

Maharashtra- Covid test, quarantine must for those coming from at-risk countries

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In view of the emergence of the new Omicron variant of coronavirus, the Maharashtra government will conduct Covid-19 (RT-PCR) tests and mandatory quarantine for travellers coming from countries affected by the new strain.

"Our ICU beds, oxygen beds and manpower have been increased and we're ready to go all-in, in case of sudden spurt," Mumbai Mayor Kishori Pednekar was quoted as saying today.

Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray has also expressed concern over tracking those international passengers who don't land directly in Mumbai but then travel to the state using other means. He said it will be easier to stop the spread of coronavirus infection if information about such travellers is shared.

The issue of the new variant was also discussed in the Cabinet meeting here. "The meeting also discussed the issue of how to check the passengers arriving from abroad without landing directly at Mumbai or other airports in Maharashtra and then travelling at other places in the country by domestic airlines, road or rail. The question is how to test such people and the prime minister should be apprised of this," a statement quoting CM Thackeray said.

"Information of the passengers coming from abroad should be received regularly so that they can be monitored and the infection can be prevented in time," the statement said.

No confirmed case of the Omicron variant is detected so far in Maharashtra. Countries that are currently recording a spike in the cases are witnessing the biggest wave.

France, Germany, the Netherlands and Austria are reporting more than 30,000 people (cases), the CM noted. Currently, masks are most needed for prevention, he stressed.

The Centre has made it mandatory for passengers from 12 countries to take the RT-PCR test 72 hours before boarding a flight. RT-PCR test is made mandatory once they land here, the CM said. South African scientists identified a new version of the coronavirus that they say is behind a recent spike in COVID-19 infections in Gauteng, the most populous province in that country.

It's unclear where the new variant first emerged, but scientists in South Africa alerted the World Health Organisation in recent days, and it has now been seen in travellers arriving in several countries, from Australia to Israel to the Netherlands.

On Friday, the WHO designated it as a variant of concern, naming it Omicron after a letter in the Greek alphabet. The new variant has forced several countries to impose fresh travel restrictions.

With agency inputs