

## **Delhi to conduct Covid test for all travellers from 'high-risk' countries amid Omicron scare**

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NEW DELHI : Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) on Monday decided to conduct RT-PCR testing for all people arriving from 'high-risk' countries, genome sequencing of the positive cases and mandatory isolation, in accordance to the Centre's guidelines amid concerns over the coronavirus variant 'Omicron' detected in some nations.

"It was decided to conduct 100 per cent RT-PCR testing of passengers from high-risk countries, followed by genome sequencing of the positive cases and mandatory isolation/quarantine as per the guidelines laid down by the Government of India," an official said.

Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia, in a press briefing, said the new 'Omicron' variant was discussed by experts in the meeting and it was stressed that there should be no relaxation in preparation to deal with Covid infections and in monitoring the situation.

Sisodia said there was an "uncertainty" over the spread and impact of the new coronavirus variant in the world but the Union government has stressed that there would be no negligence in preparations and the situation will be monitored.

He said the Delhi government is ready to deal with the situation in case Covid cases rise.

"The Delhi government has been making preparations going by the experience of the second wave of Covid in April-June. We have kept availability of hospital beds on alert mode and those reserved for dengue will be taken back for Covid."

At the DDMA meeting, the chief secretary of Delhi was told to ensure continued contact and coordination between the Civil Aviation Ministry and other departments and ministries concerned to ensure concurrent evaluation and speedy decisions, officials said.

According to officials, the DDMA meeting, chaired by Lt Governor Anil Bajjal, discussed in detail the current Covid situation and decided to renew as well as strictly adhere to the test, track, treat and isolation strategy along with strict enforcement of Covid-appropriate behaviour and enhanced vaccination.

The Health Department was directed to ensure adequate availability of beds, medicines and oxygen to tackle any emergent situation. It was also advised to ramp up the vaccination drive for the remaining citizens by all possible means, they said.

Amid the mounting concerns over the potentially more contagious coronavirus variant "Omicron" spreading to many countries, the Centre on Sunday introduced stricter guidelines for people travelling from or transiting through 'at-risk' countries and issued a slew of directions to the states for ramping up testing-surveillance measures and health facilities.

No cases of the variant, which was first reported to the World Health Organisation (WHO) from South Africa on November 24, have been recorded in India so far.

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The Centre has asked all states and Union Territories to focus on intensive containment, active surveillance, enhanced testing, monitoring of hotspots, increased coverage of vaccination and augmentation of health infrastructure.

The countries designated as 'at-risk' (updated as of November 26, 2021) include European countries, the UK, South Africa, Brazil, Bangladesh, Botswana, China, Mauritius, New Zealand, Zimbabwe, Singapore, Hong Kong and Israel.