

Media Release

Date: 29 November 2021

Civil Contingencies Authority agrees new requirements for travel and for the use of face coverings in response to uncertainty around Omicron variant

The Civil Contingencies Authority has met today and agreed to introduce new testing and isolation requirements for travellers. This is in response to the emergence of the Omicron variant which continues to present uncertainty around its transmissibility, risk of reinfection, and whether it means the current vaccines are any less effective.

After adding countries to the red list over the weekend, in line with the UK, people who had travelled to red list countries in the last 10 days were phoned and asked to attend for PCR testing. Any positive result was immediately sequenced to ascertain the genetic lineage. So far, Guernsey's on-island sequencing has not detected any cases of the Omicron variant, with all recent cases sequenced being of the Delta lineage.

Alongside the new requirement for travel, the CCA has also agreed to make the use of face coverings mandatory in some settings, specifically public transport, shops and customer-facing areas of some States of Guernsey administrative buildings.

Mandatory use of face coverings

Face coverings are being introduced as an additional measure to prevent transmission locally, because of the uncertainty around the new variant. This is a precautionary measure which will be regularly reviewed as we learn more about Omicron.

At this stage, the CCA is not extending the mandatory use of face coverings to businesses where it would effectively prevent the business from operating. **The intention is to reduce the number of transmissions wherever it is reasonably practical to do so without impacting the lives and livelihoods of Islanders.** The strong recommendation to wear a face covering in any setting where there are crowds, it is hard to physically distance or there is poor ventilation remains in place and should be adopted by all business sectors and individuals wherever possible, even if the mandatory requirement does not extend to them.

The mandatory use of face coverings will come into effect at 00.01 Wednesday 1 December 2021, and further details on legal requirements will be published tomorrow.

New travel requirements

The CCA has also agreed that from 00.01 Wednesday 1 December 2021, all fully vaccinated arrivals who have been to a non-Common Travel Area (CTA) country in the 10 days before their journey to the Bailiwick will need to complete a PCR test on arrival and isolate until they receive a negative result.

Furthermore, all arrivals who have only been to the Common Travel Area will be legally required to purchase a pack of Lateral Flow Tests on arrival and complete the course of tests over the following 10 days.

There LFT packs for CTA arrivals and the PCR tests for non-CTA arrivals both incur a charge of £25.

Travel requirements for arrivals from outside the CTA who are not fully vaccinated will not change. These travellers currently need to complete a PCR test on their day of arrival and on day 8 and isolate until they receive a negative result on the day 8 test.

The travel requirements for those arriving from red list countries are also unchanged. These arrivals, regardless of vaccination status, must complete a test on arrival and a test on day 9 and isolate until they receive a negative result on the day 9 test. This is on the basis that they have not travelled to the Bailiwick via the UK, as red list arrivals travelling via the UK must complete 10 days in a UK quarantine hotel before they are permitted to travel onto the Bailiwick.

Before the new requirements come into effect on Wednesday, passengers on services from outside the CTA such as ferries or flight coming directly from the continent, are being requested to take PCR tests on arrival as an additional precaution.

Contact tracing and isolation requirements for suspected Omicron cases

Further changes will also be made to the isolation requirements for individuals who are a close contact of a confirmed or suspected case of the COVID-19 Omicron variant. These people will be legally required to self-isolate, regardless of their age or vaccination status. Contacts of confirmed or suspected cases of the Omicron variant will be notified by Public Health. These contacts of cases will be required to self-isolate for 10 days, or until the case they were in contact with is confirmed to be of the Delta or other lineage (Delta is the current dominant strain in the Bailiwick). If the case turns out not to be the Omicron variant after sequencing then the contact can then be released to follow the existing requirements for contacts, which for fully vaccinated people means completing 10 days of lateral flow tests and avoiding certain higher-risk health and care settings.

Deputy Peter Ferbrache, Chair of the Civil Contingencies Authority said

“We need to recognise the uncertainty that the Omicron variant brings and the measures that we are introducing are precautionary and reflect the uncertainty of the current situation. It may be a greater risk than the Delta or other variants, and it may not, and so we are quickly stepping both our border and local rules as a

precaution. But we're not seeking to overreact, either and we want people to continue to be able to live, work, attend school and enjoy the festive period with as little unnecessary disruption as possible, mindful that we do have a highly-vaccinated community and this is not a repeat of what we faced when the very first cases of COVID-19 were emerging around the world. We do need more information on the efficacy of vaccines against the new variant, but we're also advised that the vaccines we have administered will offer some protection. That means we must work quickly to continue our booster programme and encouraging anyone who has not yet been vaccinated to do so.

I hope the measures we're announcing today are temporary measures that can soon be lifted again, but they may not be, we will need to see what new information emerges on the Omicron variant. We should also take note of how quickly things can still change because of this virus, particularly for those considering travel. The Omicron variant may not be the only or the last variant that prompts countries to react rapidly and reimpose strict travel requirements. Travel in general continues to carry a real element of risk."

Dr Nicola Brink, Director of Public Health said

"We are very closely monitoring the new information on the Omicron variant, including where it's been detected. The UK, who we work closely with, are a world leader in sequencing and that gives us good visibility, alongside our own on-island sequencing capability. So we can, and should take a cautious, but proportionate approach for the moment, while we learn more about the transmissibility and spectrum of symptoms caused by the Omicron variant. While there are some new requirements coming in, the guidance we have promoted recently still applies. Use a face covering wherever you can't socially distance or there's poor ventilation and test regularly with lateral flows. Most of all we must all stay at home if we are unwell and report our symptoms to the clinical helpline. Do not assume that a negative lateral flow result means you can go back out into the community if you are symptomatic, you must still stay at home and report those symptoms so we can arrange a PCR test. And, importantly get vaccinated and boosted.

We are also today looking at the very latest guidance from the Joint Committee for Vaccination & Immunisation, in relation to our vaccine and booster programme. We know we are receiving a lot of enquiries about that today and we will provide more information as soon as we can."

A live COVID-19 briefing is being held today at 6pm, available on <https://covid19.gov.gg/>, the States of Guernsey Facebook page and local radio, where the panel will provide more detail on these new requirements.