UK airport scraps 160 flights over air traffic control shortages

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London's Gatwick airport said on Monday that it had been forced to cancel more than 160 flights between now and Sunday due to an exceptional shortage of controllers, partly caused by coronavirus infections.

Flights will be limited to 800 per day, departures and arrivals, until October 1, the airport said in a statement, adding that the decision had been taken in agreement with NATS, Britain's air traffic control service.

This daily ceiling "will prevent last-minute cancelations and delays for passengers while NATS work through challenges driven by sickness and staffing constraints", the statement said.

Some 30 percent of controllers "are currently unavailable for a variety of medical reasons including COVID", it added.

"This has been a difficult decision but the action we have taken today means our airlines can fly reliable flight programs, which gives passengers more certainty that they will not face last minute cancelations", said Stewart Wingate, director of London Gatwick, London's second largest airport behind Heathrow.

The latest challenges follow a meltdown at the end of August which led to the cancelation of almost 2,000 flights over two days and numerous delays.

The UK's Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) had announced an independent investigation into the wider issues surrounding the system failure.

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