

Countries tighten travel rules to try to slow Omicron spread

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More countries put travel curbs in place to secure themselves from the new COVID-19 variant
[File: Chaline Thirasupa/Reuters]

Tokyo, December 1 (RHC)-- The United States, Japan and Malaysia have announced tighter travel restrictions in an attempt to slow the spread of the new Omicron coronavirus variant as more countries confirmed their first cases.

Japan and Hong Kong said on Wednesday they would expand travel curbs and Malaysia temporarily banned travellers from countries deemed at risk. Hong Kong added Japan, Portugal and Sweden to its

travel restrictions while Uzbekistan said it would suspend flights with Hong Kong as well as South Africa. Japan, which had already barred all new foreign entrants, reported its second case of the new variant and said it would expand its entry ban to foreigners with resident status from 10 African countries.

Malaysia temporarily barred travellers from eight African countries and said Britain and the Netherlands could join the list. In North America, air travellers to the U.S. were set to face tougher COVID-19 testing rules.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said late on Tuesday that the U.S. would require all air travellers entering the country to show a negative COVID-19 test performed within one day of departure.

Currently, vaccinated international travellers can present a negative result obtained within three days from their point of departure. The new one-day testing requirement would apply to U.S. citizens as well as foreign nationals.

Saudi Arabia's health ministry said it recorded the Gulf's first confirmed case of the Omicron variant in a citizen returning from North Africa.

Nigeria said it had confirmed two cases of the Omicron variant among travellers who had arrived from South Africa in the past week. Ghana and Norway also reported their first cases of the new variant on Wednesday.

Brazilian health regulator Anvisa said late on Tuesday that two Brazilians had tested positive for the Omicron strain, the first reported cases in Latin America. A traveller arriving in Sao Paulo from South Africa and his wife, who had not travelled, had tested positive.

Germany, which is battling a surge in COVID-19 infections and deaths, reported that four fully vaccinated people had tested positive for Omicron in the south of the country but had moderate symptoms.

The World Health Organization (WHO) said "blanket travel bans will not prevent the international spread, and they place a heavy burden on lives and livelihoods," while advising those unwell, vulnerable or 60 years or over and unvaccinated to postpone travel.

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