitalizations and deaths have remained well below previous pandemic peaks. Britain has seen over 154,000 deaths in the pandemic, the second-worst toll in Europe after Russia.

Johnson's Conservative government is also lifting mask mandates and other restrictions this week, and is relying on vaccinations and widespread testing to keep the virus in check.

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