

Plans for safe return to international travel

The Government's [Global Travel Taskforce](#) has set out recommendations to support the safe return of international travel, [announcing](#) the launch of a new traffic light system and 'green watchlist', and the introduction of travel certification.

The [new 20-page report](#) includes recommendations to support:

- Progressing a risk-based reopening of international travel
- Ensuring readiness for international travel restart
- Building consumer clarity and confidence
- Supporting a transition to future travel

This follows on from an earlier report published in November 2020. Although international travel 'could' resume from 17 May, the Government will not yet confirm this and advises that further details will be provided by early May.

New Business Rates relief fund

A £1.5 billion [Business Rates relief fund](#) has been made available for businesses affected by Covid-19 outside the retail, hospitality, and leisure sectors. The fund will be allocated to local authorities in England based on the stock of properties in the area whose sectors have been affected by the pandemic.

Local Authorities will use their knowledge of local businesses and the local economy to make awards.

New Recovery Loan Scheme launches

[HM Treasury has launched](#) a new Government-backed [Recovery Loan Scheme](#) to provide additional finance to those businesses that need it.

From 6 April 2021, businesses can access loans from £25,000, up to a maximum of £10 million. Invoice and asset finance is available from £1,000. The scheme is open until 31 December 2021.

Loans will include 80% government guarantee and an interest rate cap. The new scheme can be used as an additional loan on top of support received from the emergency schemes, such as the Bounce Back Loan Scheme and Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme.

A [full list of financial support](#) available for businesses is published on the Gov.UK website.

Fourth round of the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme

Self-employed individuals and people in a partnership, whose business has been impacted by the Coronavirus may be eligible for the fourth [Self-Employment Income Support Scheme](#), covering the period 1 February 2021 to 30 April 2021.

Guidance has also been updated on [how trading conditions affect eligibility](#) for the scheme. The online service to claim the fourth grant will be available from late April 2021, and claims must be made on or before 1 June 2021.

Transport usage figures

The Department for Transport has published its latest weekly [transport usage figures](#), showing that vehicle usage peaked at 88% of pre-pandemic levels, during the first week of April.

The return to public transport remains slow, with national rail usage peaking at 26% and London Underground usage peaking at 30%.

Government seeks views on commercial rents

The Government has launched a consultation to better understand how landlords and tenants are responding to the build-up of rent arrears caused by businesses being unable to trade normally during the Covid pandemic.

[The consultation](#), which closes on 4 May, hopes to attract input from small to medium sized businesses including small commercial landlords, independent businesses and sole traders with leased premises.

The BVRLA would like to hear members' views, so please email policy@bvrla.co.uk.

Free Covid testing for everyone in England

[Guidance on Coronavirus testing](#) has been updated to reflect that from Friday 9 April, everyone in England will be eligible for free rapid Covid-19 tests, twice a week. The Government has [announced](#) that rapid testing will be delivered through:

- a [home ordering service](#), which allows people to order lateral flow tests online to be delivered to their home
- workplace testing programmes, on-site or at home. Businesses must [register interest](#) by 12 April to access free tests.
- community testing, offered by all local authorities
- collection at a local polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test site during specific test collection time windows
- testing on-site at schools and colleges
- collection from participating pharmacies

Around 1-in-3 people with Covid-19 do not experience any symptoms and may be spreading the virus unwittingly. A campaign is being launched to encourage people to regularly take tests.

The easing of lockdown enters its next phase

Step 2 of [the roadmap](#) takes effect on Monday 12 April, marking the next milestone in the easing of lockdown restrictions across England.

[Rules on what you can and cannot do](#) provide full details of what will change, and many businesses will be able to reopen their doors, including:

- non-essential retail
- personal care premises such as hairdressers and nail salons
- public buildings such as libraries and community centres
- outdoor hospitality venues, with table service only
- self-contained accommodation will be able to open for overnight stays
- indoor leisure and sports facilities

[Guidance on working safely](#) has been updated to reflect the rule changes.

A full list of national restrictions is also available for [Scotland](#), [Wales](#) and [Northern Ireland](#).