

Evaluation process of countries for high risk of Variants of concern (VOCs)

Update 25/06/2021

Background

In order to limit the introduction in Belgium of variants of concern (VoCs), and more specifically those presenting an escape mutation that may affect neutralization by some antibodies, travel restrictions are imposed for a list of high risk countries.

This list of high risk countries is evaluated on a weekly basis by the RAG, using the indicators and criteria below. In addition, other indicators such as a worrisome trend of the incidence or the test capacity can also be taken into consideration. To ensure stability in the list, a country is only added or removed from the list if the criteria for this are met for two consecutive weeks.

After validation of the list by the authorities, the list of countries is updated every Thursday evening on the website of [Info-Coronavirus.be](https://www.info-coronavirus.be).

Indicators and criteria

1) Percentage of SARS-CoV-2 in the last 30 days

- The percentage of VOCs in the last 30 days is evaluated weekly based on data available in the database of the [GISAID initiative](https://gisaid.org/).
- A given strain is considered as a VOC based on the evaluation of the [ECDC](https://ecdc.europa.eu/en/).
- If a VOC represents more than 20 % of the strains circulating in Belgium, for at least a month (or shorter if fast exponential increase), it is not considered in the evaluation.
- A minimum of 10 sequences deposited on GISAID in the last 30 days is required for a country to be included in the evaluation.
- A country is considered potentially at risk if the cumulative number of circulating VOCs represents **more than 20% of the circulating strains** in that country.

2) Incidence of COVID-19 cases in the last 14 days and positivity rate

- The 14-day incidence of COVID-19 in countries highlighted as potentially at risk of VOC is evaluated weekly based on data from [Our world in data](https://ourworldindata.org/).
- The positivity rate in these countries is also retrieved from [Our world in data](https://ourworldindata.org/).
- A country is considered as at risk if, in addition to > 20% VOC, it presents a 14-day incidence **> 100/100 000 inhabitants OR a positivity ratio > 4%**.

3) Geographical situation

In addition to the above mentioned criteria, the RAG advised that other countries should be considered as high-risk VOC, because of a lack of genomic surveillance data (in general and more specifically about variants) and the geographical proximity (neighboring country) with a country showing a very high proportion of a new variant (such as currently South Africa, Brazil and India).