

# NEWS BRIEF

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## Coronavirus Omicron Variant Detected in Canada

The government of Ontario announced on Nov. 29 that two individuals in Ottawa tested positive for the coronavirus Omicron variant with recent travel from Nigeria.

Scientists in South Africa detected a variant with a high number of mutations that could make it more transmissible and adept at evading the body's immune defences. South Africa first reported the variant to the World Health Organization (WHO) on Nov. 24, and the first known confirmed infection was from a specimen collected Nov. 9. The WHO has labelled it as "a variant of concern" and gave it the name Omicron. The variant has also been found in various other countries, including Australia, Israel, Botswana and Britain.

In response to concerns about the Omicron variant, the government of Canada implemented enhanced border measures for all travellers who have been in the Southern Africa region—including South Africa, Eswatini, Lesotho, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Mozambique and Namibia—within the last 14 days before arriving in Canada, until Jan. 31, 2022.

Additional precautionary measures include:

- Foreign nationals who have travelled in any of the above countries in the previous 14 days will not be permitted entry into Canada.
- Canadian citizens, permanent residents and people with status under the Indian Act who have been in these countries in the previous 14 days will be subject to enhanced testing, screening and quarantine measures,

regardless of their vaccination status or having had a previous history of testing positive for COVID-19.

- These individuals will be required to obtain, within 72 hours of departure, a valid negative COVID-19 molecular test in a third country before continuing their journey to Canada.
- These individuals will be subject to immediate arrival testing upon arrival to Canada, regardless of their vaccination status or having a previous history of testing positive for COVID-19.
- All travellers will also be required to complete a test on day eight of arrival and quarantine for 14 days.
- All travellers will be referred to Public Health Agency of Canada officials to ensure they have a suitable quarantine plan.
- Those travelling by air will be required to stay in a designated quarantine facility while awaiting their arrival test result. They will not be permitted onward travel until their quarantine plan has been approved and they have received a negative arrival test result.



# NEWS BRIEF



- Those arriving by land may be allowed to proceed directly to their suitable isolation location. If they do not have a suitable plan—where they will have no contact with anyone they haven't travelled with—or do not have private transportation to their place of quarantine, they will be directed to stay at a designated quarantine facility.

Early data suggests that the Omicron variant may be more transmissible, but the evidence is limited at this time. There is ongoing international data-gathering to determine the impact of this variant on the severity of illness and vaccine effectiveness.

Canada continues to maintain pre-entry molecular tests for vaccinated and unvaccinated international travellers arriving from any country to reduce the risk of importation of COVID-19 and its variants.

The government of Canada also reminds Canadians that vaccination, in combination with public health and individual measures, is just as important as ever to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and its variants.

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*The World Health Organization warned that global risks posed by the new Omicron variant of the coronavirus were “very high,” despite significant questions about the variant itself.*

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More information about COVID-19 and its variants can be found [here](#).