



STATE OF NEW YORK

January 6, 2021

The Honorable Chad Wolf
Acting Secretary, Department of Homeland Security
245 Murray Lane, SW
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Acting Secretary Wolf:

I write to you with an urgent plea. I ask that you immediately take action with the CDC and HHS to require a negative PCR test within 72 hours of departure for all passengers arriving from international destinations.

There are currently 70-80,000 passengers arriving at JFK from outside of the United States each week. I have for months deployed as many as 100 personnel to meet domestic flights, and enforce our domestic travel quarantine, but do not have access to arrivals of international flights. Those areas of the airport are under the sole federal control of Customs and Border Protection and the CDC. Once an individual is already on U.S. soil, I believe it is too late anyway.

Many other countries acted aggressively in November or December to either ground flights entirely, or to meet flights to enforce strict quarantines and testing requirements. Some 120 countries require that every passenger present a negative test result prior to boarding, and dozens more restrict all travel entirely. On December 25, you belatedly required a negative test result from travelers returning from the U.K. only. But the U.K. variant, "B.1.1.7" which has so far been estimated at anywhere from 50-70% more transmissible, has now been found in more than 30 other countries. This strain is so virulent it went from being merely a quarter of all U.K. cases in November to over two-thirds in just one month. A South African and now Nigerian strain have also been identified, both showing evidence of increased transmissibility.

While we do not yet know if there is any impact on the ability of these variants to outsmart the vaccines we so urgently developed, we can only hope that we stop it before it surges our caseload beyond the capacity of the U.S. health care system.

The only way to manage this is to control this at the source – prevent any passenger who is positive from getting on the plane. We saw from our own genetic testing that the virus that arrived in New York came here from Europe, not China. It was our failure to control the airports that brought this virus to us. We have now seen that the action taken on Christmas was too late to prevent the U.K. strain from making its way to New York and other states, and has been circulating.

We can still learn our mistake from last spring, we can do what must be done – order all airlines flying into the U.S. from international locations to require a negative COVID-19 test. It is not enough to simply address the U.K.; that ship has sailed. We can, however, prevent the next mutation by following the science.

I am willing to assist in any way I can, but only Customs and Border Protection can truly protect us from this next threat.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Andrew M. Cuomo". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "A" and "C".

Governor Andrew M. Cuomo

cc: Secretary Azar, Health and Human Services
Dr. Redfield, CDC