



Department
of Health &
Social Care

*From the Lord Bethell
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Innovation (Lords)*

*39 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0EU
Tel: 020 7210 4850*

By email to:

09 June 2021

Dear Yvette,

Thank you for your letter regarding risk assessments supporting the Government's decision to add Pakistan and Bangladesh to the "red list" of countries requiring additional travel restrictions.

I recognise the impact that additions to the red list have on individuals. However, it is right that the Government does all it can to reduce the risk of new strains of COVID-19 being imported into the UK. As with all our coronavirus measures, we keep the red list under constant review and our priority remains to protect the health of the UK public.

The Joint Biosecurity Centre (JBC), part of the UK Health Security Agency, in partnership with devolved administrations, has developed a dynamic risk assessment methodology to inform ministerial decisions on red, amber and green list countries and the associated border measures against the risks of importing cases of SARS-CoV-2 and its variants.

JBC provides a risk assessment which covers a range of factors for each country to give an overview of how each country or territory is doing in keeping on top of Covid-19. This in turn allows Government to assess the risk from people entering the UK from these destinations.

Key factors in the JBC risk assessment of each country include:

- genomic surveillance capability
- COVID-19 transmission risk
- Variant of Concern transmission risk

The criteria include testing rates, weekly incidence rates test positivity, evidence of variants of concern (or high risk variants under investigation) in country, exported cases (including VoCs and high risk Vuls) to the UK and elsewhere, genomic sequencing capability and strong travel links with countries known to have community transmission of a VoC/Vul.

As part of their risk assessments, JBC consider a broad range of both quantitative and qualitative information (for example, from publicly available platforms such as GISAID and the World Health Organization, host government websites, UK mandatory testing data and travel data), and take into account data availability, limitations and biases. These risk assessments are comprehensive and balanced, and there is no single factor or threshold that will trigger a risk assessment to suggest that a country or territory presents a particularly high public health risk to the UK.

Decisions on red, amber or green list assignment and associated borders measures are taken by ministers. Ministers take the JBC risk assessments into account alongside wider public health

factors to inform their decisions on how to mitigate the risk to the extent they consider appropriate and proportionate.

The decision to place Pakistan and Bangladesh on the red list, as announced on April 2nd was taken on the basis of the epidemiological evidence at the time. The latest available data was from the 3-17 March. At this time, neither B.1.617 nor B.1.617.2 had yet been designated a VUI. Test positivity of travellers returning from Pakistan was 4.6%, three times the 1.6% positivity of returning travellers from India.

Since the Government's decision to add Pakistan and Bangladesh to the "red list" of countries requiring additional travel restrictions, on May 7), we have published details about the JBC's risk assessment methodology and also a summary of key data used by JBC to inform the first round of assessments for the new traffic light system. These publications provide transparency as to how these difficult Ministerial decisions are made.

We have made it consistently clear this government will take decisive action where necessary to contain the virus and these additions to the red list were made to protect public health. To consider removing any country from the red list, Ministers would need to be satisfied that the risk of variants of concern or under investigation being imported into the UK has significantly reduced.

With my very best wishes,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Bethell', is centered on the page. The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letter 'B' being particularly large and stylized.

LORD BETHELL