

Country	Total to 25 February:		Total to 10 March:		Total to 13 March:	
Spain	2	0	1,024	28	2,965	84
Cambodia	1	0	2	0	5	0
China (incl SARs)	77,749	2,655	80,879	3,139	80,942	3,179
Japan	157	1	514	9	675	19
Malaysia	22	0	117	0	129	0
Singapore	90	0	160	0	187	0
South Korea	977	10	7,513	54	7,979	66
Taiwan	30	1	45	1	49	1
Thailand	37	0	53	1	75	1
Vietnam	16	0	31	0	39	0

Source: World Health Organisation, [Coronavirus disease \(COVID-2019\) situation reports](#)

27. At a time when Vietnam, Taiwan, Thailand and Singapore all remained on the category 2 list, arrivals from Spain, France and Germany remained subject to no specific precautionary guidance despite the clearly significant and increasing numbers of infections in those countries. Furthermore, while data is not publicly available on a daily or weekly basis, Civil Aviation Authority figures show that, during February and March 2020, 3,482,702 people travelled between UK and Spanish airports, 1,305,441 between the UK and France and 1,401,837 between the UK and Germany. By comparison, 190,170 people travelled between the UK and Singapore, 136,068 between the UK and Thailand, and 23,861 between the UK and Vietnam.⁴⁶

28. On 11 March, 8 days after SAGE advised that there was no evidence in favour of cancelling mass gatherings, and at a time when Spain already had over 1,000 recorded cases, Atletico Madrid played Liverpool Football Club in a Champions League match hosted at Anfield; an estimated 3,000 people travelled from Madrid to attend the match.⁴⁷

29. On 12 March, the Chief Scientific Adviser stated at a Downing Street press conference that, in terms of scale of the outbreak, the UK was “maybe four weeks or so” behind Italy, and “behind where Germany and France are as well”. Other countries were continuing to extend their border restrictions, as is described later in this Report.

30. On 13 March, the Government lifted all special guidance for international arrivals from specific countries/areas. From 13 March until 8 June there would be no quarantine or self-isolation requirements for asymptomatic travellers, and no screening or testing at the border.

Incremental quarantine and self-isolation measures targeted at high-risk countries/areas

31. We set out later in this Report the evidence on the number of people arriving in the UK with COVID-19 during February and March, but it is clear that even by early March there were significant and rising numbers of imported infections. A genomic study published in June (see paragraph 64 onwards) estimated that only 0.08% of UK imported infections came directly from China, to which the earliest travel restrictions were applied. From Italy, it estimates that imported cases started to rise in early February and then to gradually fall again after around 25 February. Imported cases from Spain rose from late February until the middle of March, and imported cases from France rose from early March

prevented proper analysis of the options and a strategy to develop and expand testing as part of border measures.

40. Overall, in the early phase of COVID-19, insufficient emphasis was placed on the importance of controlling importation from overseas as a method for containing the virus or delaying its spread. The decision by SAGE only to consider measures that could deliver a full month's delay to the spread of the virus was a mistake and it is very hard to understand why that approach was taken. Additive measures that could have contributed to more effective containment should have been considered, and delays even of a few days alongside the introduction of other domestic measures such as social distancing and lockdown could have had a significant impact on the scale of the outbreak in the UK.

41. Dismissing strict border measures as "draconian" on 3 February was erroneous, as it was their strength that could have made a significant contribution and potentially mitigated the scale of domestic restrictions that were later needed. SAGE papers suggest that prioritising delay of spread rather than suppression of cases was influenced by the conclusion that the virus ought to be treated similarly to pandemic influenza, but this has been retrospectively proved wrong.

COVID-19 border measures after 13 March

Withdrawal of travel advice and move to 'delay'

42. On 13 March, the Government withdrew its travel advice for specific incoming countries. No reason was given for the withdrawal of the guidance at the time, other than that it had been "superseded by information in COVID-19: stay at home guidance" which was published on the same day.⁵³

43. In a letter to the Committee on 4 May, the Home Office Chief Scientific Adviser, Professor John Aston, confirmed that:

This advice was removed on 13 March when the incidence in the UK had increased and the 'stay at home' guidance to everyone in the UK, regardless of whether a new arrival or not, came into force.⁵⁴

This was reiterated by the Second Permanent Secretary of the Home Office, Shona Dunn, in oral evidence on 1 July:

As Professor Aston has explained, the position on 13 March, when the guidance was removed—because that was the point in time when the stay at home guidance came into effect for all people regardless of whether they were already within the country or coming into the country—was that specific guidance with respect to self-isolation for people coming in from particular routes was no longer regarded as being appropriate.⁵⁵

44. The new guidance for all households in the UK was significantly less stringent than the guidance for travellers from identified high risk (category 1) areas like Italy and Wuhan that it replaced. It was also significantly less stringent than the quarantine arrangements introduced for everyone on 8 June, which we cover in the next chapter.

45. This new guidance, *for households with possible or confirmed coronavirus (COVID-19) infection*,⁵⁶ came into effect following a press conference held by the Prime Minister on 12 March in which he advised that:

From tomorrow, if you have coronavirus symptoms, however mild—either a new continuous cough or a high temperature—then you should stay at home for at least 7 days to protect others and help slow the spread of the disease.⁵⁷

Four days later, on 16 March, the Prime Minister gave another press conference in which he advised that:

[...] even if you don't have symptoms and if no one in your household has symptoms, there is more that we need you to do now.

So, second, now is the time for everyone to stop non-essential contact with others and to stop all unnecessary travel.

We need people to start working from home where they possibly can. And you should avoid pubs, clubs, theatres and other such social venues.⁵⁸

46. From 16 March, everyone in the UK was encouraged to avoid all unnecessary social contact, but not to self-isolate when asymptomatic, as had been required of 'category 1' travellers prior to 13 March. UK residents were at that time advised to avoid pubs and restaurants, but they were not discouraged from going to the shops or going to work if it was not possible to work from home. These conditions, which superseded the withdrawn guidance for international arrivals, therefore reduced the level of restrictions applying to the travellers deemed as having the highest risk of infection.