

# FAQ: Omicron variant

## What does it mean for business travel?

The picture and understanding of the Omicron variant is rapidly evolving and information is likely to change. Travel and other restrictions can be implemented with little or no advance warning - be prepared for the risk that onward travel may be delayed or not possible.

Click the questions below to quickly find the answers you need:



**1. What is the current situation?**



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**5. What's our advice for travellers due to travel to impacted countries?**



**6. What do we do if we get 'stuck' in a country that is impacted by a travel ban?**

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travel  
restrictions page**



## 1. What is the current situation?



Scientists in South Africa reported a new COVID-19 variant, B.1.1.529, to the World Health Organisation (WHO) on 24 November 2021; the WHO on 26 November designated it as a 'Variant of Concern'.

Experts and authorities are rapidly scaling up testing and investigations to understand the extent of the risk. There is limited information however so far it appears:

- further geographic spread is highly likely
- rapid surges in infections may occur, especially in locations with low vaccination rates
- the illness is similar in symptoms and severity to other strains of COVID-19
- it may be more transmissible than the Delta variant
- current vaccines are still effective, but how well they prevent infection, transmission and disease is uncertain
- other preventive measures effective against COVID-19 will reduce transmission of Omicron.

An increasing number of countries are finding the variant in travellers, some are fully vaccinated, and some have no obvious links to South Africa. The variant is likely to spread, and cases have already been identified in countries outside of South Africa.

Many countries have implemented sudden changes to their management of travellers from South Africa, affected and neighbouring countries, such as banning entry or extending quarantine and testing requirements.



## 2. Which countries have imposed a travel ban?

A number of countries globally began imposing travel restrictions on inbound travel from countries in Southern Africa, namely Angola; Botswana; Comoros; Eswatini; Lesotho; Madagascar; Malawi; Mauritius; Mozambique; Namibia; Seychelles; South Africa; Zambia; Zimbabwe. These have been applied rapidly, and this information is continually changing.

We anticipate that restrictions on travel from Southern Africa will remain in place in the coming days and/or weeks while countries assess their domestic exposure to the variant. Additional countries within Europe, the Middle East, Asia and the Americas are likely to impose similar restrictions in the coming days but precisely which countries, or when, will be difficult to predict.

For the most up-to-date information on countries impacted, [please visit our Pandemic Information Site](#).



## 3. How long will the travel ban last?

It is difficult to predict how long the restrictions will last. They are likely to last several weeks to several months until governments are able to understand the domestic prevalence of the new variant and implement measures to tackle it.

Countries with rising cases of Omicron variant are likely to be subject to additional entry requirements in the coming days and weeks. Various exemptions for entry exist but are implemented on an individual state basis. Some restrictions are set to last for at least 48 hours, while others are likely to be extended indefinitely. We recommend, if booking essential travel, to book flexible routes with refundable tickets, on the assumption that the trip could be cancelled at short notice.

Please visit our Pandemic Information Site for updates on those countries who have already detected the Omicron variant of COVID-19 in travellers.



## 4. What's our advice for travellers currently in, or near, the impacted countries?

- Closely follow all official directives and abide by them. Monitor reliable sources for information relating to changes to directives.
- Continue to undertake COVID-19 preventative measures, such as mask wearing, social distancing, good ventilation, hand-washing and vaccinations.
- Understand your organisation's medical and security triggers for changes to in-country posture.
- Anticipate possible disruption, maintain flexible itineraries and be prepared for short-notice changes to entry requirements, including potential restrictions.
- We do not hold information on specific flights. Contact the airport or the relevant airline to confirm itineraries. In the event of cancellations, your travel agent will be able to assist with alternative arrangements.
- If making arrangements for flight routes via third countries, reconfirm flight schedules before departing for the airport and allow additional time to complete check-in formalities.

If you do not feel comfortable staying where you are for several weeks or even months, we would recommend you discuss returning to your home country while commercial flights are still available – with the understanding that these flights may be cancelled at short notice. **Demand for flights is also likely to be high, so make bookings as soon as possible if you wish to travel.**

We are not able to predict which countries may be added to restrictions list in the future, but at the moment it appears to be countries that closely border South Africa (thus, West/North African countries are unlikely to be added soon, although they may be if cases of the Omicron variant are found there). The decision of whether to travel should be between yourself and your managers; we are not able to give you a 'go/no go' in terms of whether you should travel.



## 5. What is our advice for business travellers due to travel to impacted countries?

The picture and understanding of Omicron is rapidly evolving. Information is likely to change. Restrictions can be implemented with little or no advance warning. Ensure that you reconfirm your itinerary, stay flexible, have appropriate contingency plans in place and check the latest restrictions for your destination.

**We recommend businesses and individuals review the need, risk and viability of travel** in light of the potential for travellers to be:

- suddenly barred from entry to your next destination, including your home country.
- “stuck” in a location for an extended period of time (due to both unavailability of flights, new entry requirements and new lockdowns)
- be quarantined and tested, regardless of your vaccination status
- unable to access local medical infrastructure due to rising cases





## 5. What do we do if we get 'stuck' in a country that is impacted by a travel ban?



**We recommend pursuing commercial flight options if you wish to leave the country you are currently in.**

Itineraries should factor in that countries with travel bans will not allow you in if you have been in an impacted Southern African country at any time in the past 14 days. Therefore, you would need to stay at least 14 days in a non-Southern African country in order to enter your destination country.

If commercial flight options are not possible, **we advise reaching out to the relevant diplomatic mission to enquire about government-sponsored repatriation flights.** We must stress that any charter evacuations require diplomatic channels to obtain the relevant flight permits.

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