

More states impose COVID tests on travellers from China

December 30 2022



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Spain, South Korea and Israel on Friday joined nations imposing COVID tests on travellers from China, after Beijing dropped foreign travel curbs despite surging cases.

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.

On Wednesday, 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.

On Thursday, the head of the World Health Organization, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, also urged China to be more forthcoming on the pandemic. It was "understandable" that some countries had introduced restrictions in response to its COVID-19 surge, he said.

But on Friday, Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin insisted: "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."

Nevertheless, Spain, South Korea and Israel on Friday became the latest countries to impose mandatory coronavirus tests on visitors from China.

They join 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 variants from the Asian giant.

Different European approaches

In Beijing, Wang argued that health experts in several countries had

decided there was no need to impose entry restrictions on travellers from China.

The European Union's infectious disease agency (ECDC) said on 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

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

new local cases and one death on Friday.

With the end of mass testing however and the narrowing of criteria for what counts as a COVID fatality, those numbers are no longer believed to reflect reality.

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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Citation: More states impose COVID tests on travellers from China (2022, December 30)

retrieved 14 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2022-12-states-impose-covid-china.html>

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