

LOSING CONTROL:

A STORY OF CONSERVATIVE
COVID BORDER FAILURE



"A Story of Conservative Covid Border Failure"

6 January 2021: Nick Thomas-Symonds urges the government to 'get a grip' on its border policy.¹

6 January 2021: Figures from the Isolation Assurance Service show just 3 out of 100 travellers are being reached to check they are quarantining.²

7 January 2021: Labour accuses the government of leaving the nation's "doors unlocked" to COVID mutations.

14 January 2021: Government delays introduction of the requirement for passengers to have a negative Covid-19 test to enter the country.³

15 January 2021: Brazil variant found in the UK, reiterating the need for comprehensive hotel quarantine to prevent variants that could affect the efficacy of the vaccine from entering the U.K.

20 January 2021: Labour demands an overhaul of border policy after Priti Patel tells Conservative supporters that she wanted to 'close the borders'. Nick Thomas-Symonds writes to the Home Secretary urging her to make a statement to Parliament following her comments.⁴

26 January 2021: A Labour Urgent Question calls for 'a comprehensive hotel quarantine system'.⁵

29 January 2021: Labour forces a vote to extend the hotel quarantine plans laid out by the Government, beyond the limited "red list" of 30 countries and instead cover all travellers entering the UK.

3 February 2021: Nick Thomas-Symonds writes to the Home Secretary warning 'the quarantine measures in place do not work. This is particularly concerning as we have no way of knowing where new strains of the virus might emerge from, before it is too late'.⁶

¹ <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/covid-19-britain-must-get-a-grip-on-its-air-borders-to-control-virus-risk-7n9zqhrrg>

² <https://twitter.com/NickTorfaen/status/1346804527945670658?s=20>

³ <https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-negative-test-requirement-for-people-arriving-in-england-delayed-until-next-week-12187294>

⁴ <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/priti-patel-wanted-to-close-borders-last-march-to-control-covid-spread-2xb5qct8h>

⁵ <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2021-01-26/debates/AD02BC0A-B7A1-4988-A1B6-995BE1DAF63D/UKBorderCovidProtections>

⁶ <https://twitter.com/NickTorfaen/status/1356915756370395143?s=20>

3 February 2021: Keir Starmer asks Boris Johnson at PMQs why he ignored SAGE advice on preventing new variants coming to the UK.

9 February 2021: Matt Hancock tells the Commons all international arrivals would be tested on day two and day eight of their quarantine – more than five months after Nick Thomas-Symonds called for a ‘two test system’.⁷

15 February 2021: Labour writes to the Home Secretary raising the fatal flaws with the Government’s hotel quarantine policy.⁸

1 March 2021: Nick Thomas-Symonds derides the government’s ‘unforgivable incompetence’ as the Brazilian variant reaches the UK.

20 March 2021: Labour responds to surges of cases across Europe and the need for comprehensive hotel quarantine to protect the progress made by the vaccine.

24 March 2021: India’s health ministry warn about a so-called ‘double mutant’ variant.⁹

30 March 2021: The BMJ publishes an article warning India’s cases have “taken a sharp upward turn since March”, noting that globally, India had the “third highest number of confirmed cases and deaths from Covid-19 after Brazil and the US.”

1 April 2021: B.1.617.1 was designated under investigation (Delta variant).¹⁰

2 April 2021: The UK announces four countries, including India’s neighbours Pakistan and Bangladesh, will join the red list for foreign travel – but did not include India in this. *The Mirror* reports that this time India’s overall rate of new cases has shot from a low of around 10,000 a day to 81,000 a day.¹¹

13 April 2021: Thomas-Symonds urged the Home Secretary to introduce a comprehensive hotel quarantine after outbreaks of the South African variant in Lambeth and Wandsworth.

16 April 2021: The first cases of the Indian variant are discovered in the UK. Once again, Labour urges the need for a proper hotel quarantine system.

⁷ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-54045057>

⁸ <https://labour.org.uk/press/fatal-flaws-in-the-governments-half-baked-hotel-quarantine-policy-show-why-only-a-comprehensive-system-can-work/>

⁹ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-56507988>

¹⁰ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/984274/Variants_of_Concern_VOC_Technical_Briefing_10_England.pdf

¹¹ <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/politics/31-days-indian-variant-crept-24135540>

19 April 2021: The Prime Minister cancels a trip to India due to take place on 26 April.¹²

19 April 2021: Labour criticises Conservative delay in adding India to the red list.¹³

23 April 2021: The government put India put on the UK's 'red list' for foreign travel, noting that "there is a high volume of travel between India and the UK, and we have already seen 103 cases of the variant under Investigation (VUI) in the UK".

6 May 2021: Two more variants (B.1.671.2) and (B.1.617.3) were designated as under investigation and of concern.¹⁴

14 May 2021: Since then the variant has continued to spread, leading the government to change its vaccination approach to tackle rising cases of B1.617.2 variant.¹⁵

17 May 2021: Government continue to give mixed messages about the amber list. In the space of 24 hours George Eustice claimed that you could travel to amber list countries to see family and friends, only for this to be refuted by the Health Secretary who said that people should avoid travelling to amber list countries although.¹⁶

17 May 2021: 86 local councils have 5 or more confirmed cases of the Indian variant.¹⁷

18 May 2021: Labour calls for the amber list to be scrapped with all countries on the amber list put on the red list.

27 May 2021: With figures showing 1.59m people flew into the UK in the first four months of 2021, Thomas-Symonds brands government policy 'weak and dangerous'.¹⁸

4 June 2021: Labour calls for Thailand and Vietnam to be put on the red list due to high Covid numbers.

¹² <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-56800305>

¹³ <https://labour.org.uk/press/nick-thomas-symonds-comments-on-india-being-added-to-travel-red-list/>

¹⁴ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/984274/Variants_of_Concern_VOC_Technical_Briefing_10_England.pdf

¹⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/most-vulnerable-offered-second-dose-of-covid-19-vaccine-earlier-to-help-protect-against-variants>

¹⁶ <https://www.thesun.co.uk/travel/14989314/holidays-abroad-summer-warning-variants/>

¹⁷ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-57150131>

¹⁸ <https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-1-5m-people-flew-to-uk-in-first-four-months-of-2021-when-borders-were-meant-to-be-heavily-restricted-12318777>

9 June 2021: It was announced that Greater Manchester and Lancashire would receive a "strengthened package of support" to tackle a rise in the Delta coronavirus variant.¹⁹

11 June 2021: The Delta variant causes more than 90% of new Covid cases in UK.²⁰

14 June 2021: It is reported the government are considering delaying the end of lockdown by 4 weeks because of the rapid increase in Delta variant cases.

¹⁹ <https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-greater-manchester-and-lancashire-get-rapid-response-teams-and-extra-testing-as-variant-cases-rise-12327676>

²⁰ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jun/11/delta-variant-is-linked-to-90-of-covid-cases-in-uk>

