

# Japan confirms first case of new coronavirus variant

November 30 2021, by Mari Yamaguchi



Passengers walk at the lobby for the international arrivals at Kansai International Airport in Osaka, western Japan, Tuesday, Nov. 30, 2021. Japan confirmed on Tuesday its first case of the new omicron coronavirus variant, a visitor who recently arrived from Namibia, an official said. Credit: Yukie Nishizawa/Kyodo News via AP

Japan confirmed on Tuesday its first case of the new omicron coronavirus variant, a Namibian diplomat who recently arrived from his country, officials said.

Chief Cabinet Secretary said the patient, a man in his 30s, tested positive upon arrival at Narita airport on Sunday and was isolated and is being treated at a hospital.

Later Tuesday, Health Minister Shigeyuki Goto identified the patient as a diplomat from Namibia.

A genome analysis at the National Institute of Infectious Diseases confirmed Tuesday that he was infected with the new variant, which was first identified in South Africa.

The patient was initially showing no symptoms, but now has a fever, Goto said. Health ministry officials said he received his second Moderna vaccine in July.

A total of 70 other passengers, including the patient's two family members on the same flight, were identified as having close contact, but they have all tested negative and are self-isolating while being monitored remotely by the Japanese health authorities. If they do not cooperate, their names will be released as a penalty, Goto said.

Ten crew members of the plane did not enter Japan and continued their flight to a next destination.



Passengers wait in a line to receive quarantine test on their arrivals at Kansai International Airport in Osaka, western Japan, Tuesday, Nov. 30, 2021. Japan confirmed on Tuesday its first case of the new omicron coronavirus variant, a visitor who recently arrived from Namibia, an official said. Credit: Yuki Nishizawa/Kyodo News via AP

The 40 Tokyo residents identified as having close contact are being required to quarantine at facilities designated by the the capital's metropolitan government instead of their homes to ensure anti-virus measures, Governor Yuriko Koike told reporters.

Matsuno said the government will maintain strict border controls and will step up its capacity to conduct genome analyses of the new variant.

Japan announced on Monday that it will ban all foreign visitors beginning Tuesday as an emergency precaution against the variant, tentatively through the end of the year. The government is also requiring Japanese nationals and foreigners with resident permits to quarantine 14 days following entry.

The World Health Organization warned Monday that the global risk from the omicron variant is "very high" based on the early evidence, saying it could lead to surges with "severe consequences."



People wearing face masks to protect against the spread of the coronavirus walk along a street in Tokyo, Monday, Nov. 29, 2021. Credit: AP Photo/Koji Sasahara



People wearing protective masks to help curb the spread of the coronavirus walk through the row of ginkgo trees along a sidewalk as the trees and sidewalk are covered with the bright yellow leaves Monday, Nov. 29, 2021, in Tokyo. Credit: AP Photo/Kiichiro Sato

Despite the lack of information about the new variant, Japan will start giving booster shots Wednesday as scheduled to those who have completed vaccination eight months ago or earlier, officials said.

The new variant scare comes just as Japan was expanding its business and social activity following the sharp decline of new daily cases. So far, Japan has only re-tightened its border control. Japan reported just 76 new cases nationwide for an accumulated total of 1.72 million cases and

18,351 deaths.

On Tuesday, Japan's Self Defense Force closed down its mass inoculation center, which was launched in late May to help bolster a nationwide vaccination drive. About 77% of the Japanese have been fully vaccinated.

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