



## **Omicron: What you need to know about the new coronavirus variant**

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November 26<sup>th</sup>, 2021

Several efforts are already underway to contain the Omicron variant of the coronavirus. The U.S. is saying it's all hands on deck to buy time so that experts can learn more about it.

In the last few hours, New York Governor Kathy Hochul declared a state of emergency ahead of a potential spike in cases. The measure allows the state to stockpile medical supplies, increase hospital capacity, and fight staffing shortages.

Both Moderna and Johnson & Johnson have announced plans to measure their vaccines' efficacy against the new strain. Moderna added that they've already begun work on an Omicron-specific booster. They plan to have data on that in the coming weeks.

Looking ahead, we're now 48 hours out from new travel restrictions. President Joe Biden is ending air travel for eight African countries based on the advice of U.S. health experts. They'll remain in effect indefinitely, but do not apply to U.S. citizens or permanent residents.

“It has, I think, over 100 different mutations on the protein spike. So I think it's important that I don't think any of us have heard of it yet,” said Dr. Jeffery Singer. “But the fact that there are so many mutations worries virologists, that this may be enough mutations that it might escape the protection of the immune systems of the people who've been vaccinated.”

President Biden has ordered a travel ban restricting travel into the U.S. from South Africa and several other countries. Dr. Singer says it may just be a matter of time before the variant reaches the U.S.

“Unfortunately, experience has shown us that every time. We initiated a travel ban and really, the horse is already out of the barn,” Dr. Singer said. “You know, in our global interconnected world, by the time we discover something, it's already too late. So it's unlikely that a travel ban is going to prevent it from getting here.”

