

CDC to toughen COVID testing for international travelers

December 1 2021



(HealthDay)—As the world struggles with ways to stem the spread of the

new Omicron variant, the U.S. Centers of Disease Control and Prevention announced Tuesday that international travelers to the United States will soon have to provide a negative result from a coronavirus test taken within 24 hours of departure.

That's a much tighter turnaround: Current rules allow fully vaccinated people to take a PCR test for the coronavirus up to three days (72 hours) before departing on a flight to the United States.

The "CDC is working to modify the current global testing order for travel as we learn more about the Omicron [variant](#); a revised order would shorten the timeline for required testing for all international air travelers to one day before departure to the United States," agency spokesman Jason McDonald said.

"This strengthens already robust protocols in place for international travel, including requirements for foreign travelers to be fully vaccinated," he added, *The New York Times* reported.

It's not clear whether the new, tougher rule will require an antigen or rapid PCR test, the *Times* reported.

Already, the new Omicron variant has been detected in more than a dozen countries worldwide.

President Joe Biden has said he will announce on Thursday plans for strengthening safeguards against the coronavirus. It is not clear whether Biden will announce the tougher testing requirements, and McDonald offered no timeline for the CDC action, the *Times* reported.

In the meantime, the CDC continues to recommend that all travelers also get a coronavirus test three to five days after arrival in the United States. Unvaccinated travelers should self-isolate and quarantine for seven days

after arrival, even if they test negative, according to the agency.

Natalie Quillian, deputy coordinator for the COVID response at the White House, said Monday that the Omicron variant had prompted the administration to take a hard look at what safeguards it has in place to make sure people entering the country were not carrying the virus.

"We're constantly looking at what can we do to make that travel system even stronger," she told the *Times*. "For example, right now we're assessing all of our tests to make sure they're effective in picking up this variant. If we found that a test was not effective at picking up the variant, we would remove that [variant] from the list that is accepted to enter the country."

The new rule could prove a real hardship for travelers. Even the current 72-hour rule is a nail-biter, Paula Tolton, 23, a student in Taipei, Taiwan, told the *Times*.

"I've had that stress before when a PCR [test](#) didn't come back when I was supposed to fly here in April," she said. "I was freaking out." Locating a clinic that could meet the 24-hour mark would make things even tougher, she added.

More information: Visit the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for more on [traveling during the pandemic](#).

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Citation: CDC to toughen COVID testing for international travelers (2021, December 1) retrieved 3 July 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-12-cdc-toughen-covid->

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