



ICAO reinforces air transport recommendations for the new Omicron variant

For immediate release

Montréal, 1 December 2021 –In line with the latest recommendations of the World Health Organization (WHO), ICAO issued a new global bulletin today urging a more measured and evidence-based approach to countries' national air transport restrictions due to the emergence of the SARS-CoV-2 Omicron variant.

Until more detailed assessments are available, the UN aviation agency is encouraging countries to continue combatting the spread of COVID-19, and specifically the Omicron variant, using the [recommendations and guidance](#) contained in the ICAO Council Aviation Recovery Task Force's (CART) *Take-off Guidance for Air Travel through the COVID-19 Public Health Crisis*, in addition to the third edition of ICAO's [Manual on COVID-19 Cross-Border Risk Management](#).

The new bulletin was issued under the authority of ICAO Secretary General Juan Carlos Salazar, who commented that "It's critical that we continue to respond to this disease and its variants on the basis of the best available science and evidence."

"Countries have recently and very clearly reinforced their commitments to proceed on this basis through their Ministerial [Declaration](#) outcome from our [High-level Conference on COVID-19](#), in addition to other multilateral statements, and the costs and implications of being excessively cautious and overly restrictive in this context must be carefully measured by all concerned," he underscored.

ICAO and other UN bodies have been consistently reinforcing that no country can defeat COVID-19 in isolation, and that the costs of significantly restricted global air mobility affect all countries, and are especially acute for Landlocked and Small Island Developing States. This is affecting millions of livelihoods globally, and the basic capabilities of many countries to pursue current UN *Agenda 2030* and *Common Agenda* objectives for global sustainability, prosperity, equality, and well-being.

Countries are encouraged to follow and implement ICAO's guidance with the coordination and support of the ICAO Regional Offices, and according to their specific national needs and circumstances.

The ICAO bulletin also re-emphasized the importance of "a globally coordinated approach," and for countries to proceed based on "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."



Resources for Editors

Full text of ICAO bulletin 2021/43

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.

About ICAO

A specialized agency of the United Nations, ICAO was created by governments in 1944 to support their diplomacy on international air transport matters. Since that time, countries have adopted over 12,000 standards and practices through ICAO which help to align their national regulations relevant to aviation safety, security, efficiency, capacity and environmental protection, enabling a truly global network to be realized. ICAO forums also provide opportunities for advice and advocacy to be shared with government decision-makers by industry groups, civil society NGOs, and other officially-recognized air transport stakeholders.

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