



EB 2021/43

30 November 2021

RECOMMENDATIONS TO STATES REGARDING THE SARS-CoV-2 OMICRON VARIANT

1. The World Health Organization (WHO) designated a new SARS-CoV-2 variant as a Variant of Concern on 26 November 2021. This variant, named Omicron, has been reported in several areas of the world. It resulted in States imposing a range of travel measures at short notice. Measures include additional testing, mandatory quarantine, flight cancellations or suspensions and denied entry of some travellers, specifically those originating from countries where the new variant has been detected.

2. According to WHO, the Omicron variant is of concern due to its large number of mutations, which may be associated with higher transmissibility and potential immune escape (when the virus may escape the body's immune response despite vaccination or prior infection). However, current scientific information is limited regarding its transmissibility, potential severity of disease, the risk of reinfection and the effectiveness of current vaccines and treatments.

3. Until such time that more detailed Omicron-specific scientific information becomes available, Member States are encouraged to continue to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 using the existing recommendations in the ICAO guidance material (<https://www.icao.int/covid/Pages/default.aspx>), contained in the Council Aviation Recovery Task Force reports, the fourth edition of the *Take-off: Guidance for Air Travel through the COVID-19 Public Health Crisis* and the third edition of the *ICAO Manual on COVID-19 Cross-Border Risk Management* (Doc 10152), notably with regard to:

- Using the multilayer risk-based approach to mitigate the transmission of the disease;
- Continuing to apply general public health risk mitigation measures including hygiene and sanitation practices, wearing masks, applying physical distancing where feasible, ensuring adequate ventilation, use of health declarations, health monitoring and health screening practices;
- Implementing evidence-based testing and quarantine practices;
- Recording and sharing testing, recovery and vaccination evidence in an internationally, or globally, interoperable format;
- Considering exemptions from testing and/or quarantine based on vaccination or recovery from infection;
- Using and sharing genomic sequencing;
- Enhancing contact tracing;
- Considering the implementation of Public Health Corridors as opposed to implementing general border closures; and
- Encouraging COVID-19 vaccination and supporting States' access to vaccines – as inadequate vaccination could lead to further mutations and possible immune escape, resulting in prolonging of the pandemic and potentially more severe health, social and/or economical outcomes.

4. States are urged to follow and implement this guidance in coordination with ICAO Regional Offices according to their specific needs and circumstances, noting the importance of a global coordinated approach and the principles of solidarity and equality in order to mitigate the transmission of the disease and facilitate the recovery of international travel and the global economy.

Issued under the authority of the Secretary General