

Australia reports 3rd case of omicron COVID-19 variant

November 29 2021, by Rod McGuirk



A passenger arrives on an early morning flight at Sydney Airport, Monday, Nov. 29, 2021. Authorities in Australia said Sunday, Nov. 28, 2021, that two travelers who arrived in Sydney from Africa became the first in the country to test positive for the new variant of the coronavirus, omicron. Credit: AP Photo/Mark Baker

Australian authorities announced on Monday a third case of the omicron COVID-19 variant as government leaders reconsidered plans to relax border restrictions this week.

A South African man in his 30s who flew from Johannesburg to the northern Australian city of Darwin last Thursday tested positive for the new variant at Australia's most secure quarantine facility at Howard Springs, Northern Territory Health Minister Natasha Fyles said.

New South Wales state authorities reported on Sunday that two travelers from South Africa to Sydney had become Australia's first omicron cases. Both were fully vaccinated, showed no symptoms and were in quarantine in Sydney.

New South Wales Premier Dominic Perrottet said Monday there could be a third omicron case in Australia's most populous state.

In the 24 hours since Sunday, 141 passengers on five flights arrived from the nine countries affected by the omicron variant, officials said. All the travelers were in quarantine.

Senior federal government ministers are meeting Monday to consider the national response, including whether to alter plans to relax border restrictions starting Wednesday.

Federal Health Minister Greg Hunt said Australian authorities "will not hesitate to take additional steps if the [medical evidence](#) is that more" action is required.



A flight crew walk through the terminal at Sydney Airport, Monday, Nov. 29, 2021. Authorities in Australia said Sunday, Nov. 28, 2021, that two travelers who arrived in Sydney from Africa became the first in the country to test positive for the new variant of the coronavirus, omicron. Credit: AP Photo/Mark Baker

Prime Minister Scott Morrison announced last week that starting Wednesday, vaccinated students, [skilled workers](#) and travelers on working vacations will be allowed to land at Sydney and Melbourne airports without quarantining.

Vaccinated citizens of Japan and South Korea with certain Australian visas would also be allowed in without quarantining, as well as people on humanitarian visas, the government said last week.

Morrison on Monday urged a calm response to omicron, which the World Health Organization has designated a variant of concern.

"There's no evidence to suggest that this leads to any more severe disease. If anything, it's suggesting a lesser form of disease, particularly for those who are vaccinated," Morrison told Nine Network television.

"Case numbers of themselves are not the issue. It's about whether people are getting a worse illness or it's going to put stress on your hospital system," Morrison said.



A flight crew walk through the terminal at Sydney Airport, Monday, Nov. 29, 2021. Authorities in Australia said Sunday, Nov. 28, 2021, that two travelers who arrived in Sydney from Africa became the first in the country to test positive for the new variant of the coronavirus, omicron. Credit: AP Photo/Mark

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Ground crew drive their vehicles on the tarmac in the early morning at Sydney Airport, Monday, Nov. 29, 2021. Authorities in Australia said Sunday, Nov. 28, 2021, that two travelers who arrived in Sydney from Africa became the first in the country to test positive for the new variant, omicron. Credit: AP Photo/Mark Baker

New South Wales and Victoria, Australia's second-most populous state, as well as the national capital Canberra have introduced a blanket 72-hour quarantine requirement for all international arrivals.

Hunt announced on Saturday that because of the concerns about omicron, non-Australian citizens and permanent residents who have been to South Africa, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Lesotho, Eswatini, the Seychelles, Malawi, and Mozambique within the past 14 days will not be able to enter Australia.

Australians will be allowed in but must quarantine for 14 days.

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Citation: Australia reports 3rd case of omicron COVID-19 variant (2021, November 29)
retrieved 7 May 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-11-australia-3rd-case-omicron-covid-.html>

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