

'Very real risk' that foreign holiday plans could be disrupted by Covid-19 again



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If you book a holiday, make it a package holiday – but avoid booking for now.

That is the advice given by a consumer body amid ongoing confusion and uncertainty over foreign travel as the July 19 date for reopening looms.

With Tánaiste Leo Varadkar saying young people should be able to travel abroad despite not being vaccinated, in contrast to Chief Medical Officer Dr Tony Holohan saying they should not, the public messaging has become even more blurred as the date approaches.

Backing Dr Holohan's advice, World Health Organisation (WHO)'s special envoy on Covid-19, David Nabarro, told RTÉ's *Today with Claire Byrne* that people should be "quite careful about travel".

Mr Varadkar said the Government considered it unfair to restrict travel to unvaccinated people.

European Consumer Centre (ECC) Ireland, which is part of a bloc-wide network providing advice to the public, said it was advising against booking as of now, but if people did so, they should protect themselves as best as they could beforehand.



"The uncertainty of whether it is safe to book or safe to go continues well into 2021. With the arrival of vaccines though, more and more people are confident they can book and actually travel for a sun holiday in late summer, autumn and winter this year, with all the caveats that this entails.

"We're not advising that you should book anything right now, but, if you do, here is what to look for: flexible booking terms, package holiday contracts and trusted travel agents with a good record – these are key to enjoying your holiday, as well as peace of mind if anything goes wrong before, during or after your holiday," ECC Ireland said in its latest advice.

It advised would-be travellers not to be seduced by heavily discounted deals for late summer or the end of the year.

Even though we are all optimistic that we will be vaccinated in time to make our holiday, a very real risk remains that your plans could be disrupted due to Covid-19 again, just like in 2020.

"Remember that thousands of holidaymakers are still struggling to obtain their overdue refunds from tour operators and airlines for trips cancelled during 2020," it said.

It is absolutely vital to know what outward non-essential travel is allowed, and if there are any specific conditions attached, according to the Dublin-based body.

"Many tourists were not entitled to refunds last year after cancelling their holidays even though the Irish Government's guidance at the time said people shouldn't/can't travel.

"Secondly, if you travel for non-essential reasons out of your country of residence and/or to a destination that is not allowing inward travel/tourism at all or only under strict conditions, you may not be able to change or get a refund for your travel bookings.

"Essentially, make sure that there are no restrictions either in/from Ireland and at destination because if travel operators (airlines, for instance) are operating their services as normal, but you decide not to travel or cancel the reservations/tickets, you will not be entitled to a refund."