



Home Office

Urgent government business or compassionate travel

Version 3.0

This guidance tells Her Majesty's Passport Office staff how to deal with passport applications for customers that need to travel urgently for urgent government business or compassionate reasons

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About: Urgent government compassionate or business travel

This guidance tells Her Majesty's Passport Office staff about customers who need to travel quickly for:

- urgent government business reasons
- compassionate reasons

You must refer to Passports and applications affected by COVID-19 guidance, if the customer needs to travel for urgent government business or compassionate reasons and their application is affected by COVID-19 restrictions.

If a customer needs to travel urgently for other reasons (for example, they have booked a last minute holiday), they may:

- apply for their passport using the Premium or Fast Track service (if they have not already applied for their passport) however there are specific restrictions relating to child applications
- be able to upgrade their application (if they have already applied for their passport) however there are specific restrictions relating to child applications

Contacts

If you have any questions about the guidance and your line manager or senior caseworker cannot help you or you think that the guidance has factual errors then email Guidance & Quality, Operating Standards.

If you notice any formatting errors in this guidance (broken links, spelling mistakes and so on) or have any comments about the layout or navigability of the guidance then you can email Guidance & Quality, Operating Standards.

Publication

Below is information on when this version of the guidance was published:

- version **3.0**
- published for Home Office staff on **26 September 2021**

Changes from last version of this guidance

The definitions of compassionate grounds in this guidance have been updated to include customers working in the haulage industry or food preparation, supply or distribution sector (page 10 and 11).

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Urgent travel: government business or compassionate reasons

This section tells HM Passport Office staff about quicker services we may offer customers who need to travel for urgent government business or compassionate reasons.

Regardless of why a customer needs their passport urgently, they can apply for a Premium and Fast Track service or ask us to upgrade their application. If they meet the criteria and we can complete our checks, we will process their application using the service they selected. There are specific restrictions for child applications, refer to TAS: the service levels we provide guidance. We cannot upgrade a Fast Track application to a Premium service.

Customers who do not qualify for a Premium or Fast Track service (or an upgrade) may still need to travel urgently. If the customer needs to travel for urgent government business travel or compassionate reasons, we will consider:

- accepting a Premium or Fast Track application (if they have not already applied)
- processing their standard application as soon as possible in line with these service types (if the customer already applied using the standard service), but we will not offer them a guaranteed service, for example for a child upgrade (see Upgrades: how to deal with passport service upgrades) because of compassionate grounds we must not:
 - process the application unless we have had the application for 5 working days, unless it is an exceptional circumstance
 - guarantee when the passport will be ready

We aim to handle urgent government business or compassionate travel requests within the 4 hour timescale, but cannot guarantee this, as we must:

- ask for evidence to show they must travel due to compassionate or urgent government business reasons
- only issue a fully valid passport when we're satisfied, we have no safeguarding issues, and are satisfied with a customer's:
 - nationality
 - identity
 - entitlement

If we cannot do all standard identity checks, we may consider doing alternative identity checks. For example, we may complete additional checks on the countersignatory or digital referee, to make sure we are happy with the intended passport holder's identity before we consider issuing a restricted validity passport. We would only do this if:

- their British nationality is not in doubt
- you have no concerns with their identity, because you have completed other identity checks (for example because an identity interview has not taken place, and is being deferred)

Child applications: Premium service

Premium service is not available for child applications. We will only accept an application (in special cases), if a child must travel urgently and we are certain it is for urgent government business or compassionate travel. We take the Premium fee but will not offer a Premium guarantee. We will try to process it as soon as possible. We must not relax these rules. We must take extra care when dealing with Premium service requests for children.

Before you agree to process a child application more quickly due to compassionate or urgent government business travel, you must:

- have proof of compassionate or urgent government business travel
- have higher executive officer (HEO) approval
- be satisfied there are no safeguarding or vulnerability concerns

Child applications: Fast Track service

Fast Track service is available for some child applications. We will only accept an application that does not meet the criteria. We will consider a child's application for a Fast Track service, if the child needs to travel urgently due to urgent government business or compassionate reasons. Before you agree to accept the application, you must:

- have proof of the urgent government business travel or compassionate reason
- have HEO approval
- be satisfied there are no safeguarding or vulnerability concerns

Upgrades for child applications

We offer upgrades for some child applications, if it meets our specific child criteria, see child upgrades in TAS: upgrades guidance and we can complete our checks, we will process the request. If it does not, see: Child upgrade: compassionate or urgent government business travel reasons.

We must be satisfied that we have no safeguarding or vulnerability concerns with the application.

How customers tell us they need a passport urgently

Customers who do not qualify for a Premium or Fast Track service, cannot apply directly for a passport under urgent government business or compassionate travel grounds. They can only phone, email or write to us. To apply for a guaranteed

service, they can either:

- turn up at an Application Processing Centre (APC) in person with an application
- call our Teleperformance (TP) helpline

Most customers will contact TP to tell us they need to travel urgently due to urgent government business or compassionate reasons and want to apply for:

- a Premium service (if they have not already applied), and they meet the criteria for a guaranteed Premium service, if they do not meet the criteria, we will process the application as soon as possible
- an upgrade (if they have already applied)

Urgent travel: if the customer has not yet applied

If a customer has not yet applied for a passport, TP will:

- ask the customer what APC they want to attend
- email the APC counter manager the details of the customer's request for a Premium or Fast Track service

The counter manager must contact the customer to check if they qualify for a Premium or Fast Track service. If they do, the counter manager will arrange an appointment at the APC. If the customer does not meet the criteria for a guaranteed Premium or Fast Track service but has urgent government business or compassionate reasons for travel, we will process the application as soon as possible.

If a customer is applying for a first-time adult passport, they must attend in person, unless they meet an exception that allows a third party to attend on their behalf.

Urgent travel: if the customer has already applied

If the customer has already applied for a passport and wants to upgrade (including for urgent government business or compassionate reasons and contacts TP, see: If a customer contacts TP with an upgrade request guidance.

Urgent government and compassionate travel: fees

The customer must initially pay the full fee for the service they are using, however if they are travelling for compassionate reasons, they may ask us to refund:

- the counter service portion of the fee, if they use the Premium or Fast Track service

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What we accept as urgent government business travel

This section tells HM Passport Office staff what we may accept as evidence for urgent government business travel.

If a customer gives us evidence that they must travel on urgent government business, we may accept their application, even if:

- they do not qualify for a Premium or Fast Track service
- they do not qualify for an upgrade
- we cannot complete our checks for example they need to attend a passport interview before we issue their passport

Definition of urgent government business travel

Travel for urgent government business, includes travel in (or to):

- the UK (nationally)
- local government
- an overseas government
- an overseas institution

Customers travelling for national government, include:

- Members of Parliament (MPs)
- members of Her Majesty's armed forces (Army, Royal Navy, Royal Air Force)
- members of the Diplomatic Service
- members of other departments of state (Home Office, Department for Environment, Ministry of Defence)
- sports men and women representing their country as part of the UK (this could be, any country in the UK, a crown dependency or a British Overseas Territory)

Customers travelling for local government business, include:

- police officers
- local councillors
- social services staff (for example, with children in care)

Reasons for urgent government business travel include:

- responding to an international crisis
- taking up (or attending) a posting abroad
- transporting a prisoner

Her Majesty's armed forces

HM Forces personnel who need to travel urgently, must apply at our Peterborough office. You must follow Forces guidance when dealing with these applications.

Evidence for urgent government business travel

To stop the misuse of this service, customers must prove their need for urgent government business travel, by providing us with:

- documentary evidence (for guidance on what evidence you may accept, see: [checking the customer's evidence for urgent travel](#) guidance)
- proof of the purpose of their journey and how long they will stay (if this can be provided, for example they will not be able to provide this if they are travelling for a peace keeping mission)

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What we accept as compassionate grounds for travel

This section tells HM Passport Office staff what we may accept as evidence for compassionate grounds for travel.

If a customer gives us evidence that they must travel for compassionate reasons, we may accept their application, even if:

- they do not qualify for a Premium or Fast Track service
- they do not qualify for an upgrade
- we cannot complete our checks before they need to travel, for example they need to attend a passport interview before we issue their passport

Definition of compassionate grounds

We will consider issuing passports to customers that do not meet the criteria but have evidence of compassionate travel. For example:

- they, a family member or a friend has a serious illness or accident
- the death of a family member or friend
- they and their carers need to travel abroad for medical treatment
- they and their carers have had travel arranged by a charitable or religious organisation
- they are victims of a crime resulting in the theft of their passport and have pre-booked travel within 1 week
- they work (or are about to start work) in the haulage industry (for example, lorry drivers)
- they work (or about to start work) in the food preparation, supply or distribution sector, this:
 - means those whose job involves (or will involve) preparing, supplying or delivering food to supermarkets and shops
 - does not mean those who work in supermarkets or shops whose job does not include preparing, supplying or delivering food to the supermarket or shop (for example, food home delivery services)

Compassionate grounds do not include:

- last minute holidays
- business travel (with the exception of the haulage industry or food preparation, supply or distribution sector)
- weddings or honeymoons
- lost or expired passports

Evidence we need for compassionate grounds

To stop the misuse of this service, customers must give us evidence they need to travel urgently (see: [checking customer's evidence for urgent travel](#)). Before you accept the application, you must carefully check the evidence to make sure travel is for compassionate reasons. Evidence includes:

- a completed application for Premium service on compassionate grounds form (this must be completed for each application)
- a death certificate or a photocopy (if needed) if the customer does not have a death certificate, you may accept other evidence, if a Senior Executive Officer (SEO) agrees
- an original signed and dated letter from a doctor, hospital, Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office post abroad, minister of religion, police officer or person acting in an official role, we will accept:
 - faxes in serious cases for example when there is no time to provide the original letter (for example if the customer arrives in person and needs the passport the same day, and they did not know they needed to provide the original letter)
- emails (we can only accept these in limited cases) and only, if you can verify:
 - the email address online
 - that the booking was made after the change in circumstances (for example, if a customer's relative is in hospital, you must check the customer made the booking after the relative's hospital admission date)
- a signed and recently dated letter from their employer or prospective employer (where the customer works in the haulage or food preparation, supply or distribution sector) that:
 - confirms an offer of employment (if the customer is about to start work)
 - confirms what the customer's job role is (or will be)
 - confirms the customer needs their passport for their job role for identity or travel reasons
 - includes the employer's address, email address and phone number

You must check evidence, in line with, [checking the customer's evidence](#) guidance.

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Dealing with urgent government business and compassionate applications

This section tells HM Passport Office staff how to deal with applications for Premium and Fast Track services, if the customer needs to travel for compassionate or urgent government business reasons. It explains how to check evidence, how to record an application and about identity interviews and when to issue a restricted validity passport.

You, the examiner, must refer to [upgrades: urgent government business or compassionate travel](#), for customers who want to upgrade their application.

How to confirm the customer's evidence is genuine

We need evidence to confirm the customer's need to travel urgently. When we get the evidence, you must check that it is genuine.

Compassionate grounds

You must consider evidence on a case by case basis. For example, you can accept an email from a hospital to confirm a patient is ill overseas, if you:

- have done external checks (for example, to verify a person, company or hospital exists)
- are confident the email is genuine
- are satisfied with the link between the customer and patient

If a customer is applying for a Premium service, due to compassionate reasons, they must complete an application for Premium service on compassionate grounds form.

If you are concerned the evidence is not genuine, you must refer it to your operational team leader (OTL) for advice.

The OTL will review the evidence and (if possible) speak to the person who provided it, after verifying the person with external sources. If the OTL thinks the letter is not genuine or they cannot accept it, they will tell you to ask the customer for new evidence.

Urgent government business travel

You must consider evidence on a case by case basis and make sure it is genuine. For example, you may accept an email is genuine, if you have:

- spoken to an official at that department about the case

- received a confirmation email or letter from an official government email or postal address

If you have not spoken to an official at that department before you get the letter, you must phone the department to check the correspondence is genuine.

Letters from official UK government offices, for example, the Foreign Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO), must be on official headed paper and must confirm the:

- customer's name
- customer needs to travel for urgent government business reasons

You must:

- ask the customer for an authorisation letter, if they:
 - have not provided one
 - have not signed the original letter
 - have not provided the original letter on official headed paper
- accept signed PDFs (portable document formats) or emailed copies of confirmation letters, if you:
 - are satisfied they were sent from an official government email address
 - have spoken to an official at that department before
- check with the organisation (if you have any concerns about the PDF or emails)
- scan the authorisation letter on the application as a permanent record
- case note the application on the system to record you have the correct information and authorisation
- case note the application and scan any correspondence (if the customer tells us they no longer need the passport urgently)

If you have any concerns the evidence is not genuine you must refer to your OTL for advice.

The OTL will:

- verify the person
- decide if the evidence is genuine
- speak to the person to confirm they signed the letter.

If the OTL thinks the letter is not genuine and cannot accept it, you, the examiner, must refer the application to the Counter Fraud team (CFT).

Customers from other government departments must send emails to a shared HM Passport Office email inbox. We expect emails from another government department to come from a GOV.UK email address. Any letters sent to us must be on letter headed paper with a contact number and the person's occupation.

Passport stolen and the customer is travelling within 7 days

If the customer's passport has been stolen and they are travelling within 7 days, you must check that the customer has provided acceptable evidence:

- that their passport was stolen (for example, a police report or crime reference number)
- of pre-booked travel

How to record your decision to issue a passport

You, the examiner, must:

- make sure a higher executive officer (HEO) or any grade above a HEO agrees to issue the customer a passport
- case note all checks and decisions you've made on a customer's application and include the name of the authorising office (HEO or above), who agreed the issue
- scan the customer's evidence on the application as a permanent record

The authorising HEO must:

- give it to the area office manager
- add the details of the application (in line with this guidance) on the premium exception tracker for any applications that they agree to accept for a Premium service

This does not apply for upgrade requests.

Restricted validity passports

If a customer tells us they need to travel urgently for urgent government business or compassionate reasons, you may consider issuing them a restricted validity passport (RVP) if:

- their British nationality is not in doubt
- you have no concerns with their identity, for example because you have examined the countersignatory or digital referee to confirm the customer's identity (because an identity interview has not taken place)

You must tell the customer we will not renew their passport, until they attend a passport interview, if we have issued them an RVP because they should have attended a passport interview.

An HEO or above must approve the RVP and case note their decision.

How to renew an RVP

If a customer needs a passport urgently and applies to renew an RVP but cannot attend an interview, we may consider issuing another RVP. This is a rare exception, as we must try to issue a fully valid passport when we can.

You must refer the application to an HEO, who will decide if we can give the customer another RVP. If the HEO agrees, you must tell the customer they must attend an interview before we can issue them a fully valid passport.

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Change of service requests: urgent government business or compassionate travel

This section tells HM Passport Office staff how to deal with requests for a service request, change because the customer needs to travel more quickly for urgent government business or compassionate travel.

If the application is for a child and they want a quicker service because they need to travel for urgent government business or compassionate reasons, you must follow child upgrades for urgent government business or compassionate travel in Upgrades guidance.

If a customer wants to upgrade their application for other reasons refer to upgrade guidance.

How to find an application

If a customer has already applied for a passport and contacts us for a change of (quicker) service, the Teleperformance (TP) agent (or examiner) will find the application on AMS (Application Management System) or the DAP (Digital Application Processing) system.

How to decide if a customer can have an upgrade

If an adult customer applies for a passport using the Standard service but later contacts us to say they need a change of (quicker) service, because of urgent government business or compassionate reasons, you must:

- follow Upgrade guidance if the application meets the criteria for an upgrade
- follow urgent government business or compassionate guidance, to make sure the application meets the criteria
- issue the passport as soon as you can once the application is ready to be passed for issue (PFI)
- consider issuing a restricted validity passport, if the application is not ready to issue

Examination and counter staff can deal with urgent government business and compassionate travel applications.

How to record your decisions

You must case note all checks and decisions you make and scan all correspondence (for example, emails, faxes, letters of travel) on the application as a permanent record. The case note must include:

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- the circumstances why an upgrade has been requested
- the evidence provided
- who provided consent for a child's application
- details of any third party contact confirming the circumstances

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