

Message

**From:** [Name Redacted]  
**Sent:** 04/08/2020 7:02:58 PM  
**To:** [Name Redacted]  
**CC:** (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=fc89b796653e48c6b1193441e59df285; [Name Redacted] Van Tam, Jonathan  
[/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group  
(FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=d29c846fc8fa4678b419c6f0dc3836f3-JVanTam]  
**Subject:** RE: To clear asap - x gov line on COVID-19 border measures in March

CMO has had a look. Nothing wrong with the content but says background point 2 and 3 are stronger and show what we did more than the generic line

- During the contain phase of the outbreak we had enhanced monitoring at the borders to identify symptomatic travellers from high risk areas early and safely triage them into the health system. This was applied to those returning from Wuhan on 22 January and broadened to the whole of China on 25 January; Japan on 8 February, Iran on 25 February, northern Italy on 4 March and the whole of Italy on 5 March.
- National stay at home guidance was published on 12 March, superseding the above guidance and applied to everyone in the UK – including new arrivals.

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**From:** [Name Redacted]@dhsc.gov.uk>  
**Sent:** 04 August 2020 18:51  
**To:** [Name Redacted]  
**Cc:** [Name Redacted]@dhsc.gov.uk>; Van Tam, Jonathan <Jonathan.VanTam@dhsc.gov.uk>  
**Subject:** RE: To clear asap - x gov line on COVID-19 border measures in March

The original line went to No10 who came back with the below feedback:

The feedback from here is that we should focus on what we did do and why (as we always have previously) rather than go back and forth on what's in the report.

So, something along the lines of:

- Guided by science
- Arrivals fell dramatically
- Changes in place once numbers fell and then how we're working the system to keep people safe.

It might be No10 strengthen it again, but that is the current version. Obviously if CMO thinks there is something that we should directly rebut I am happy to feed that back. Will update if anything different comes out of No10 before CMO feeds back.

Thanks,  
Name  
Redacted



Name Redacted  
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of Health & Social Care |  
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From: Name Redacted [@dhsc.gov.uk](mailto:NameRedacted@dhsc.gov.uk)

Sent: 04 August 2020 18:47

[See recipients listed above]

Subject: RE: To clear asap - x gov line on COVID-19 border measures in March

Why has it been made weaker?

From: [See recipients listed above] [@dhsc.gov.uk](mailto:[See recipients listed above]@dhsc.gov.uk)

Sent: 04 August 2020 18:43

[See recipients listed above]

Subject: RE: To clear asap - x gov line on COVID-19 border measures in March

Hi CMO's office,

This is the latest line, but it is being reviewed by No10. However, if CMO's time is tight, might be worth him reviewing in case there are any issues he has with it.

**A Government spokesperson said:**

**“All of our decisions throughout the pandemic have been guided by the science, with appropriate measures introduced at the right time to keep us all safe.**

**“And with passengers numbers at a significant low, the scientific advice was clear that quarantine measures for those entering the country from abroad would be most effective when the UK has a lower level of infection.**

**“Therefore, as the virus was brought under control here, border measures were introduced on June 8 to protect public health and avoid a second peak of this deadly virus.”**

Further lines:

- The Home Affairs Select Committee are incorrect in their assertions. Isolation guidance was not dropped on 13 March, it was superseded by the national stay at home guidance. As has been explained to the committee this meant that anyone entering the country, like the rest of the population, was required to self-isolate if they developed symptoms.
- During the contain phase of the outbreak we had enhanced monitoring at the borders to identify symptomatic travellers from high risk areas early and safely triage them into the health system. This

was applied to those returning from Wuhan on 22 January and broadened to the whole of China on 25 January; Japan on 8 February, Iran on 25 February, northern Italy on 4 March and the whole of Italy on 5 March.

- National stay at home guidance was published on 12 March, superseding the above guidance and applied to everyone in the UK – including new arrivals.
- By 13 March, there was sustained community transmission and a significant number of domestic cases present in the UK.
- Once there was significant transmission within the UK, additional border restrictions would have a very marginal impact on the epidemic within the UK, as at that point they contributed a tiny proportion of the number of new infections.
- The scientific advice was clear that coronavirus cases entering the UK from abroad matter most when the UK has a low level of infection. Therefore, as the virus was brought under control here, border measures were introduced on June 8 to protect public health and avoid a second peak of this deadly virus.
- The Home Office's Chief Scientific Adviser, John Aston, wrote to the chair of the Home Affairs Select Committee following the Home Secretary's appearance last month, to make it clear that on 23 March, SAGE advised that the numbers of cases arriving from other countries were estimated to be insignificant when compared to the rate of in-country transmissions. His letter also explained the rationale for introducing border health measures in June.
- Throughout, the policies have been developed with input and advice from participants of SAGE, including the Home Office's Chief Scientific Adviser.



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From: Name Redacted

Sent: 04 August 2020 17:31

[See recipients listed above]

Subject: RE: To clear asap - x gov line on COVID-19 border measures in March

To flag, No10 and Home Office still going back and forth on this line, so will share whatever the latest version is at 18:30.

NR



Name Redacted  
Senior Communications Officer | International, Public Health & Medicines | Department of Health & Social Care |  
[39 Victoria St, London, SW1H 0EU](https://www.dhsc.gov.uk)  
E: [jack.robertson@dhsc.gov.uk](mailto:jack.robertson@dhsc.gov.uk) T: Irrelevant & Sensitive  
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From: Name Redacted <[Name Redacted@dhsc.gov.uk](mailto:Name Redacted@dhsc.gov.uk)>

Sent: 04 August 2020 16:50

[See recipients listed above]

**Subject:** RE: To clear asap - x gov line on COVID-19 border measures in March

The US introduced temperature screening...

**From:** Name Redacted <[redacted]@dhsc.gov.uk>

**Sent:** 04 August 2020 16:43

[See recipients listed above]

**Subject:** RE: To clear asap - x gov line on COVID-19 border measures in March

Hi Name Redacted

Line has been updated as below for CMO to look at. Is there anything we can say on countries who did introduce strict measures that didn't help? (Like Italy and China flights)

Thanks,

NR

#### **A Government spokesperson said:**

“The Home Affairs Select Committee are incorrect in their assertions. Isolation guidance was not dropped on 13 March, it was superseded by the national stay at home guidance. As has been explained to the committee this meant that anyone entering the country, like the rest of the population, was required to self-isolate if they developed symptoms.

“And the scientific advice was clear that quarantine measures for those entering the country from abroad would be most effective when the UK has a lower level of infection.”

#### Further lines:

- During the contain phase of the outbreak we had enhanced monitoring at the borders to identify symptomatic travellers from high risk areas early and safely triage them into the health system. This was applied to those returning from Wuhan on 22 January and broadened to the whole of China on 25 January; Japan on 8 February, Iran on 25 February, northern Italy on 4 March and the whole of Italy on 5 March.
- National stay at home guidance was published on 12 March and applied to everyone in the UK – including new arrivals.
- By 13 March, there was sustained community transmission and a significant number of domestic cases present in the UK.
- Once there was significant transmission within the UK, additional border restrictions would have a very marginal impact on the epidemic within the UK, as at that point they contributed a tiny proportion of the number of new infections.
- The scientific advice was clear that coronavirus cases entering the UK from abroad matter most when the UK has a low level of infection. Therefore, as the virus was brought under control here, border measures were introduced on June 8 to protect public health and avoid a second peak of this deadly virus.
- The Home Office's Chief Scientific Adviser, John Aston, wrote to the chair of the Home Affairs Select Committee following the Home Secretary's appearance last month, to make it clear that on 23 March, SAGE advised that the numbers of cases arriving from other countries were estimated to be

insignificant when compared to the rate of in-country transmissions. His letter also explained the rationale for introducing border health measures in June.

- Throughout, the policies have been developed with input and advice from participants of SAGE, including the Home Office's Chief Scientific Adviser.



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From: Name Redacted  
Sent: 04 August 2020 16:20

To: [See recipients listed above]  
Cc:

Subject: RE: To clear asap - x gov line on COVID-19 border measures in March

Thanks Name - I will let home office know and see if any issues. Will keep you updated in the mean time if the line changes.

Name Redacted



Name Redacted  
Senior Communications Officer | International, Public Health & Medicines | Department of Health & Social Care |  
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For emergency out of hours queries, call Irrelevant & Sensitive

From: Name Redacted [@dhsc.gov.uk](mailto:Name Redacted@dhsc.gov.uk)  
Sent: 04 August 2020 16:15

To: [See recipients listed above]  
Cc:

Subject: RE: To clear asap - x gov line on COVID-19 border measures in March

Copying: Name Redacted . Comment below.

Chris is next free at 6.30. Is that too late?

From: Name Redacted [@dhsc.gov.uk](mailto:Name Redacted@dhsc.gov.uk)  
Sent: 04 August 2020 16:10

To: Name Redacted  
Cc:

Subject: To clear asap - x gov line on COVID-19 border measures in March

Hi Name

Home Office are planning a x-gov line to respond to this critical Home Affairs committee report on Border measures in March.

Could you confirm if CMO is happy with this line? Once he is we will flag to spads here and Home Office will be issuing. I'll keep you updated of any changes.

Thanks,

Name

**Deadline:** COP

**Clearance:** Home Office

**Issue:**

The Home Affairs Committee has issued a release criticising initial border measures in March and claim they have led to the virus spreading in the UK. They are particularly critical of what the committee sees as a lack of isolation guidance for international arrivals.

**Media Handling:**

No10 have asked the Home office to lead on a x-gov line and have drawn from previous responses on this issue.

**LTT:**

**A Government spokesperson said:**

"Isolation guidance was not dropped on 13 March, it was superseded by the national stay at home guidance. This meant that anyone entering the country, like the rest of the population, was required to self-isolate if they developed symptoms.

"It's important to remember what these (? Which ones looks like 13 March?) measures were brought in to do - protect public health, avoid a second peak of this deadly virus and that means managing the risk of cases being imported from abroad. And the scientific advice was clear that coronavirus cases entering the UK from abroad matter most when the UK has a low level of infection.

"The Home Office's Chief Scientific Adviser wrote to the chair of the Home Affairs Select Committee following the Home Secretary's appearance last month, explaining this rationale."

Further lines:

- The Home Office's Chief Scientific Adviser, John Aston, wrote to the chair of the Home Affairs Select Committee following the Home Secretary's appearance last month, to make it clear that on 23 March, SAGE advised that the numbers of cases arriving from other countries were estimated to be insignificant when compared to the rate of in-country transmissions
- By 13 March, there was sustained community transmission and a significant number of domestic cases present in the UK.
- The policy was developed with input and advice from participants of SAGE, including the Home Office's Chief Scientific Adviser.
- During the contain phase of the outbreak we had enhanced monitoring at the borders to identify symptomatic travellers from high risk areas early and safely triage them into the health system. This was applied to those returning from Wuhan on 22 January and broadened to the whole of China on 25 January; Japan on 8 February, Iran on 25 February, northern Italy on 4 March and the whole of Italy on 5 March.

- Once there was significant transmission within the UK, border restrictions would have a very marginal impact on the epidemic within the UK, as at that point they contributed a tiny proportion of the number of new infections.

## HASC press notice

**EMBARGOED REPORT: NOT FOR PUBLICATION OR BROADCAST IN ANY FORM UNTIL 00:01 ON WEDNESDAY 5 AUGUST**

Home Affairs Committee  
Embargoed report

## **Failures on border measures in March increased scale and pace of Covid-19 pandemic - Committee finds**

**The Covid-19 pandemic in the UK was accelerated in the early months by critical errors in the Government's approach to border measures which led to many more people contracting Covid-19, a report by the Home Affairs Committee has found.**

**Cross-party report says Government is right to include Spain in the current quarantine arrangements but criticises handling and calls for improvements in way travel corridor decisions are made.**

The inquiry considered all of the Government's decisions on border measures – from the early quarantine of 273 people largely from Wuhan, through the voluntary self-isolation measures applied to travellers from specific countries (including China, Iran and Italy) in February and early March followed by the lifting of all border measures on 13 March, to the introduction of mandatory quarantine in June, followed by travel corridors and the most recent decision to reintroduce quarantine for Spain.

Drawing on evidence that thousands of people with Covid-19 arrived in or returned to the UK in February and March, the Committee concludes that the UK's experience of Covid-19 has been far worse as a result of the Government's decision not to require quarantine during March, which would have reduced the number of imported infections.

The Committee is particularly critical of the Government's decision on 13 March to remove all self-isolation guidance for travellers arriving in the UK at a time when other comparable countries were strengthening their border measures, and when hundreds of new Covid cases were arriving every day – particularly from Spain, Italy and France, including many British residents returning home.

The Committee was unable to find any scientific evidence to justify this inexplicable decision and says that the failure to have any special border measures in place in mid March was a serious error. It also found that the decision not to include Spain in the earlier country specific measures in late February was a mistake as doing so could have slowed the virus spread.

The report welcomes the introduction of border measures this summer, supports the development of travel corridors and the application of quarantine requirements for arrivals from Spain given the current rising number of infections there. But it is very critical of the handling and communication of the decision to remove the travel corridor with Spain and warns that the Government needs to be much more sensitive to the impact on families and businesses. It calls for publication of the Joint Biosecurity Centre's traffic light assessment of different countries so that people can better judge the risk before travelling. It criticises the lack of earlier warnings about the potential risks of travel and the mixed messages from Government, with Ministers welcoming air corridors on 8 July as "good news for holiday makers."

The Committee recognises the difficulties the Government has faced in responding swiftly to the unprecedented challenges from Covid-19, and also recognises that border measures are only part of the

response to the pandemic. But given the changing global pattern of the pandemic it says border measures will be needed for some time, so scrutiny is important to ensure the most effective measures are put in place at the right time.

Publishing the report, Chair of the Home Affairs Committee Rt Hon Yvette Cooper MP said:

*“Covid-19 is a global pandemic, so all countries need to be able to use border measures at different times to prevent it spreading and to save lives – the consequences of failing to do so are very serious for both public health and the economy.*

*The Government’s failure to have proper quarantine measures in place in March as the infection was spreading fast was a grave error and meant Covid spread faster and reached more people. The UK was almost unique in having no border checks or quarantine arrangements at that time. That alone should have rung loud alarm bells for Ministers and made them think again.*

*Many times Ministers told us they were following the science, but we cannot find any science at all behind their completely inexplicable decision to lift all the self isolation guidance for travellers on 13 March a full ten days before lockdown, just at a time when other countries were introducing stronger border measures. We were told that thousands more people with Covid-19 came back to the UK after that guidance was lifted. So in the middle of March, at a time when the number of people with Covid coming back into the UK was at its peak, they were going back to work or onto public transport or seeing family without any quarantine in place.*

*We are concerned that border measures just weren’t taken seriously enough at the beginning of the crisis, either in the discussions among scientific advisers or in Ministerial decision making. It appears Ministers took decisions without critical information they should have had, and it has been extremely difficult to work out who took key decisions and on what basis,.*

*Given that mistakes were made at the beginning, the Government has been right to learn lessons and to reintroduce border measures including applying quarantine for arrivals from Spain as infections are rising. But it was very unhelpful for Ministers to describe the travel corridors as “good news for holiday makers” when they were announced as the mixed messages meant people booked holidays in Spain in good faith and now are put in a really difficult position. The Government needs to be much more sensitive to the impact on families and businesses of last-minute decisions like this, and it needs to publish much more information including a proper traffic lights system so that people can see what the risks are.*

*In an unprecedented public health crisis, the Government inevitably faces very difficult decisions. But they would be much more effective with greater transparency and trust. Publishing the science and evidence behind their decisions would mean they benefit both from greater scrutiny and debate to get those decisions right, and also from greater trust, understanding and support.*

### **Critical errors in preventing spread of infection**

In late January and February, as it faced a new and unprecedented public health challenge from Covid-19, the Government was right to quarantine people arriving from Wuhan, and then to introduce self-isolation measures for other infection hotspots including Italy and Iran. However, it was slow to recognise the increased risk of the disease spreading from other European countries, and it was a mistake particularly not to include Spain on the list for early self-isolation measures. With stronger early measures it is likely that the spread of infection would have been slowed.

The Government’s decision to lift the self-isolation guidance for specific countries on 13 March and to begin a period of 3 months where no border measures were in place to counteract the spread of Covid-19 was inexplicable. Evidence suggests that thousands of new infections entered the country in the 10 day period between the 13 March and the introduction of a general lockdown in the UK on 23 March, and that is likely to have seriously increased the pace and scale of the pandemic in the UK.

Other countries were overwhelmingly introducing stronger border measures at this time, including quarantine, testing, screening and border closures. The UK was highly unusual in lifting border measures instead and that should have raised serious questions for Ministers about the approach they were taking.

Evidence from genomic studies and referenced by the Chief Scientific Adviser Sir Patrick Vallance shows that over 1300 separate strains of the virus were imported largely from Spain, Italy and France during that period. Other evidence to the Committee suggests up to 10,000 people with Covid-19 entered or returned to the country in March.

Not having any special border measures applicable to people arriving from Spain and France during February and March, and only having voluntary self-isolation measures for travellers from Italy until 13 March was a serious error and had a material impact on the number of cases arriving in the UK, and on the pace and scale of the epidemic. Many more people in the UK caught Covid-19 as a result.

### **Poor decision-making**

The Committee is very critical of the lack of transparency over Government border decisions and raises concerns about the scientific advice and about Ministerial decision making and Departmental coordination.

It is not clear who was responsible for making the decision to withdraw self-isolation guidance on 13 March or on what basis. No Cabinet Minister or official whom we have asked has been able to provide any explanation for the process by which and the basis on which the decision was made. The lack of clarity about the responsibility for decision making in this crucial area is very serious and may well have contributed to mistakes being made.

The Committee has been unable to find any scientific basis or analysis behind the decision to lift border controls on 13 March. It is unacceptable that despite nine different formal requests by members of the Committee for the science behind the decision, and despite Government promises to provide the information, none has been provided.

Insufficient emphasis was placed on the importance of controlling importation from overseas as a method to contain the virus. The early decision by SAGE only to consider measures that could deliver a full month's delay to the virus is very hard to understand. Additive measures should have been considered and delays even of a few days as a result of border quarantine measures alongside other domestic measures like social distancing could have had a significant impact on the scope of the outbreak.

Ministers also appeared to take decisions without critical information and appear not to have had any estimates of the number of people likely to be travelling into the country with Covid-19 during this time. It is vital that a wider range of estimates be made available to ministers to inform their decisions in the future.

### **Travel corridors**

We welcome the Government decision to reintroduce border measures and the report considers what kinds of border measures are most appropriate. At a time when Covid-19 infections continue to increase across the world and when hotspots of infection continue to change, all countries are going to need different kinds of border measures to control the spread of the virus for some time to come. We support the development of travel corridors to recognise the different prevalence of the virus in different countries, but we urge the Government to be more transparent and publish the analysis behind its decisions. It will build more support for the difficult balancing judgements it has to take if it is open about the evidence behind them.

### **Lifting the travel corridor for Spain**

Given the surge in Covid infections in Spain and the clear and rising risk of increasing numbers of people returning to the UK with Covid-19, a precautionary approach including quarantine for returning travellers is the

right one. It is welcome that the Government has learned from what happened earlier in the crisis when measures were not in place as infections were rising.

However this has undoubtedly been extremely difficult for many travellers who paid for holidays in Spain following Government guidance in the expectation that they would be able to return to work, caring responsibilities, medical appointments or family events on their return. There should be significant changes to the way such decisions are handled and communicated in future.

The Government has rightly warned now about the risk that travel corridors will change but stronger warnings should have been given when the travel corridors were announced in early July. Government mixed messages, including Ministers hailing the measures as “good news for holiday makers”, were regrettable.

Instead the Government should publish the traffic light assessments and prevalence rates for different countries compiled by the Joint Biosecurity Centre. Potential travellers must be able to access information on the risks of travelling especially when the rules may change at short notice.

### **Improving co-ordination, communication and transparency**

The Joint Biosecurity Centre should represent a step forward in how the pandemic is managed in the UK, both in identifying travel risk for individual countries and assessing the public health impact of border measures as a whole. However there has been a concerning lack of transparency about the analysis produced by the centre and even basic assessments of Covid-19 prevalence have not been published.

There is a lack of clarity over which Government department or agency is ultimately responsible for coordinating Covid-19 border policy. It is right that Departments carry out work within their remit; however better coordination and overall leadership is required for policies to work coherently. The Committee welcomes the role of a cross-departmental committee—the COVID-19 operations committee—to draw together decisions between departments, but there have still been co-ordination problems. The Committee recommends that either the Cabinet Office or the Home Office should be charged with lead responsibility for Covid-19 border policy.

### **Enforcement and compliance**

The Committee is unconvinced by the Home Office estimate that the compliance rate for quarantine is 99.9%, as the majority of checks are being done at the border even though the majority of the compliance is required in the community.

The Government’s estimate of compliance with its enforcement regime for border quarantine needs to be better evidenced. It should routinely publish the number of people required to quarantine and the number of spot checks, home visits, police referrals and enforcement actions, among other data, to allow oversight of the whole process.

### **Testing**

The Home Office, Department of Health and Social Care and Department for Transport should investigate the viability of introducing widespread or targeted tests at the border learning lessons from other countries like Iceland, Hong Kong or South Korea. We agree with the Government that a testing and tracing system alone is not currently enough to address the importation risk from overseas travel. However, it should look at international examples and develop testing further alongside quarantine and travel corridor measures.

### **Preparing for future spikes**

Border quarantine measures are likely to remain in place for some time, particularly if the predicted increase in cases over winter months comes to fruition. The UK will have to maintain a flexible approach that reacts quickly to emerging circumstances and learn from practice in other countries.

Greater clarity would be helpful on the Government's overall objectives for its border measures and travel corridors as part of the wider strategy against Covid-19, including how it is balancing public health and economic considerations.

Maintaining transparency and trust will be vital if public confidence in self-isolation and quarantine measures following international travel is to be sustained in the long-term.



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