# WRITTEN STATEMENT

# BY

# THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **TITLE**  | **International Travel**  |
| **DATE**  | **14 March 2022** |
| **BY** | **Eluned Morgan MS, Minister for Health and Social Services**  |

As we move beyond the emergency response to the pandemic, we continue to consider our approach to managing border health measures.

The pandemic is not over but we are moving to a different phase where we learn to live safely with coronavirus in the longer-term. There is still a risk new variants of concern may emerge and we need to be prepared for this eventuality. As the Scientific Advisory Group on Emergencies (SAGE) has outlined, there is no reason why future variants should be similarly or less severe than omicron.

I am extremely disappointed the UK Government is planning to remove all the remaining border measures, including removing the passenger location form (PLF) and testing requirements.

We know that if the PLF is withdrawn, it will take three weeks to recommission. This will make contingency testing and home isolation unworkable if we needed to monitor passengers from overseas, as we will no longer be know which travellers are arriving from areas of concern or their contact details.

We believe the UK must collectively maintain an operable suite of border health measures, including pre-departure tests, flight bans, home isolation and isolation hotels to help us manage coronavirus threats into the future and ensure all UK nations are able to respond quickly to any new and emerging threat – such as a new variant of concern entering the UK.

A system of surveillance linked to international travel is vital to help us identify any new variant quickly and as early as possible. Previous decisions to amend the border health measures, led by the UK Government, have significantly limited our ability to respond effectively. And the decision by the UK Government not to fund a border surveillance programmes will significantly limit our ability to identify new coronavirus variants.

As countries around the world scale back their testing and sequencing measures in the future, this ability to identify new variants diminishes even further.

We continue to advocate a more precautionary approach towards retaining these public health protections because of the ongoing risk of importing new variants through international travel.

However, in view of the significant practical difficulties associated with diverging from the arrangements in England in this area – a significant number of Welsh travellers use English airports and ports – we are reluctantly retaining alignment with the decisions made by the UK Government and agreed by the other devolved governments.

As travel regulations and requirements have been removed, there is a greater opportunity for people to return to making decisions based on their own circumstances. On that basis, and because of the success of our vaccination programme, we no longer advise people to only travel overseas if their journey is essential.

However, we still urge caution. Everyone considering booking a trip abroad should consider their own personal and family circumstances and how best they can keep themselves safe as they travel, especially those who are vulnerable.

If you are planning on travelling overseas:

* Check the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office [website](https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice) for the specific entry requirements for the country you are travelling to – these include Covid-19 vaccines and testing requirements.
* Check the specific requirements for children and young people under 18 in the country you are travelling to.
* Check the coronavirus situation in the country you are travelling to before you travel.
* Stay safe while you are away by following the same measures which help keep you safe while you are at home.
* Check and follow the entry requirements for returning home to the UK – these are available on the Welsh Government [website](https://gov.wales/rules-international-travel-and-wales-coronavirus).
* Once you return home, consider taking some extra precautions to keep you, your friends and family safe, including taking a lateral flow test before visiting vulnerable family members; space out visits and social events and if you experience coronavirus symptoms, isolate and take a test.