

Japan tests all China arrivals for COVID amid surging cases

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A traveler walks near a banner for the coronavirus testing center at the Incheon International Airport in Incheon, South Korea, Friday, Dec. 30, 2022. South Korea on Friday announced that it will require travelers from China to show negative PCR test results within 48 hours or rapid antigen tests within 24 hours of their departures, beginning Jan. 5. Credit: Ryu Young-suk/Yonhap via AP

Japan on Friday started requiring COVID-19 tests for all passengers arriving from China as an emergency measure against surging infections there and as Japan faces rising case numbers and record-level deaths at home.

Japan reported a record 420 new coronavirus deaths on Thursday, one day after reaching an earlier single-day record of 415 deaths, according to the Health Ministry.

The numbers are higher than the daily deaths at the peak of an earlier wave in August, when they exceeded 300. Experts say the reason for the latest increase is unclear but could be linked to deaths from the worsening of chronic illnesses among elderly patients.

Japan tightened its border measures on Friday, making the antigen test that was already conducted on entrants suspected of having COVID-19 mandatory for all people arriving from mainland China. Those who test positive will be quarantined for up to seven days at designated facilities and their samples will be used for genome analysis.

The measures began ahead of the New Year holidays marked by travel and parties. Direct flights between China and Japan will be limited to four major Japanese airports for now, government officials said.

Flights from Hong Kong and Macao will be allowed to land at three other airports—New Chitose Airport in Hokkaido, Fukuoka Airport and Naha Airport in Okinawa—provided there are no passengers who have been to mainland China within seven days prior to the flight.



People wearing and not wearing face masks shop around at a shopping street famous for a year-end shopping before New Year holidays in Tokyo, Friday, Dec. 30, 2022. Japan on Friday started requiring COVID-19 tests for all passengers arriving from China as an emergency measure against surging infections there and as Japan faces rising case numbers and record-level deaths at home. Credit: AP Photo/Hiro Komae

Hong Kong authorities called the restrictions "unreasonable" and requested Japanese authorities to withdraw them. Prior to adding the three airports for flights from Hong Kong and Macao, authorities said that 60,000 travelers and some 250 flights would be affected between December and January 2023.

Japan earlier this year stopped requiring COVID-19 tests for entrants

who had at least three shots—part of the country's careful easing of measures after virtually closing its borders to foreign tourists for about two years. This year's holiday season is the first without virus restrictions other than recommendations for mask wearing and testing.

The country is now reporting about 200,000 known daily cases.

At a meeting earlier this week, experts cautioned that the rapid spread of influenza this winter also has the potential to add pressure to medical systems.



Travelers crowd at a departure lobby of Haneda airport in Tokyo Thursday, Dec. 29, 2022. Japan on Thursday reported a record 420 single-day coronavirus deaths, one day after reaching an earlier record of 425 deaths, according to the Health Ministry. Credit: Kyodo News via AP

China recently reversed its anti-virus controls that kept the country in isolation for nearly three years and announced this week plans to reissue passports and visas for overseas trips. This could send many Chinese abroad for the Lunar New Year holiday in January, raising concerns about the possible spread of the virus.

India, Italy, South Korea and Taiwan have also responded to the Chinese wave of infections by requiring virus tests for visitors from China. The United States said Wednesday it would require [testing of all travelers from China](#) beginning Jan. 5.

South Korea on Friday announced that it will also require travelers from China to show negative PCR test results within 48 hours or rapid antigen tests within 24 hours of their departures, beginning Jan. 5.

Effective Monday, all visitors from China will be also required to take PCR tests within a day of arriving in South Korea, said Jee Youngmee, commissioner of the Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency. South Korea will also restrict the number of flights from China and restrict short-term visas for Chinese nationals, except for those visiting for diplomatic, essential business or humanitarian reasons, at least until the end of February.



People wearing face masks flock to a shopping street famous for a year-end shopping before New Year holidays in Tokyo, Friday, Dec. 30, 2022. Japan on Friday started requiring COVID-19 tests for all passengers arriving from China as an emergency measure against surging infections there and as Japan faces rising case numbers and record-level deaths at home. Credit: AP Photo/Hiro Komae



Travelers crowd at a departure lobby of Haneda airport in Tokyo Thursday, Dec. 29, 2022. Japan on Thursday reported a record 420 single-day coronavirus deaths, one day after reaching an earlier record of 425 deaths, according to the Health Ministry. Credit: Kyodo News via AP

Thailand authorities said they were considering requiring a negative virus test and other restrictions on travelers from China.

China had stopped issuing visas to foreigners and passports to its own people at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020.

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