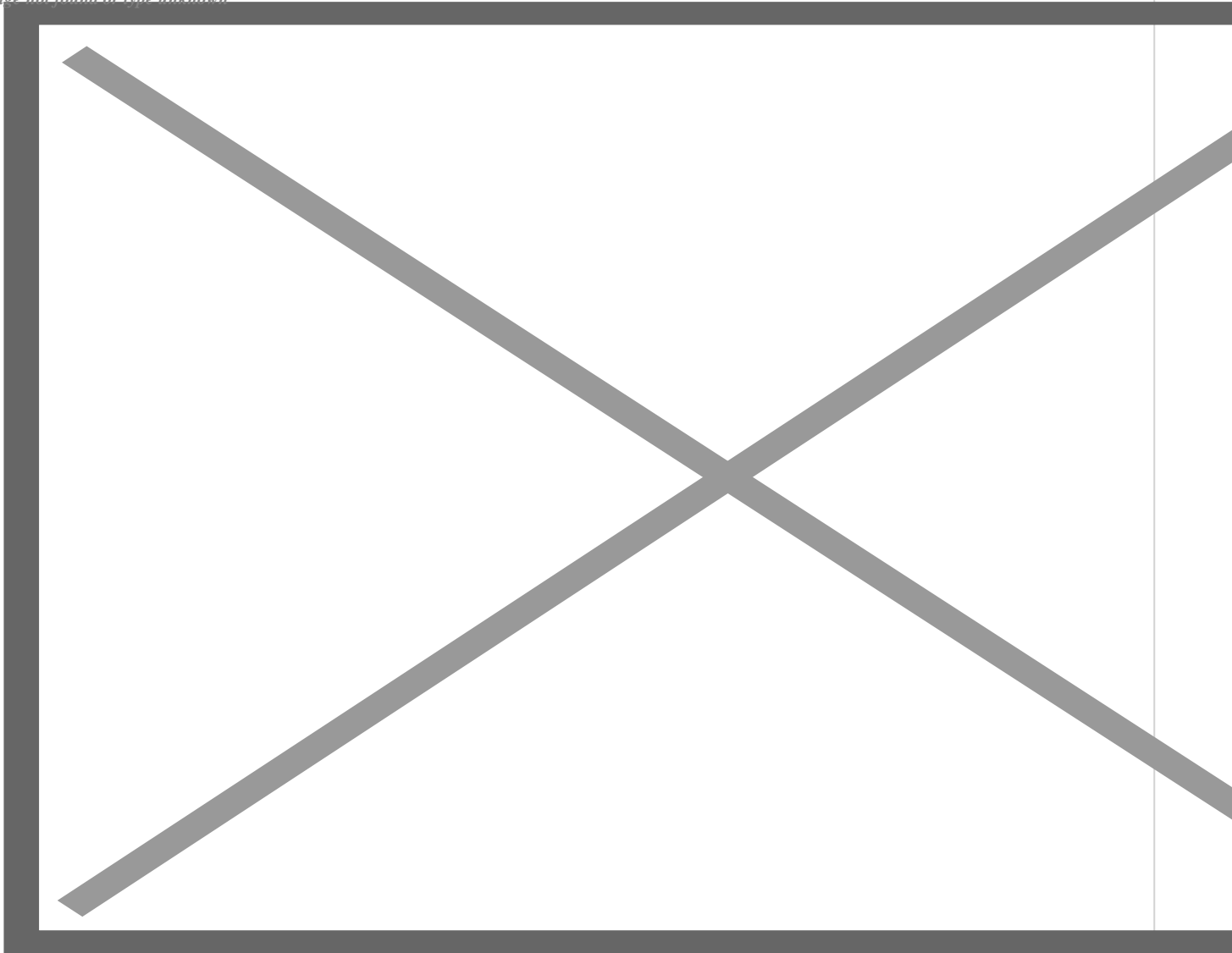


UK quarantine violators face heavy fines, up to 10 years in jail

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Heathrow International Airport in London. Anyone attempting to conceal travel history to 'red list' countries could face a \$13,800 fine or prosecution and long imprisonment. (Photo: Henry Nicholls/Reuters)

London, February 11 (RHC)-- Travellers to the United Kingdom caught violating newly imposed quarantine restrictions could face a heavy fine of up to 10,000 British pounds (\$13,800) and 10 years in prison, as the British government tightens measures to curb the spread of COVID-19 and its new variants.

The UK's Department of Health and Social Care said that the tough new enforcement rules, which include mandatory hotel quarantines for the first time, will come into force on February 15th.

Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock said that the new measures were necessary "to protect the progress that we've worked so hard to accomplish." "The compliance and enforcement regime is end-to-end and all passengers should expect to be checked at various points throughout their journey," he said.

Starting on Monday, all passengers to England regardless of where they are coming from are required to take two coronavirus tests on the second and eighth day of a 10-day quarantine period. The new measures build on those already in place, including a requirement for all overseas arrivals to provide proof of a negative coronavirus test no more than three days prior to departure.

For contact tracing, all passengers are also required to provide contact information and travel history on arrival. Under the changes, passengers coming from so-called "red list" countries, where the virus continues to spread widely or where new potentially more transmissible variants have emerged, are also required to buy a "quarantine package" to cover both testing and hotel accommodation during the mandatory quarantine.

The government has so far contracted at least 16 hotels with an initial 4,600 rooms. Other passengers coming from countries not included in the red list are allowed to self-isolate for 10 days.

The 33 red list countries considered high risk include Portugal and the United Arab Emirates, as well as several countries in Africa and South America. Initially, there were 22 countries on the list.

Flights to the UK from the countries on the red list have already been suspended, and only British and Irish nationals, as well as UK residents, are allowed into the country. Meanwhile, a 1,000 British pound (\$1,380) penalty will also be given to any international passenger, who fails to take the mandatory virus test.

If they fail to take the second test, they will be fined 2,000 British pounds (\$2,700) and have their quarantine period extended to 14 days.

Other countries such as Australia, New Zealand and Singapore imposed mandatory quarantine on international arrivals and closed their borders to all but nationals and residents last year.

The United Kingdom has already rolled out its vaccination programme, with more than 12 million people having received at least the first of two shots, according to the government. While the rate of new infections has fallen, cases in the UK continue to climb to almost four million. More than 114,000 people have died.

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