

Heathrow calls for UK airport virus tests after £1-bn loss

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Heathrow wants Britain to copy Germany, where travellers arriving from countries with high levels of coronavirus are tested instead of being ordered into quarantine

London's Heathrow airport on Wednesday urged the government to create a coronavirus testing programme for travellers to replace quarantines, as it announced more than a billion pounds in losses in 2020.

The air hub, usually the busiest in Europe, said it had recorded a pre-tax loss of £1.1 billion (\$1.4 billion, 1.2 billion euros) in the first six months of the year, as the pandemic decimates the aviation sector.

Revenues halved year-on-year while [passenger](#) numbers dropped 96 percent in the [second quarter](#), as [air travel](#) came to a virtual standstill due to COVID-19 lockdowns around the world, it said.

"Today's results should serve as a clarion call for the government—the UK needs a passenger testing regime and fast," chief executive John Holland-Kaye said in a statement.

"Without it, Britain is just playing a game of quarantine roulette."

Heathrow has been among the critics of the British government's controversial weekend decision to quarantine all travellers arriving from Spain, following a recent spike in virus cases there.

It follows the introduction earlier this month of a so-called traffic light quarantine system, in which passengers from countries deemed high-risk are ordered to self-isolate for 14 days.

Critics would like the UK to follow the lead of countries like France and Germany and screen passengers from such places.

"Testing offers a way to safely open up travel and trade to some of the UK's biggest markets which currently remain closed," Holland-Kaye added.

"Our European competitors are racing ahead with passenger testing, if the UK doesn't act soon global Britain will be nothing more than a campaign slogan."

'Swift and decisive'

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson has defended the latest quarantine moves, warning "swift and decisive" action was needed as Europe sees a "second wave" of the virus.

Officials are thought to be weary of an airport testing system because they fear it will miss people who have contracted the virus but are yet to display symptoms.

Heathrow—which is owned by a consortium led by Spanish construction giant Ferrovial—said it expects a gradual recovery in air travel but that passenger volumes would still be more than 60 percent down on last year.

In response the hub has cut its operating costs by at least £300 million and cancelled or paused over £650 million in projects.

The airport, which directly employs 7,000 staff, has already begun voluntary redundancies and reduced its management by a third.

Around 76,000 people work at Heathrow, employed by approximately 400 companies, including airlines.

Meanwhile, its controversial plan to build a third runway is on-hold for at least two years amid an ongoing legal battle.

Environmental campaigners in February won a court case arguing that the government had failed to take into account its own climate change commitments in the decision.

Heathrow has appealed the ruling to the Supreme Court.

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