

Australia reports first locally transmitted Omicron cases

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Australia on Friday reported three students at a Sydney school have tested positive for the COVID-19 Omicron variant, the country's first cases of community transmission of the new strain.

Health officials said there were 10 additional suspected Omicron cases at the school that are urgently being confirmed, raising the spectre of widespread infection.

The cluster comes despite a ban on non-citizens entering the country and restrictions on flights from southern Africa, where the [variant](#) was first detected.

New South Wales Health said the first case had "no overseas travel history or links to people with overseas travel history" raising the alarm.

Australia had previously detected several other Omicron cases, but all were found in incoming travellers who quarantined.

The entire staff and student body at Regents Park Christian School in the west of Sydney have been asked to get tested and isolate.

Australia currently records around 2,000 COVID cases a day.

For much of the pandemic, the virus' spread had been limited by two years of border closures, lockdowns, aggressive testing and tracing as well as local travel bans.

Authorities have expressed confidence that with 87 percent of people over 16 years old vaccinated, the country is well placed to deal with the new variant.

Hospitalisation rates are currently low, and the pandemic death toll stands at 2,021.

The severity of Omicron is not yet known and it is also unclear whether it could render existing vaccines less effective.

But there are concerns the variant could be more transmissible than the dominant Delta strain.

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