

Tamil Nadu urges Govt to issue directions to test int'l passengers as Omicron cases soar

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- **Dr T S Selvavinayagam requested that international passengers should undergo mandatory post-arrival testing of Covid-19 as against the current practice of testing only those passengers who arrive from 'at risk' countries.**

CHENNAI : After a person who had travelled from a 'non-risk country' tested positive in for the New Coronavirus variant Omicron in Tamil Nadu, the state urged the Centre to issue further guidelines to test international passengers upon arrival.

The Director of Public Health and Preventive Medicine, Dr T S Selvavinayagam asked the state to make testing of Covid-19 mandatory for all international passengers upon arrival, instead of testing only those passengers who arrive from 'at risk' countries.

Director of Public Health and Preventive Medicine, Dr T S Selvavinayagam said this in his letter to the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare Secretary Rajesh Bhushan.

According to him, 28 passengers, who arrived from various overseas destinations till Friday in Tamil Nadu, were detected with 's' gene drop indicating infection of Omicron variant of coronavirus.

Of them, only four were from 'high risk' countries while the remaining from 'non-risk countries'

Selvavinayagam pointed out that as per the current guidelines issued by the Centre, only 11 countries along with the European countries including the United Kingdom were declared as 'high risk' and additional surveillance protocol followed for passengers from these countries were being adhered to, but no additional surveillance protocol was being followed for passengers arriving from 'not at risk countries'.

"All international passengers arriving in Tamil Nadu should undergo mandatory post-arrival testing for Covid-19. If found positive, they will be treated as per existing protocol. They should be allowed to leave the airport to take a transit flight only if they are found negative", he said in his letter, which was shared with the media on Saturday. "Only two per cent of passengers from non-risk countries are being randomly tested with RT-PCR and permitted to leave even before the results are declared, thereby increasing chances of missing passengers from non-risk countries infected with Omicron variant of being detected and leading to rapid transmission in the community", he said.

Selvavinayagam said passengers who have tested 'negative' should be advised to undergo home quarantine for seven days and again should take up a re-test on the eighth day of arrival in Tamil Nadu. "If found (Covid-19) positive, they will be treated as per existing protocol. If found negative, they may be advised to self-monitor their health for further period of seven days", he said.

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Selvavinayagam said the additional surveillance for international travellers has been followed in Tamil Nadu from December 1 in all the four international airports in the state--Coimbatore, Madurai, Tiruchirappalli and Chennai.