# End the £1 billion holiday Covid PCR tests rip-off

H
olidaymakers paid out more than £1 billion for compulsory [Covid tests](#) this summer from an industry being investigated for a "laundry list" of bad practices, the Standard can reveal.

The huge scale of a "travel tax" blamed for the slow recovery of Britain's aviation industry and a devastating no-show of foreign tourists in [London](#) will intensify pressure on regulators to clamp down harder and faster on profiteering by "cowboy" providers of gold-standard PCR tests.

Ministers are to announce within weeks a review of the traffic light system for foreign travel, including whether to change the current green, amber and red categories and the testing regimes that apply to them, possibly exempting the double-jabbed from non-red countries from having to take tests after arriving back in England. Our findings will increase pressure on the Government to reform the controversial system.

Analysis of the latest passenger data by aviation and travel experts for the Standard suggests that at least five million people over the age of 12 had flown into Britain from Europe by the start of this month since foreign holidays were made legal again in May.

Most of them were British families returning from summer breaks. Almost all those aged 12 or over will have had to have taken at least one PCR test, at an estimated average of more than £90, to prove that they do not have Covid.

# READ MORE

Research by travel expert Paul Charles, chief executive of travel consultancy The PC Agency, estimates the average number of PCR tests required for each arrival to have been 2.3, meaning that some 11.5 million tests have already been taken in total – just from passengers on European flights.

Research by the all-party parliamentary group for the future of aviation found that the average cost of a government-approved PCR test in the UK was £93, pointing to a bill that could already be as high as £1.1 billion.

The actual total is likely to be considerably higher as the analysis has not included people flying from outside Europe, on ferries or using the Eurostar.

Mr Charles said: "This £1 billion industry has grown quickly, with no clear oversight or regulation. A whole summer has gone by with consumers being ripped off with tests they don't need at sky-high prices."

Unlike most European countries, the Government chose not to regulate prices except in the case of PCRs provided by the NHS, allowing a huge new industry to build up with hundreds of companies offering the tests.

Transport bosses have blamed the onerous cost of the tests for

the slow recovery in Britain's aviation sector.

Stewart Wingate, chief executive of Gatwick airport, said: "The cost of PCR tests remains prohibitive for many and should be replaced by cheaper, quicker lateral flow tests."

Virginia Messina, of the London-based World Travel and Tourism Council, said: "We need to see costs come right down and proper policing of the test sector in order for confidence to be restored."

Investigations by the Standard have found that the underlying cost of a PCR test is as little as £20 to £25.

The CMA has written to hundreds of providers of PCR tests warning they risk enforcement action if they mislead customers about prices or fail to deliver results on time.