

COVID-19 Lockdown Exit Analysis

15th Dec 2020

News Highlights

First vaccinations take place in America

America has seen its first vaccinations against Covid-19, following the emergency use authorisation for Pfizer's vaccine candidate. [An intensive care unit nurse in New York City became the first American inoculated](#). Sandra Lindsay said 'healing is coming' after she received the shot. Others were vaccinated at selected hospitals in other cities.

Fears over relaxed restrictions at Christmas

Scientists have voiced fears over the UK's plans to ease restrictions over the Christmas period. '[We are heading towards disaster](#),' said Independent Sage group member Stephen Reicher. The relaxed rules will allow three households to meet indoors between December 23rd and 27th - a decision public health officials fear could lead to a surge in infections at an already busy time for the National health Service.

'Travel bubble' between New Zealand and Australia on the cards

New Zealand is set to allow for quarantine-free travel with Australia after almost a year of closed borders in response to the pandemic. [A date will be agreed in the first quarter of 2021, Prime Minister Jacinda Arden said](#). The move is 'good for the economy, good for our airlines and good for both countries' said Australian health minister Greg Hunt in reply.

How lockdown affected the most vulnerable in Malaysia

In Malaysia, experts identified women and children as the hardest-hit during the lockdowns. [They cited higher instances of domestic violence, with distress calls jumping threefold](#). Calls to abortion helplines also increased: one group saw a 150% climb. Women and young people were also disproportionately affected by the economics of the situation. The government took a few positive steps, the report said, but experts know that much more needs to be done.

Lockdown Exit

The shift to working from home can outlast COVID-19

For the past eight months, office life has been transformed as - in the interest of social distancing - millions were told to work from home. The shift to remote working is surprisingly widespread. The percentage of people who work from home has of course climbed in tech-savvy sectors such as IT and finance. But it has risen significantly in some old economy sectors too. In construction, for instance, the share of work-from-home workers jumped from 15 per cent pre-COVID to 34 per cent in September, according to Fair Work Australia. Yet from Monday, the NSW Public Health Order requiring employers to allow all workers to work remotely lapsed. Bosses will now have the option of ordering staff back to the office. Yet the return to the pre-COVID status quo also poses problems because some Australian employers are more enthusiastic about returning to the old work arrangements than their workers, who have enjoyed the flexibility and the time saved from the daily commute.

<https://www.smh.com.au/business/workplace/the-shift-to-working-from-home-can-outlast-covid-19-20201214-p56ndd.html>

Australia's Shops See Year-End Spending Boom as Optimism Returns

Australia's retailers are preparing for a late-December spending splurge that could fuel the kind of recovery on the year-end wishlist of Reserve Bank of Australia Governor Philip Lowe. Consumer confidence rose for a fourth straight month in December, climbing to a 10-year high. Lowe said just two months ago that greater confidence was the catalyst needed to prompt households to part with the extra savings they squirreled away during the lockdown.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-12-13/australia-s-shops-see-year-end-spending-boom-as-optimism-returns>

New Zealand offers travel bubble with Australia if coronavirus cases stay low

Health Minister Greg Hunt says the Federal Government welcomes New Zealand's announcement of a travel bubble, describing it as the "second half of the equation". New Zealand's Cabinet agreed in principle to establish a trans-Tasman bubble with Australia early next year, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern announced on Monday. It would be conditional on coronavirus case levels staying low and pending approval by the Federal Government. Mr Hunt said the Federal Government would "absolutely" approve the agreement, and that increased travel between the two countries would benefit both economies.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-12-14/new-zealand-cabinet-agrees-to-trans-tasman-bubble-with-australia/12981258>

Covid 19 coronavirus update: Zero new cases today

There are no new Covid cases in New Zealand today. The total number of active cases in New Zealand is 56. Officials are still investigating how an Air NZ crew member caught Covid-19. The person flew into New Zealand from the United States. "Preliminary genome sequencing results suggest the source of their infection was in the United States," the Ministry of Health said. "The Air New Zealand aircrew member remains in the Auckland quarantine facility. Three other aircrew members who are close contacts are in isolation. All three close contacts will have a day 5 Covid test today," the ministry said.

<https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/covid-19-coronavirus-update-zero-new-cases-today/CYCIUE7E253YNHICG5SIAJSEGU/>

New Zealand agrees on 'travel bubble' with Australia in early 2021

New Zealand agreed on Monday to allow quarantine-free travel with Australia in the first quarter of 2021, nearly a year after it locked down its borders to protect its population from the novel coronavirus. Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said the cabinet had agreed in principle on a trans-Tasman, quarantine-free travel bubble pending confirmation by Australia's cabinet and no significant change in circumstances in either country. "It is our intention to name a date ... in the New Year once remaining details are locked down," Ardern said at a news conference in the capital, Wellington. New Zealand's has virtually eliminated the novel coronavirus by enforcing a tough lockdown and keeping its borders shut to all foreigners for most of the year.

<https://uk.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-newzealand/new-zealand-agrees-on-travel-bubble-with-australia-in-early-2021-idUKKBN28003U>

US deaths from COVID-19 pass 300,000 as vaccine rolls out

The death toll from the coronavirus pandemic in the United States has topped 300,000 on the same day the first vaccines against COVID-19 were administered in the country, which has been the hardest hit globally in terms of cases and deaths. The number of dead is roughly five times the number of Americans killed in the Vietnam War and equivalent to the number of people killed in the 2001 9/11 World Trade Center attacks times 100.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/12/14/united-states-records-300000-deaths-as-vaccine-rolls-out>

Kids and COVID isolation & stress: What parents need to know

Experts voice concern over how children are relating to the world outside their homes during the pandemic, as well as the stress they are feeling from their parent's COVID-related financial struggles.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2020/12/14/how-covid-isolation-and-stress-are-impacting-children>

Exit Strategies

Nurse gets New York's first COVID-19 vaccine as U.S. rollout begins

A New York City intensive care unit nurse on Monday became the first person in the United States to receive a coronavirus vaccine, calling it a sign that "healing is coming," as the nation's COVID-19 death toll crossed a staggering 300,000 lives lost. Sandra Lindsay, who has treated some of the sickest COVID-19 patients for months, was inoculated at Long Island Jewish Medical Center in the New York City borough of Queens, an early epicenter of the country's coronavirus outbreak, receiving applause on a livestream with New York Governor Andrew Cuomo. "It didn't feel any different from taking any other vaccine," Lindsay said. "I feel hopeful today, relieved. I feel like healing is coming. I hope this marks the beginning of the end of a very painful time in our history. "I want to instill public confidence that the vaccine is safe," she added.

<https://uk.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-vaccines-distribution/new-york-nurse-given-covid-19-vaccine-as-u-s-rollout-begins-idUKKBN28O1TQ>

US set for first COVID-19 shots as shipments begin arriving

Hospital workers begin unloading precious frozen vials of COVID-19 vaccine Monday, with the first vaccinations against a scourge that has killed nearly 300,000 Americans expected later in the day. "It feels like the cavalry is arriving," Robert C. Garrett, CEO of Hackensack Meridian Health, said as New Jersey's largest health network awaited delivery. Shots made by Pfizer Inc. and its German partner BioNTech are the first authorized for emergency use by the Food and Drug Administration -- beginning what will become the largest vaccination campaign in U.S. history. Several other countries also have OK'd the vaccine, including the U.K. which started vaccinating last week.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/us-set-for-first-covid19-shots-as-shipments-begin-arriving-vaccine-vaccinations-pfizer-inc-uk-workers-b1773348.html>

Canada's first COVID-19 vaccinations set to start as soon as Monday

Canada kicked off its inoculation campaign against COVID-19 on Monday by injecting frontline healthcare workers and elderly nursing home residents, becoming just the third nation in the world to administer the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine. The first dose broadcast on live TV went to Anita Quidangen. The personal support worker at the Re kai Centre, a non-profit nursing home for the elderly in Toronto, Canada's largest city, said she was "excited" to have been first in line. Healthcare workers in masks and white coats applauded after she was injected. "Today really we turn a corner," said Dr. Kevin Smith, president and chief executive of the University Health Network's Michener Institute, where the shot was administered.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-canada-vaccine-idUKKBN28O17B>

First Americans receive COVID-19 vaccine

New York ICU nurse Sandra Lindsay was the first to receive the COVID-19 vaccine in the US this morning. The first of the vaccinations were administered just hours before the COVID-19 death toll surpassed the grim 300,000 milestone. Seven-day rolling average for deaths is now just over 2,400 per day and average daily cases are at 213,000. Hospitalizations climbed to a record 109,331 yesterday. President Trump tweeted: 'First Vaccine Administered. Congratulations USA! Congratulations WORLD!' Vaccinations continued to roll out across the country throughout the morning with relieved healthcare workers from Ohio to Louisiana rolling up their sleeves to get the shot. General Gustave Perna, who is in charge of the federal Operation Warp Speed, said

vaccinations will start in nursing homes this week New York Gov Andrew Cuomo said his state was in the process of vaccinating 10,000 people on the first day. The first 2.9 million doses began to be shipped to distribution centers around the country on Sunday from Pfizer's manufacturing plant in Kalamazoo, Michigan

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-9051623/amp/First-Americans-receive-COVID-19-vaccine.html>

Spain expects to start COVID-19 vaccination as early as Jan 4 or 5

Spain expects to start vaccinating people against the coronavirus as early as Jan. 4 or 5 if the European Medicines Agency gives the green light to a vaccine on Dec. 29, health minister Salvador Illa said on Monday. Spain plans to vaccinate elderly residents and staff in nursing homes first, then health workers and other vulnerable people.

<https://uk.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-spain-vaccine/spain-expects-to-start-covid-19-vaccination-as-early-as-jan-4-or-5-idUKKBN28016T>

'Relieved': US health workers start getting COVID-19 vaccine

An intensive care unit nurse becomes the first person in the US to receive the Pfizer/BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/12/14/trump-to-nix-plan-for-early-covid19-vaccine-at-white-house-live>

Nicola Sturgeon 'must rethink' Christmas lockdown rules

An SNP politician has urged Nicola Sturgeon to rethink the planned relaxation of lockdown rules over Christmas. Scots will be able to form a festive "bubble" with a maximum of three households over a five day period from December 23, meaning they can meet up indoors if social distancing rules are followed. But rising infection rates in other parts of the UK - with London on the brink of tighter lockdown - has led to some questioning whether now is the time to relax lockdown restrictions. The First Minister today insisted the Christmas guidance published earlier this month remains in place but urged Scots to be cautious if they do plan to meet with others.

<https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/politics/nicola-sturgeon-must-rethink-christmas-23165582>

France launches mass Covid-19 screening campaigns before lifting lockdown

The French cities of Le Havre, on the Normandy coast, and Charleville-Mézières, near the Belgian border, are conducting mass Covid-19 testing campaigns on Monday in the country's latest effort to stem the spread of the disease before the holidays and the end of France's second lockdown on Tuesday. While the French will be allowed to circulate freely throughout the country without having to document their comings-and-goings with administrative permits, the number of new daily coronavirus infections remains high above the government's objective for mid-December.

<https://www.france24.com/en/europe/20201214-france-launches-mass-covid-19-screening-campaigns-before-lifting-lockdown>

Partisan Exits

Covid-19: Trump rejects plan for early vaccines at White House

US President Donald Trump says he has reversed a plan for White House officials to receive a coronavirus vaccine in the coming days. Officials said senior members of the Trump administration would be among the first to get the Pfizer/BioNTech jab. But Mr Trump later tweeted that people working at the White House "should receive the vaccine somewhat later... unless specifically necessary". The US will begin its roll out of the vaccine on Monday. The vaccine offers up to 95% protection against Covid-19. The first three million doses are being distributed to dozens of locations in all 50 states across the US. The first shipment of those doses left a facility in Michigan on Sunday, with health workers and the elderly in line to receive the first shots.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-55298015>

Donald Trump reverses plan to give White House officials Covid vaccine

The US recorded another 1,389 deaths from Covid-19 on Sunday, pushing the toll closer to 300,000 as hospitalisations continued to hit new heights. There was a ray of hope on Monday morning, however, as the first vaccinations were carried out using the Food and Drug Administration-approved Pfizer vaccine. "I feel hopeful today. Relieved," said critical care nurse Sandra Lindsay after getting a shot at Long Island Jewish Medical Center in New York. Watching via video, New York governor Andrew Cuomo said: "This is the light at the end of the tunnel. But it's a long tunnel." From Washington, Donald Trump tweeted: "First Vaccine Administered. Congratulations USA! Congratulations WORLD!"

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/dec/14/donald-trump-reverses-plan-to-give-white-house-officials-covid-vaccine>

'There will be consequences': Christmas coronavirus easing a 'mistake' as fears of new year death toll grow

Relaxing coronavirus restrictions over Christmas a "mistake" which pull put lives at risk, a leading public health expert has said, as NHS leaders warned Boris Johnson they feared a third wave of infections. Linda Bauld, professor of public health at the University of Edinburgh, added her voice to growing calls among scientists for the UK governments to rethink an easing of Covid-19 rules over the festive period. "From a public health perspective, I have to be perfectly honest, I think this is a mistake," she said. "I think it's going to have consequences." She spoke out on Saturday as the UK recorded another 519 deaths within 28 days of a positive test.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/covid-coronavirus-christmas-lockdown-b1771343.html>

48 hours in September when ministers and scientists split over Covid lockdown

In its latest investigation into the government's handling of the pandemic, Insight asks whether the PM's decision to prioritise the economy over 'following the science' led him to repeat the errors of the spring

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/48-hours-in-september-when-ministers-and-scientists-split-over-covid-lockdown-vg5xbpsfx>

US officials plan to split \$908bn COVID-19 package in two: Report

A \$908bn bipartisan COVID-19 relief plan set to be introduced in the United States Congress as early as Monday will be split into two packages in a bid to win approval, a person briefed on the matter told the Reuters news agency. The plan's highlights were made public on December 1, but the authors now plan to divide them into two proposals that could be voted on separately, the source said.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2020/12/14/us-lawmakers-plan-to-split-908bn-covid-19-plan-into-two>

Continued Lockdown

Covid-19: Lancashire sees 'disappointing' rise in rule breaches

A "disappointing" rise in Covid-19 rule breaches saw 31 fines handed out at four house parties over the weekend, Lancashire Police have said. Deputy Chief Constable Terry Woods said the county, which is under tier three restrictions, had seen an increase in breaches in recent days. House parties were the "biggest issue" and gatherings in Blackburn and Nelson had to be broken up, he added. The force added that fines would only be used as "an absolute last resort". The latest government figures showed the county had a wide range of Covid-19 infection rates in the week up to 9 December, with Burnley seeing the highest rate of 287.9 cases per 100,000 people while Fylde recorded the lowest rate of 92.8 cases per 100,000.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-lancashire-55304118>

UK pubs fear for future as £650m Covid losses forecast for December

Pubs expect December sales to be as much as 90% lower than last year, costing the industry £650m

and fuelling concern that vast parts of the sector will disappear for good. December is typically the most lucrative month of the year for the UK's ailing pub sector, accounting for as much as a quarter of annual profit, thanks to Christmas parties and New Year's Eve festivities. However, the British Beer and Pub Association (BBPA) said its forecasts showed pubs would sell 270m fewer pints than usual over the period, with only one in five of the UK's 47,200 pubs expected to be open. "I'd be stunned if sales across the industry were any better than 10% or 20% as good as last year," said Chris Jowsey, the chief executive of Admiral Taverns, which has 1,000 pubs across the UK. "It's not unusual for lots of pubs to make anywhere up to 25% of their profit in December. For a lot of smaller pubs it's really important because it carries you through the lean months of January and February, so it's a bit of a disaster."

<https://www.theguardian.com/business/2020/dec/14/uk-pubs-covid-december-sales>

Malaysian women, children bear brunt of coronavirus lockdown

Domestic violence and calls to abortion hotlines have both soared, while job losses and a greater burden of unpaid care work have also taken a toll. Rights body highlights case in which pregnant migrant women were on verge of selling their babies because they could not access health care

<https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/health-environment/article/3113852/malaysian-women-children-bear-brunt-coronavirus>

Scientific Viewpoint

COVID-19 Changed Science Forever

In fall of 2019, exactly zero scientists were studying COVID-19, because no one knew the disease existed. The coronavirus that causes it, SARS-CoV-2, had only recently jumped into humans and had been neither identified nor named. But by the end of March 2020, it had spread to more than 170 countries, sickened more than 750,000 people, and triggered the biggest pivot in the history of modern science. Thousands of researchers dropped whatever intellectual puzzles had previously consumed their curiosity and began working on the pandemic instead. In mere months, science became thoroughly COVID-ized.

<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2021/01/science-covid-19-manhattan-project/617262/>

CureVac starts late-phase clinical trial of COVID-19 vaccine

CureVac has begun a phase 2b/3 clinical trial of its COVID-19 vaccine candidate CVnCoV. The study will enroll 36,500 participants in Europe and Latin America with a view to generating data to support approval of the mRNA vaccine next year. BioNTech, working with Pfizer, and Moderna have validated the concept of using mRNA to provide protection against SARS-CoV-2, rapidly delivering stellar efficacy results that set a high bar for the rest of the field. CureVac has taken a slightly different approach to mRNA vaccines, choosing to use the potency of untranslated regions to optimize the RNA rather than make chemical modifications. The approach has created a candidate that triggers immune responses at a 12- μ g dose, compared to the 100 μ g used by Moderna. That will enable CureVac to make more doses of the vaccine. CureVac is also aiming to trigger balanced immune responses.

<https://www.fiercebiotech.com/biotech/curevac-starts-late-phase-clinical-trial-covid-19-vaccine>

Scientists pinpoint genes common among people with severe coronavirus infections

Certain gene variants are linked to severe coronavirus infections, according to a team of scientists in Europe who studied the genomes of 2,200 critically ill covid-19 patients. Their results provide robust support that genetic makeup plays a role in the potentially fatal illness experienced by some people infected by the coronavirus. Diving into people's DNA is an approach that could help answer one of the pandemic's biggest mysteries: Why do some people have mild coronavirus cases, or no symptoms at all, while others rapidly fall ill and die? Evidence is clear that older age and underlying conditions are risk factors for increased covid-19 severity. But genetic predispositions to runaway

inflammation or other harmful immune responses could also contribute to worse disease.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/science/2020/12/14/covid-genes-illness-severity/>

Covid: How different ethnic groups have been affected by the pandemic

Most people in the UK have said they experienced a worsening of their mental health between 2019 and April 2020, according to the Office for National Statistics (ONS). The ONS has analysed data from different ethnic groups in the UK just before the Covid-19 pandemic and in April this year, when the UK was in a full national lockdown. Data from the ONS reveals most ethnic groups have suffered in society in the past year - whether that is financially or mentally - through stress or lack of sleep and loneliness.

<https://www.itv.com/news/2020-12-14/covid-how-different-ethnic-groups-have-been-affected-by-the-pandemic>

Why many countries failed at COVID contact-tracing — but some got it right

Across the Western world, countries have floundered with this most basic public-health procedure. In England, tracers fail to get in touch with one in eight people who test positive for COVID-19; 18% of those who are reached provide no details for close contacts. In some regions of the United States, more than half of people who test positive provide no details of contacts when asked. These statistics come not from the first wave of COVID-19, but from November, long after initial lockdowns gave countries time to develop better contact-tracing systems. The reasons for the failures are complex and systemic. Antiquated technology and underfunded health-care systems have proved ill-equipped to respond. Wealthy nations have struggled to hire enough contact-tracers, marshal them efficiently or make sure that people do self-isolate when infected or that they quarantine when a close contact has the disease. And overstretched contact-tracers have been met with distrust by people wary both of health authorities and of the technologies being deployed to fight the pandemic. Meanwhile, researchers who are keen to draw lessons from contact-tracing operations are stymied by a dearth of data.

<https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-020-03518-4>

CSL 'optimistic' on vaccine delivery as AstraZeneca provides data to regulators

CSL's chief scientific officer Andrew Nash says Australia has a range of options in place when it comes to COVID vaccines even if the Oxford/AstraZeneca project were to hit regulatory hurdles. The axing of the local University of Queensland vaccine candidate last Friday puts the ASX-listed biotech's focus squarely on the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine, for which it has committed to make 50 million doses. While CSL has started the production process it must wait for AstraZeneca to secure regulatory approval of the product before it can be deployed.

<https://www.smh.com.au/business/companies/csl-optimistic-on-vaccine-delivery-as-astrazeneca-provides-data-to-regulators-20201214-p56n6h.html>

Almost 50 Brits to be given experimental nasal spray Covid-19 vaccine next month

New York company Codagenix said human studies to begin first week of January Codagenix says its computer-edited virus is 1,000 times slower than real thing Given via a nasal spray, in the same way the influenza jab is given to children

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-9051675/Codagenix-Serum-Institute-begin-UK-trials-nasal-COVID-19-vaccine-January.html>

'I will not be the test dummy': Nursing home residents and staff are reluctant to get COVID vaccine

US nursing home residents account for nearly 40% of nation's death toll Some families and nurses fear those in 'fragile health' could be put at risk by the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine, and claim it has been 'rushed.' 'I will not be the test dummy,' said one respondent to survey by National Association of Health Care Assistants. Others are keen for 'light at the end of the tunnel' that could allow them to rejoin children and grandchildren. In on-going study of 44,000 people, U.S. Food and Drug

Administration found vaccine safe and more than 90% effective, including the elderly. Experts say 70% of the population need to receive vaccine for it to be successful. Some experts blame Trump administration for undermining faith in science. Authorities are investigating reports in UK of several health workers with a history of severe allergies suffering from side effects after receiving the vaccine

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/us-politics/article-9050363/After-110K-virus-deaths-nursing-homes-face-vaccine-fears.html>

Moderna will ship nearly 6 million doses of its coronavirus vaccine as soon as it gets FDA approval

Moderna Inc's first shipment of its coronavirus vaccine to the U.S. will include nearly six million doses. The jabs will be sent to 3,285 locations across the country via FedEx and UPS. In a briefing on Monday, Gen Gustavo Perna said a reserve has been set aside, but he didn't disclose the exact amount, The FDA's advisory committee will meet on Thursday to discuss whether or not recommend approving Moderna's vaccine. If approved this week, the first Americans will likely not get immunized before December 21

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-9052585/Moderna-ship-nearly-6-million-doses-coronavirus-vaccine-soon-gets-FDA-approval.html>

Coronavirus Resurgence

UK reports 20,263 new COVID cases, 7-day total up 22%

The United Kingdom reported 20,263 new cases of COVID-19 on Monday, taking the total figure over the past seven days to 131,708, up 21.6% compared with the previous seven-day number, official data showed. The country reported 232 new deaths from the disease, with the seven-day total rising to 2,984, almost unchanged from the previous seven days. Since the start of the pandemic, the United Kingdom has recorded 1.870 million cases of COVID-19 and 64,402 deaths from the virus.

<https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-health-coronavirus-britain-cases-idUKKBN2802PX>

Italy reports 491 COVID-19 deaths on Monday, 12,030 new cases

Italy reported 491 coronavirus-related deaths on Monday against 484 the day before, the health ministry said, while the daily tally of new infections declined to 12,030 from 17,938. There were 103,584 swabs carried out in the past day, down sharply from a previous 152,697, the ministry said. The first Western country hit by the virus, Italy has seen 65,011 COVID-19 fatalities since its outbreak emerged in February, the highest toll in Europe and the fifth highest in the world.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-italy-tally-idUSR1N2HO001>

U.S. heads for sobering COVID-19 death toll of 300,000 as vaccinations begin

Critical care nurse Sandra Lindsay in Queens, N.Y. the first person in U.S. to receive COVID-19 vaccine. Italy passes U.K. for highest COVID-19 death toll in Europe. Germany pandemic restrictions over the holidays. The U.S. reached the sobering milestone of 300,000 for COVID-19 related deaths on Monday, a contrast to the hope and relief felt after the first person in the U.S. received a shot to protect against the deadly pandemic. The U.S. death toll climbed to 300,267 as of Monday afternoon, and the case tally rose to 16,388,504, according to data aggregated by Johns Hopkins University.

https://www.marketwatch.com/story/u-s-heads-for-sobering-covid-19-death-toll-of-300-000-as-vaccinations-begin-11607963764?mod=hp_minor_pos20

New strain of Covid-19 may be cause of rise in cases, Hancock tells MPs

A new Covid-19 variant has been identified in the UK, the health secretary has revealed, suggesting it could be linked to the rapid spread of the virus in south-east England as millions more people in London are being moved into the toughest restrictions. Cases of the strain have been found in

almost 60 areas, Matt Hancock disclosed, although he stressed that clinical advice suggested it was "highly unlikely" the mutation would fail to respond to a vaccine. It came as he confirmed that the capital, as well as the majority of Essex and parts of Hertfordshire, would be placed into tier 3 from Wednesday after an "exponential" rise in cases.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/dec/14/new-strain-of-covid-19-may-be-cause-of-rise-in-cases-hancock-tells-mps>

Covid: Intensive care staff plead for pre-Christmas lockdown

The Christmas relaxation of lockdown rules "makes no sense" as Covid-19 cases continue to rise in Wales, doctors have warned. The Welsh Intensive Care Society also wants an "urgent" lockdown across Wales before Christmas, warning critical care would be unable to cope without urgent action. It comes after the number of positive Covid-19 tests passed 100,000 in Wales. Wales' health minister Vaughan Gething has said "nothing is off the table". But Mr Gething fears people would "make up their own rules" if meeting up over Christmas was banned.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-55299862>

Health Minister Vaughan Gething refuses to rule out lockdown in Wales before Christmas

The health minister has refused to rule out introducing tougher restrictions before Christmas in the wake of rising coronavirus cases across Wales. Vaughan Gething said in his press conference on Monday afternoon that "every option was still available" to the Welsh Government and that discussions had taken place with partners to set out the best course of action. The number of confirmed cases of coronavirus passed the 100,000 mark over the weekend in Wales, and there are now more than 2,000 people with confirmed or suspected cases of the virus in our hospitals. When asked about whether there was still a chance restrictions could be tightened further before Christmas, Mr Gething said: "Every option is still available to us. I have had a meeting with local stakeholders across Wales about a range of challenges in different regions. Ministers in Cabinet will also meet today in our new virtual form.

<https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/health/lockdown-wales-gething-christmas-coronavirus-19454500>

Bill Gates says US entering worse phase of COVID pandemic and predicts lockdowns will last into 2022

Bill Gates offered his predictions during an interview with CNN on Sunday. It came as the US set new records for new cases, hospitalizations and deaths over a seven-day period. 'Sadly the next four to six months could be the worst of the epidemic,' Gates said. He went on to signal support for coronavirus-related business restrictions. 'Bars and restaurants in most of the country will be closed as we go into this wave, and I think sadly that's appropriate,' he said. Gates said he thinks the US will become more 'normal' by summertime after a vaccine is rolled out. He also expressed optimism about Joe Biden's incoming administration.

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-9050229/Bill-Gates-says-entering-worse-phase-COVID-pandemic-predicts-lockdowns-2022.html>

Queues form outside Milan food banks as crisis bites ahead of Christmas

Long queues have been forming outside food banks and help centres in Italy's financial capital Milan as the economic devastation caused by the coronavirus has deepened before Christmas. As case numbers surged after the summer, Italy - the first European country to be struck by the pandemic and among the worst hit - has seen its stagnant economy dealt a blow by lockdowns to try to halt the spread of COVID-19. "During this period of the pandemic, the numbers have gone up," said Luigi Rossi, vice-president of local aid group Pane Quotidiano, as a queue stretched down the block outside the centre in the south of Milan.

<https://uk.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-italy-food/queues-form-outside-milan-food-banks-as-crisis-bites-ahead-of-christmas-idUKKBN2801V8?il=0>

South Korea orders schools to shut as COVID-19 cases spike

South Korea ordered schools to close from Tuesday in the capital Seoul and surrounding areas as it battles its worst outbreak of novel coronavirus since the pandemic began, surpassing the previous peak in February. Schools in the capital region would move classes online until the end of the month, in the latest ratcheting up of social distancing measures which so far have failed to reverse the spike in infections. The school closure is a step towards the imposition of Phase 3 social distancing rules, a move that would essentially lock down Asia's fourth-largest economy.

<https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-health-coronavirus-southkorea/south-korea-orders-schools-to-shut-as-covid-19-cases-spike-idUKKBN28009Q>

South Korea ramps up testing as coronavirus cases surge

South Korea is ramping up its coronavirus testing after reporting its highest daily number of infections since the start of the pandemic. The country that had been held up as a success story, but now health authorities are getting increasingly nervous.

<https://www.dw.com/en/south-korea-ramps-up-testing-as-coronavirus-cases-surge/av-55936241>

COVID-19 Cases, Deaths Reach New Records

Daily records continue to tumble for COVID-19 cases and deaths in many parts of the world, forcing governments to impose restrictions or consider lockdowns to halt the spread of the coronavirus. In Europe, Germany is heading for a second lockdown starting on Wednesday amid rising coronavirus infections. The government is urging citizens to avoid Christmas shopping in the two days before most stores close and social distancing rules tighten. According to Johns Hopkins University Coronavirus Resource Center (JHU), as of Monday morning, Germany had recorded over 1,350,800 confirmed cases and more than 22,080 deaths. Italy has overtaken Britain as the European country with the most COVID-19 deaths, according to data collected by JHU. Monday morning Italy had 64,520 deaths, while Britain 64,267.

<https://www.voanews.com/covid-19-pandemic/covid-19-cases-deaths-reach-new-records>

South Korea weighs tougher Covid-19 restrictions to stem third wave

South Korea is considering raising Covid-19 restrictions to the highest level as the country struggles to contain a third wave of infections. Chung Sye-kyun, South Korea's prime minister, on Monday said the government "won't hesitate in making a bold decision" after the country reported a record for new cases over the weekend. Mr Chung, however, refrained from imposing a nationwide level 3 lockdown. "[Adopting] the level 3 social distancing scheme should be our last resort as it requires cautious deliberation," he said.

<https://www.ft.com/content/2841f59b-15a9-4598-8f0e-305639bc4dba>

China coronavirus cases on Russia border spark lockdowns, tests

China has put one northern city in lockdown and launched citywide coronavirus testing in another, after two local infections involving workers at a port and trade zone respectively, authorities have said. There was one new case each in Dongning and Suifenhe, which both sit on the country's border with Russia. In Dongning, a 40-year-old maintenance worker at a port tested positive on Thursday, triggering the latest measures. Officials there said Saturday it would enter "wartime mode"—temporarily suspending public bus services and road transport, while requiring anyone leaving the city to produce a negative COVID-19 test from the preceding 24 hours.

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-12-china-coronavirus-cases-russia-border.html>

Japan, South Korea fret as surging coronavirus undermines leaders' support

Japan and South Korea grappled with surging coronavirus cases and growing public frustration on Monday, with Japan suspending a contentious travel subsidy programme and South Korea closing some schools and considering its toughest curbs yet. Japan reported more than 3,000 new cases on Saturday, yet another record as winter set in, with infections worsening in Tokyo, the northern island

of Hokkaido and the city of Osaka. But Japan, with a focus on the economic costs, has steered clear of tough lockdowns. It tackled its first wave of infections in the spring by asking people to refrain from going out and for businesses to close or curtail operating hours.

<https://uk.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-asia/japan-south-korea-fret-as-surg-ing-coronavirus-undermines-leaders-support-idUKKBN2800HO>

Why us again? Italy suffers disproportionate toll in second COVID wave

In late November doctor Maurizio Cappiello visited more than 130 patients in the emergency room of Cardarelli hospital, in the southern Italian city of Naples. More than two-thirds had COVID-19. The virus which was limited mainly to Italy's industrial north during the first wave in the spring was now also ravaging the poor south, overwhelming its fragile public health system. "Despite our efforts it was impossible to help them as we would have wanted and to transmit a sense of humanity, we tried to be fast and concentrate on the most critical," Cappiello, a top official at Italy's national ANAAO-ASSOMED doctors' union, told Reuters.

<https://in.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-italy-dead/why-us-again-italy-suffers-disproportionate-toll-in-second-covid-wave-idUKKBN28020I>

Coronavirus: Success stories Japan and South Korea start to struggle

Two countries lauded for keeping COVID-19 largely under wraps face uptick in cases. South Korea is closing schools and offering free tests, while Japan's prime minister is under fire for a travel incentive scheme. The coronavirus has put South Korea "against the wall," President Moon Jae-in told the nation on Monday as schools were ordered to close under what's expected to become a "Phase 3" lockdown — this year's first in Asia's fourth-largest economy. South Korea since January has largely kept the global spread of the virus SARS-CoV-19 in check with residents proactively wearing face masks, curbs on travel and strict social distancing.

<https://www.dw.com/en/coronavirus-success-stories-japan-and-south-korea-start-to-struggle/a-55934306>

New Lockdown

Covid-19: London mayor calls for schools to close early

London's mayor has urged the government to ask all secondary schools and colleges in the capital to shut early ahead of Christmas. In a letter to ministers, Sadiq Khan said he also wanted schools to reopen later in January amid "significant" Covid outbreaks in 10 to 19-year-olds. It comes as the BBC was told London was likely to move into tier three. Greenwich and Islington councils are the first in England to urge schools to switch this week to online learning. Council officials in Greenwich have advised schools to shut from the end of Monday, although some academies will remain open, while Islington schools have been asked to move online from the end of Tuesday.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-55299848>

Europe's biggest economy is heading into lockdown. Will recession follow?

Germany, the fourth largest economy in the world, is heading into a national lockdown that could send it into another recession — a major warning as countries like the United States try to battle a spike in coronavirus cases over the winter. What's happening: Chancellor Angela Merkel said Sunday that Germany will go into a "hard" lockdown starting this week and continuing through the Christmas period. Non-essential shops and schools will be shut starting on Wednesday, and Christmas gatherings will be reduced from 10 people to only five from two different households. The announcement comes after Germany recorded nearly 30,000 new coronavirus infections and almost 600 deaths within 24 hours on Friday, surpassing records.

<https://www.cnn.com/2020/12/14/investing/premarket-stocks-trading/index.html>

New rapid strain of coronavirus identified as London and south east moved into Tier 3 lockdown

Matt Hancock told MPs that a worrying new strain of covid-19 has been identified which may be the cause of a rapid spread of the virus in the south east of England. A new strain of coronavirus that spreads more rapidly has been identified, leading to surges in cases in London and the south east of England. UK Health Secretary Matt Hancock revealed the discovery to MPs as he confirmed plans to move London and parts of the surrounding area into Tier 3. Hancock said the new variant of Covid may explain the fast rise in cases in the south. He said: "We have identified a new variant of coronavirus, which may be associated with the fastest spread in the south-east of England. Initial analysis suggests that this variant is growing faster than the existing variants. "We've currently identified over 1,000 cases with this variant, predominantly in the south of England, although cases have been identified in nearly 60 different local authority areas, and numbers are increasing rapidly."

<https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/politics/new-rapid-strain-coronavirus-identified-23166525>

London set to move to Tier 3 of lockdown restrictions

London is being moved into the highest level of coronavirus restrictions, after a surge in cases across the city.

<https://uk.news.yahoo.com/london-set-move-tier-3-125649332.html>

Germany calls on all to forgo Xmas shopping before lockdown

The German government called on citizens Monday to forgo Christmas shopping, two days before the country heads into a hard lockdown that will shut most stores tighten social distancing rules and close schools across the country. "I wish and I hope that people will only buy what they really need, like groceries," Economy Minister Peter Altmaier said late Sunday. "The faster we get these infections under control, the better it is for everyone." Chancellor Angela Merkel and the governors of Germany's 16 states agreed Sunday to step up the country's lockdown measures beginning Wednesday and running to Jan. 10 to stop the exponential rise of COVID-19 cases.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/germany-calls-on-all-to-forgo-xmas-shopping-before-lockdown-germany-peter-altmaier-country-schools-stores-b1772955.html>

Germany back in hard lockdown for Christmas

Germany will be placed under a hard lockdown from Wednesday, with schools, nurseries and all but the most essential shops to be closed through Christmas and the new year, Angela Merkel has announced.

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/edition/news/germany-back-in-hard-covid-lockdown-for-christmas-c55j2wcpd>

German Economy Hit Hard as Abrupt Lockdown Strikes Fresh Blow

Anneliese Kleinschmidt was gearing up for a brisk Christmas season, but now stands in a sea of roses, lilies and chrysanthemums that will perish if she can't sell them by the end of Tuesday.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-12-14/german-economy-hit-hard-as-abrupt-lockdown-strikes-fresh-blow>

Italy considers new COVID-19 restrictions for the holidays

Italy is considering more stringent nationwide coronavirus restrictions during the Christmas holidays, the health minister said on Monday, after scenes of big gatherings in many cities over the weekend raised worries of a new spike in infections. Italy, the first Western country hit by the pandemic, on Saturday passed Britain as the European nation with the worst official death toll, with more than 65,000 dying since the start of the outbreak in February. With pressure on hospitals easing and daily cases falling, the government relaxed some restrictions put in place last month. But scenes of crowded shopping districts in cities such as Milan and Rome have caused concern. Police were forced to close off popular sites such as Rome's Trevi fountain due to large crowds.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-italy-restrictions-idUSKBN2800XB>

Italy likely to follow Germany with Covid Christmas lockdown

The Netherlands and the Czech Republic have said they will follow Germany into strict second lockdowns over the holiday period, with Italy weighing similar measures to avoid a fresh surge in coronavirus infections over Christmas and new year. In a rare television address, the Dutch prime minister, Mark Rutte, said non-essential shops and businesses, gyms, museums, cinemas and theatres would close for five weeks after the country's seven-day new case average rose by more than 40% in the past week. Bars and restaurants in the Netherlands have been closed since mid-October but the partial lockdown has not slowed the spread of the virus enough, Rutte said, as anti-lockdown protesters booted and whistled outside his office.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/dec/14/italy-likely-to-follow-germany-with-covid-christmas-lockdown>

Germany braced as hard lockdown set to trigger double-dip recession

Germany is heading for a double-dip recession this winter after Berlin imposed a hard lockdown, economists have predicted, denting hopes that Europe's largest economy will rebound to pre-pandemic levels by the start of 2022. Chancellor Angela Merkel's government announced at the weekend that schools and most shops would be closed from Wednesday until January 10 in an effort to contain a surge in coronavirus infections. "Germany must brace itself for a second recession," said Jörg Krämer, chief economist at Commerzbank. "The additional closures affect, among other things, all stores except those for daily needs . . . hairdressers and largely schools and day care centres for children."

<https://www.ft.com/content/f4ce04eb-ce16-4b7b-8ae2-166149575767>

Germany to close shops and schools in Covid Christmas lockdown

Germany will close most shops from Wednesday until 10 January and ban the sale of fireworks for New Year's Eve, after Angela Merkel and state leaders agreed to impose a national lockdown in order to regain control of rising coronavirus infection rates before a "very difficult Christmas". Non-essential shops, excluding food retailers, pharmacies and banks but including hairdressing salons and beauty parlours, will have to close their doors from 16 December. Schools and nurseries will also be required to offer only emergency care for essential workers for the last three days before the start of the scheduled Christmas holidays, with parents asked to look after their children at home "whenever possible".

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/dec/13/germany-to-close-shops-and-schools-in-tightened-covid-lockdown>

Lifting of Germany's lockdown early next year unlikely -Merkel aide

A broad lifting of anti-pandemic measures in Germany early next year is unlikely, Chancellor Angela Merkel's chief of staff, Helge Braun, said on Monday. Germany goes into full lockdown on Wednesday to tackle high infection rates. Braun told broadcaster n-tv he was very optimistic that the stricter measures would help to bring new infection numbers down. However, during winter and as long as not enough vaccines are available for everyone, "we are going to have some difficult days ahead," he said. "A comprehensive easing is very, very unlikely."

<https://in.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-germany/lifting-of-germanys-lockdown-early-next-year-unlikely-merk-el-aide-idINL8N2IU10V>

Lithuania orders tougher lockdown, to last until January 3

Lithuania told citizens to stay at home for three weeks from Wednesday as it seeks to rein in a raging coronavirus spread that has seen the country jump from 18th to third worst-hit in the European Union in just six weeks. Leaving home will be permitted only for work, essential shopping, caring for the sick, funerals and for people to take walks in single household groups, Prime Minister Ingrida Simonyte announced. All non-essential shops will be closed and meetings between households banned. As of Sunday, Lithuania reported 1,178 coronavirus cases per 100,000 people over the past two weeks, three times more than the 340 cases per 100,000 when a lighter lockdown

was announced on Nov. 4.

<https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-health-coronavirus-lithuania/lithuania-orders-tougher-lockdown-to-last-until-january-3-idUKKBN28N001>

Tough Christmas lockdown looming in Netherlands

Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte held emergency meetings on Monday about the soaring rate of COVID-19 infections and was expected to announce tougher lockdown measures during a television address in the evening. Key members of the Dutch government were weighing stricter social curbs and Rutte took the unusual step of inviting the heads of all political parties in parliament for talks, the national news agency ANP reported. He was set to address the country from his office in a rare broadcast at 1900 local time

<https://uk.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-netherlands-idUKL8N2IU270>

Tighter COVID-19 restrictions imposed in London as infections surge

London will move into England's highest tier of COVID-19 restrictions, the government said on Monday, citing increased infection rates that may be partly linked to a new variant of the coronavirus. Health Secretary Matt Hancock said more than 1,000 cases of the new variant had been identified, mainly in southeastern England. Although there was currently nothing to suggest the new strain was likely to cause more serious disease or that it would not respond to a vaccine, Hancock said that it could be contributing to higher infection rates.

<https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-health-coronavirus-britain-london/tighter-covid-19-restrictions-imposed-in-london-as-infections-surge-idUKKBN28O1AU>