



Website: www.blackphysicians.ca

E-mail: info@blackphysicians.ca

Twitter: [@blackdocscanada](https://twitter.com/blackdocscanada)

Instagram: [@blackphysiciansofcanada](https://www.instagram.com/blackphysiciansofcanada)

Facebook: [@blackphysiciansofcanada](https://www.facebook.com/blackphysiciansofcanada)

LinkedIn: Black Physicians of Canada

December 17, 2021

Authors:

Black Physicians of Canada

Black Physicians of British Columbia

Black Physicians of Alberta

Black Physicians of Nova Scotia

To:

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, P.C., M.P.

Prime Minister of Canada

Office of the Prime Minister

80 Wellington Street

Ottawa, Ontario

K1A 0A2

Copies to:

The Honourable Jean-Yves Duclos, P.C., M.P., F.R.S.C., Minister of Health

The Honourable Omar Alghabra, M.P., Minister of Transport

The Honourable Marco Mendicino, P.C., M.P., Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness of Canada

The Honourable Melanie Joy, M.P., Minister of Foreign Affairs

The Honourable Mary Ng, P.C., M.P., Minister of International Trade, Export Promotion, Small Business and Economic Development

Dr. Theresa Tam, MD, FRCPC, Chief Public Officer of Canada

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau,

As Black Canadian physicians, we have been working frontline throughout this pandemic and caring for patients affected by COVID-19 across the country. We have diligently worked to improve the Black community's vaccine confidence and uptake by organizing vaccine information sessions, advocating for improved public health measures and mobilizing our human resources to vaccinate our community.



Website: www.blackphysicians.ca

E-mail: info@blackphysicians.ca

Twitter: [@blackdocscanada](https://twitter.com/blackdocscanada)

Instagram: [@blackphysiciansofcanada](https://www.instagram.com/blackphysiciansofcanada)

Facebook: [@blackphysiciansofcanada](https://www.facebook.com/blackphysiciansofcanada)

LinkedIn: Black Physicians of Canada

On November 24th, 2021, when an exceptional team of Botswanan and South African scientists identified the newly emerged variant Omicron, B 1.1.529, and promptly shared their findings with the World Health Organization (WHO) and the global community, we were prepared to continue the fight against COVID-19 armed with this new scientific discovery. However, when Canada responded with swift travel restrictions on 7 Southern African countries immediately after WHO's classification of Omicron as a variant of concern on November 26th, we were quite dismayed at the lack of evidence-based decision making. At the time of these initial restrictions, Omicron had only been identified in 2 out of these 7 Southern African nations, but had already been identified in non-African nations that faced no travel restrictions such as Belgium, Hong Kong and Israel.

Canada continued these unscientific selective travel restrictions by adding three more African nations to the travel ban list by November 30, when the Omicron variant had already been identified in Canada and over 15 non-African nations. Canada's swift increments on selectively African travel bans with Nigeria's identification of 3 cases of Omicron, while nations such as United Kingdom with 22 cases and Netherlands with 16 cases faced no travel restrictions, has created a wave of global reaction to the discriminatory nature of Canada's policy.

For Black Canadians, Canada's selective targeting of African nations on these travel restrictions comes as a public demonstration of the pervasive systemic racism we battle in our personal and professional lives. Anti-Blackness has deep historical roots in Canada with precedents of discriminatory bans against Black people as shown in the story of Alberta's Amber Valley, one of the oldest Black communities in the country, whose settling prompted the then prime minister Wilfred Laurier to ban Black people from entering Canada for a year - an executive decision that effectively stopped Black migration to the prairies for years. Moreover, contemporary structural anti-Black racism continues to impact our community and lead to disproportional morbidity and mortality that is further illuminated by the COVID-19 pandemic. As Black physicians who have actively and routinely engaged in community conversations to dispel vaccine misinformation and improve confidence in public health measures, we understand that medical mistrust that is compounded by the historical legacies of colonialism, and current experiences of structural racism is the driver of vaccine hesitancy. When the



Website: www.blackphysicians.ca

E-mail: info@blackphysicians.ca

Twitter: [@blackdocscanada](https://twitter.com/blackdocscanada)

Instagram: [@blackphysiciansofcanada](https://www.instagram.com/blackphysiciansofcanada)

Facebook: [@blackphysiciansofcanada](https://www.facebook.com/blackphysiciansofcanada)

LinkedIn: Black Physicians of Canada

Canadian government imposes such discriminatory travel bans, it provides further evidence for a significant portion of the community who has long felt targeted and it further erodes their trust in government and public health agencies.

As we have seen with our experiences of previous variants of Alpha and Delta, we understand that an effective solution to prevent transmission of variants will not be selective, irrational travel restrictions. As long as the majority of the world is deprived of access to vaccines, we will continue to face new variants. With over 3 billion people waiting for their first doses, it is imperative on Canada to fulfill its promise to the COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access (COVAX) program and provide more vaccines to developing countries beyond the 4.5% of its pledge that has currently been shipped. We also encourage the Canadian government to join the hundred other countries in supporting the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) waiver, so that pharmaceutical companies share instrumental information on COVID-19 vaccine and therapeutics design to the global community and enable nations such as South Africa and India to manufacture vaccines.

We call on the Canadian government to lift travel bans placed on African countries along with the third country testing requirements immediately. Given that the Omicron variant has currently been identified in over 77 countries including several cases in Canada, most of which are community acquired, placing a travel ban exclusively on African countries is not an evidence-based measure to limit infection transmission. Improved border testing and management of all inbound travellers will be a better approach. This travel ban sets a dangerous precedent for medical researchers regarding transparency of data and continues to limit scientific advancements as researchers in these countries face restrictions to receive their testing reagents. We are deeply grateful to the dedication to genomic surveillance and transparent communication demonstrated by Southern African scientists. Their phenomenal scholarship and expertise in identifying and sequencing this variant has empowered the global community with critical and timely scientific information. Therefore, rejecting a PCR test from African nations on the grounds of their presumed inability to run such simple tests when they have achieved groundbreaking scientific discovery, further reflects structural racism that routinely questions African brilliance and competence rather than celebrates.



Website: www.blackphysicians.ca

E-mail: info@blackphysicians.ca

Twitter: [@blackdocscanada](https://twitter.com/blackdocscanada)

Instagram: [@blackphysiciansofcanada](https://www.instagram.com/blackphysiciansofcanada)

Facebook: [@blackphysiciansofcanada](https://www.facebook.com/blackphysiciansofcanada)

LinkedIn: Black Physicians of Canada

The COVID-19 pandemic has illuminated several ills in our society including structural racism and has made it clear that the marginalized will continue to be disproportionately impacted when we uphold of systems of discriminatory and inequitable practices. The only effective way forward is to challenge such practices, build an equitable system rooted in global solidarity. Canada is standing at a critical point with an opportunity to demonstrate its allyship in the global fight against COVID-19 and thus we call on the Canadian government to immediately lift selective travel restrictions on African nations.

List of organizations that support this letter:

1. Canadian Medical Association
2. Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada
3. The College of Family Physicians of Canada
4. Canadian Association of Nigerian Physicians and Dentists
5. Black Opportunity Fund Health Working Group
6. Indigenous Physicians Association of Canada
7. Federation of Medical Women of Canada
8. South Asian COVID Task Force
9. Canadian Muslim COVID-19 Task Force
10. Diversity and Inclusion in Cardiology Education
11. Health and Immigration Policies and Practices Research Program, University of Alberta
12. Black Youth Mentorship and Leadership Program
13. African Child and Youth Migration Network
14. Afro-Canadian Positive Network Of BC
15. Coalition of African, Caribbean and Black Nurses in British Columbia
16. WombCare Inc
17. Women's Health in Women's Hands CHC
18. Everton Gooden Medicine Professional Corporation



Website: www.blackphysicians.ca

E-mail: info@blackphysicians.ca

Twitter: [@blackdocscanada](https://twitter.com/blackdocscanada)

Instagram: [@blackphysiciansofcanada](https://www.instagram.com/blackphysiciansofcanada)

Facebook: [@blackphysiciansofcanada](https://www.facebook.com/blackphysiciansofcanada)

LinkedIn: Black Physicians of Canada

References:

1. African-Canadian Civic Engagement Council. (2021, September 2). Impact of COVID-19 – Black Canadian Perspectives. Retrieved December 15, 2021 from <https://innovativeresearch.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/ACCEC01-Release-Deck.pdf>
2. Black Health Alliance. (2021). Black experiences in health care symposium: bringing together community and health systems for improved health outcomes. Retrieved from <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5a0d40298dd041f9a60bb3a7/t/5ea9a317983eca78fd95ee6d/1588175652047/Full+Report+-+Black+Experiences+in+Health+Care+Symposium+2020.pdf>
3. CBS News. (2021, November 30). Omicron COVID variant was in Europe before South African scientists detected and flagged it to the world. CBS News. Retrieved December 15, 2021 from <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/omicron-variant-covid-in-europe-netherlands-before-alert-raised/?tag=CNM-00-10aab7e&linkId=142329193>
4. Derworiz, C. (2021, February 4). 'One of the biggest Black settlements in Western Canada' has a rich history. CBC News. Retrieved December 15, 2021 from <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/black-settlement-alberta-amber-valley-1.5900836>
5. Dyer, E. How Canada changed its position on pandemic travel bans. CBC News. Retrieved December 15, 2021 from <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/travel-ban-africa-covid-omicron-trudeau-1.6268299>
6. Gilmore, R. (2021, November 30). Why just Africa? Health experts question Canada singling out continent with COVID travel rules. Global News. Retrieved December 15, 2021 from <https://globalnews.ca/news/8416750/omicron-variant-travel-ban-restrictions-canada-africa/>
7. Lee, M. (2021, December 10). Canada urged to lift travel ban on several African countries, focus on vaccine equity. CTV News. Retrieved December 15, 2021 from <https://www.ctvnews.ca/health/coronavirus/canada-urged-to-lift-travel-ban-on-several-african-countries-focus-on-vaccine-equity-1.5701974>
8. Mallapaty, Smriti. "Omicron-variant border bans ignore the evidence, say scientists." *Nature* 600.7888 (2021): 199-199.



Website: www.blackphysicians.ca

E-mail: info@blackphysicians.ca

Twitter: [@blackdocscanada](https://twitter.com/blackdocscanada)

Instagram: [@blackphysiciansofcanada](https://www.instagram.com/blackphysiciansofcanada)

Facebook: [@blackphysiciansofcanada](https://www.facebook.com/blackphysiciansofcanada)

LinkedIn: Black Physicians of Canada

9. Meyn, C. (2021, November 28). Canada reports North America's first cases of omicron COVID-19 variant. The Hill. Retrieved December 13, 2021 from <https://thehill.com/policy/international/583311-canada-reports-north-americas-first-cases-of-omicron-covid-19-variant>
10. Omicron: the global response is making it worse [Editorial]. *Nature* 600, 190 (2021).
11. Pai, M., & Olatunbosun-Alakija, A. (2021). Vax the world. *Science*. 374(6571), 1031-1031. DOI: 10.1126/science.abn3081
12. Picheta, R. (2021, December 2). The first cases of the Omicron variant identified around the world. CNN. Retrieved December 15, 2021 from <https://www.cnn.com/2021/11/29/world/covid-omicron-variant-countries-list-cmd-intl/index.html>
13. Public Health Agency of Canada (2021, November 30). Government of Canada introduces additional measures to address COVID-19 Omicron variant of concern [News Release]. Retrieved from <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/news/2021/11/government-of-canada-introduces-additional-measures-to-address-covid-19-omicron-variant-of-concern.html>
14. Scott, L., Hsiao, N. Y., Moyo, S., Singh, L., Tegally, H., Dor, G., ... & de Oliveira, T. (2021). Track Omicron's spread with molecular data. *Science Commentary*, eabn4543.
15. Strauss, M., & Blenkinsop, P. (2021, November 26). Belgium detects first case of new COVID variant in Europe. Reuters. Retrieved December 15, 2021 from <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/belgium-seeks-slow-down-social-life-fight-fourth-covid-wave-2021-11-26/>
16. Thevenot, S. (2021, November 27). Canada bans flights from South Africa and neighbouring countries. CIC News. Retrieved December 15, 2021 from <https://www.cicnews.com/2021/11/canada-bans-flights-from-south-africa-and-neighbouring-countries-1119709.html#gs.jbv4c9>
17. Vogt A., Westcott B., Renton A., McKenzie S., & Upright, E. (2021, December 1). November 30 Omicron coronavirus variant news. CNN. Retrieved December 15, 2021 from https://www.cnn.com/world/live-news/omicron-covid-19-variant-11-30-21/h_6dce3691faebd4f24f5ac2811eec6d34
18. World Health Organization. (2021). Classification of Omicron (B. 1.1. 529): SARS-CoV-2 Variant of Concern. Retrieved [https://www.who.int/news/item/26-11-2021-classification-of-omicron-\(b.1.1.529\)-sars-cov-2-variant-of-concern](https://www.who.int/news/item/26-11-2021-classification-of-omicron-(b.1.1.529)-sars-cov-2-variant-of-concern)