

WHO: Omicron detected in 89 countries, cases doubling fast

December 18 2021



Despite rainy weather, Duesseldorf's city centre is well frequented despite the Corona rules for retailers, shortly before Christmas in Duesseldorf, Germany, Saturday, Dec. 18, 2021. Credit: Malte Krudewig/dpa via AP

The omicron variant of the coronavirus has been detected in 89

countries, and COVID-19 cases involving the variant are doubling every 1.5 to 3 days in places with community transmission and not just infections acquired abroad, the World Health Organization said Saturday.

Omicron's "substantial growth advantage" over the delta variant means it is likely to soon overtake delta as the dominant form of the virus in countries where the new variant is spreading locally, the U.N. health agency said.

WHO noted that omicron is spreading rapidly even in countries with high vaccination rates or where a significant proportion of the population has recovered from COVID-19.

It remains unclear if the rapid growth of omicron cases is because the variant evades existing immunity, is inherently more transmissible than previous variants, or a combination of both, WHO said.

Other major questions about omicron remain unanswered, including how effective each of the existing COVID-19 vaccines are against it. Conclusive data also does not exist yet on how ill omicron makes COVID-19 patients, the health agency said.

WHO first labeled omicron a variant of concern on Nov. 26.



Closed turn stiles following the news that Aston Villa's match against Burnley at Villa Park has been postponed, in Birmingham, England, Saturday, Dec. 18, 2021. The Premier League lost another match to a COVID-19 outbreak in a squad when Aston Villa's home game against Burnley was postponed around two hours before kickoff. Villa said it did not have enough players to field a team following more positive tests in its squad. Credit: David Davies/PA via AP



A woman receives Moderna COVID-19 vaccine as riders train at the National Velodrome in Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines, west of Paris, France, Friday, Dec. 17, 2021. The government is holding a special virus security meeting Friday to address growing pressure on hospitals in France from rising infections. Credit: AP Photo/Christophe Ena

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