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Omicron Variant Identified in U.S.; In USVI, Active Cases Drop to 35 Territory-Wide

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What health authorities were expecting would soon happen is now a reality: the Omicron variant — currently known to be a highly transmissible strain of Covid-19 with over 50 mutations — has been identified in the U.S.

The variant was detected in a fully vaccinated traveler who returned to California from South Africa on Nov. 22. The patient as of Wednesday had mild symptoms and was improving. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the patient has been self-quarantining since testing positive and all known contacts have tested negative.

There are now 24 countries the variant has been confirmed in after the announcement of its presence in the U.S. In South Africa, newly reported cases nearly doubled from Tuesday to 8,561,

although health authorities did not specify which variant had caused the new infections.

The CDC has raised its travel advisory for eight African countries to level 4, its highest.

Governor Albert Bryan on Monday said he would hold off on his plan to [further ease Covid-19 restrictions](#), a decision Mr. Bryan said is tied to concerns over Omicron.

"As many of you know we have been signaling that we would make changes to our existing Covid protocols for the last several weeks. Given the downward trend of our positivity rate and the number of active cases right now, it's really looking good — our active cases are at 82 and our 7-day positivity rate is at 1.43 percent. However, with the news of the Omicron variant making its way across South Africa, Europe, Canada and now the United States, we will make that choice to really hold steady to the existing protocols that are in place right now out of an abundance of caution," Mr. Bryan said.

Health Commissioner Justa Encarnacion said Omicron had not been identified in the USVI as of Monday, though the strain may already be here, she said.

Meanwhile cases in the territory saw another steep drop, an encouraging sign for the U.S. territory even as concerns over Omicron has delayed the local government's efforts to return to normalcy.

As of Monday there were 35 active cases territory-wide: 31 on St. Croix, 4 on St. Thomas and none on St. John. Just on Monday, there were 82 active cases territory-wide with St. Croix accounting for the plurality of infections with 70, followed by St. Thomas with 11, and St. John 1.