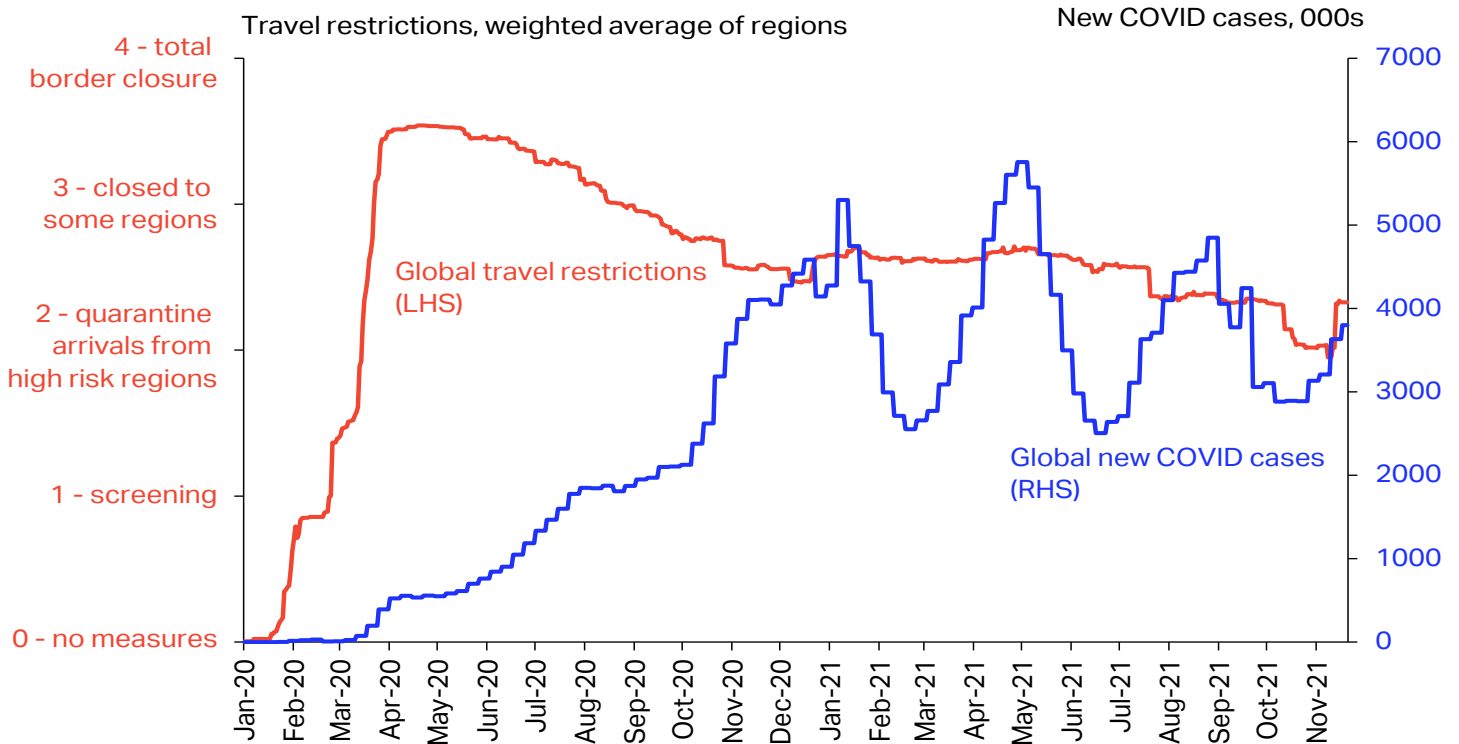




IATA Economics' Chart of the Week

03 December 2021

Do travel restrictions reduce new COVID cases?



Source: IATA Economics using data from ECDC, Oxford University

- The discovery of a new variant of concern in South Africa has led to knee jerk reactions from governments, which have tightened international travel restrictions, as they aim to buy time and limit the spread of the Omicron variant. In many cases, travellers from southern Africa have been banned from entry, and testing requirements and quarantines have become more stringent. In China, Japan, Israel and Morocco, full travel bans are in place. But is there evidence this reduces new COVID-19 infections?
- Commentary from [global health experts](#) seems to suggest any impact from travel restrictions is limited. The Omicron variant has already been detected in at least 30 countries on each of the main continents as of 3 December, so it is too late to prevent the variant from leaving southern Africa.
- Looking at simple trends in both metrics does not yield more evidence. Peaks and troughs in new COVID-19 infections have happened even as international travel restrictions stayed stable throughout 2021, and the consistent increase in cases in 2020 took place even as restrictions were at their highest. In [the main regions](#), the picture is similar, as local travel restrictions often followed global trends. Since mid-2020, the aviation sector has implemented a multi-layered framework of risk mitigation measures to ensure that flying during COVID-19 is safe, further weakening the rationale for travel restrictions.
- Despite that, travel restrictions have a marked impact on societies and economies, as indicated by the circa 50% fall in both [employment and economic value](#) supported by aviation in late 2021 compared to pre-COVID. As year-end celebrations draw near, it is also good to remember the importance of keeping people and families united.

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