

Russia Confirms First Omicron Variant Infections

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The mutated strain was detected in two Russian citizens returning from South Africa. **Sofia Sandurskaya / Moskva News Agency**

Russia has confirmed its first two cases of the new Omicron coronavirus variant, health authorities [announced](#) Monday.

The cases were detected in two Russian citizens who recently returned from South Africa, the state-run RIA Novosti news agency cited state consumer protection watchdog Rospotrebnadzor as saying.

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“The Omicron strain was confirmed in two patients with a positive PCR test obtained on the first day of their stay at the observatory after the completion of genome-wide sequencing carried out by Rospotrebnadzor’s Central Research Institute of Epidemiology,” the watchdog was quoted as saying.

Last week, Rospotrebnadzor announced that 10 Russians who had recently returned from South Africa on a specially chartered flight received a positive PCR test result on arrival. It was not immediately clear if the two newly detected cases of the Omicron variant were part of that group.

In a bid to prevent the Omicron variant from spreading in the country, Russia last month banned flights from South Africa, Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Madagascar, Swaziland and Tanzania, as well as Hong Kong.

Russian citizens returning home from South Africa or neighboring countries are also [required](#) to quarantine for 14 days upon arrival from Dec. 2.

The Omicron variant, which was first identified by scientists in South Africa, where it has spread rapidly, has now been detected in over 38 countries. The World Health Organization (WHO) has listed Omicron as a “variant of concern” and said last week that it was likely to spread internationally. No deaths linked to the new variant have yet been reported and early data [hints](#) that it may cause less severe illness.

“The emergence of the highly mutated Omicron variant underlines just how perilous and precarious our situation is,” WHO head Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus [said](#) during a Nov. 29 session of the World Health Assembly.

The Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF), which helped develop Russia’s Sputnik V Covid-19 vaccine, [said](#) last week that their jab was effective against the Omicron variant but that they were also developing an adapted booster. RDIF said it hoped to supply “billions of doses” of the Sputnik Omicron booster to the international market by February.

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