



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

Consular Directorate
Foreign and Commonwealth Office
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Website: <https://www.gov.uk>

09 May 2017

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000 - REQUEST REF: FOI 0291-17

Thank you for your email of 28 March 2017 asking for information under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) 2000. You asked:

1. *Details of the FCO travel advice to Sierra Leone during the Ebola outbreak in 2014 and 2016 and the reasons for any advice advising against all but essential travel to the country at that time, including any perceived health risks to individuals.*
2. *Please provide dates between which the FCO advised against all but essential travel to Sierra Leone during this period (2014-2016) due to the Ebola outbreak.*
3. *Please state what the FCO considered during this period as constituting 'essential travel' and / or any advice or guidance on the meaning of this term.*

Outcome of search

I am writing to confirm that we have now completed the search for the information which you request. I can confirm that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) does hold information relevant to your request.

Q1 Copies of the FCO travel advice for Sierra Leone that appeared on the GOV.UK website during 2014 and 2016 are attached. There are 76 versions in total. Please note that when files are retrieved from our archives, the date that appears in the 'still current at' field at the top of each page defaults to the date on which the files were retrieved – in this case either 7 April 2017 or 19 April 2017. When travel advice is live on the website, the date in the 'still current at' field defaults to the date on which the page is being viewed. A table showing the time and date each version was published is also attached. Where a map was displayed as part of the travel advice, it appeared on the website shaded amber across the entire country, not grey as shown in the attached files.



On 28 August 2014, the FCO changed the travel advice for Sierra Leone to say the “the FCO advise against all but essential travel to these countries, except for those involved in the direct response to the Ebola outbreak”. The decision was based on our assessment of the reduced availability of commercial flights to Sierra Leone at that time, as a result of a number of airlines that ceased to operate flights to the country. Due to these restrictions, we assessed there could be risks to British nationals leaving the country if the remaining airlines decided to cease commercial flights to the country. We also took the decision as a preventative measure to avoid mass evacuation of British nationals, if the situation were to deteriorate rapidly. In regard to the health risks at the time, the FCO had considered the World Health Organisation’s advice, including the low risk of contracting Ebola to most travellers. At the time of the travel advice change in August 2014, we had advised against all but essential travel, except for those who were involved in the direct response to the Ebola outbreak. We regarded such personnel necessary to maintain the humanitarian effort and medical response to Ebola to prevent it spreading further. The UK had at the time created an Ebola specific medical centre in Sierra Leone to support the medical access for those medical staff deployed to assist in the Ebola response.

Q2 28 August 2014 to 07 November 2015.

Q3 The following guidance appeared on the GOV.UK website during this period:

“Definition of ‘essential travel’

Sometimes we say that only essential travel is advised. Whether travel is essential or not is your own decision. You may have urgent family or business commitments to attend to. Circumstances differ from person to person. Only you can make an informed decision based on the risk.”

Consular FOI/DPA Team
Consular Directorate

