

## **Visiting Kerala? People from risk countries must quarantine for 14 days amid Omicron scare**

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THIRUVANANTHAPURAM: Veena George, the Health Minister in Kerala, on Monday, said that travellers from the new COVID-19 variant 'Omicron' risk countries will have to mandatorily undergo for fourteen days quarantine, in accordance with the guidelines stipulated by Centre.

"We have deployed more health workers at four international airports. Genomic surveillance is continuously underway," George said.

The health minister said, "we will have a discussion further on the present situation and will take every possible measure."

Speaking to media, the health minister said the Centre has issued the guideline and said certain countries are at high risk.

As per the guidelines, the travellers from those particular countries affected with the new variant will take their RT-PCR and stay in quarantine for fourteen days.

Asked about the COVID-19 booster dose, the minister said "We have also asked the Centre for booster doses and vaccinations for children below eighteen years of age, as it is very essential, but we are awaiting their decision."

Following the emergence of the new COVID variant of concern 'Omicron', the Centre on Sunday advised States/UTs and nodal agencies to keep a strict vigil at airports and ports and focus on enhancing genomic surveillance of incoming passengers from "at-risk" countries.

According to the Ministry of Home Affairs, genomic surveillance for variants is to be further strengthened and intensified. "Airport Health Officials (APHOs) and Port Health Officials (PHOs) will be sensitized for strict supervision of testing protocol at airports and ports."

The strengthening and intensification of genomic surveillance for variants through the INSACOG network was agreed upon with a focus on sampling and whole-genome sequencing of international passengers especially from those countries where Omicron variant has been detected.

India has categorized 16 countries including some in Europe in "at-risk" category.

The countries include the UK, France, Germany, Netherlands, Finland, South Africa, Brazil, Bangladesh, Botswana, China, Mauritius, New Zealand, Zimbabwe, Singapore, Hong Kong and Israel.