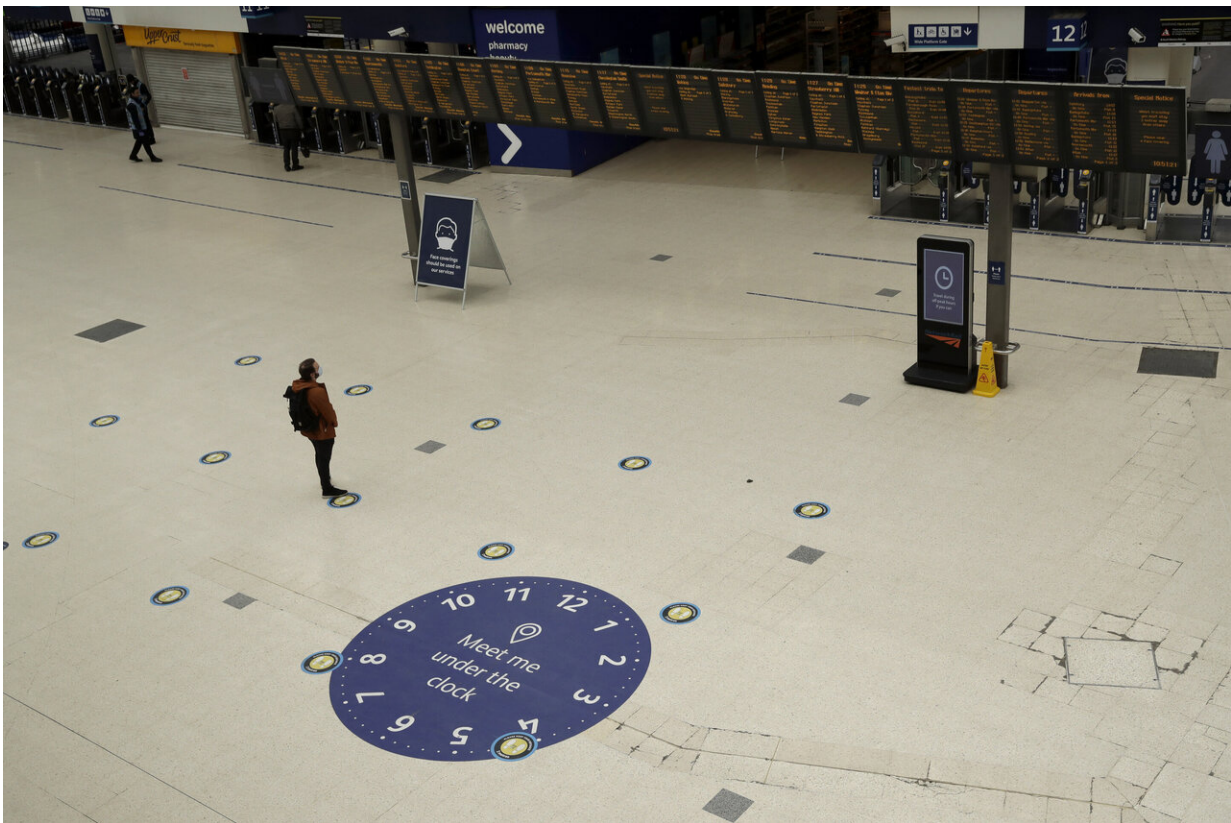


Face coverings to be mandated on public transport in England

June 4 2020, by Pan Pylas



Social distancing guidelines on the floor by train departure information screens to help stop the spread of coronavirus in Waterloo station, London, Thursday, June 4, 2020. Waterloo station, which is wide recognised as the busiest train station in Britain, is still much quieter than normal as most commuters are working from home and not commuting into central London offices. (AP Photo/Matt Dunham)

Passengers on England's buses, subways and trains will have to wear face coverings from June 15 when most shops reopen, the British government said Thursday.

It's the second time in as many days that the government has adopted a measure that it didn't insist on when the coronavirus pandemic swept through the U.K. in March before the lockdown was imposed. On Wednesday, the government said it would require anyone flying into the U.K. from abroad to quarantine for 14 days after their arrival.

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps said face coverings will be mandatory from the date nonessential stores, such as department stores and electronics retailers, are scheduled to reopen. That easing of the lockdown will, he said, likely lead to an increase in traffic from the near-negligible levels since the lockdown was imposed on March 23.

"The evidence suggests wearing face coverings offers some, albeit limited, protection against the spread of the virus," he said at the government's daily briefing.

Face coverings will also be mandated on planes and ferries, though usage of both is not expected to pick up as fast as domestic modes of transport, especially after the change of policy on quarantining.



Signs requesting people keep their distance from each other are displayed on ticket barriers to help stop the spread of coronavirus in Waterloo station, London, Thursday, June 4, 2020. Waterloo station, which is widely recognised as the busiest train station in Britain, is still much quieter than normal as most commuters are still working from home and not travelling into central London offices. (AP Photo/Matt Dunham)

"We need to ensure every precaution is taken, on buses, trains, aircraft and ferries," Shapps said.

He also said face coverings will be a "condition of travel" and failure to abide by the requirement could potentially lead to fines. Young children and people with disabilities and breathing difficulties will be exempt.

Currently passengers are advised to wear a face covering but are not stopped from travelling without one.

The new policy only applies to England, but Shapps said it may not be long before the other nations of the U.K.—Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland—adopt the measure. Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon said her government was also considering making it mandatory.

London Mayor Sadiq Khan said the government has "finally seen sense," adding that there is "a large body of evidence" showing that face coverings can help stop the spread of the virus.



A member of staff wearing a face shield gives out face masks to help stop the spread of coronavirus in Waterloo station, London, Thursday, June 4, 2020. Waterloo station, which is wide recognised as the busiest train station in Britain,

is still much quieter than normal as most commuters are working from home and not commuting into central London offices. (AP Photo/Matt Dunham)



A sign recommending people wear face coverings to help stop the spread of coronavirus is displayed in Waterloo station, London, Thursday, June 4, 2020. Waterloo station, which is wide recognised as the busiest train station in Britain, is still much quieter than normal as most commuters are working from home and not commuting into central London offices. (AP Photo/Matt Dunham)



Signs recommending people wear face coverings to help stop the spread of coronavirus are displayed in Waterloo station, London, Thursday, June 4, 2020. Waterloo station, which is wide recognised as the busiest train station in Britain, is still much quieter than normal as most commuters are working from home and not commuting into central London offices. (AP Photo/Matt Dunham)



A member of staff wearing a face shield checks that people are observing social distancing as they disembark from a train, to help stop the spread of coronavirus in Waterloo station, London, Thursday, June 4, 2020. Waterloo station, which is wide recognised as the busiest train station in Britain, is still much quieter than normal as most commuters are working from home and not commuting into central London offices. (AP Photo/Matt Dunham)

Transport unions had also been urging the government to make face coverings compulsory after the deaths of dozens of workers.

Mick Cash, general secretary of the Rail, Maritime and Transport union, also said the announcement was "long overdue."

Last month, Shapps said 42 people working at Transport for London and

10 mainline rail staff had died after being infected by coronavirus.

On Thursday, the government also reported that another 176 people who tested positive for the coronavirus had died in the U.K. in all settings. That takes the U.K.'s total to 39,904, the world's second-highest death toll in the pandemic.

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