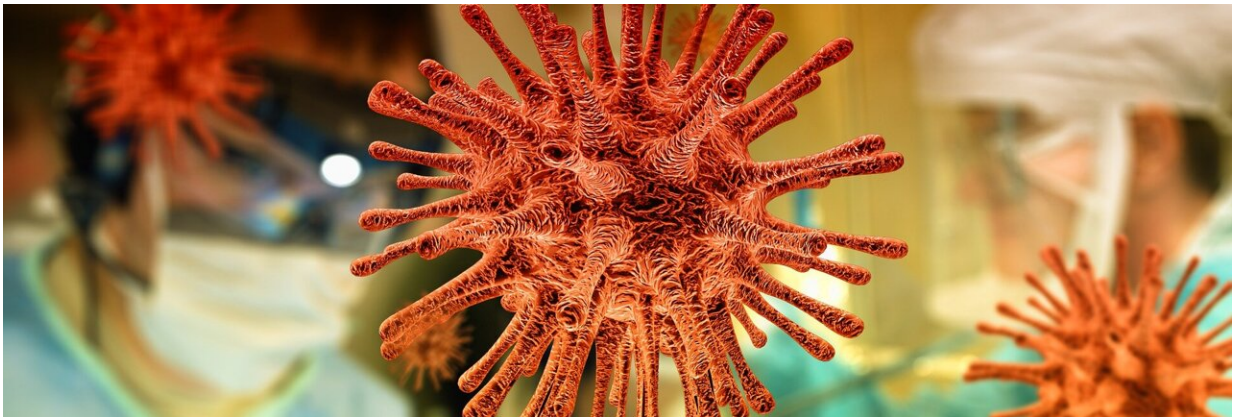


Saudi Arabia, UAE report first Omicron cases in Gulf

December 1 2021



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Saudi Arabia recorded the Gulf's first confirmed case of the Omicron variant of the coronavirus, followed hours later by a case in the UAE, health ministries in both countries said Wednesday.

"One case of the Omicron variant has been detected in the kingdom—it was a citizen coming from a North African country," a Saudi health ministry official told the state SPA news agency.

"He has been put in isolation, as have his contacts, and the necessary health measures have been taken."

The neighbouring United Arab Emirates announced later that it had also detected its first Omicron case, in an "African woman arriving from an African country via an Arab country", the health ministry said on Twitter.

The variant was first announced by South Africa but has since been discovered to have been present earlier in Europe.

It has prompted governments around the globe to reimpose travel restrictions, despite warnings from the World Health Organization this could do more harm than good.

Saudi Arabia last week halted flights from seven southern African countries, mirroring similar moves by other government, but travel links with North Africa have remained unaffected.

The kingdom had been lifting some of the remaining restrictions it imposed early in the pandemic, allowing worshippers at the Muslim holy places to resume praying shoulder-to-shoulder from October.

More than 47 million doses of COVID vaccine have been administered in the kingdom, which has a population of nearly 35 million.

Since the pandemic started, Saudi Arabia has recorded in excess of 549,000 cases of COVID-19, more than 8,800 of them fatal, while the UAE has registered about 742,100 cases and more than 2,100 deaths.

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