

# France, Britain impose COVID tests on travelers from China

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France and Britain on Friday joined a growing list of nations imposing COVID tests on travelers from China, and the World Health Organization pressed Beijing to be more forthcoming on real-time data

amid an explosion of cases there.

Spain, South Korea and Israel also said they would require proof of a negative test for travelers leaving China.

Despite its hospitals and morgues being overwhelmed—and international concern over the low official figures on infections and deaths there—China insisted Friday that it had been transparent in sharing its COVID-19 data.

Earlier this week, a senior US [health](#) official said Beijing had provided only limited data to global databases about variants circulating in China, and its testing and reporting on new cases had diminished.

The Geneva-based World Health Organization summoned Chinese officials and "asked for regular sharing of specific and real-time data on the epidemiological situation," the agency said in a statement.

"WHO stressed the importance of monitoring and the timely publication of data to help China and the global community... to inform effective responses," it said.

Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin refuted suggestions that the country had not been forthcoming on data: "Since the outbreak of the epidemic, China has been sharing relevant information and data with the international community, including WHO, in an open and transparent manner.

"We shared the sequence of the new coronavirus at the first instance, thus making important contributions to the development of relevant vaccines (and) drugs in other countries."

A national disease control body in China said there were about 5,500

new local cases and one death Friday but, with the end of mass testing and the narrowing of criteria for what counts as a COVID fatality, those numbers are no longer believed to reflect reality.

Britain, France, Spain, South Korea and Israel have joined Italy, Japan, India, Malaysia, Taiwan and the United States in requiring negative COVID tests for all travellers from mainland China, in a bid to avoid importing new virus variants.

In Britain's case, the requirement comes into effect from January 5.

Switzerland however said it would keep its borders open for arrivals from China.

## **Different European approaches**

In Beijing, Wang argued that health experts in several countries had decided there was no need to impose entry restrictions on travelers from China.

The European Union's infectious disease agency (ECDC) said Thursday such restrictions were not warranted for the moment, due to the high levels of immunity in the EU and European Economic Area.

Germany seemed to take that on board Friday, saying it did not currently see the need to impose routine tests on arrivals from China.

But Health Minister Karl Lauterbach did argue for a coordinated EU-wide system to monitor variants across European airports.

"We need a European solution," he said.

A coordinated approach would make it easier to detect new variants of

the coronavirus quickly and take appropriate measures, he added.

And while routine tests were "not yet necessary" for arrivals from China, that could change given that data from China could not be reliably obtained.

Justifying the restrictions Spain had decided to impose, Health Minister Carolina Darias said, "A major concern lies in the possibility of new variants appearing in China that have not been controlled.

"Given the health situation in that country, we know the importance of acting with coordination, but also the importance of acting quickly," she added.

## **Rival estimates**

Jiao Yahui, from China's National Health Commission (NHC), insisted on Thursday Beijing had always published data "on COVID-19 deaths and severe cases in the spirit of openness and transparency".

The NHC said last week it would no longer release an official daily COVID death toll.

But health risk analysis firm Airfinity said it currently estimates 9,000 daily deaths and 1.8 million infections per day in China, and it expects 1.7 million fatalities across the country by the end of April 2023.

The Britain-based research firm said its model was based on data from China's regional provinces before changes to reporting infections were implemented, combined with case growth rates from other former zero-COVID countries when they lifted restrictions.

China said this month it would end mandatory quarantine for people

arriving in the country and that it had abandoned strict measures to contain the virus.

The world's most populous country will downgrade its management of COVID-19 from January 8, treating it as a Class B infection rather than a more serious Class A.

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