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Atlanta, January 12 (RHC)-- The United States has raised the risk assessment level for COVID-19 for Canada, designating its northern neighbor among the world's most dangerous travel destinations. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has now changed its cautionary rating on Canada to Level 4, indicating very high COVID-19 levels.

It advised Americans to “avoid travel” to Canada, based on criteria that include rising numbers of new infection cases due to the rapid spread of the Omicron variant of the coronavirus disease. The sudden surge of infections in Canada has spurred some government officials to begin developing contingency plans to handle the crisis.

"We are planning for worst-case scenarios, up to and including illness rates of 50 to 60 percent, so that we have made plans for that possible scenario," Toronto Mayor John Tory told reporters on Tuesday.

Meanwhile, as of January 10, the CDC advisory has ranked more than 80 countries across the globe, which include Turkey, Iraq, Saudi Arabia France, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland and the United Kingdom, in Level 4. "If you must travel to these destinations, make sure you are fully vaccinated before travel," it said.

Level 3 countries, according to the CDC assessment, included Egypt, Armenia, Bahrain, the UAE and Mexico. Costa Rica, Cuba, El Salvador, Kuwait, Nepal, New Zealand and Nigeria were among the Level 2 countries, while China, India, Japan and Pakistan ranked as Level 1.

The fast-spreading Omicron variant has become the dominant strain of COVID-19 in the United States, according to the CDC. All in all, the CDC advised against traveling to most countries, adding that if you must travel to other countries, make sure you are fully vaccinated before the trip.

Vaccination is the most significant safety factor for travel since unvaccinated travelers are more likely to become ill and transmit COVID-19 infections to other people, according to Public Health specialists.

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