**Summary and Action Items**

1. To provide information on IDPH monitoring of travelers from eight countries (Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, and Zimbabwe) into the United States due to the identification of the Omicron variant.
2. To provide information on CDC travel changes.
3. To provide information on COVID-19 cases for whom sequencing to look for Omicron would be recommended.

**Background**

Travelers from eight countries in Africa: CDC has suspended entry of persons into the U.S. of noncitizens (both immigrants and nonimmigrants) who have been physically present within the following eight countries (Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, and Zimbabwe) during the 14-day period prior to entry into the U.S. U.S. citizens and lawful permanent residents of the U.S., including family members and other individuals who meet certain exceptions, will be allowed into the U.S. See presidential proclamation under additional resources for more details.

On November 30th, IDPH began receiving from CDC a listing of individuals who do come to the U.S. from these eight countries who list Illinois as their final destination. CDC has requested that these individuals be contacted by health departments after their arrival in the U.S. and reminded to quarantine and to test by PCR 3-5 days after arrival. To reduce the burden on the local health departments, IDPH will contact these individuals.

All international travelers to the U.S.: In addition, CDC has amended travel requirements for ALL international travelers to the U.S. to require pre-departure testing of everyone (regardless of vaccination status) within one day of their travel to the U.S. Travelers should also have a COVID-19 test 3-5 days after arrival in the U.S. ***These travelers should self-quarantine for seven days after arrival in the U.S. even if the post-arrival test is negative***. If they are symptomatic or COVID-19 positive, they should isolate.

Basic Information on Omicron variant

* The B.1.1.529 variant (Omicron) was classified as a variant of concern on November 26, 2021.
* Persons who have the Omicron variant are expected to test positive on current COVID-19 tests available in the U.S. Because Omicron has an S-gene target failure, this characteristic can be detected with some assays, including the TaqPath COVID-19 combo kit and Linea COVID-19 kit. However, additional genomic sequencing would be needed to confirm the Omicron variant.
* This variant is currently present in a number of countries in Europe, Asia, Australia, Africa, and North America (Canada). It is currently the most common variant in cases in South Africa. The first U.S. case was identified today (December 1, 2021) in California.
* Because the Omicron variant is newly discovered, much is not known about its effects, including transmissibility compared to the Delta variant, the severity of disease associated with this variant, and the level of protection provided by the current vaccines.
* IDPH has a system in place for routine genomic sequencing of a set number of surveillance COVID-19 specimens and many commercial laboratories are also working to do genomic sequencing of specimens.

International travel for U.S. residents Individuals with questions about international travel should consult the CDC website to determine countries classified as Level 4, which means travel to those areas is not recommended due to COVID-19 levels or the presence of variants (https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/map-and-travel-notices.html).

**Local Health Department Actions**

* Contact the IDPH CD Section to report any suspect or confirmed cases of Omicron and to discuss sequencing results, details of the case and release of information.
* Call IDPH with any concerns about a possible case of the Omicron variant.
* Leverage existing resources for community-based case navigation to support the quarantine/isolation period.
* If there are epidemiologic links in a COVID-19 case that may make sequencing more important (such as arrival from a country where Omicron is circulating widely or being a close contact with someone who has tested positive for the Omicron variant), ensure that the specimen is submitted for sequencing. If submission to the IDPH laboratory is desired, contact your local health department to make arrangements.

**Health Care Provider Actions**

* Ensure your facility has your local health department contact information for during and after work hours.
* If you identify a COVID-19 case that you believe would be important to have sequencing done for the Omicron variant due to travel history or contact with a confirmed case of the Omicron variant, contact your local health department for submission approval.

**Contact**

IDPH Communicable Disease Section 217-782-2016

**Additional Resources**<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/map-and-travel-notices.html>

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/11/26/a-proclamation-on-suspension-of-entry-as-immigrants-and-nonimmigrants-of-certain-additional-persons-who-pose-a-risk-of-transmitting-coronavirus-disease-2019/>

**Target Audience**

Local Health Departments, Regional Health Officers, Hospital Emergency Departments, Infection Control Professionals, Infectious Disease Physicians, Illinois Emergency Management Agency

**Date Issued**

December 1, 2021