



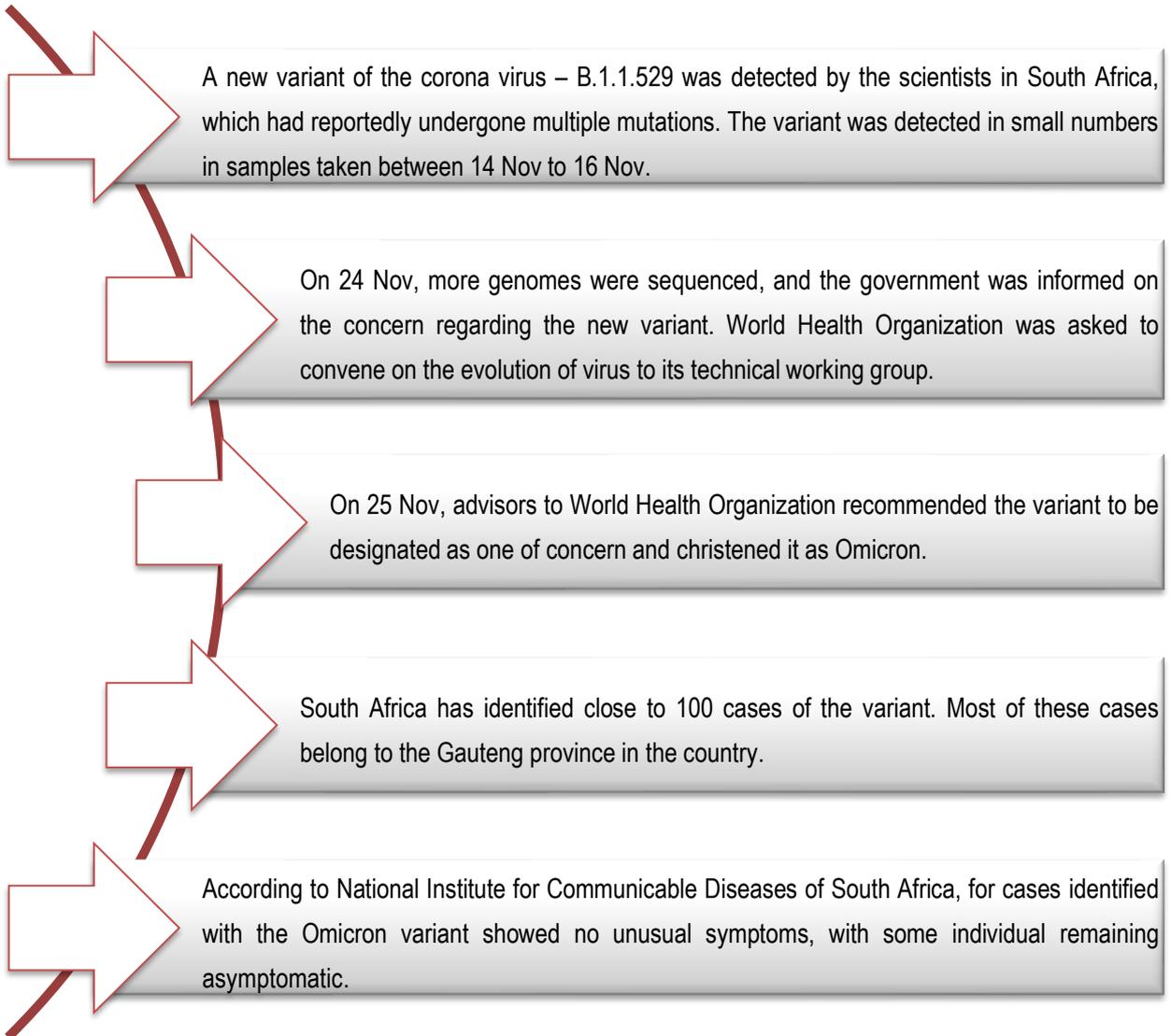
# INSIGHTS

## Omicron COVID-19 Variant

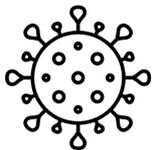
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29 Nov 2021

## I. BACKGROUND



## II. WHY IS IT CONCERNING?



Viruses undergo mutations over a period of time. Though many a times the mutations does not have much impact to the property of the virus, certain times, it may have larger impact, which can transform the virus to become more contagious and infect more severely.



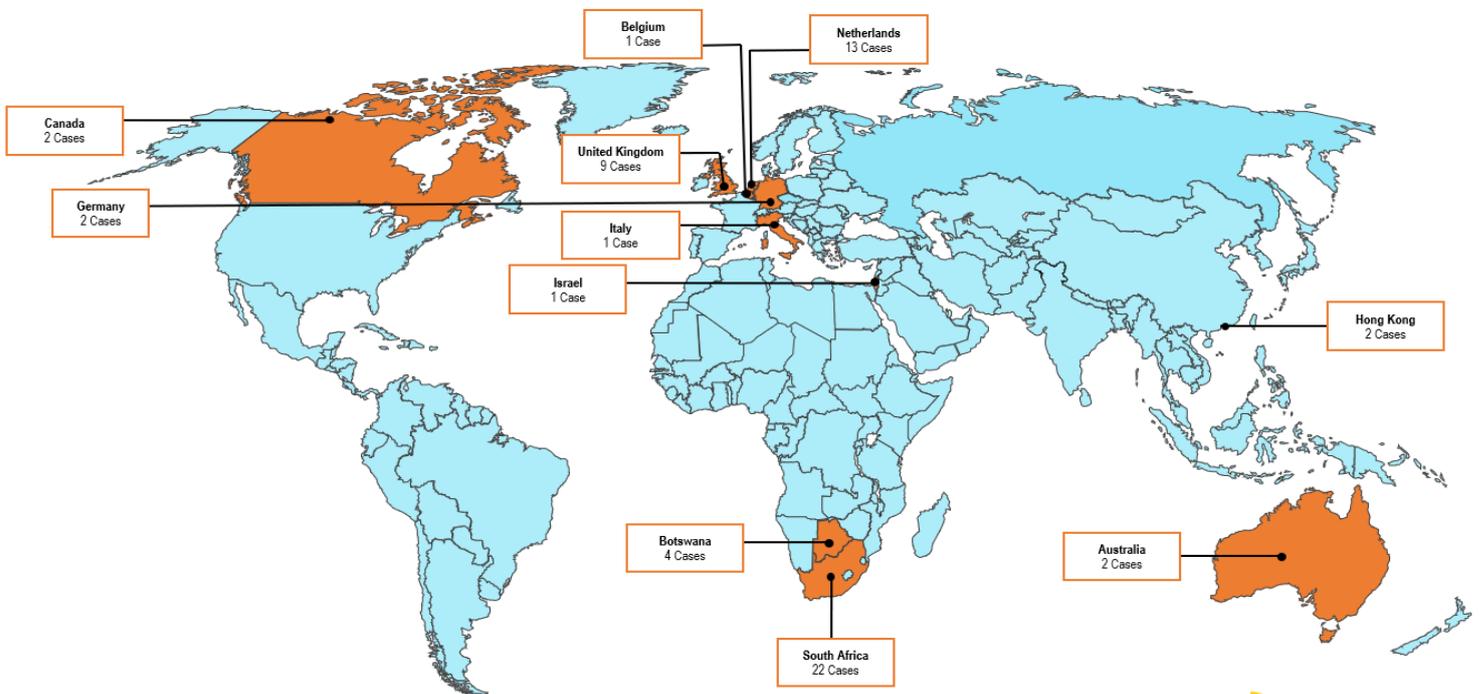
**Concern Over Effectiveness of WHO Approved Vaccines**

The growing concern over the new variant is majorly due to the number mutations it has undergone. The spike protein of the virus which is used to get into the human cells have reportedly undergone 32 mutations (almost double of that of the Delta variant), making it quite different from the initial variant of the virus. It is to be noted that the current vaccines approved by the World Health Organization against the COVID-19 is designed based on the initial variants of the virus. The latest discovered variant may have the potential to evade the effectiveness of the vaccines, making it more contagious and infectious.

However, according to experts, since the variant is most complex one identified till date with few mutations that has not been reported before, more tests will be required in order to confirm whether it is more transmissible, infectious, or can surpass vaccines. This process is expected to take few weeks' time.

**III. CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS**

Countries Confirmed With COVID-19 Omicron Variant Presence As of 29 Nov



Apart from these countries, several other countries have reported on the suspected cases of Omicron variant, however, confirmation on the same will be subject to the result after conducting genome sequencing of the virus.

**Countries Imposing Travel Restrictions**

- With the identification of the new variant and the fear over it evading the vaccines have led countries to take sudden measures to implement travel restrictions, especially on the southern African countries.
- The list of countries imposing travel restriction on countries identified with Omicron variant are given below:

**APAC**

Country Name	Countries On Which Restrictions Are Imposed	Restrictions
<b>Australia</b>	South Africa, Namibia, Lesotho, Botswana, Eswatini, Seychelles, Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Non-Australian citizens or their dependents and those people who have visited the countries identified with Omicron variant presence 14 days prior to their travel to Australia will be barred entry.</li> <li>• Arriving Australian citizens and residents, as well as their dependents, will be placed under immediate supervised quarantine for a period of 14 days, subject to the jurisdictional requirements of the relevant states or territories.</li> <li>• Those people already arrived in Australia and has spent the previous 14 days in any of the nine African countries must immediately isolate themselves, be tested for COVID-19, and adhere to jurisdictional quarantine requirements</li> </ul>
<b>Japan</b>	South Africa, Eswatini, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Botswana, Mozambique, Malawi, Zambia, and Lesotho	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Travelers from the listed countries, including Japanese citizens, are required to quarantine at designated facilities for 10 day.</li> <li>• The quarantined individuals will be required to take 4 tests during the period.</li> <li>• All new foreign arrivals to Japan will be barred entry from 30 Nov.</li> </ul>
<b>Singapore</b>	South Africa, Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All long-term pass holders, and short-term visitors with travel history within the last 14 days to the mentioned</li> </ul>



	Mozambique, Lesotho and Eswatini	<p>African countries will not be allowed to enter Singapore or transit.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Citizens and permanent residents of Singapore who return from these countries will be required to serve a 10-day stay-home notice at a designated facility.</li> </ul>
<b>Malaysia</b>	South Africa, Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Lesotho and Eswatini	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Non-citizens and people without permanent residency who have visited the seven countries recently will be denied entry</li> <li>• Citizens and permanent residents of Malaysia will be allowed to return but will be subjected to 14 days of quarantine at designated centres, regardless of the vaccination status of the passenger</li> </ul>
<b>Philippines</b>	South Africa, Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia, Zimbabwe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Government has temporarily suspended flights from seven African countries until 15 Dec</li> <li>• The travellers coming from or having been to these countries within the last fourteen days, will not be allowed entry into the country.</li> <li>• The Bureau of Quarantine and local government units will trace the travellers from the countries, who have arrived in the country 7-days prior to the suspension order.</li> <li>• Philippines temporarily suspended the decision of reopening on 01 Dec to allow fully vaccinated tourists entry due to the outbreak of new Omicron variant.</li> </ul>
<b>Taiwan</b>	Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Namibia, South Africa, and Zimbabwe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All permitted arrivals with travel history, including transits, in the affected countries in the previous 14 days must undergo a two-week quarantine in specific group facilities and PCR tests at the beginning and end of their quarantine periods.</li> <li>• Individuals must also follow self-monitoring protocols for seven days after their quarantine.</li> </ul>
<b>Thailand</b>	Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effective 01 Dec, travel from the mentioned countries will be prohibited</li> <li>• Thailand will not allow travellers from these countries to register to travel to Thailand starting on 27 Nov</li> <li>• On 29 Nov, Thailand announced 14 days of quarantine and repeated COVID-19 test for individuals arriving</li> </ul>



		<p>from African countries that are not subjected to ban for new Omicron variant.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People arriving from the unbanned African countries will not be entering under sandbox quarantine programme and Test and Go programme.</li> </ul>
<b>New Zealand</b>	Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, and Zimbabwe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Only citizens and their partners, parents, dependents can enter from these mentioned countries.</li> <li>• All arrivals must undergo 14 days of managed isolation and COVID-19 testing.</li> </ul>
<b>Macau</b>	Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, and Zimbabwe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Civilian aircraft are prohibited from carrying passengers with travel history in the last 21 days to the mentioned countries.</li> </ul>
<b>Mongolia</b>	Countries confirmed with Omicron variant presence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 10-day isolation for returning Mongolian citizens who have travelled through one of the countries that have detected the new Omicron variant.</li> <li>• Mongolia banned the entry of foreign nationals arriving from countries that have cases of the new COVID-19 variant as well as those transiting through the countries</li> </ul>

## EUROPE

Country Name	Countries On Which Restrictions Are Imposed	Restrictions
<b>European Union</b>	Southern African Countries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Member states of the European Union was proposed to implement travel suspension from all countries in Southern Africa to prevent the spread to Europe.</li> </ul>
<b>France</b>	Southern Africa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All flights from southern Africa were suspended for 48 hours on 26 Nov.</li> </ul>
<b>United Kingdom</b>	South Africa, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Lesotho and Eswatini	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All flights from the mentioned countries have been suspended.</li> </ul>



		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Non-UK and Irish residents will be banned from entering England if they have been in any of the six countries in the past 10 days.</li> <li>• Any British or Irish resident arriving from the countries after 0400hrs on 28 Nov will have to quarantine in a hotel, with those returning before that being asked to isolate at home.</li> <li>• Those who have returned in the last 10 days are being asked to take a PCR test by the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA).</li> <li>• All travellers arriving in UK from 30 Nov must take a RT-PCR COVID-19 test on or before the second day of their stay and isolate until they receive a negative result.</li> </ul>
<b>Spain</b>	South Africa and Botswana	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flights from the countries will be restricted beginning 30 Nov.</li> <li>• A resolution will be soon adopted requiring passengers from high-risk countries to provide either an antigen test or a PCR in addition to vaccination certificate as proof.</li> </ul>
<b>Switzerland</b>	South Africa, Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Hong Kong, Israel, and Belgium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All direct flights from southern Africa are banned for an indefinite period.</li> <li>• People entering the country from Southern Africa, Hong Kong, Israel, and Belgium, a negative COVID-10 test is to be submitted and will have to undergo quarantine for 10 days.</li> </ul>
<b>Denmark</b>	South Africa, Lesotho, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Namibia, and Eswatini	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advisory has been issued against travel to the mentioned countries.</li> <li>• Travellers from these mentioned countries will be permitted only for emergency purposes. The traveler will have to get tested and then undergo 10-day isolation period.</li> <li>• People who have in the past 10 days visited any of the mentioned countries have been urged to get tested.</li> </ul>
<b>Scotland</b>	South Africa, Lesotho, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Namibia, and Eswatini	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arrivals from the mentioned countries or those who have visited the countries in the past 10 days will be required to self-isolate at Managed Quarantine accommodation and take PCR tests on day 2 and day 8. This rule applies regardless of the person's vaccination status.</li> </ul>



## AMERICAS

Country Name	Countries On Which Restrictions Are Imposed	Restrictions
<b>United States of America</b>	South Africa, Lesotho, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Namibia, Malawi, and Eswatini	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Air travel restriction in place for the mentioned countries.</li> <li>• Non-US citizens who have visited any of the mentioned countries within 14 days prior will be denied entry to USA</li> </ul>
<b>Canada</b>	South Africa, Lesotho, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Namibia, and Eswatini	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Entry will be denied to all foreign national who have visited any of the mentioned countries within 14 days prior.</li> <li>• Citizens and permanent residents will be allowed entry, but with conditions. They will be required to reach the country indirectly by transiting through another country, where they will be required to undergo molecular COVID-19 testing.</li> </ul>
<b>Argentina</b>	Africa continent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Any person who comes from or has been to Africa continent or in the affected areas defined by the national health authority in the last 14 days prior to entering Argentina must quarantine and do a PCR test on the tenth day after taking a sample from the PCR test at the source, the result of which must be negative, as a condition of completion of the mandatory isolation of 14 days.</li> <li>• People will be required to have completed the vaccination schedule at least 14 days before entering the country, have a negative PCR test performed in the country of origin within 72 hours before departure.</li> <li>• An antigen test will be conducted upon arrival in Argentina.</li> <li>• In the case of non-residents, the Government request that they present COVID-19 health insurance, with coverage of hospitalization services, isolation and/or medical transfers, for those who result in positive cases, suspects.</li> </ul>



<p><b>Trinidad and Tobago</b></p>	<p>Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All persons who are not citizens or permanent residents of Trinidad and Tobago and have visited the 8 countries within a 14-day time period of their arrival in Trinidad and Tobago will not be allowed entry.</li> <li>• Trinidad and Tobago citizens and permanent residents who have visited the 8 countries within a 14-day time period of their arrival, will be allowed entry, but will require a mandatory state-supervised quarantine of no less than 14 days.</li> <li>• The traveler will be required to bear all associated costs and therefore should make the necessary arrangements prior to travel.</li> <li>• It applies to both vaccinated and non-vaccinated nationals.</li> </ul>
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**SOUTH ASIA**

Country Name	Countries On Which Restrictions Are Imposed	Restrictions
<p><b>India</b></p>	<p>South Africa, Botswana, and Hong Kong</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Indian government has ordered for enhanced and rigorous screening of travellers from the mentioned countries.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Nepal</b></p>	<p>South Africa</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nepal will indefinitely ban the entry of nationals from African countries as of 29 Nov.</li> <li>• Officials are also barring entry for fully vaccinated foreign tourists arriving from African countries.</li> <li>• Authorities require all foreigners entering through either Tribhuvan International Airport (KTM) or through a land border crossing to provide evidence that they received their second vaccination dose at least 14 days before arrival.</li> <li>• They must also provide a negative RT-PCR test taken within 72 hours before entry, proof that they have already booked hotel arrangements, and a printed copy of the International Traveler Online Arrival Form</li> </ul>



<b>Sri Lanka</b>	South Africa, Lesotho, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Namibia, and Eswatini	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sri Lanka has imposed a ban on travellers arriving from the mentioned countries from 28 Nov. People who have visited the mentioned countries within 14 days prior will also be denied entry.</li> </ul>
<b>Pakistan</b>	Botswana, Eswatini, Hong Kong, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia, and South Africa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>International travelers with recent travel history to these areas are not able to enter Pakistan.</li> <li>Pakistani citizens who have been to these locations can enter the country until 05 Dec with protocols.</li> <li>Rules include presenting a vaccination certificate, showing a negative result from a PCR test taken within 72 hours before departure, taking a rapid antigen test upon arrival, and quarantining at their residence for three days if the entrants obtain a negative result from the on-arrival test.</li> <li>From 06 Dec onwards, citizens who have been to the aforementioned areas can only enter the country in emergency cases.</li> </ul>
<b>Bangladesh</b>	South Africa, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Estonia, Lesotho and countries where presence of Omicron has been detected.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Thorough screening of travelers coming from the mentioned countries will be conducted.</li> <li>Compulsory 14-day quarantine for passengers coming from infected countries.</li> </ul>

## MENA

Country Name	Countries On Which Restrictions Are Imposed	Restrictions
<b>Dubai, UAE</b>	South Africa, Lesotho, Botswana, Namibia, Mozambique, Eswatini, and Zimbabwe.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All travellers originating from or transiting through the mentioned countries will be barred entry into Dubai effective from 19 Nov.</li> <li>The travel from the countries is suspended until further notice.</li> </ul>
<b>Egypt</b>	South Africa, Lesotho, Botswana, Namibia,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All direct flights from the mentioned countries is temporarily suspended.</li> </ul>



	Mozambique, Eswatini, and Zimbabwe.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Measures are being taken by the country to restrict travellers entering Egypt from these country indirectly by transiting through other countries.</li> </ul>
<b>Saudi Arabia</b>	South Africa, Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Lesotho, and Eswatini.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All flights to and from the mentioned countries to Saudi Arabia has been temporarily suspended.</li> <li>Citizens and residents of Saudi Arabia have been urged to avoid travel to the mentioned countries.</li> </ul>
<b>Israel</b>	All countries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All foreigners are barred entry into Israel.</li> <li>The ban is expected to be in place for 14 days, however government approval for the same is pending.</li> </ul>
<b>Kuwait</b>	South Africa, Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Lesotho, Eswatini, Zambia, and Malawi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All commercial direct flights from these mentioned countries have been suspended.</li> <li>Citizens of Kuwait entering the country from the mentioned countries will require to do PCR test on arrival and will have to undergo quarantine for 7 days. Another PCR test will be required to be taken on the 6<sup>th</sup> day of arrival.</li> <li>Non-citizens from the mentioned countries will be barred entry unless they stay for at least 14 days in a third country.</li> </ul>
<b>Oman</b>	South Africa, Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Lesotho, and Eswatini	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Entry to travellers from the mentioned countries to Oman has been suspended since 28 Nov.</li> </ul>
<b>Morocco</b>	All countries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All incoming flights to Morocco will be suspended beginning from 30 Nov for 14 days.</li> </ul>
<b>Tunisia</b>	All countries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All non-residential inbound travelers above the age of 18 must present a certificate of completion of the vaccination or a vaccination pass.</li> <li>Passengers over six years old must present a negative PCR test result within 48 hours before take-off.</li> <li>All Tunisians as well as foreigners residing in Tunisia who have not yet completed their vaccination must undergo a 10-day quarantine in one of the designated centers.</li> </ul>
<b>Qatar</b>	Angola, South Africa, Mozambique, Zambia, and Zimbabwe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Qatar Airways, the national carrier of Qatar suspended flight operations from the mentioned countries until further notice.</li> </ul>



		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Qatari officials have updated the list of Exceptional Red countries as of 29 Nov to include Botswana, Egypt, Eswatini, Lesotho, Namibia, South Africa, and Zimbabwe.</li> </ul>
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## AFRICA

Country Name	Countries On Which Restrictions Are Imposed	Restrictions
<b>Angola</b>	South Africa, Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia, and Zimbabwe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Travellers from the mentioned countries are banned from entering Kenya from 29 Nov until 05 Jan 2022.</li> <li>Flights to Mozambique, Namibia, and South Africa have been suspended until further notice.</li> </ul>
<b>Rwanda</b>	Southern Africa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Direct flights to southern African countries have been suspended.</li> <li>All arriving and departing travellers must submit a negative Covid-19 RTPCR Report test taken 72 hours prior to departure at Kigali International Airport.</li> <li>All arriving passengers must quarantine for 24 hours at their own expense.</li> <li>COVID-19 PCR test will be done at their own expense upon arrival, with a further test paid by the government to be taken at a designated testing centre on day 7 after arrival.</li> <li>Passengers flying from or with a history of travel in response to on-going assessments of global health issues will be required to complete a 7-day quarantine at their own expense.</li> </ul>
<b>Kenya</b>	South Africa, Namibia, Lesotho, Botswana, Eswatini, Zimbabwe, and Hong Kong	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For travellers coming from/transiting through the mentioned countries, enhanced surveillance protocols will be followed, including quarantine and repeated testing.</li> <li>All inbound travellers must be in possession of physical proof of vaccination prior to the entry into the country.</li> </ul>



		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All inbound passengers to Kenya will be required to submit a negative RT-PCR test certificate for COVID-19, taken 96 hours prior to their entry into the country</li> </ul>
<b>Sudan</b>	South Africa, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Lesotho, and Namibia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Travellers from the mentioned countries have been banned entry into Sudan.</li> <li>Travellers from other countries will require to present negative PCR test result for COVID-19 taken within 72 hours prior to travel.</li> <li>Passengers failing to present the negative test result will be required to undergo 14 days of quarantine at their own cost.</li> </ul>

#### IV. WHO ADVISORY

World Health Organization has released the following recommended actions for countries and people after the discovery of Omicron.

##### Recommended Action For Countries

- Enhanced surveillance and sequencing of cases.
- Share genome sequencing on publicly available databases.
- Report initial cases of clusters to WHO.
- Performing field investigations and laboratory assessments to better understand the characteristics of Omicron, impact effectiveness of vaccines, therapeutics, diagnostics, and social measures.
- To implement the effective public health measures to reduce COVID-19 circulation overall through risk analysis and science-based approach.

##### Recommended Actions For People

- Keep physical distance of atleast 1 metre from others
- Wear well-fitting mask
- Open windows to improve ventilation
- Avoid poorly ventilated or crowded spaces.
- Keep hands clean
- Cough or sneeze into bent elbow or tissue
- Get vaccinated



## V. REACTION OVER TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS

### World Health Organization



With number of countries imposing travel bans after South Africa announced on the new variant detected, the World Health Organization requested the world leader to not engage in severe measures. WHO stressed on the need to wait for the data and urged countries to remain open and stay focused.

### South Africa



- After multiple countries imposed ban on travellers from South Africa and other southern African countries, the Health Minister of South Africa called the measures unjustified. He also added that the measures were against the “norms and standards as guided by the World Health Organizations.
- The scientist who announced on the newly discovered variant – Tulio de Oliveira, who is the director of KwaZulu-Natal Research and Innovation Sequencing Platform apologized for the ‘radical’ measures that was taken by countries post the announcement. According to the statements by Oliveira, he believed that South Africa’s decision to publicize the findings would be received with international solidarity.

## VI. ASSESSMENT

- Considering that the vaccination coverage in the African countries are low compared to the rest of the world, rapid spread of infection and high mutations are likely in the region.
- The discovery of the new variant comes at a time when many countries are reporting a rise in number of COVID-19 infections. The new variant has raised concerns across many countries over the severity, the level of transmissibility and on whether the new variant can surpass the protection provided by the currently available vaccines. However, without substantial data, the same cannot be confirmed and until then, countries will require to take preventive measures to curb the spread of the virus.



- Considering that the latest identified variant was first detected in the samples taken between 14 Nov to 16 Nov, at a time when travel restrictions were eased and South Africa was already reporting a spike in cases, the spread of the virus to other countries by the time South Africa announced regarding the virus is very likely. Hence more countries are expected to report on the presence of the variants in the coming days and more countries are expected to announce on restrictions in the coming days. If the virus has the potential to evade the protection provided by the vaccination, it can be the trigger further waves of the pandemic across the world.
- The virus is expected to further mutate over time, with some of the mutations having the potential to raise concerns. Imposing of severe measures including travel ban on countries which reported the presence of the new variants can have serious consequences in the future, where any similar discovery may be kept hidden from the public fearing the imposition of restrictions. To avoid taking such measures, the countries would need to remain prepared with better action-plan, which includes increased screening of travellers, directing citizens to strictly adhere to COVID-19 appropriate behaviour and ensure faster pace of vaccination coverage.
- With the imposition of restrictions on the southern African countries, the economy of the countries are going to be further impacted, as the tourism sector in the countries were picking up after travel restrictions were eased in the recent period. With the threat of highly contagious variant, the countries are also likely to witness another wave of the pandemic, pushing to further economic crisis.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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