



PR#566

PRESS RELEASE

Ministry of Health & Wellness Increases Surveillance Following Announcement of New COVID-19 Variant

Belmopan. December 2, 2021. 3:50 p.m.

The Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO) announced on November 26, 2021, the confirmation of the new COVID-19 variant Omicron. This variant was discovered by scientists in South Africa.

The new variant has numerous mutations, which may make it more transmissible especially amongst the unvaccinated population, and WHO has indicated that this variant poses a very high risk for global spread.

The team at the Ministry of Health & Wellness (MOHW) in collaboration with the National Immunization Technical Advisory Group and the COVID-19 Medical Advisory Group are carefully monitoring the situation. The MOHW has alerted its health teams in the districts and advised for increased surveillance of possible cases of concern. Additionally, the ministry is in communication with Baylor College of Medicine and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention to ensure that the Central Medical Laboratory is equipped with the necessary agents to identify the variant.

The Government of Belize is currently not considering any flight bans. At this time there are no direct flights into Belize from any southern African countries, and many larger countries have already implemented public health measures that include flight bans on approximately seven southern African nations.

The MOHW reminds the public to get vaccinated as a matter of urgency if they have not already done so. For those eligible, the booster dose is available. The ministry reiterates the importance of adhering to public health measures, which include proper wearing of a fitted facemask covering both the nose and mouth, maintaining physical distance, avoiding crowds where possible, and regularly washing and sanitizing hands.

The Ministry of Health & Wellness will continue to monitor and provide updates to the public as more information becomes available.

Ends