

Norway reports omicron cases linked to company party

December 2 2021, by Jan M. Olsen



A student at Holtet high school receives the first dose of Pfizer vaccine against COVID-19 in the school's auditorium in Oslo, Sept. 7, 2021. Authorities in Norway said on Thursday, Dec. 2 at least 50 people in Oslo have been infected with the omicron coronavirus variant. The Norwegian Institute of Public Health said the cases are connected to a company's Christmas party in a restaurant in the capital. Credit: Heiko Junge/NTB via AP, file

At least 50 people in and around Norway's capital have been infected with the omicron coronavirus variant, and the cases are connected to a Norwegian company's Christmas party in an Oslo restaurant, officials said Thursday.

The Norwegian Institute of Public Health said that those affected live in Oslo and surrounding municipalities, and "the infection detection team in Oslo has contacted the municipalities concerned to start infection detection."

The government agency said that there was "a high vaccination coverage" in the group, adding that overall "more than 50 cases" have been recorded in Norway. The country's first two cases were announced Monday.

"More cases are expected. Effective tracing is being done to limit transmission routes and prevent major outbreaks," the Oslo Municipality said in a statement.

The city of Oslo on Wednesday urged people who visited two restaurants in the capital to be tested. One reportedly was where the Christmas party was held. It is customary in Scandinavia for companies, associations and individuals to hold Christmas parties in the weeks leading up to Christmas Eve.

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 vaccines.

In response to omicron, however, the Norwegian government said new national and regional restrictions would take effect Friday. Norwegian Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Støre the strictest measures were regional and would apply to Oslo—a city of nearly 700,000—and surrounding

municipalities.

He said they include working from home when possible, a 100-person attendance limit at private indoor events in public places or rented venues, and restaurants and bars having to register patrons.

Nationally, anyone entering Norway must be tested within 24 hours, either at the border, at a public test station or by self-test. If a rapid test comes back positive, a traveler must take a PCR test within 24 hours, the government said.

"It is likely that the omicron variant will spread in Norway, and that is why the government believes in stricter measures," Gahr Stoere said. Health Minister Ingvild Kjerkol added that the situation was "worrying" and "we now pull the brake."

On Tuesday, Norway recommended the use of face masks on public transportation and in shops and shopping malls.

"We still have to keep our distance to get control of the spread of infection, but that does not mean that we cannot have good contact with each other," Gahr Stoere said.

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