

# Brazil confirms 3rd omicron case, considers new measures

December 1 2021, by Diane Jeantet

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Commuters wear protective face masks as they walk through a subway station, in Sao Paulo, Brazil, Wednesday, Dec. 1, 2021, amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Brazil joined the widening circle of countries to report cases of the omicron variant. Credit: AP Photo/Andre Penner

Health officials on Wednesday confirmed Brazil's third known case of

the omicron coronavirus variant as officials examined possible new measures to contain the virus, such as requiring proof of vaccination or even possibly scrapping Carnival celebrations if conditions grow worse.

A passenger from Ethiopia tested positive for Covid-19 upon landing in Sao Paulo on Nov. 27, the state's health secretariat said in a statement. The 29 year-old man is vaccinated with two doses of the Pfizer shot and is in good health, officials said.

The news came a day after Brazilian health officials reported confirmed cases of the omicron variant in two travelers arriving from South Africa — the first such cases in Latin America.

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.

The number of daily deaths and new infections from the virus are currently low and vaccination coverage is higher than in many countries—including the United States. But Brazil has suffered heavily from the coronavirus pandemic, with more than 610,000 deaths, second only to the U.S.

Brazilian mayors and governors, in charge of implementing local measures to rein in COVID-19, were closely watching the situation unfold, waiting for more information on the new variant.



A commuter wears a protective face mask in a subway station, in Sao Paulo, Brazil, Wednesday, Dec. 1, 2021, amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Brazil joined the widening circle of countries to report cases of the omicron variant. Credit: AP Photo/Andre Penner

In Rio de Janeiro, where New Year's Eve and Carnival usually attract millions of visitors each, Mayor Eduardo Paes said both events were still scheduled, but warned they would only go forward if it is safe to organize them.

"I want to remind you that planning an event does not mean that it will necessarily take place. After all, it is entirely possible to cancel what was planned," Paes said Tuesday in a recorded statement.

Sao Paulo Gov. João Doria also said Tuesday the state's COVID-19 scientific committee will reassess the scheduled Dec. 11 end of mask mandates.

The federal government said Tuesday it needed "further clarification" on the epidemiological situation in Angola, Malawi, Mozambique and Zambia before deciding whether to suspend flights from these countries, as recommended by the Brazilian Health Regulatory Agency, known as Anvisa.



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The South American country has already blocked flights originating from or with stopovers in South Africa, Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Namibia and Zimbabwe.

Rodrigo Cruz, the Health Ministry's number two, said on Wednesday the nation was also debating whether to require vaccine certificates from arriving passengers. Brazil does not currently require COVID-19 vaccination from foreign travelers entering the country.

In a technical note sent to the government on Nov. 12, Anvisa asked the government to consider such a step, citing a 4.6% increase in tourism activities in October and upcoming end-of-year celebrations.

The lack of vaccine requirement "may allow Brazil to become one of the countries of choice for unvaccinated tourists and travelers, which is undesirable from the point of view of the risk that this group represents for the Brazilian population," Anvisa said.

Other suspicious cases are being investigated, including in Rio de Janeiro and Minas Gerais states, with a final number expected to be released later Wednesday, Health Ministry said.

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