



## BRIEFING PAPER

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# Coronavirus: UK support to the Overseas Territories

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## 1.1 British Overseas Territories (BOTs)

There are fourteen BOTs with an estimated total population of 260,000.

The Territories differ greatly in their level of economic and social development and their population size. The largest, the Cayman Islands, has a population of 66,000 and is a leading financial centre; while the Pitcairn Islands have an estimated population of only fifty and are reliant on UK aid. Four territories have no permanent population of BOT citizens.<sup>1</sup>

## 1.2 Responsibilities of the UK Government

Each Territory has its own constitution, government, and local laws. However, “as a matter of constitutional law” the UK Parliament has “unlimited power to legislate” for them.<sup>2</sup>

The UK is responsible for ensuring the defence and security, and good governance, of the Territories. As such, for those BOTs that are eligible for Overseas Development Assistance

### Estimated population of British Overseas Territories, 2020

	Population
Cayman Islands	66,000
Bermuda	62,000
Turks and Caicos Islands	39,000
Gibraltar	34,000
British Virgin Islands	30,000
Anguilla	15,000
Saint Helena, Ascension & Tristan da Cunha	6,000
Montserrat	5,000
Falkland Islands	3,000
<b>Estimated total</b>	<b>260,000</b>

#### Territories without population estimates

Akrotiri and Dhekelia (sovereign base Cyprus)  
British Antarctic Territory  
The British Indian Overseas Territory  
South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands  
Pitcairn, Henderson, Ducie and Oeno Islands

Source: United Nations, [World Population Prospects 2019: Total Population-both sexes](#), 2019.

<sup>1</sup> This includes the Sovereign Base Areas (SBA) in Cyprus. These constitute those parts of Cyprus which stayed under British jurisdiction and remained British sovereign territory when the 1960 Treaty of Establishment created the independent Republic of Cyprus. The SBA have a resident population of Cypriot nationals.

<sup>2</sup> Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO), [The Overseas Territories White Paper](#), Cm8374, June 2012

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(ODA), the “reasonable assistance needs” of the Territories are a first call on the UK’s international development budget.<sup>3</sup>

ODA eligible territories are Montserrat, Saint Helena (including Tristan da Cunha) and the Pitcairn Islands.

### 1.3 The pandemic in BOTs

The World Health Organisation (WHO) reports there have been 147 confirmed deaths from Covid-19 in the BOTs, 94 of which were in Gibraltar (to 1 June 2021).<sup>4</sup>

As of 1 June 2021, the [WHO reported](#) Covid-19 rates were relatively low in BOTs:

- Montserrat, the Pitcairn Islands and St Helena, Tristan da Cunha and Ascension had no confirmed cases.
- The Falkland Islands and the Cayman Islands were listed as having “sporadic cases.”
- Gibraltar, the Turks and Caicos Islands, Anguilla and the British Virgin Islands were listed as having “clusters of cases.”
- Bermuda was listed as experiencing “community transmission” (the same classification as the UK at time of writing).

### 1.4 Support for healthcare and vaccinations

#### Support for testing and healthcare systems

The Ministry of Defence, Foreign Office and Department for International Development (now merged to form the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO)) have been working with the BOTs to support their health response to the pandemic.

This has included supporting BOTs to source and recruit additional health personnel and Personal Protective Equipment.<sup>5</sup> The FCDO says that its support for setting up testing systems enabled seven BOTs to begin testing for Covid-19 for the first time.<sup>6</sup>

Public Health England have also provided BOTs with technical advice and guidance.<sup>7</sup> This included genome sequencing support in Gibraltar, Bermuda and the Cayman Islands.<sup>8</sup>

In the Falklands, the Ministry of Defence deployed a military medical team in 2020 and two Intensive Treatment Units.<sup>9</sup>

Defence personnel also helped build Gibraltar’s Nightingale hospital and provided other logistical and planning support. 175 military personnel were committed by June 2020.<sup>10</sup>

#### Provision of Vaccines

The FCDO are responsible for arranging and funding vaccines to the Territories, with the intention of delivering enough doses to offer sufficient vaccines to every adult in the BOTs.

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<sup>3</sup> [Ibid](#), p13

<sup>4</sup> WHO, [Coronavirus dashboard: Situation by country, territory and area](#), accessed 1 June 2021

<sup>5</sup> PQ 83907 [[BOTs: Coronavirus](#)], 9 September 2020; PQ HL 13108 [[BOTs and Crown Dependencies: Coronavirus](#)], 22 February 2021; FCO, [UK supports overseas territories in coronavirus \(COVID-19\) battle](#), 10 June 2020

<sup>6</sup> PQ HL13109 [[BOTs and Crown Dependencies: Coronavirus](#)], 22 February 2021

<sup>7</sup> PQ HL13109 [[BOTs and Crown Dependencies: Coronavirus](#)], 8 February 2021

<sup>8</sup> PQ 139003 [[Coronavirus Research](#)], 28 January 2021

<sup>9</sup> HC Deb, [6 July 2020](#), c649; Ministry of Defence, [COVID support force: The MOD’s contribution to the coronavirus response](#), updated 12 June 2020

<sup>10</sup> PQ 46536 [[BOTs: Coronavirus](#)], 13 May 2020; Ministry of Defence, [COVID support force: The MOD’s contribution to the coronavirus response](#), updated 12 June 2020

Deliveries began on 5 January 2021. The UK Government expects the rollout to be completed in a similar timescale to that in the UK.<sup>11</sup>

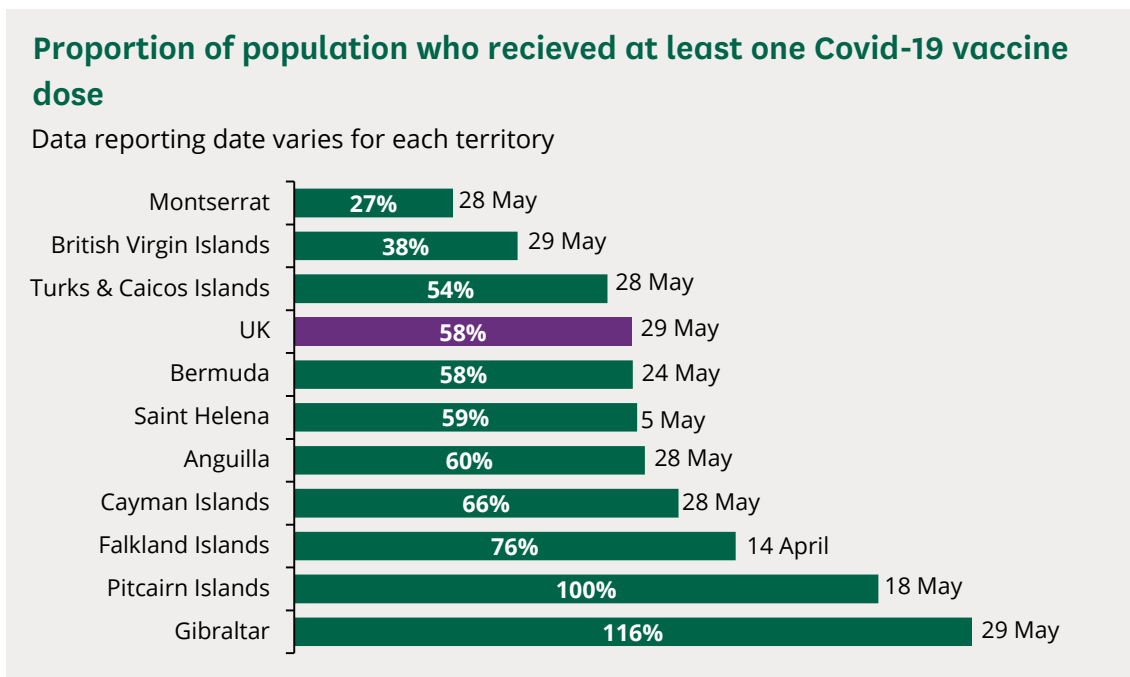
As of 10 March, the UK had delivered vaccines to all inhabited BOTs with airports and was making arrangements to deliver vaccines to Tristan da Cunha and the Pitcairn Islands.<sup>12</sup>

While the UK Government is responsible for the procurement and delivery of the vaccines, the individual governments of the BOTs are responsible for the coordination of their own vaccine programmes. This includes determining the priority groups for vaccination. Public Health England has been providing advice on vaccine deployment.<sup>13</sup>

## Vaccine rollout

The below chart shows the proportion of the total population that received at least one vaccine dose in the BOTs for which data is available. This may not equal the share that have received two doses. Eight BOTs have reported that at least 50 percent of their populations have received at least one vaccine dose.

The recorded number of first doses in Gibraltar has exceeded its projected population.<sup>14</sup> On 17 March, the UK Government said that “Gibraltar became the first nation in the world to complete its entire adult vaccination programme.”<sup>15</sup>



Notes: Data reporting date varies from mid-March to early April. Any second doses are not counted in this metric. Population estimates taken from [2019 UN population estimates](#).

Source: Our World in Data/Oxford University, [Covid-19 data explorer: Share of people who received at least one dose of Covid-19 vaccination](#), accessed 1 June 2021

## 1.5 Security assistance

The UK Government says it has provided Security Assistance Teams to a “small number” of BOTs. Support in 2020 also included bringing forward the deployment of RFA Angus in

<sup>11</sup> PQ 169986 [[BOTs: Coronavirus](#)], 23 March 2021

<sup>12</sup> PQ HL13675 [[BOTs and Crown Dependencies: Coronavirus](#)], 10 March 2021

<sup>13</sup> PQ HL13109 [[BOTs and Crown Dependencies: Coronavirus](#)], 22 February 2021

<sup>14</sup> Calculations are based on an [estimated population for 2020 from the UN](#). This projects that Gibraltar’s population was 33,691 in 2020. As of 31 May 2021, 39,080 [first doses had been administered](#).

<sup>15</sup> HC Deb, [17 March 2021](#), c518

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the Caribbean to support BOTs during hurricane season, the pandemic and in their counter-narcotics operations.<sup>16</sup> HMS Medway was also in the region to provide support.<sup>17</sup>

In the Turks and Caicos Islands, the FCDO provided additional support to counter illegal migration from Haiti during the pandemic through a security assistance team of twenty-nine military personnel and police liaison officers.<sup>18</sup>

A security assistance team was also deployed to the Cayman Islands to assist planning on security, logistics, the pandemic and hurricane responses.<sup>19</sup>

### 1.6 Repatriation

The UK Government has supported territories to arrange flights to several BOTs, including those in the South Atlantic and Caribbean, to fly BOT residents back and to repatriate British citizens and other nationalities from BOTs.<sup>20</sup>

The UK and Saint Helena Governments have also arranged chartered flights to allow those from Saint Helena to travel to the UK for medical treatment during the pandemic.<sup>21</sup>

### 1.7 Funding support

While the UK Government has said that it expects BOTs to make use of their own financial resources first before applying to the UK, it has said that, subject to “good governance,” it will consider requests for additional economic support on a case by case basis.<sup>22</sup>

#### Direct financial support and loan guarantees

Emergency budgetary support in 2020 was provided to Monserrat, Saint Helena and Anguilla to support essential public services and their responses to the pandemic.<sup>23</sup>

The UK Government has also agreed a loan guarantee for a lending facility of up to £500 million to Gibraltar. This is to allow its Government to borrow at preferential rates to fund its Covid-19 support measures.<sup>24</sup>

#### UK Budget commitments

In order to meet the healthcare, access and security needs of the BOTs, the Foreign Office confirmed in July 2020 that £15 million from the 2020/21 Conflict, Security and Stability Fund (CSSF) and £5 million from 2020/21 International Programme funds had been reallocated to Covid-19 support initiatives.

The then Department for International Development also provided an initial £10 million to mitigate immediate non-health impacts in the three BOTs that are [eligible for Overseas Development Assistance](#): Montserrat, Saint Helena (including Tristan da Cunha) and the Pitcairn Islands. It also earmarked a further £20 million to address the medium-term impacts of the coronavirus pandemic on these territories.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> PQ 83907 [[BOTs: Coronavirus](#)], 9 September 2020; Royal Navy, [RFA Angus returns to the UK \[...\]](#), 18 December 2020

<sup>17</sup> HC Deb, [21 September 2020](#), c615

<sup>18</sup> HC Deb, [30 June 2020](#), c146

<sup>19</sup> PQ HL6373 [[BOTs: Coronavirus](#)], 10 July 2020

<sup>20</sup> PQ 83907 [[BOTs: Coronavirus](#)], 9 September 2020; PQHL6373 [[BOTs: Coronavirus](#)], 10 July 2020

<sup>21</sup> HL Deb, [4 February 2021](#), c 2401

<sup>22</sup> PQ 83907 [[BOTs: Coronavirus](#)], 9 September 2020

<sup>23</sup> PQ HL8985 [[BOTs: Coronavirus](#)], 23 October 2020

<sup>24</sup> PQ 153323 [[Gibraltar: Coronavirus](#)], 22 February 2021; HCWS588, [Gibraltar Covid response](#), 19 November 2020

<sup>25</sup> PQ HL6373 [[BOTs: Coronavirus](#)], 10 July 2020

## 1.8 Future support

The UK Government has not made any specific statements in relation to planning for further waves of the pandemic, if BOTs are adversely affected. In September 2020, the Government said support would be available to manage the medium- and long- term impacts of the pandemic:

The OTs are facing an unprecedented challenge, and in addition to the urgent assistance already delivered, we will support the territories as they deal with the medium and longer-term economic, public health and other impacts of the pandemic.<sup>26</sup>

The Government has said it would provide additional security and military support “as needed and if requested.”<sup>27</sup>

The [UK-Overseas Territories Joint Ministerial Council 2020: Communiqué](#) in November 2020 also said that the UK Government would continue to support the BOTs in the supply of vaccines and reaffirmed “its continued support to the Territories during the pandemic.”<sup>28</sup>

Financial support, the communiqué said, would be considered on a “case by case basis.”<sup>29</sup>

## 1.9 Testing requirements and travel corridors

Due to the increasing number of Covid-19 cases around the world, and the emergence of new variants of the virus, the UK Government has introduced changes to the requirements for international travel.

All arrivals into the UK, including from the BOTs, must provide proof of a negative Covid-19 test, taken within 72 hours prior to travel. Exempt territories include Ascension Islands, Falkland Islands and Saint Helena.<sup>30</sup> In January 2021, the UK Government said this was due to the lack of testing infrastructure in these territories.<sup>31</sup>

From May 2021, states and territories are [rated as either red, amber or green](#) for Covid-19. Individuals must follow [separate rules](#), depending from where they have arrived.<sup>32</sup>

Under the [Test to Release](#) scheme an individual may be eligible to choose to end their self-isolation early by paying for a private Covid-19 test after five days (assuming a negative result is achieved).

The Department for Transport [maintains an updated list](#) of ratings. As of 1 June 2021, territories rated as “green” include the Falkland Islands, Gibraltar, South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands and St Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha.

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<sup>26</sup> PQ 83907 [[BOTs: Coronavirus](#)], 9 September 2020

<sup>27</sup> PQ 83907 [[BOTs: Coronavirus](#)], 9 September 2020

<sup>28</sup> FCDO, [UK-Overseas Territories Joint Ministerial Council 2020: Communiqué](#), 27 November 2020, section 2.1

<sup>29</sup> [Ibid](#), section 3.2

<sup>30</sup> Department for Transport (DfT), [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) testing before you travel to England](#), updated 19 February 2021

<sup>31</sup> HLWS692, [International travel update](#), 12 January 2021

<sup>32</sup> DfT, [Red, amber and green list rules for entering England](#), 17 May 2021

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