

Coronavirus (COVID 19) outbreak: Protocol agreed to reopen French border to UK arrivals

United Kingdom - France (22 December 2020)

An agreement to reopen the UK-French border to allow the resumption of accompanied freight services and some passenger services between the two countries has been reached by the UK and French governments this evening (22 December).

Rail, air and sea services will resume tomorrow morning, with all people travelling from the UK into France required to show proof of a negative Coronavirus test taken within the previous 72 hours.

Under the protocol agreed with the French Government, which will be reviewed on the 31st December and in place until 6th January, all lorry drivers, irrespective of nationality, will require a lateral flow test.

This can detect the new strain of Covid-19 and provide results in around 30 minutes, rather than the 24 hours required after a PCR test.

The French Government will also carry out sample testing on incoming freight to the UK. The UK government continues to strongly urge hauliers not to travel to Kent until further notice, while a mass testing programme for HGV drivers is being developed.

Operation Stack remains in force along the M20 while lorry drivers in Kent are continuing to be directed to the Manston holding facility, where they have access to food and welfare facilities.

Under the agreement announced this evening, admittance into France will only be granted to those travelling for urgent reasons – including hauliers – French citizens, and British citizens with French residency.

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps said:

“I am pleased that we have made this important progress with our French counterparts this evening. This protocol will see the French border reopen to those travelling for urgent reasons, provided they have a certified negative COVID test.

“We continue to urge hauliers not to travel to Kent until further notice as we work to alleviate congestion at ports.”

The Transport Secretary also announced the temporary relaxation of drivers' hours for hauliers to help drivers get through UK borders safely, including via Kent, during the coming weeks. The rules will come in force from midnight tonight.

To enable this, the former Manston Airfield site will remain the main testing centre for hauliers. On-site staff will provide tests to hauliers to be self-administered in their cabs under supervision. The result will be communicated to the driver via text message or email, identifying them via their number plate.

Hauliers with negative tests will then be released in batches to manage traffic flows. If a positive test is confirmed, the haulier will be directed to leave the Manston site in their vehicle and will be provided accommodation to enter self-isolation for 10 days.

The UK Government is working with Kent Local Authorities to provide this location, which will provide hauliers with Covid-secure accommodation and secure parking for their cargo. Non-hauliers will have to arrange a private test to enable travel.

Source: UK Department for Transport