

Briefing on new temporary measures introduced following the emergence of the Omicron Variant in the UK.

The UKHSA designated variant B.1.1.529 as a variant under investigation (Vul) on Thursday 25 November. It was designated a Variant of Concern (VoC) on Saturday 27 November.

The B.1.1.529 variant includes a large number of spike protein mutations as well as mutations in other parts of the viral genome. These are potentially biologically significant mutations which may change the behaviour of the virus with regards to vaccines, treatments, and transmissibility.

The UK Health Security Agency, in partnership with scientific bodies across the globe, is constantly monitoring the status of SARS-CoV-2 variants as they emerge and develop worldwide. We are particularly grateful to health protection specialists and the Government of South Africa for early sharing of local information on the omicron variant in an exemplary way to support global health security.

UKHSA is acting to get scientific information available as quickly as possible in order to inform the right balance of interventions to prevent transmission and protect lives. This will include analysing live samples of the new variant in our laboratories to investigate properties such as response to current vaccines.

As viruses mutate often and at random, it is not unusual for small numbers of cases to arise featuring new sets of mutations. Any variants showing evidence of spread are rapidly assessed.

Three cases of Omicron variant linked to travel have been confirmed in the London, one each in East Midlands and East of England regions. Scotland has reported 6 cases. UKHSA is carrying out contact tracing and targeted testing at relevant locations.

In order to contain the spread of Omicron in England a number of temporary measures have been introduced

A. International Arrivals – red listed countries – guidance can be found [here](#)

The Red List Countries are Angola, Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Namibia, Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

- Arrivals from red listed countries **pre 26th November** have been contacted:
 - Arrivals from a red list country on or after 15th November have been sent 2 PCR tests and asked to self-isolate (voluntarily) for 10 days
 - If they arrived less than 5 days prior to 26th November, they'd be asked to take a PCR immediately (i.e. day 2) and then day 8, and self-isolate at their designated address for 10 days **and until negative test result received.**
 - If they arrived more than 5 days prior to 26th November they will only need to do one PCR test, self-isolate for 10 days from date of arrival **and until negative test result received.**

- **From 26th November to 4.00am 28th November**, international arrivals have, who have been in a red listed country - South Africa, Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Namibia, and Zimbabwe - in the 10 days prior to arriving in England

- are required to quarantine at the address designated on their passenger locator forms and take day 2 and day 8 PCR tests
 - they need to quarantine for 10 days **and until negative test result received.**
- **From 4am on 28th November,**
 - 4 additional countries were added to the red list – Angola, Malawi, Mozambique, and Zambia
 - Arrivals from any of these 10 red listed countries (plus any other countries subsequently added to the red list) are required to book and pay for a managed quarantine facility prior to their departure to England
 - The Managed Quarantine Service will include quarantine in designated facilities plus day 2 and 8 PCR tests.

Managed Quarantine Facilities MQF

- Two MQF hotels were opened in Hillingdon to take in guests from 4am on 28th November
- Additional hotels - 3 in Hillingdon, 2 in West Sussex, one in Milton Keynes and 1 in Tower Hamlets have since been opened. Our MQS colleagues are working at pace to open more MQF in response to demand from red listed countries.
- These hotels have all been Managed Quarantine Facilities previously so should be very quickly able to get back up to speed bar a refresher to any changes in our SOPs.
- We will be working with partners, including NHS over coming days to ensure all provision is in place as before as soon as they open.
- Based on feedback from Stakeholders we are aiming to spread out the location of the MQFs, so they are not concentrated in a few Local Authorities.

B. Other International Arrivals – Guidance can be found [here](#) others

- If you are **fully vaccinated** and arrive in England after 4am Tuesday 30 November, you:
 - must self-isolate
 - take a PCR test before the end of day 2 after you arrive (lateral flow tests will not be accepted)
 - can leave self-isolation if your PCR test result is negative
- **If you are not fully vaccinated**, before you travel to England you must:
 - take a pre departure COVID-19 test – to be taken in the 3 days before you travel to England
 - book and pay for day 2 and day 8 COVID-19 PCR tests – to be taken after arrival in England
 - complete a passenger locator form – to be completed in the 48 hours before you arrive in England
 -

C. Other Temporary for members of the General Public – advice can be found [here](#)

- **Face Coverings:** From 4am Tuesday 30 November, face coverings will be compulsory in shops and other indoor settings such as banks, post offices and hairdressers, as well as on public transport unless individuals are exempt from doing so. All hospitality settings will be exempt.
- **PCR Testing** - anyone who has symptoms of Covid should take a PCR test immediately and self-isolate
- **Self-isolation:** All contacts of suspected Omicron cases **must** self-isolate, regardless of their vaccination status or age. They will be contacted by NHS Test and Trace.

D. Education and Childcare Settings – guidance can be found [here](#)

- **Face Coverings**
 - Face coverings should be worn in communal areas in all settings by staff, visitors and pupils or students in year 7 and above, unless they are exempt.
 - Pupils or students (in year 7 or above) should continue to wear face coverings on public and dedicated school transport unless they are exempt.
 - Staff and adults in Primary schools should wear face coverings in communal areas.
- **Testing** - All educational and childcare settings should continue to encourage staff and students to test twice weekly using lateral flow device (LFD) tests.
- **Contact Tracing and Isolation**
 - The current guidance remains in place but in addition any suspected or confirmed close contacts of the Omicron variant will be asked to **isolate for 10 days regardless of vaccination status or age.**