

Brazil sees 2 confirmed omicron cases, Latin America's 1st

November 30 2021, by Mauricio Savarese



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Health officials in Brazil have reported the country's first confirmed cases of the omicron variant in two travelers arriving from South Africa, the first such cases in Latin America.

The Sao Paulo state health secretariat said a 41-year-old man and a 37-year-old woman are in isolation. The two had their tests taken on

Nov. 25 and showed light symptoms of the disease at the time.

The secretariat statement said both travelers arrived in Brazil on Nov. 23 and took a PCR test before a trip scheduled for two days later. Their positive test results were collected at the Guarulhos international airport, outside Sao Paulo, before a return flight to South Africa.

"After the positive result, the couple was instructed to remain in isolation at home. Both are being monitored by state and municipal (authorities), as well as their respective family members," said the Sao Paulo health secretariat, which added that neither of the two are registered in the state's vaccination platform.

"An initial investigation did not identify them being vaccinated anywhere else," it said.

Sao Paulo city hall's health secretariat said the couple lives in South Africa and was visiting Brazil. It did not disclose their nationalities.

Another potential case of omicron has been under investigation by Brazilian authorities since Sunday.

The two Brazilians are the first confirmed cases in Latin America, which has suffered heavily from the coronavirus pandemic. Brazil alone has reported more than 600,000 deaths, a figure that analysts believe to be undercounted.

Brazil does not require COVID-19 vaccination from foreign travelers entering the country.

Earlier on Tuesday, Japan and France reported their first cases of the omicron variant, while new findings indicate the mutant coronavirus was already in Europe close to a week before South Africa sounded the

alarm. It was last Wednesday, Nov. 24, that South African authorities reported the existence of the highly mutated virus to the World Health Organization.

Much remains unknown about the new variant, including whether it is more contagious, as some health authorities suspect, whether it makes people more seriously ill, and whether it can thwart the vaccine.

Brazil's health agency Anvisa said the entry took place before Sunday's federal government decision to block passengers arriving from South Africa. The South American country has blocked flights originating from or with stop overs in South Africa, Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Namibia and Zimbabwe.

Sao Paulo Gov. João Doria said the state's COVID-19 scientific committee will reassess the end of the mask mandates, which was expected to come into force on Dec. 11.

"We need to know the impact of this new variant" before deciding if removing masks is allowed outdoors, said Doria, who is also a presidential hopeful for next year's elections.

President Jair Bolsonaro, who has flouted health protocols since the beginning of the pandemic and remains unvaccinated, is insisting that social distancing policies should not be put back in place.

Many mayors of Brazilian cities are wondering whether they should keep scheduled end of year festivities and February's Carnival due to fears COVID-19 infection rates could soar again.

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