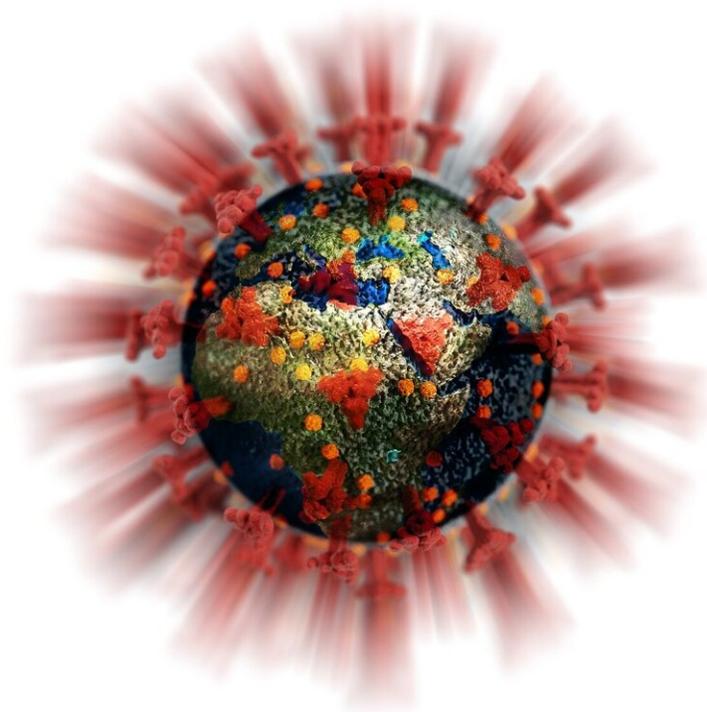


Over-60s, vulnerable should postpone travel due to Omicron: WHO

November 30 2021



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The WHO said Tuesday that while blanket travel bans would not stop the spread of the Omicron variant, COVID-vulnerable people, including the over-60s, should postpone plans to travel abroad.

Omicron, the new COVID-19 variant of concern which the World Health Organization says poses a "very high" risk globally, has prompted many [countries](#) to shut their borders.

"Blanket [travel](#) bans will not prevent the international spread, and they place a heavy burden on lives and livelihoods," the WHO said in a travel advice statement on Omicron.

"In addition, they can adversely impact global health efforts during a pandemic by disincentivising countries to report and share epidemiological and sequencing data."

First reported to the WHO less than a week ago after being detected in southern Africa earlier this month, Omicron has already appeared in several countries.

The WHO noted the increasing number of governments introducing travel measures, including temporarily banning arrivals from countries where the variant has been found.

The WHO said that as of Sunday, 56 countries were reportedly implementing travel measures aimed at potentially delaying the importation of the new variant.

"It is expected that the Omicron variant will be detected in an increasing number of countries as national authorities step up their surveillance and sequencing activities," it said.

"Persons who are unwell or at risk of developing severe COVID-19 disease and dying, including people 60 years of age or older or those with co-morbidities (e.g. [heart disease](#), cancer and diabetes), should be advised to postpone travel," said the WHO.

The WHO advised countries to apply an "evidence-informed and risk-based approach" when implementing travel measures.

The UN health agency said national authorities in countries of departure, transit and arrival could apply mitigation measures that might delay or reduce the exportation and importation of the variant.

They could include screening passengers, testing and quarantine.

"All measures should be commensurate with the risk, time-limited and applied with respect to travellers' dignity, human rights and fundamental freedoms."

The WHO said that "essential international travel", including for humanitarian missions, repatriations and transport of vital supplies, should always be prioritised during the pandemic.

'Calm, coordinated, coherent'

Earlier Tuesday, WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told member states to keep calm and take "rational" steps in response to Omicron.

"We call on all member states to take rational, proportional risk-reduction measures," he said.

"The global response must be calm, coordinated and coherent."

Tedros stressed that it remains unclear how dangerous the variant is.

"We still have more questions than answers about the effect of Omicron on transmission, severity of disease, and the effectiveness of tests, therapeutics and vaccines," he said.

The WHO chief said it was understandable that countries wanted to protect their citizens "against a [variant](#) that we don't yet fully understand".

"But I am equally concerned that several member states are introducing blunt, blanket measures that are not evidence-based or effective on their own, and which will only worsen inequities."

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