

EU moving toward joint measures to face China COVID crisis

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Passengers arriving from China wait in front of a COVID-19 testing area set at the Roissy Charles de Gaulle airport, north of Paris, Sunday, Jan. 1, 2023. France says it will require negative COVID-19 tests of all passengers arriving from China and is urging French citizens to avoid nonessential travel to China. Credit: AP Photo/Aurelien Morissard

European Union nations are fine-tuning a coordinated response to China's COVID-19 crisis on Wednesday and are zeroing in on travel restrictions that would upset both Beijing and the global airline industry.

China has already vehemently rejected [travel restrictions](#) that some EU nations have started to impose and has warned of "countermeasures" if such actions should be expanded in coming days.

Yet on Wednesday, EU Commission spokesman Tim McPhie said that the "overwhelming majority of countries are in favor of" imposing testing of passengers from China prior to departure. The EU nations were seeking an official stance on the issue later in the day.

The Chinese government and European health experts have said there is no pressing need for any blanket restrictions on travel since the coronavirus variants emerging from China are already prevalent in Europe.

On Wednesday the International Air Transport Association, which represents some 300 airlines worldwide, lent its powerful voice to the protests.

"It is extremely disappointing to see this knee-jerk reinstatement of measures that have proven ineffective over the last three years," said IATA Director General Willie Walsh.

"Research undertaken around the arrival of the omicron variant concluded that putting barriers in the way of travel made no difference to the peak spread of infections. At most, restrictions delayed that peak by a few days," Walsh said.



Passengers arriving from China wait in front of a COVID-19 testing area set at the Roissy Charles de Gaulle airport, north of Paris, Sunday, Jan. 1, 2023. France says it will require negative COVID-19 tests of all passengers arriving from China and is urging French citizens to avoid nonessential travel to China. Credit: AP Photo/Aurelien Morissard

After threatening countermeasures on Tuesday, Chinese government spokesperson Mao Ning said Wednesday that "we sincerely hope that all parties will focus on fighting the epidemic itself, avoid the politicization of COVID."

Still, the EU seems bent on taking some sort of joint action to ensure incoming passengers from China do not transmit any potential new variants to the continent. Sweden, which holds the EU presidency, said

in a statement that "travelers from China need to be prepared for decisions being taken at short notice."

Fearful of being caught unawares like at the outset of the global pandemic in early 2020, the EU Integrated Political Crisis Response group is now slated to make a decision later Wednesday.

As well as pre-departure testing, EU nations are likely to agree on special testing of wastewater in planes coming from China to see if it contains dangerous variants that are not common on the continent yet.



A passenger arriving from China is tested for COVID-19 at the Roissy Charles de Gaulle airport, north of Paris, Sunday, Jan. 1, 2023. France says it will require negative COVID-19 tests of all passengers arriving from China and is urging French citizens to avoid nonessential travel to China. Credit: AP Photo/Aurelien

Morissard



A passenger coming from China leaves a COVID-19 testing area set at the Roissy Charles de Gaulle airport, north of Paris, Sunday, Jan. 1, 2023. France says it will require negative COVID-19 tests of all passengers arriving from China and is urging French citizens to avoid nonessential travel to China. Credit: AP Photo/Aurelien Morissard

Over the past week, EU nations have reacted with a chaotic cascade of national measures to the crisis in China, disregarding an earlier commitment to act in unity before anything else.

Italy was the first EU member to require coronavirus tests for airline passengers coming from China, but France and Spain quickly followed with their own measures.

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