

# Omicron scare- India makes post-arrival Covid test mandatory

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NEW DELHI : With rising concerns over the new mutant coronavirus strain Omicron, the Centre on Monday made it mandatory for all passengers coming to India from "countries at-risk" to undergo covid-19 tests post-arrival at airports from 1 December.

Covid-19 testing will be done irrespective of the vaccination status. The testing on arrival will be in addition to pre-departure covid-19 testing undertaken 72 hours before the departure. In continuation of the risk-based approach for management of covid-19 pandemic, the Union Ministry of Health had issued revised 'Guidelines for International arrivals' on Sunday.

All passengers arriving from Europe, South Africa, Brazil, Bangladesh, Botswana, China, Mauritius, New Zealand, Zimbabwe, Singapore, Hong Kong and Israel will be tested at the airport using the RT-PCR method, the union health ministry said.

The updated guidelines require passengers found positive in these tests to be isolated and treated as per the clinical management protocol besides their samples also taken for whole-genome sequencing. Passengers found negative can depart but have to undergo home isolation for seven days, followed by repeat testing on the eighth day of arrival in India, followed by seven days of self-monitoring, the latest guidelines stated.

"Further, in view of reports of increasing number of countries reporting the Omicron variant, the present Guidelines also mandate that 5% of the travelers coming from countries which are not in the 'at risk category' will also be tested on random basis at the airports for covid-19," the union health ministry said.

Samples of all individuals testing positive for Covid-19, either at airports under home isolation or during random sampling, will also be sent for whole genomic sequencing at identified INSACOG network laboratories to determine the presence of SARS-CoV-2 variants (including Omicron).

The B.1.1.529 variant (Omicron) was first reported to World Health Organization (WHO) from South Africa on 24 November 2021 and the WHO's Technical Advisory Group on SARS-CoV-2 Virus Evolution (TAG-VE) on 26 November classified it as a 'variant of concern' in view of large number of mutations noted in it, some of which may make this mutation more transmissible and have immune escape behaviour.

"The emerging evidence on the issue is being monitored by Union Ministry of Health. States have also been advised for rigorous surveillance of international passengers, enhanced testing, monitoring the hotspots of covid-19, ensuring augmentation of health infrastructure, including undertaking samples for whole genome sequencing," the health ministry said.