

# Highly vaccinated UAE reports most virus cases in months

December 21 2021, by Isabel Debre

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The skyline of downtown Dubai on a rare cloudy day is seen at sunset in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, Saturday, Dec. 4, 2021. Credit: AP Photo/Jon Gambrell

The United Arab Emirates on Tuesday recorded its highest daily virus caseload in months, a spike that comes as the omicron variant races

across the globe and the Mideast tourist hub prepares to welcome hordes of tourists for the holidays.

The emirate reported 452 infections in the past 24 hours, including two deaths—an increase not seen in the highly vaccinated Gulf Arab state since mid-September. Infections had plummeted to record lows, around 50 a day, just over a week ago, contributing to a sense in the freewheeling entrepôt of Dubai that the worst of the pandemic was over and life could return to normal.

A nationwide mask mandate remains in place outdoors, but Dubai's bars and restaurants have been teeming with mask-less revelers. Most luxury hotels report that they're booked through the December holidays. Each year, giant New Year's Eve celebrations in the city draw thousands of tourists and [social media influencers](#) fleeing wintry weather in Europe.

The world's fair in the desert outside Dubai has hosted sprawling concerts, parades and other festivities for millions of visitors. Expo 2020 said this week it would suspend its daily parade and other events to stem the virus's spread.

The UAE boasts one of the world's highest vaccination rates, with authorities reporting that over 99% of eligible residents have received at least one dose. The government also offers Pfizer-BioNTech booster shots to all adults.

Emirati health authorities announced they'd detected the first omicron case in the country earlier this month. They have said nothing else about cases of the highly contagious variant in the seven emirates.

But signs of the virus's rapid spread have emerged.

Local Indian media reported that a couple traveling from the UAE had

tested positive for the omicron variant upon arrival in the Indian state of Kerala. Spanish tennis star Rafael Nadal announced on Monday that he had tested positive for the coronavirus in Spain after returning from an exhibition tournament in Abu Dhabi.

A passenger on Israeli Prime Minister's Naftali Bennett's flight home from the UAE tested positive for the virus. Israel shortly afterward banned travel to the UAE due to the high risk of infection.

The more conservative capital of Abu Dhabi rolled out new border checks for commuters from Dubai and the federation's other emirates this week. Police now scan drivers for COVID-19 symptoms, referring those with high temperatures to get [antigen tests](#) before crossing.

Two COVID-19 doctors at [private hospitals](#) in Dubai said they were alarmed by the recent uptick in cases fueled by the omicron variant's spread. But they said the vast majority of newly infected patients had mild to moderate symptoms and were being treated at home, while hospitals remained largely empty of virus patients. They spoke on condition of anonymity under regulations.

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