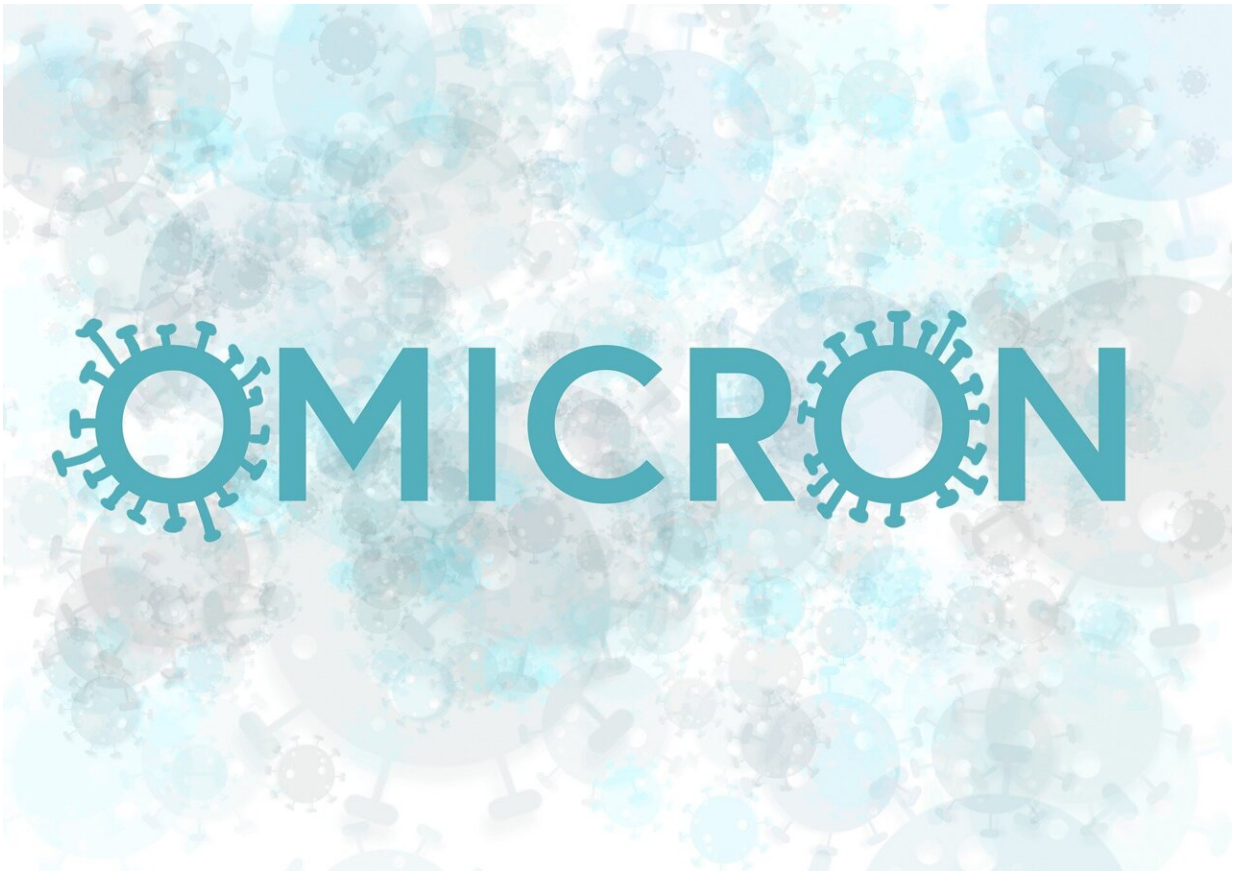


# PM says Omicron to be 'dominant' in France from start of 2022

December 17 2021

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French Prime Minister Jean Castex on Friday likened the spread of the Omicron variant in Europe to "lightning", adding it would be the

dominant strain in France from the start of 2022.

Castex added that while much remains unknown about the variant "it does not seem to be more dangerous than the Delta variant and the data available to us indicate that complete vaccination coverage with the booster dose protects well against severe forms of the disease".

Nearly 3,000 people are in intensive care with COVID-19 in France according to latest figures.

Meanwhile people will become eligible for booster jabs four months from the date of their second vaccination down from five, Castex added.

And he said the government would announce new measures to tackle non-vaccination from next year.

"While we have given time, a lot of time for those French people who were hesitant and had doubts, in January we will strengthen the incentive for vaccination, because it is not acceptable that the refusal of a few million French people to be vaccinated, puts the life of an entire country at risk," he said.

From Saturday, travellers will need to show a compelling reason for travel between Britain and France, under shock new rules announced on Thursday by France to combat the Omicron variant of COVID-19.

The only exemptions for needing a compelling reason are for French and European travellers returning to France and British passengers heading in the other direction.

France on Thursday justified the new rules "faced with the extremely rapid spread of the Omicron variant in the UK" and to give time for its own booster programme to find the upper hand against the variant.

The new rules are set to bring havoc to numerous sectors, with this weekend's European Champions Cup and Challenge Cup rugby matches between clubs from the UK and France postponed, organisers said on Friday.

Castex called on local authorities to cancel fireworks and concerts on New Year's Eve to limit the spread of coronavirus, and said the consumption of alcohol on public roads will be outlawed during the celebrations.

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Citation: PM says Omicron to be 'dominant' in France from start of 2022 (2021, December 17) retrieved 4 July 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-12-omicron-covid-variant-dominant-france.html>

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