

# COVID-19 travel plan will let new variants into the UK, experts warn

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The government's COVID-19 travel plan will let new variants into the UK, warn experts in *The BMJ* today.

Virologists Jangu Banatvala and Deenan Pillay urge caution over plans to implement a traffic light system, permitting international travel to resume dependent upon the COVID-19 status of destination countries.

And they warn that the [aviation industry](#)'s current enthusiasm to resume international air travel and overseas holidays, and to expand airports needs to be checked, saying "it flies in the face of the twin needs to control international virus transmission, and tackle the climate emergency and [environmental degradation](#)."

They acknowledge the success of the UK's COVID-19 vaccination programme which, combined with public health measures, has led to restrictions being eased and plans to reopen international travel.

But they say COVID-19 "is likely to be endemic for

the foreseeable future and mathematical modelling scenarios predict potential for a further UK surge of infections later this year."

They point out that The Lancet COVID-19 Commission Task Force identified risk of spread through air travel as a priority and emphasized that the entire door to door travel process should be evaluated to minimize the risk of transmission.

While the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on [coronavirus](#) has identified long queues at airports, failure to separate arrivals from red and amber countries, and fake COVID-19 test certificates as significant risks to biosecurity.

And despite a successful vaccination programme, the current surge in infections in Chile—due in part to relaxation of social distancing and travel restrictions—"stands as a salutary reminder of the ease with which COVID-19 evades [control measures](#)," they add.

Until our vaccination programme is complete, and while there are significant risks of variants arising in countries with high transmission, "it would be remiss to abandon all attempts to limit new variants being imported into the UK," they argue.

Most importantly, they say "we must consider the urgent and serious global public health threat of climate change. We should reduce the amount of air [travel](#) not only because of COVID-19, but also because of the detrimental impact that this has on our climate."

This year the UK is hosting the 26th United Nations Climate Change Conference, and expectations for coordinated action to tackle climate change are high. There is an urgent need to do so, they conclude.

**More information:** Opinion: Covid-19 travel plan will let new variants into the UK,

[blogs.bmj.com/bmj/2021/05/12/c ... variants-into-the-uk](https://blogs.bmj.com/bmj/2021/05/12/covid-19-travel-plan-will-let-new-variants-into-the-uk)

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