

U.S. to restrict travel from eight African nations over new COVID-19 concerns



Passengers walk through the terminal at Newark Liberty International Airport in Newark, New Jersey, US, on November 24, 2021. (Reuters photo)

New York, November 27 (RHC)-- The United States says it will restrict travel from South Africa and seven other African countries starting on Monday as a new coronavirus variant first detected in South Africa appeared to be spreading across the globe.

The administration of U.S. President Joe Biden announced on Friday it will restrict travel from Botswana, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Lesotho, Eswatini, Mozambique and Malawi in an effort to control the spread of the new variant of COVID-19.

The Biden administration said that the measure was taken out of an abundance of caution in light of the new variant. The World Health Organization (WHO) has classified the new COVID-19 variant found in South Africa, "Omicron," a label applied when a particular strain is especially virulent, transmissible or able to defeat public health measures.

"President Biden has promised to take every measure necessary to keep Americans safe and defeat the pandemic, and this was a step recommended by U.S. government medical experts and the COVID-19 Response Team," the Biden administration said a statement on Friday.

American citizens and lawful permanent residents must show proof of a negative test prior to traveling to the United States. The new travel restrictions, however, will not apply to them.

"This morning I was briefed by my chief medical advisor, Dr. Tony Fauci, and the members of our COVID response team, about the Omicron variant, which is spreading through Southern Africa. As a precautionary measure until we have more information, I am ordering additional air travel restrictions from South Africa and seven other countries. As we move forward, we will continue to be guided by what the science and my medical team advises," Biden said in a statement.

Biden urged Americans who aren't vaccinated to get their shots, and for those who are to get boosters.

"Boosters are approved for all adults over 18, six months past their vaccination and are available at 80,000 locations coast-to-coast. They are safe, free, and convenient. Get your booster shot now, so you can have this additional protection during the holiday season," the US president said.

The decision to ban travelers from African countries comes weeks after the US allowed international travelers to the country. "Our scientists and public health officials are working quickly to learn more about this variant," the administration added.

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Top U.S. infectious disease official Dr. Anthony Fauci said on Friday that the United States was rushing to gather data on the new COVID-19 variant. "There is always the possibility of doing what the UK has done, namely block travel from South Africa and related countries," Fauci said in an interview on CNN.

"That's certainly something you think about and get prepared to do. You're prepared to do everything you need to protect the American public. But you want to make sure there's a basis for doing that," he said. "Obviously as soon as we find out more information we'll make a decision as quickly as we possibly can."

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