

Coronavirus – Portugal added to the amber list

Portugal will be placed on the amber travel list after what the government say are worrying increases in test positivity in the country.

Evidence of increased cases of the Delta variant of concern being spread among people in Portugal with no travel history led the Joint Biosecurity Centre (JBC) to recommend the step.

The JBC analyses a wide variety of data to determine a country's travel colour status – including Covid-19 prevalence and infection rates – with its findings taken up on a four-nation basis.

The government has taken swift action regarding Portugal to protect the gains made with the vaccine rollout. There has been an almost doubling in the Covid-19 test positivity rate in Portugal since the first review for traffic light allocations.

The changes affecting international travel come into force at 4.00am on 8 June 2021. Any travellers returning to Scotland from Portugal beyond that deadline will have to self-isolate at home for 10 days.

This is the first review of international travel restrictions since the traffic light system was introduced on 17 May. It is subject to review every three weeks.

There are no additions to the green list at this time.

Several countries are to be added to the red list, namely Afghanistan, Bahrain, Costa Rica, Egypt, Sri Lanka, Sudan, and Trinidad and Tobago.

People should not travel to amber or red countries other than for essential reasons.

Transport Secretary Michael Matheson said: "Portugal is a popular destination for Scottish holiday makers and this change will clearly cause disruption to people's travel plans.

"However we have been forthright from the outset that the traffic light system is designed to protect the safety of the people of Scotland and the continued progress we are making as we come out of lockdown.

"Using the stringent methodology of the Joint Biosecurity Centre it is clear the risk this new variant poses is now too great to allow unrestricted travel to Portugal, an approach that has been agreed by all four nations.

"International travel for holidaying purposes remains risky and subject to sudden change. We have said before people should think very carefully about travelling – and this latest development serves to underpin that advice – especially so given the prevalence and unpredictable nature of variants of concern."