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Guidance

Coronavirus (COVID-19): immigration guidance

Guidance on immigration provisions made by the Home Office for individuals affected by travel restrictions associated with coronavirus (COVID-19).

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From:
Home Office (<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/home-office>) and UK Visas and Immigration (<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/uk-visas-and-immigration>)

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Due to travel restrictions because of coronavirus some individuals may be facing uncertainty in relation to the expiry date of their current visa or leave to remain in the United Kingdom. The Home Office understands that in many cases this is because of circumstances outside of your control.

Subject to the below guidance, most people in the UK whose immigration status is affected by the coronavirus outbreak will get an automatic extension of their visa until 31 March 2020.

Read the guidance below to find out if your visa will be automatically extended or if you need to contact the Home Office's dedicated coronavirus immigration helpline to discuss your circumstances and arrange an extension.

The helpline can only speak to the visa holder or applicant about individual cases. If a third party wishes to speak on their behalf, they must have the visa holder's permission.

Chinese nationals in the UK whose visa has recently expired or is about to expire

If you are a Chinese national in the UK and have been compliant with the conditions of your visa prior to the coronavirus outbreak, your visa will be automatically extended to 31 March 2020 if your visa has an expiry date between 24 January 2020 and 30 March 2020.

You'll also get an automatic extension if you're in the UK on a long-term standard visitor visa that lasts 2, 5 or 10 years and you have reached the maximum stay of 180 days between 24 January 2020 and 30 March 2020.

You don't need to do anything to get this extension.

You will remain subject to the same immigration conditions attached to your visa during the extension period.

You will not automatically receive a new visa or Biometric Residence Permit card.

Your new expiry date (31 March 2020) will be added to UK Visas and Immigration's systems.

If you need a status letter confirming this extension, or a new Biometric Residence Permit with a revised expiry date, you should contact the coronavirus immigration helpline.

If you have already applied to extend your visa you don't need to do anything.

If you are intending to apply to extend your stay in the UK before 31 March 2020 you should continue to do so.

Non-Chinese, non-EEA nationals in the UK normally resident in China

If you are a non-Chinese or non-EEA national in the UK but are normally resident in China and your visa in the UK has an expiry date between 24 January 2020 and 30 March 2020 you should contact the coronavirus immigration helpline.

The team will be able to extend your visa to 31 March 2020 if you can demonstrate you are normally resident in China.

You will remain subject to the same immigration conditions attached to your visa during the extension period.

Chinese nationals in the UK whose visa was granted by Irish authorities (British Irish Visa Scheme (BIVS))

If you are a Chinese national in the UK with a visa that was granted by the Irish authorities and has an expiry date between 24 January 2020 and 30 March 2020 you should contact the coronavirus immigration helpline to discuss your circumstances.

Chinese nationals in the UK whose visa was granted by the Crown Dependencies

If you are a Chinese national in the UK with a visa that was granted by a Crown Dependency and has an expiry date between 24 January 2020 and 30 March 2020 you should contact the coronavirus immigration helpline to discuss your circumstances.

Switching to a Tier 2 category in the UK

If you are a Chinese national in the UK on a Tier 2 Intra-Company Transfer visa and want to switch to a Tier 2 General visa you normally need to return to China to make your application.

You can exceptionally apply to switch from a Tier 2 Intra-Company Transfer to a Tier 2 General visa from within the UK if your visa has an expiry date between 24 January 2020 and 30 March 2020.

You will still need to pay the relevant fee and meet all the requirements of a Tier 2 General visa, other than the requirement that you usually have to apply in China.

Information for Chinese or third country nationals in China

UK Visa Application Centres in China are currently closed.

The Home Office continues to monitor the situation and updates on when the VACs will re-open will be available on VFS's website (<https://www.vfsglobal.co.uk/cn/en/news/china-visa-application-centres-closure>).

Bookings for Secure English Language Testing (SELT)

Access to approved Secure English Language Testing (SELT) facilities across China is also currently restricted in line with national requirements, and tests scheduled for March 2020 have been cancelled.

These dates are being kept under review as the situation develops.

Test takers who have already taken their test will receive their Test Report Form (TRF) by mail.

For all the latest information, please visit the International English Language Testing System (IELTS)'s website (<https://www.ielts.org/news/2020/changes-to-ielts-test-arrangements-in-some-locations-due-to-novel-coronavirus>), or contact your test centre directly by email.

Chinese or third country nationals whose passport is at a Visa Application Centre (VAC)

UK Visa Application Centres in China are currently closed.

Where possible we will return passports currently held in VACs to customers via courier, where courier return has been requested. This will not be possible in all locations.

If your passport is currently held in a VAC, but you have not previously arranged for it to be returned by courier, please contact VFS Global directly.

The Home Office continues to monitor the situation and updates on when the VACs will re-open will be available on VFS's website (<https://www.vfsglobal.co.uk/cn/en/news/china-visa-application-centres-closure>).

As soon as we are able to re-open the VACs we will prioritise the return of all documents to our customers.

British nationals in China who need to apply for a passport

Due to the closure of Visa Application Centres (VAC), it is not currently possible to apply for a British passport from China. If you urgently need to travel to the UK, you can apply for an emergency travel document (<https://www.gov.uk/emergency-travel-document>).

British passports that were due for collection at a VAC have now been delivered to the British Embassy in Beijing, or the Consulates in Shanghai and Guangzhou. You will be contacted to make arrangements to collect your documents.

The Home Office is monitoring the situation, and as soon as we are able to re-open the VACs we will prioritise the return of documents to our customers.

Licensed Tier 2, Tier 4 or Tier 5 sponsors: absences due to coronavirus

Some Tier 4 students or Tier 2/5 employees may be prevented from attending their studies or employment due to illness, the need to serve a period of quarantine or the inability to travel due to travel restrictions caused by coronavirus.

Sponsors do not need to report student or employee absences related to coronavirus which they have authorised.

Sponsors do not need to withdraw sponsorship if they consider there are exceptional circumstances when:

- a student will be unable to attend for more than 60 days
- an employee is absent from work without pay for four weeks or more

Decisions on whether to withdraw a student from their studies or terminate an employment are for sponsors to make. The Home Office recognises the current situation is exceptional and will not take any compliance action against students or employees who are unable to attend their studies/work due to the coronavirus outbreak, or against sponsors which authorise absences and continue to sponsor students or employees despite absences for this reason.

The Home Office will keep this under review, especially if the length of absences mean a potential repeat of period of studies become necessary.

Additional immigration queries

You can also contact the coronavirus immigration helpline if you have any other immigration queries related to coronavirus, including questions about urgent, compelling, compassionate case where a Chinese national or other visa national based in China needs to travel to the UK.

If your query doesn't relate to immigration provisions associated with coronavirus (COVID-19) please contact the general immigration helpline on 0300 123 2241.

Coronavirus Immigration Helpline

Telephone: 0800 678 1767 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm)

Calls are free of charge.

Email: CIH@homeoffice.gov.uk

Due to Data Protection Regulations we can only speak to the visa holder or applicant about their specific query.

If you are a third party (for example family member or sponsor) and wish to speak on their behalf, we must have the visa holder's permission. This can be provided by verbal consent to the coronavirus immigration helpline or written consent via email. The email to verify consent must be sent from the email address provided on the visa holder's application to CIH@homeoffice.gov.uk to enable us to provide a response. Without consent we are unable to discuss person-specific details with a third party.

Additional resources

We will keep our guidance under regular review. You can keep up to date by reading the latest Public Health England advice (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-information-for-the-public>) which includes the latest advice for travellers.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) has also produced guidance for British people travelling and living overseas following the outbreak, and you can find country-specific information on their travel advice pages for all countries you're planning to visit or transit.

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1. 27 February 2020

Updated contact details for queries that don't relate to immigration provisions associated with coronavirus (COVID-19).

2. 25 February 2020

Updated information for Chinese or third country nationals in China.

3. 21 February 2020

Updated guidance.

4. 17 February 2020

First published.

Related content

- Foreign travel checklist (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/foreign-travel-checklist>)
- Register of licensed sponsors: students (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/register-of-licensed-sponsors-students>)
- COVID-19: guidance for staff in the transport sector (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-staff-in-the-transport-sector>)
- Coronavirus (COVID-19) action plan (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-action-plan>)

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