

Here are some of the most restrictive COVID-19 rules in the world

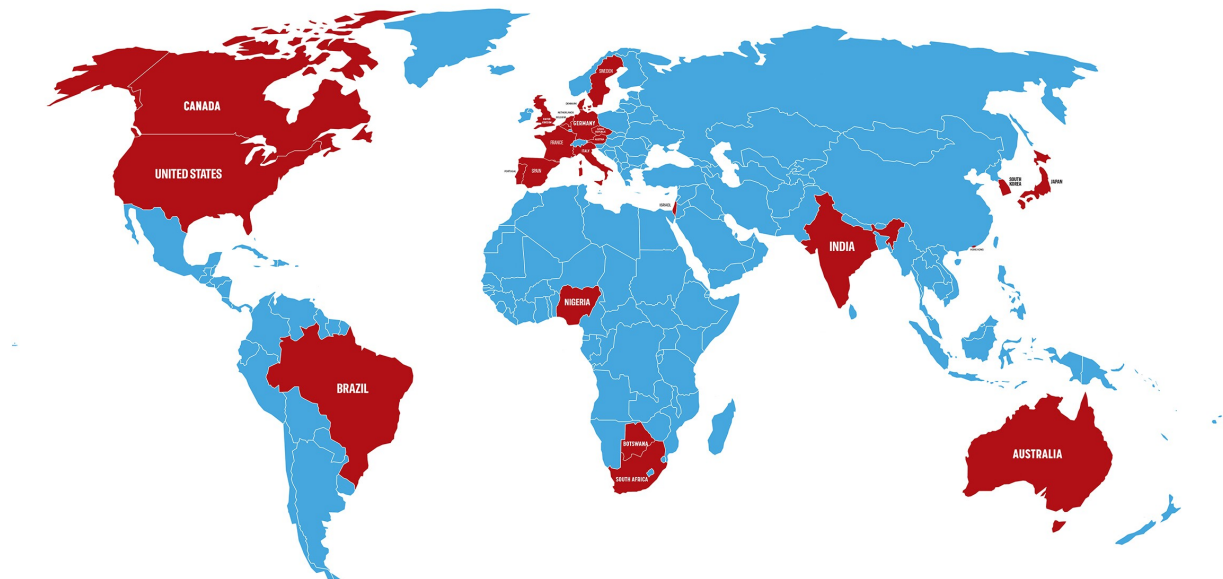
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OMICRON OUTBREAK

List of countries where new Covid-19 variant has been detected.



Source: World Health Organization

Map of countries that have identified omicron variant of COVID-19 within their borders
PytyCzech/Getty Images/iStockphoto

Although scientists have detected few severe symptoms associated with the omicron variant, some countries are reacting with extreme measures to contain its spread.

The United States, for example, imposed a travel ban aimed at a number of African countries and extended mask mandates for public transportation for weeks, working to get ahead of the variant as doctors scramble to learn more about its effects.

Other countries have extended their already burdensome restrictions in light of the new variant, despite protests that have emerged in multiple countries against what some people see as heavy-handed measures.

Here are some of the strictest COVID-19 requirements currently in place around the world.

Germany

German officials on Thursday announced a mandatory lockdown for unvaccinated people, keeping them from almost all public spaces and limiting their interactions with others.

Under the new rules, unvaccinated Germans can only enter essential businesses, such as pharmacies, and can't gather with more than two people from outside their households, even in private.

The severe restrictions on what unvaccinated people can do come as leaders also ready plans to require vaccinations for all citizens.

Germany has maintained relatively strict COVID-19 rules throughout the pandemic, although the country had recently begun to relax some of them. Even so, Germany is suffering through a spike in infections, with an average of more than 55,000 new cases being reported daily.

Israel

In response to the emergence of the omicron variant, Israel moved to ban all noncitizens from entering the country for at least two weeks.

Israelis who return from abroad will need to quarantine for at least three days, regardless of their vaccination status. All Israelis must take a COVID-19 test upon landing in the country and quarantine for three days; under the new restrictions, Israeli citizens can only be released from quarantine with a negative result from a second COVID-19 test 72 hours after returning from abroad.

Israeli officials also moved to add dozens of African countries to its "red" list, which denotes countries to which travel for Israelis is essentially forbidden. The omicron variant was first reported by scientists in South Africa.

Any traveler returning to Israel from a country on the newly expanded red list will be sent to a government-run quarantine facility, including vaccinated Israelis and those who have acquired natural immunity, until they receive a negative test result, at which point the Israeli government permits them to continue isolation at home.

Australia

Australia has had strict COVID-19 rules throughout the pandemic and has continued them as the omicron variant stokes concerns among public health officials.

Australians returning from abroad are required to quarantine in state-run facilities, facing arrest if they attempt to escape before their quarantine period is completed, as three people recently did when they attempted to escape after testing negative for the virus.

Critics have referred to the facilities as COVID-19 camps, although the country's government labels them "centers for national resilience."

Australians who have tested positive and may be contagious are also sometimes required to endure quarantine at the facilities, where strict rules about social distancing and remaining in one's assigned room govern activity.

Pursuing COVID-19-free status in some of its states, Australia has left border closures in place in many places longer than most other countries. The highly contagious delta variant, which spread worldwide over the summer, caused outbreaks in Australia that evaded the strict COVID-19 requirements, however.

Austria

Austrian officials this week extended a nationwide lockdown until Dec. 11, bringing the total duration of the lockdown to 20 days.

The lockdown has forced nonessential businesses from theaters to museums to close their doors temporarily in order to avoid another spike in cases. Austrian restaurants can't host diners but can operate privately to serve take-out meals.

Austria is one of several countries that has experienced protests against its pandemic-era rules.

COVID-19 cases have fallen since the start of the new lockdown, however. Daily infections sat at 15,000 the week before the lockdown began in November; daily infections have now reportedly fallen below 9,000.

Singapore

Once a center of international travel in Asia, Singapore had begun working on a system to allow vaccinated travelers to enter the country more easily before the discovery of the omicron variant.

Vaccinated people from certain countries deemed sufficiently safe could avoid quarantine requirements when entering Singapore.

Travelers entering Singapore using the system, known as "vaccinated travel lanes," will now be required to take a COVID-19 test every day for seven days upon their arrival in the country, submitting their results each day to the government.

In addition, Singapore placed more burdensome travel requirements on a number of countries where the omicron variant has been detected, including demanding that travelers from the designated countries observe a stay-at-home order for 10 days and adhere to a testing regimen.

Although Singapore pursued an early and aggressive vaccination strategy, the country endured rapid increases in COVID-19 cases this fall, causing the government to return to some restrictions it had recently attempted to ease.