

Japan extends strict border measures as coronavirus cases soar

January 11 2022



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Japan will extend measures barring almost all new foreign arrivals until the end of February and reopen mass-vaccination centres as it battles an Omicron-fuelled coronavirus surge, the government said Tuesday.

"We will keep the current border control policy until the end of February while taking necessary measures from a humanitarian viewpoint and considering the national interest," Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida told reporters.

Local media said there would be some new exemptions for members of Japanese families as well as students studying in Japan but there were no immediate details from officials.

The [government](#) will also reopen large-scale vaccination centres run by the Self-Defense Forces, and ask [local governments](#) to reopen their own mass-inoculation sites to accelerate booster shots, Kishida said.

Japan has imposed strict border-control measures, such as quarantine and frequent testing, on those entering the country from abroad.

But despite those efforts, the Omicron variant has been circulating locally and Japan is seeing a sharp rise in virus cases.

"Even though the Omicron strain is said to have a low ratio of serious cases, if the number of infections surges, the number of serious cases will increase and put pressure on the medical system," Kishida said, calling for the public to remain vigilant.

The government has already approved new virus restrictions for three regions, and US forces in Japan have barred troops from non-essential off-base trips for two weeks after clusters of cases emerged in the military and surrounding communities.

Overall, Japan's infection rate remains comparatively low, with 8,249 cases reported nationwide on Sunday.

But the numbers are rising, and the Sunday figure was among the highest

levels since September.

The country has recorded just over 18,400 deaths in the pandemic.

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Citation: Japan extends strict border measures as coronavirus cases soar (2022, January 11)
retrieved 8 May 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2022-01-japan-strict-border-coronavirus-cases.html>

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