

COVID-19 Lockdown Exit Analysis

29th Dec 2020

News Highlights

Russian Covid-19 deaths three times higher than reported

The Covid death toll in Russia is three times higher than previously claimed according to recent reports. [This news came from the scepticism many experts held with regard to the country's relatively low fatality rate considering its high volume of infections.](#) The newly reported figures of over 186,000 fatalities make the country's death toll the world's third-highest, trailing only Brazil and the United States.

Vaccinations underway all across Europe

Inoculations against the novel coronavirus are underway all across European Union member states. [The European Commission ordered 300 million doses of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine, of which 12.5 million are expected to arrive before the end of the year. Vaccinations began on December 27th and 28th.](#) However, there were disparities. Some vaccinations began on Saturday, before the official launch date. Some countries, such as the Netherlands, will not begin inoculations until early January.

Trump relents on spending bill with Covid-19 relief package and signs it

Outgoing U.S. president Donald Trump has given in, amidst a tense standoff over a spending bill which includes a large Covid-19 relief package. [The U.S. \\$1.4 trillion bill to fund government agencies until September 2021 includes U.S.\\$990 billion in Covid-19 relief.](#) Trump relented and signed the bill into law, but in his statement announcing the signing, he aired his criticism of the bill and said he would send a 'red-lined' version urging Congress to remove items he considered wasteful.

Not the first pandemic, not the last: Tedros urges vigilance and preparedness

World Health Organization Director-General, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus has urged vigilance against future outbreaks. 'History tells us that this will not be the last pandemic, and epidemics are a fact of life,' he said. [Tedros urged a breakaway from 'a cycle of panic and neglect...we throw money at an outbreak, and when its over, we forget about it and do nothing to prevent the next one.'](#) This first annual report on health emergency preparedness made it clear the world is unprepared for pandemics.

Lockdown Exit

People with coronavirus are still getting on planes. No one knows how many.

In the days after a man on their flight stopped breathing, fellow passengers wondered if he was infected with coronavirus — and whether they might be at risk. The airline said it didn't know, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention wouldn't say publicly. An answer didn't come until a local coroner released a report a week later confirming that covid-19 was a cause of the 69-year-old man's death on Dec. 14, along with acute respiratory failure. By Wednesday, three different passengers said they still hadn't gotten official word from any public health authorities. The tale of United Flight 591 illustrates the challenges of keeping the novel coronavirus off planes — and informing travelers about possible exposure in a timely manner so they can take their own precautions.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/travel/2020/12/28/passenger-covid-flight-airlines-positive/>

UK faces Covid third wave unless vaccination target is doubled, ministers warned

Britain must vaccinate two million people a week to avoid a third wave of the coronavirus outbreak, a new study claims. The London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) paper has issued ministers with the stark warning coming as hospital admissions surpassed the peak of the first wave of the pandemic. Around 200,000 people are being inoculated each week, which is expected to raise to one million by the middle of January, according to the Daily Telegraph. "The most stringent intervention scenario with tier 4 England-wide and schools closed during January and 2 million individuals vaccinated per week, is the only scenario we considered which reduces peak ICU burden below the levels seen during the first wave," the study said.

<https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/uk-faces-covid-third-wave-23232448>

Hospital Covid admissions are set to surge PAST first wave peak amid fears NHS is being 'overwhelmed' by highly infectious new strain - with ministers to decide in days if ...

The number of patients in hospital with the virus is likely to exceed the peak in the spring, with 21,286 coronavirus patients being treated on December 22. In comparison, the figure on April 12 was 21,

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-9090939/Millions-Britons-face-plunged-Tier-4-lockdown-week.html>

Scarred by 2020, Gen Z looks to a COVID-free future

Lives that had been focussed on school, university, sports or even going to K-pop concerts vanished overnight for members of Gen Z as the global pandemic struck. While a lot was heard about older people at risk from COVID-19, this younger generation - born between the late 1990s and the early 2010s - also saw their worlds turned upside down in 2020. Reuters profiled 10 young people around the world to learn how their lives had been affected by the coronavirus. Shut up in bedrooms - many forced to live with their parents - some went from being students, athletes and workers to caring for sick relatives and doing whatever they could to earn money to support families. One teen even became a mother

<https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-health-coronavirus-gen-z-widerimage-idUKKBN28Y0NH>

Russia admits COVID death toll is three times higher than reported

Russia has admitted its coronavirus death toll is more than three times higher than previously reported. New figures show that more than 186,000 Russians have died from the virus, up from the 55,265 the country officially reported. This means that Russia has the third-highest number of fatalities, moving ahead of India and sitting behind only the US and Brazil. Russia has reported more than three million infections since the beginning of the pandemic but its comparatively low fatality rate had raised eyebrows.

<https://news.sky.com/story/russia-admits-covid-death-toll-is-three-times-higher-than-reported-12174575>

Exit Strategies

Elite Boarding Schools Offer Students a Unique Covid-19 Bubble

Many high schools are struggling with whether to allow students to learn in the classroom as Covid-19 infections surge across the U.S. But not the nation's boarding schools. These schools have been mostly able to offer in-person learning with relatively few incidents, using a variety of intensive virus-mitigation strategies, according to Peter Upham, executive director of The Association of Boarding Schools. About a third of the nation's more than 260 academic boarding schools have had Covid-19 cases, Upham said, but very few schools have seen outbreaks of more than just a couple students.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-12-28/elite-boarding-schools-offer-students-a-unique-covid-19-bubble>

Philippines troops, ministers get COVID-19 vaccine before approval

Some Philippine soldiers and cabinet ministers have already received COVID-19 vaccine injections, officials said on Monday, despite an absence of regulatory approval that the country's health ministry said was vital to ensure safety.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-philippines-vaccin-idUSKBN2920QM>

Donald Trump relents and signs massive \$900 billion Covid-19 relief package

Donald Trump has signed off a US\$900 billion (£664bn) coronavirus relief package to end days of stand-off over the the bipartisan deal that will deliver long-sought cash to businesses and individuals and avert a federal government shutdown. The massive bill includes US\$1.4 trillion (£1.03 trillion) to fund government agencies through to September and contains other end-of-session priorities such as money for cash-starved transit systems and an increase in food stamp benefits. Mr Trump announced the signing in a statement that spoke of his frustrations with the Covid-19 relief for including only \$600 (£443) cheques to most Americans instead of the \$2,000 (£1,476) that his fellow Republicans rejected.

<https://www.standard.co.uk/news/world/donald-trump-coronavirus-relief-package-b533413.html>

Covid-19 vaccination rolls out across Europe, but anger remains over late start

Until 8 November, terminal C of Tegel airport used to be where Berliners took off for weekend breaks across the Schengen area. From Sunday, the disused runway hopes to see the start of a journey towards a more permanent destination: herd immunity to Covid-19 by mass vaccination. Departure: delayed. Arrival time: unclear. From 8.30am, Tegel will serve as a control centre for 60 minivans filled with four-person mobile "vaccination teams" who will pick up Berlin's first 18,000 doses of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine from a secret location, then administer them to vulnerable people in care homes across the city, initially prioritising dementia sufferers who struggle to adhere to social distancing. The starting gun will be fired in several European countries at the same time: the 12.5 million doses of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine that will arrive in EU countries before the end of this year are part of a 300-million dose bulk order signed by the European Commission.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/dec/27/vaccination-rolls-out-across-europe-but-anger-remains-over-late-start>

Covid-19: Gove 'confident' schools can reopen in England

Cabinet Office minister Michael Gove has said he is "confident" the staggered return to secondary schools in England can go ahead as planned. But Mr Gove said the issue was still being reviewed, amid concern over the spread of the new coronavirus variant. Wales and Scotland have delayed or revised the start of the new term. Northern Ireland schools are due back next week. Ministers have said exam year pupils in England would return as normal. But the majority of secondary school pupils in England are due to begin the term studying remotely, to give head teachers time to implement a coronavirus testing programme for students and staff.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-55466147>

Europe rolls out 'new weapon' vaccines in bid to slay COVID

Europe launches a cross-border vaccination programme of unprecedented scale on Sunday as part of efforts to end a COVID-19 pandemic that has crippled economies and claimed more than 1.7 million lives around the world. The region of 450 million people has secured contracts with a range of suppliers for over two billion vaccine doses and has set a goal for all adults to be inoculated during 2021.

<https://fr.reuters.com/article/idUSL1N2J607J>

Three volunteers receive first shots of Vietnam's very own Covid-19 vaccine

Three first volunteers received the first shot of a dose of 50mcg of Nanocovax Covid-19 vaccine on Saturday (Dec 26). Developed by the Nanogen Pharmaceutical Biotechnology JSC and the Viet Nam Military Medical University, Nanocovax is Vietnam's first Covid-19 candidate vaccine to reach the

human trial stage. A total of 60 volunteers, aged 18-50, were selected for the first phase of the clinical trials. They are divided into three groups for receiving three doses of 25 mcg, 50 mcg and 75 mcg, respectively. The vaccination consists of two injections 28 days apart.

<https://www.thestar.com.my/aseanplus/aseanplus-news/2020/12/27/three-volunteers-receive-first-shots-of-vietnam039s-very-own-covid-19-vaccine>

“Believe in science:” EU kicks off COVID-19 vaccine campaign

Doctors, nurses and the elderly rolled up their sleeves across the European Union to receive the first doses of the coronavirus vaccine Sunday in a symbolic show of unity and moment of hope for a continent confronting its worst health care crisis in a century. Weeks after the U.S., Canada and Britain began inoculations with the same vaccine, the 27-nation bloc staged a coordinated rollout aimed at projecting a unified message that the shot was safe and Europe’s best chance to emerge from the pandemic. For health care workers who have been battling the virus with only masks and shields to protect themselves, the vaccines represented an emotional relief as the virus continues to kill. But it was also a public chance for them to urge Europe’s 450 million people to get the shots amid continued vaccine and virus skepticism.

<https://apnews.com/article/pandemics-public-health-europe-immunizations-nursing-homes-2e41320c0535bfcec58f3b1066620458/gallery/38e5cc224b2c426aa25fb7447b3bb833>

Czech Republic starts coronavirus vaccine rollout

Czech Prime Minister Andrej Babis became the first person in the country to be given a vaccine against the new coronavirus on Sunday, as European Union member states begin a pushback against the pandemic which is surging across the continent. Hungary and Slovakia stole a march on their fellow EU nations as they began vaccinating people against COVID-19 on Saturday. Germany officially launches its inoculation campaign on Sunday, along with countries such as France and Italy. Babis received the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine at the Central Military Hospital in Prague, just before other hospitals in the capital and second-largest city Brno started to distribute the 9,750 doses the country has received so far.

<https://uk.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-czech-vaccination/czech-republic-starts-coronavirus-vaccine-rollout-idUKKBN29106V>

NY health network faces criminal investigation over COVID-19 vaccine

New York State Health officials said on Saturday they are investigating a Brooklyn-based healthcare provider on suspicion it violated state guidelines for distribution of COVID-19 vaccine. ParCare Community Health Network “may have fraudulently obtained COVID-19 vaccine, transferred it to facilities in other parts of the state in violation of state guidelines and diverted it to members of the public - contrary to the state’s plan to administer it first to frontline healthcare workers, as well as nursing home residents and staffers,” state Health Commissioner Howard Zucker said in a statement.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-new-york-parcare-c-idUKKBN291030>

Singapore panel recommends maximum level of COVID-19 vaccine coverage

An expert committee convened by Singapore's health ministry has recommended all residents medically eligible for COVID-19 vaccination to take shots as they become available, although it said vaccination should remain a voluntary option. The recommendation comes as Singapore's success in controlling the virus makes some question whether they should take the jabs. The city-state has been reporting almost zero new local cases daily over the last few weeks.

<https://www.msn.com/en-us/money/other/singapore-panel-recommends-maximum-level-of-covid-19-vaccine-coverage/ar-BB1cgdrP>

Thai hospital banned from offer to sell COVID-19 vaccine

A private Thai hospital was ordered on Sunday to stop advertising COVID-19 vaccinations for sale in

advance on the grounds that no vaccine is yet approved in Thailand. Vibhavadi Hospital told Reuters its online offer for 1,000 initial reservations for the two-dose Moderna vaccine had been the result of a misunderstanding. With reservations priced at 4,000 baht, the total cost of getting vaccinated would have been 10,000 baht (\$330). As the first governments begin vaccine rollouts around the world, questions have been raised over how the limited supplies are prioritised and whether people will be able to pay to jump the queue.

<https://uk.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-thailand-vaccine/thai-hospital-banned-from-offer-to-sell-covid-19-vaccine-idINKBN2910CC>

Millions face eviction, poverty as unemployment benefits expire with COVID-19 relief bill in limbo

Jo Marie Hernandez doesn't know how she and her 4-year-old daughter will survive after her unemployment aid lapsed this weekend. Hernandez, who lives in Olean, New York, is on the brink of losing her home in days after she lost her job as a customer service associate at a gas station in the spring. Enduring prolonged unemployment, she's struggled to make ends meet and has nothing left in savings to keep her afloat. "I only have \$100 left to my name. My whole world is shattered," says Hernandez, 32, who was forced to put her car up for sale. "We can't wait a few weeks for help. We're starving and will be out on the street soon."

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/money/2020/12/27/stimulus-checks-unemployment-benefits-trump-covid-relief-package/4050133001/>

Slovakia starts vaccinations against COVID-19

Slovakia on Saturday started to vaccinate its population against the coronavirus as the country joined a coordinated push by the European Union against the global pandemic. Vladimir Krcmery, a member of the government's Pandemic Commission, was the first person in the country inoculated by the vaccine produced by Pfizer and BioNTech. Hungary also began vaccinating its people on Saturday, a day ahead of rollouts in several other countries including France, Germany and Spain.

<https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-health-coronavirus-slovakia-vaccine/slovakia-starts-vaccinations-against-covid-19-idUKKBN2900K7>

Covid: EU launches mass vaccination in 'touching moment of unity'

The EU has begun a co-ordinated vaccine rollout to fight Covid-19, in what the bloc's top official says is a "touching moment of unity". European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said on Saturday the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine had been delivered to all 27 member states. Some countries started administering the jabs on Saturday, saying they were not prepared to wait another day. The EU has so far reported more than 335,000 Covid-related deaths.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-55456795>

'The beginning of the end': Europe rolls out vaccines to see off pandemic

Europe launched a mass COVID-19 vaccination drive on Sunday with pensioners and medics lining up to get the first shots to see off a pandemic that has crippled economies and claimed more than 1.7 million lives worldwide. "Thank God," 96-year-old Araceli Hidalgo said as she became the first person in Spain to have a vaccine at her care home in Guadalajara, near the capital Madrid. "Let's see if we can make this virus go away." In Italy, the first country in Europe to record significant numbers of infections, 29-year-old nurse Claudia Alivernini was one of three medical staff at the head of the queue for the shot developed by Pfizer and BioNTech.

<https://uk.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-europe-vaccines/the-beginning-of-the-end-europe-rolls-out-vaccines-to-see-off-pandemic-idUKKBN2910BQ>

Old and vulnerable people 'aren't getting their Covid jabs' with spare vaccines offered to healthy volunteers

Concerns are growing that some older and vulnerable people are not taking up the Pfizer vaccine. At

one health centre in South London, The Mail on Sunday has learned that 75 doses of the vaccine were left over as uptake had been so low. Managers were left scrambling to find other patients to vaccinate and even offered a job to healthy volunteers working there. Experts suggested that elderly people may be struggling with transport or are nervous about venturing outdoors.

https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-9089715/Old-vulnerable-people-AREN-getting-Covid-jabs.html?ito=social-twitter_dailymailUK

Wealthy Britons 'offering private doctors £2,000 to jump Covid vaccine queue and get jabs early'

Rich people are offering huge sums of money to skip the queue for the coronavirus vaccines. The jabs can currently only be obtained through the NHS, but several private British doctors say they have been bombarded with requests from wealthy individuals offering to pay to have theirs ahead of time. Dr Roshan Ravindran, owner of Klinik, a private clinic in Wilmslow, Cheshire, claimed some clients had offered £2,000 for injections.

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-9089595/Wealthy-Britons-offering-private-doctors-2-000-jump-Covid-vaccine-queue-jabs-early.html>

Rouhani defends COVID vaccine efforts amid US pressure

President Hassan Rouhani has defended his administration's efforts to purchase a COVID-19 vaccine, reassuring Iranians that the country will succeed despite United States pressure. Iran has reported more than one million coronavirus cases, including at least 54,000 deaths, since February.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/12/26/rouhani-defends-covid-vaccine-efforts-amid-us-pressure>

Taoiseach hails "day of great hope" as first coronavirus vaccines arrive in Ireland

The Taoiseach has hailed "a day of great hope" as the first coronavirus vaccine arrived in Ireland on St Stephen's Day. The Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine is the first to be approved for use in Ireland by the European Medicines Agency. The initial batch of 10,000 doses will begin to be administered on Wednesday.

<https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/republic-of-ireland/taoiseach-hails-day-of-great-hope-as-first-coronavirus-vaccines-arrive-in-ireland-39901352.html>

Turkey Signs Accord With BioNTech for Coronavirus Vaccine

Turkey signed an agreement with Pfizer Inc. partner BioNTech SE for 4.5 million of doses their coronavirus vaccine, with an option to raise it to 30 million. Health Minister Fahrettin Koca said Friday that an initial 550,000 doses will arrive by the year end or in early January, state news agency Anadolu reported.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-12-26/turkey-signs-accord-with-biontech-for-coronavirus-vaccine>

In Christmas message curbed by Covid, pope calls on nations to share vaccines

Pope Francis in his Christmas message on Friday said political and business leaders must not allow market forces and patent laws to take priority over making Covid 19 vaccines available to all, condemning nationalism and "the virus of radical individualism".

<https://in.reuters.com/article/us-christmas-season-pope/in-christmas-message-curbed-by-covid-pope-calls-on-nations-to-share-vaccines-idUSKBN28Z0MV>

U.S. will require negative COVID-19 tests for all UK passengers - CDC

The U.S. government will require all airline passengers arriving from the United Kingdom to test negative for COVID-19 within 72 hours of departure starting Monday amid concerns about a new coronavirus variant that may be more transmissible. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said in a statement on Thursday that all airline passengers arriving from the UK must test negative in order to fly to the United States. The decision was a turnaround after the Trump administration told U.S. airlines on Tuesday it was not planning to require any testing for arriving UK

passengers. The CDC said an order would be signed on Friday and is effective Monday.

<https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-health-coronavirus-usa-airlines/u-s-will-require-negative-covid-19-tests-for-all-uk-passengers-cdc-idUKKBN28Z091?il=0>

COVID-19: Pope Francis urges nations to share coronavirus vaccine in Christmas message

The Pope has used his Christmas message to urge countries to share COVID-19 vaccines, saying nationalism should not be a factor in granting access to the new treatments. His traditional Urbi et Orbi message was dominated by the social and economic impacts of the crisis. "At this moment in history, marked by the ecological crisis and grave economic and social imbalances only worsened by the coronavirus pandemic, it is all the more important for us to acknowledge one another as brothers and sisters," he said.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-pope-francis-urges-nations-to-share-coronavirus-vaccine-in-christmas-message-12172464>

Moderna's Coronavirus Vaccine Begins Arriving at Strained Hospitals Across the U.S.

Just one week after the first doses of a coronavirus vaccine were administered in the United States, a new batch of vaccines fanned out across the country on Monday, an urgently needed expansion of a vaccination effort that is expected to reach vulnerable populations and rural areas where hospitals are strained as soon as this week. The vaccine, from Moderna, comes as the virus continues to spread virtually unabated: hospitalizations are over 115,000 for the first time, according to the Covid Tracking Project. Parts of California are down to their last I.C.U. beds and almost one-fifth of U.S. hospitals with intensive care units reported that at least 95 percent of their I.C.U. beds were full in the week ending Dec. 17. Nationwide, 78 percent of I.C.U. beds were full on average.

<https://www.nytimes.com/live/2020/12/21/world/covid-19-coronavirus>

COVID-19: Major UK testing lab suffers coronavirus outbreak after claims of safety breaches

The UK's biggest testing lab has been hit by an outbreak of coronavirus after what one worker claimed were repeated breaches of COVID safety rules, Sky News has learned. Positive cases have been reported in three of the four scientific teams at the Milton Keynes Lighthouse Laboratory, as well as among administrative and warehouse staff at the site. It is not known how many people have been affected by the outbreak, but around 20 people in one 70-person lab team are currently isolating, according to a worker at the laboratory who asked to remain anonymous.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-major-uk-testing-lab-suffers-coronavirus-outbreak-after-claims-of-safety-breaches-12172290>

First batch of COVID-19 vaccine arrives in Mexico, Latin America

Latin America received its first shipment of formally approved COVID-19 vaccines Wednesday, as Mexico's foreign secretary called the arrival "the beginning of the end of that pandemic." The vaccine was brought in by a DHL flight at Mexico City's international airport. Crews began to unload batches of the same Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine that had begun to be administered to Americans last week, The Associated Press reported. Officials did not disclose how many batches were part of the relatively small shipment, which is slated to be used to test vaccine logistics procedures once Mexico and other Latin American countries begin receiving larger quantities.

<https://thehill.com/policy/international/americas/531541-first-batch-of-covid-19-vaccine-arrives-in-mexico-latin-america>

Partisan Exits

The perverse political effects of Covid-19

The PRC's success in largely suppressing the disease stands in marked contrast with the terrible toll that Covid-19 has taken on the west. But politics moves in unexpected ways. Paradoxically, there is

a strong case to be made that both the US and the EU may also end up being politically strengthened by Covid-19.

<https://www.ft.com/content/af3258af-651d-4ad8-9d11-21ff3498ae7f>

EU's Borrell accuses Russia of spreading COVID-19 disinformation to sell its vaccine

The European Union's top diplomat said on Monday that Russian public media had spread false information on European and American COVID-19 vaccines in countries where it wants to sell its own shot against the coronavirus. "Western vaccine developers are openly mocked on multi-lingual Russian state-controlled media, which has in some cases led to absurd claims that vaccines will turn people into monkeys," Josep Borrell said in a blog post. "Such narratives are apparently directed at countries where Russia wants to sell its own vaccine, Sputnik V," Borrell added, noting that these moves threatened public health amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-eu-russia-idUSKBN2921E1>

In Hungary, politicization of vaccine hangs over immunization efforts

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has spent months boasting that Hungary was working harder than other EU countries to secure vaccines against the coronavirus, even jumping the gun to start vaccinating a day earlier than other member states. That move — disregarding the European Commission's plan for a coordinated bloc-wide rollout of the jab on December 27 — will likely be seen as an attempt to undermine the EU's vaccination strategy. It comes after Orbán complained that European regulators were taking too long to approve the vaccine and claimed that Hungary would be the first country in Europe to use Russian and Chinese shots. But months later, Hungary has no Russian or Chinese vaccine and Orbán's critics say he might have undermined confidence in getting vaccinated at all.

<https://www.politico.eu/article/in-hungary-politicizing-of-vaccine-hangs-over-immunization-efforts/>

Continued Lockdown

Panama to extend lockdowns in effort to curb coronavirus

Panama will extend lockdowns in two provinces, including the capital, from Jan. 4 - 14 in an effort to contain a jump in coronavirus cases in the heavily populated areas, the health minister said on Sunday. With 231,357 registered COVID-19 cases and 3,840 deaths, Panama is the Central American nation that has accumulated the highest number of infections. Under the lockdown measures, which authorities last week said would go into effect nationwide from Dec. 31 - Jan. 4, residents may only leave their homes for essential services such as medical appointments and grocery shopping, Health Minister Luis Sucre said.

<https://uk.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-panama/panama-to-extend-lockdowns-in-effort-to-curb-coronavirus-idUKL1N2J800Y>

Two million elderly facing Christmas alone to get 'greatest gift' of someone to chat to

Elizabeth is just one of the two million older people who will be spending Christmas alone this year. The pensioner has been housebound because of the pandemic – but a new phone service set up by Age UK is helping to spread some festive cheer. The charity estimates that more than half of elderly people won't see their friends or family this Christmas. So with that in mind, I joined their team of trained volunteers for a day to see how the phone service is helping to combat loneliness among the over-60s. Elizabeth was first on their list of people to call and it was easy to imagine her face lighting up at the sound of a friendly voice. In a chat with volunteer Clare, she says: "It's been a difficult week but I feel so much better today.

<https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/two-million-elderly-facing-christmas-23213922>

Scientific Viewpoint

Healthcare workers have 7 times the risk of severe COVID-19

A new study in the journal Occupational & Environmental Medicine examines the risks that “essential” and “nonessential” British workers will develop severe COVID-19. It suggests that healthcare workers are seven times more likely to develop severe cases of COVID-19 than people with “nonessential” roles.

<https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/healthcare-workers-7-times-as-likely-to-have-severe-covid-19-as-other-workers>

The breakthrough medicines that could change the course of Covid

It remains one of the most dramatically successful outcomes in the battle against Covid-19. A cheap treatment for inflammation was found to save lives of seriously ill patients while a trio of much-touted therapies were shown to have no effect. It is now estimated that the discovery of the effectiveness of the drug dexamethasone has saved around 650,000 lives across the world, according to Professor Martin Landray, a founder of the Recovery programme – the world’s largest randomised Covid-19 drugs trial – which revealed the medicine’s anti-Covid properties last summer

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/dec/27/the-breakthrough-medicines-that-could-change-the-course-of-covid>

Teachers and key workers 'will be added to priority list when Oxford vaccine is approved' but SAGE expert warns even a million jobs a week WON'T curb Covid crisis by February

Teachers and key workers will be added to the vaccine priority list when the Oxford University/AstraZeneca jab is finally approved as the government bids to accelerate its roll-out plans, reports say. With approval for the Oxford Covid vaccine set to come as early as today, ministers are believed to be planning to overhaul the current order, which currently focuses on the elderly, vulnerable and care home employees as well as NHS staff. But Sir Jeremy Farrar, the director of the Wellcome Trust who advises Number 10's advisory panel SAGE, warned even if Britain hits one million coronavirus vaccinations a week, it will not curb the pandemic by February.

https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-9092123/SAGE-expert-warns-hitting-one-million-vaccines-week-wont-curb-Covid-crisis-months.html?ito=social-twitter_dailymailUK

Expert: Stay away from 'dangerous' unauthorized COVID-19 vaccines

A health expert warns the public to “stay away” from unauthorized COVID-19 vaccines amid the supposed presence of a Chinese-developed product in the country. “To take an unapproved, unregulated vaccine is very, very dangerous,” Dr. Edsel Salvana of the Department of Health Technical Advisory Group said in a media forum on Sunday. “I urge everyone to stay away from those, kasi (because) you are literally putting your life at risk if you take unregulated medicine, especially COVID vaccine.” During Saturday's meeting with the Inter-Agency Task Force and other health experts, President Rodrigo Duterte claimed that “many” citizens in the country have already been injected with China's Sinopharm vaccine. The Food and Drug Administration said raids have been conducted in Makati and Binondo, adding that no arrests have been made so far.

https://cnnphilippines.com/news/2020/12/27/DOH-China-Sinopharm-COVID-vaccine-Duterte.html?_=1609060645051

100million doses of Oxford coronavirus vaccine 'to be approved this week'

The groundbreaking Oxford vaccine is expected to be approved for use within days – giving Britain a massive New Year boost in the fight against coronavirus. There is growing optimism within the Government that the Medicines and Healthcare Regulatory Agency (MHRA) will give the green light to roll out the vaccine before the end of this week. Britain has pre-ordered 100 million doses of the drug, which has been developed by Oxford University with the help of the pharma giant AstraZeneca.

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-9089697/100million-doses-Oxford-coronavirus-vaccine-approved-week.html>

Fauci: Up to 90% of population needs vaccine for herd immunity

“We all have to be honest and humble, nobody really knows for sure, but I think 70-85% for herd immunity for COVID-19 is a reasonable estimate,” he said on CNN's “State of the Union” on Sunday.

Fauci had previously told The New York Times it could take up to 90% of the US population to get vaccinated to reach herd immunity against the coronavirus. He clarified that the range he states are a "guesstimate," and that the goal was for 70 to 85 percent of the population to be vaccinated. This month, the US Food and Drug Administration authorized both Moderna and Pfizer and BioNTech's coronavirus vaccine for emergency use which have been rolled out across the country.

<https://www.businessinsider.com/fauci-up-to-90-population-needs-vaccine-for-herd-immunity-2020-12>

Global report: AstraZeneca chief believes Covid vaccine will work on variant strain

The head of the firm behind the Oxford Covid vaccine has said researchers believe the jab will be effective against the variant strain of the virus that was first found in the UK. AstraZeneca chief executive, Pascal Soriot, told the Sunday Times more tests were needed to be sure, but hailed the discovery of what he called a "winning formula" to improve the vaccine's efficacy. As Spain, Sweden and Canada joined the growing list of countries to have reported cases of the more contagious variant, Soriot said: "So far, we think the vaccine should remain effective. But we can't be sure, so we're going to test that."

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/dec/27/global-report-astrazeneca-chief-believes-vaccine-will-work-on-variant-strain>

Ten reasons we got Covid-19 vaccines so quickly without 'cutting corners'

Long before the Covid-19 crisis, there was an awareness that a pandemic of some sort was likely in the coming years and plans had already been made to tackle it. Governments, international agencies and foundations had been pooling resources. The international Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) was launched in 2017, and when Covid-19 arrived they were ready. In addition, several companies and academic institutions, notably including BioNTech, Moderna and the University of Oxford, had also been working on new technologies capable of generating vaccines from the genetic codes of infectious pathogens and cancers, and testing them for several years

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/dec/26/ten-reasons-we-got-covid-19-vaccines-so-quickly-without-cutting-corners>

China's Walvax to make COVID-19 vaccine candidate similar to AstraZeneca's - media

China's Walvax Biotechnology Co has started work on a plant to manufacture an early-stage coronavirus vaccine candidate similar to AstraZeneca PLC's product, state-backed media said on Sunday. Mass production for the proposed vaccine could begin in mid-2021, with an estimated capacity of 200 million doses a year, said Health Times, a paper run by the People's Daily. The treatment is based on a chimpanzee adenovirus to deliver materials that can trigger an immune response against the virus that causes COVID-19, a technique adopted in the candidate from AstraZeneca and Oxford University. The Chinese candidate, jointly developed by China's Tsinghua University and Tianjin Medical University, has not been tested on humans. The AstraZeneca-Oxford treatment is in final-stage large trials.

<https://www.msn.com/en-gb/news/world/chinas-walvax-to-make-covid-19-vaccine-candidate-similar-to-astrazenecas-media/ar-BB1cgpMH>

Scientists call for UK lockdown after rapid spread of Covid-19 variant

Cases of the new variant Covid-19 virus were confirmed in several European countries on Saturday, including Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. All were linked to people who had arrived from the UK. Meanwhile, Japan has announced it is banning all new entries of foreign nationals from Monday following the discovery of the variant in travellers from the UK. The news came at the same time as a further six million people in east and south-east England had tier 4 conditions, England's strictest Covid level, imposed on them on Boxing Day. Lockdowns were also introduced in Scotland and Northern Ireland. Around 24 million people in England, more than 40% of the population, are now living in tier 4, as pressure mounts for the whole country to be put in this category.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/dec/27/scientists-call-for-nationwide-lockdown-after-rapid-spread-of-covid-19-variant>

Covid-19 pandemic will not be the last: WHO chief

WHO director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said it was time to learn the lessons from the Covid-19 pandemic, The novel coronavirus has killed at least 1.75 million people and nearly 80 million cases have been recorded. The coronavirus crisis will not be the last pandemic, and attempts to improve human health are "doomed" without tackling climate change and animal welfare, the World Health Organization's chief said. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus also condemned the "dangerously short-sighted" cycle of throwing cash at outbreaks but doing nothing to prepare for the next one, in a video message marking Sunday's first International Day of Epidemic Preparedness.

<https://www.livemint.com/science/health/covid-19-pandemic-will-not-be-the-last-who-chief-11609027399175.html>

Cramped housing has helped fuel spread of Covid in England - study

Overcrowded housing has helped to spread Covid-19 in England and may have increased the number of deaths, according to research by the Health Foundation. People living in cramped conditions have been more exposed to the coronavirus and were less able to reduce their risk of infection because their homes were so small, the thinktank found. Overcrowding was a key reason why poorer people and those from ethnic minority backgrounds in particular had been disproportionately affected by the pandemic, it said.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/dec/27/cramped-housing-has-helped-fuel-spread-of-covid-in-england-study>

New drug could offer 'instant immunity' against Covid-19

A new drug which could offer instant immunity against Covid-19 is being trialled by British scientists, it has been reported. The antibody therapy has been developed by University College London Hospitals (UCLH) and AstraZeneca - the pharmaceutical company that has, along with Oxford University, created a vaccine that is expected to be approved for use next week. But unlike a vaccine, the new drug would be given to someone who has been exposed to the virus, preventing them from going on to develop it.

<https://www.kentonline.co.uk/kent/news/new-drug-could-offer-instant-immunity-against-covid-19-239852/>

Boston doctor has severe allergic reaction to Moderna COVID vaccine: NYT

A doctor in Boston with a shellfish allergy developed a severe allergic reaction after receiving Moderna's coronavirus vaccine on Thursday, the New York Times reported on Friday, citing the doctor. Dr. Hossein Sadrzadeh, a geriatric oncology fellow at Boston Medical Center, said he had a severe reaction almost immediately after being vaccinated, feeling dizzy and with a racing heart, the NYT reported. It is the first severe reaction publicly linked to Moderna's vaccine, which is in its first week of a nationwide rollout.

<https://uk.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-vaccines-moderna/boston-doctor-has-severe-allergic-reaction-to-moderna-covid-vaccine-nyt-idUKKBN29000Y>

Oxford Covid vaccine may become the first to get Indian regulator's nod for emergency use

The process of granting emergency use approval for Bharat Biotech's 'Covaxin' may take time as its phase 3 trials are still underway, while Pfizer is yet to make a presentation, say official sources.

<https://www.livemint.com/news/india/oxford-covid-vaccine-may-become-the-first-to-get-indian-regulator-s-nod-for-emergency-use-11608986698515.html>

UK scientists trial drug to prevent infection that leads to Covid

British scientists are trialling a new drug that could prevent someone who has been exposed to coronavirus from going on to develop the disease Covid-19, which experts say could save many lives. The antibody therapy would confer instant immunity against the disease and could be given as

an emergency treatment to hospital inpatients and care home residents to help contain outbreaks.

https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/dec/25/uk-scientists-trial-drug-to-prevent-coronavirus-infection-leading-to-disease?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other

Brazil says Sinovac vaccine over 50% effective but delays full results

Brazilian researchers said on Wednesday the COVID-19 vaccine developed by China's Sinovac Biotech is more than 50% effective based on trial data, but again withheld full results at the company's request, raising questions about transparency. Brazil is the first country to complete a late-stage trial of the vaccine, called CoronaVac, but a release of the results, first set for early December, has now been delayed three times. The latest delay is a blow to Beijing, which has been racing to catch up with Western drugmakers, and will add to criticism that Chinese vaccine makers have lacked transparency.

<https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/Coronavirus/Brazil-says-Sinovac-vaccine-over-50-effective-but-delays-full-results>

Another new coronavirus strain found in Nigeria: Africa CDC

Africa's top public health official said on Thursday that a new strain of the coronavirus has been found in Nigeria, the continent's most populous country. As The Associated Press reports, John Nkengasong, head of the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, told reporters the new strain had been identified based on two or three genetic sequences, prompting an emergency meeting of officials this week. "It's a separate lineage from the U.K. and South Africa," said Nkengasong. "Give us some time ... it's still very early."

<https://thehill.com/homenews/news/531560-another-new-strain-suspected-in-nigeria-africa-cdc>

U.K. variant puts spotlight on immunocompromised patients' role in the COVID-19 pandemic

In June, Ravindra Gupta, a virologist at the University of Cambridge, heard about a cancer patient who had come into a local hospital the month before with COVID-19 and was still shedding virus. The patient was being treated for a lymphoma that had relapsed and had been given rituximab, a drug that depletes antibody-producing B cells. That made it hard for him to shake the infection with SARS-CoV-2. Gupta, who studies how resistance to HIV drugs arises, became interested in the case and helped treat the patient, who died in August, 101 days after his COVID-19 diagnosis, despite being given the antiviral drug remdesivir and two rounds of plasma from recovered patients, which contained antibodies against the virus. When Gupta studied genome sequences from the coronavirus that infected the patient, he discovered that SARS-CoV-2 had acquired several mutations that might have allowed it to elude the antibodies.

<https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2020/12/uk-variant-puts-spotlight-immunocompromised-patients-role-covid-19-pandemic>

Coronavirus Variant Is Indeed More Transmissible, New Study Suggests

A team of British scientists released a worrying study on Wednesday of the new coronavirus variant sweeping the United Kingdom. They warned that the variant is so contagious that new control measures, including closing down schools and universities, might be necessary. Even that may not be enough, they noted, saying, "It may be necessary to greatly accelerate vaccine rollout." Nicholas Davies, the lead author of the study, said that the model should also serve as a warning to other countries where the variant may have already spread.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/23/health/coronavirus-uk-variant.html>

Asthma-style inhaler filled with powerful LLAMA antibodies could be used to treat patients with severe COVID-19

Camelids including llamas, camels and alpacas create nanobodies. These are smaller and easier to engineer by experts than human antibodies. Researchers found a nanobody called NIH-CoVnb-112 which binds to viral spike. They write nanobodies 'have therapeutic, preventative, and diagnostic

potential'

https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-9079137/Asthma-style-inhaler-filled-powerful-LLAMA-antibodies-treat-COVID-19.html?ito=social-twitter_mailonline

Coronavirus Resurgence

Covid-19: UK records 30,000 new cases and 316 deaths

A further 30,501 positive tests for coronavirus were reported on Sunday, as hospitals in parts of the UK warn they are at risk of being overwhelmed. Another 316 people died within 28 days of a positive test, bringing the total to 70,752. The true numbers are likely to be higher as some parts of the UK are not reporting data over Christmas. It comes as doctors in Scotland warned that the health system was "severely stretched" and a Welsh hospital made an urgent appeal for help with Covid-19 patients on Saturday night.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-55461140>

Covid: South Africa passes one million infections as cases surge

South Africa has become the first country on the continent to register more than one million Covid-19 cases. It comes just days after authorities confirmed that a new, faster-spreading, coronavirus variant had been detected. Some hospitals and medical centres have reported a huge rise in admissions, putting a heavy strain on resources. President Cyril Ramaphosa is widely expected to announce tougher restrictions to prevent the virus from spreading further.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-55462863>

Covid-19: Hospitals under pressure as coronavirus cases rise

England's "very high" Covid infection level is a "growing concern" as the NHS struggles to cope with rising patient numbers, a health official has said. On Monday, a record 41,385 Covid cases and 357 deaths were reported in the UK. NHS England said the number of people being treated for the virus in hospital is now 20,426, which is higher than the previous peak of about 19,000 in April. BBC health editor Hugh Pym said Monday's figure included some infections where reporting was delayed, but that officials did not deny there had been a significant increase in infections.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-55462701>

Ukrainians flock to local ski resort, with many European resorts shut to curb coronavirus spread

Ukraine's biggest ski resort Bukovel in the Carpathian mountains is fully booked until the end of year as Ukrainians have sped to it instead of other foreign resorts that have been shut due to coronavirus-linked restrictions across Europe. Bukovel's management said the resort had already been booked at 80% capacity through January. Unlike some European countries, Ukraine did not tighten restrictions on the movement of its residents within the country to curb the spread of the coronavirus over the Christmas and New Year season.

<https://uk.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-ukraine-ski-resort-idUKKBN2920ZS>

South Africa's total COVID-19 cases cross 1 million mark

South Africa's total coronavirus infections since the first case in March crossed a million on Sunday, its Health Ministry said, just days after a new faster spreading variant was confirmed to be present in the country. The grim milestone comes nine days after the country, the worst hit in Africa, reported 900,000 cases. The country had taken two weeks to reach 900,000 from the 800,000 seen early in December.

<https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-health-coronavirus-safrica/south-africas-total-covid-19-cases-cross-1-million-mark-idUKKBN2910LX>

Sydney told to watch its famous New Year's Eve fireworks from home

Sydney, one of the world's first major cities to welcome each New Year with a public countdown

featuring a fireworks display over its well-known Opera House, has banned large gatherings that night amid an outbreak of the coronavirus. A mid-December resurgence of COVID-19 in the city's northern beach suburbs has grown to 125 cases after five new infections were recorded on Monday. About a quarter of million of people there must stay in strict lockdown until Jan. 9. That has led to further restrictions of the already toned-down plans for the New Year's Eve. New South Wales (NSW) Premier Gladys Berejiklian banned most people from coming to Sydney's downtown that night and limited outdoor gatherings to 50 people.

<https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-health-coronavirus-australia/sydney-told-to-watch-its-famous-new-years-eve-fireworks-from-home-idUKKBN29205M>

A Growing Number of Countries Find Cases of the New Virus Variant

Japan, Spain, France, Sweden and Canada have found small numbers of infections involving a new, potentially more transmissible variant of the coronavirus, most linked to travel from Britain, where it was first detected. The rapid spread of the variant led to the lockdown of London and southern England this week, prompted a temporary French blockade of the English Channel and resulted in countries around the world barring travelers from Britain. Because few countries have the level of genomic surveillance that Britain does, there is concern that the variant may have been traveling across the world undetected for weeks.

<https://www.nytimes.com/live/2020/12/26/world/covid-updates-coronavirus>

Beijing tightens COVID-19 curbs as cases detected across capital

Beijing has tightened COVID-19 curbs over concerns that China's mass travel during the holiday period could cause cases to spike in the capital, as it reported locally transmitted cases for a fourth straight day on Sunday. A meeting led by the capital's Communist party boss, Cai Qi, urged all districts in Beijing to enter an "emergency" mode, sealing off residential compounds and villages where infections are found. Shunyi district, where all the recent coronavirus cases have been reported, has declared a wartime mode and testing for all its 800,000 people. All the cases reported on Saturday were close contacts of previous cases.

<https://www.msn.com/en-gb/news/world/beijing-tightens-covid-19-curbs-as-cases-detected-across-capital/ar-BB1cg6it>

One in 1,000 Americans have died from Covid-19

Within 10 months since the onset of a public health crisis that has upended the lives of millions of Americans, the nation's death toll has surpassed 330,000, during what has become the year's deadliest month, with nearly 60,000 lives lost within the final weeks of 2020. The overwhelming scale of death means that one in 1,000 Americans have died from Covid-19. Nearly 19 million confirmed infections have been reported in 2020, with an average number of daily new cases remaining above 200,000 within the year's final days, according to Johns Hopkins University - more than three times higher than the outbreak's summer peak in July.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-death-toll-coronavirus-b1779173.html>

COVID-19: South Korea braced for 'third wave' as daily cases hit new highs

South Korean officials have warned of a third wave of coronavirus, as a resurgence in cases continues over the Christmas period. The Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency (KDCA) recorded 1,132 new COVID-19 cases on Saturday, which was the country's second-highest daily increase after 1,241 on Christmas Day. South Korea has been seen as one of the countries to have responded best to the pandemic since it began, but has seen significant coronavirus outbreaks in prisons, nursing homes and churches recently - leading to officials asking people to stop end-of-year gatherings.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-south-korea-braced-for-third-wave-as-daily-cases-hit-new-highs-12172650>

COVID-19: Canada among latest countries to confirm first cases of new COVID variant

The new variant of coronavirus that is spreading through Britain has been detected in Norway and

on the Portuguese island of Madeira. It follows several countries in reporting cases of the mutation, listed as VUI-202012/01, first spotted in the UK and thought to be up to 70% more transmissible - meaning it can spread much faster. Authorities in Madeira have not said how many people are infected, but confirmed it had been "detected in travellers who arrived there from the United Kingdom". Norway also discovered the mutation in two people who had arrived there from the UK.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-france-discovers-its-first-case-of-the-new-coronavirus-variant-after-frenchman-travelled-from-london-12172620>

South Korea to decide on tougher distancing as COVID-19 count hits another high

South Korea plans to discuss whether it needs to further tighten distancing rules this weekend as the current curbs failed to reverse a resurgence in outbreaks, with the daily coronavirus count hitting another high on Friday, officials said. The Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency (KDCA) reported 1,241 new coronavirus cases as of midnight Thursday, the highest daily count recorded. Daily numbers have been hovering at record levels over the past few weeks, around 1,000, but the government resisted calls for imposing the toughest Level 3 at least for the greater Seoul area due to economic concerns, calling it a last resort.

<https://uk.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-southkorea/s-korea-pm-says-highest-daily-coronavirus-count-recorded-at-1241-yonhap-idUSKBN28Z00L>

Canada's Ontario finds two cases of virus variant first seen in UK

Health officials in Ontario said on Saturday that two confirmed cases of the new coronavirus variant first detected in the United Kingdom have appeared in the Canadian province. Scientists say the variant is about 40%-70% more transmissible than the original strain. Several other countries, including Australia, Italy and the Netherlands say they detected cases of the new strain. The Canadian cases, identified in a couple in southern Ontario with no known travel history, exposure or high-risk contact, came as the province went into a lockdown on Saturday.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-canada/canadas-ontario-finds-two-cases-of-virus-variant-first-seen-in-uk-idUSKBN2900JX>

Sydney awaits verdict on New Year's Eve festivities as COVID-19 outbreak grows

Sydney's COVID-19 outbreak continued on Sunday with more than a quarter million people in lockdown as Australia's largest city awaited word on whether any public New Year's Eve celebrations will be allowed. Seven cases of the new coronavirus were reported in New South Wales state, six linked directly to the outbreak in Sydney's northern beach suburbs, which are under a stay-at-home order until Wednesday. Infections stand at 122. "I appreciate frustration levels are increasing as we get closer to New Year's Eve and days we stay at home increase," state Premier Gladys Berejiklian told a news conference.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-australia/sydney-awaits-verdict-on-new-years-eve-festivities-as-covid-19-outbreak-grows-idUSKBN29102M>

Philippines eyes more COVID curbs to halt new variants

The Philippines approved measures on Saturday to slow the spread of new, more infectious coronavirus variants, as President Rodrigo Duterte warned of a second lockdown should cases spike before the country gets its first vaccines in May. Countries around the world have in recent days closed their borders to flights from Britain and South Africa, where more infectious variants have been detected. Duterte extended an existing a ban on flights from Britain by two weeks to mid-January, and said the Philippines would impose travel curbs on countries with local community transmission of the UK variant.

<https://uk.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-philippines/update-1-philippines-eyes-more-covid-curbs-to-halt-new-variants-idUKL1N2J606H>

German daily COVID death toll nears 1,000 a week into lockdown

Germany reported a record daily coronavirus death toll of 962 on Wednesday, a week after the start of a hard lockdown that has forced most stores as well as hair salons and other services to close. The total death toll now stands at 27,968, data from the Robert Koch Institute (RKI) for infectious diseases showed. The previous daily death toll record was 952, reported on Dec. 16, the day the lockdown came into effect.

<https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-health-coronavirus-germany-cases/german-daily-covid-death-toll-nears-1000-a-week-into-lockdown-idUKKBN28X0EZ>

Health officials brace for a surge in US Covid-19 cases after the holidays

With Christmas in the rear view mirror, public health experts are bracing for yet another surge in Covid-19 cases, similar to those seen after other US holidays in recent months. "We've just seen these amplification events, and that's what's happened at the end of this year in the US," said Erin Bromage, an associate professor of biology at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth. "We had Thanksgiving, we had Labor Day, we had Halloween, and each one of these events brought lots of people together and just gave the virus more fuel to move through the population," Bromage said. "Christmas is going to do a similar thing."

<https://www.cnn.com/2020/12/26/health/us-coronavirus-saturday/index.html>

UK records 210 more COVID-19 deaths, cases rise to 34,693

The United Kingdom recorded 210 COVID-19 deaths on Saturday, down from 570 the day before, while cases rose 1,968 to 34,693, the government said, citing partial data. The latest R number is estimated at 1.1 to 1.3, the government said. The United Kingdom has recorded a death toll of 70,405, defined as those dying within 28 days of a positive test. Under that measure, it has the world's sixth largest toll, after the United States, Brazil, India, Mexico and Italy.

<https://uk.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-britain/uk-records-210-more-covid-19-deaths-cases-rise-to-34693-idUKKBN2900EY>

Covid-19: NI concern at spread of new coronavirus variant

Health officials in Northern Ireland are concerned that the spread of a variant form of coronavirus could have "substantial consequences", according to NI's chief scientific adviser. Prof Ian Young said the reproduction rate of the virus could rise by between 0.4 and 0.6 as a result. On Wednesday, the health minister confirmed a positive case of the new strain had been detected in NI. However, Prof Young said detecting new variants "is not unexpected".

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-55435518>

First case of new COVID variant found in France as cases rise

France recorded its first case of the new variant of coronavirus, as the number of cases and deaths from COVID-19 mounted in the country, increasing concerns of a new wave of the virus hitting the euro zone's second-biggest economy. The French health ministry said a Frenchman who recently arrived back in France from London had tested positive for the new variant of the coronavirus. The ministry said the case - the first in France - had been found in the city of Tours. The man in question arrived from London on Dec. 19. He was currently self-isolating and felt alright, the ministry added.

https://uk.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-france-variant-idUKKBN28Z0YJ?taid=5fe6a865047c5c0001cbfba2&utm_campaign=trueAnthem:+Trending+Content&utm_medium=trueAnthem&utm_source=twitter

COVID-19: Fears new variant could prevent schools returning in January

One of the biggest potential casualties of the new variant of COVID-19 may be the possibility of a normal return to school in England in January. Scientists are currently studying the evidence that children might be more affected. It could mean a return to home schooling for thousands of children. Secondary schools across England are already staggering their start of term, to allow a testing programme to get under way. Recent figures show there's been a sharp rise in cases of COVID among school-aged children. This might be driven by the new variant of the virus, which could

spread more easily in young people.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-fears-new-variant-could-prevent-schools-returning-in-january-12170593?dcmp=sf-twitter>

New Lockdown

Sydney residents discouraged from Boxing Day shopping, some suburbs to re-enter lockdown

Sydney residents were urged not to head to the shops for Boxing Day bargains, while those in some northern beach suburbs prepared to re-enter a strict lockdown for three days from Sunday as the city seeks to stamp out a coronavirus outbreak. The state of New South Wales recorded nine new coronavirus cases, eight of them directly linked to the northern beaches outbreak, which now stands at 116 confirmed cases. Lockdown measures for some suburbs were first imposed on Dec. 19 but were eased slightly for the Christmas break. "Our strategy is to make sure we nip this in the bud as soon as we can," the state's premier, Gladys Berejiklian, said

<https://uk.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-australia-idUKKBN29002X>

UK imposes more lockdowns as mutated COVID variant causes record cases

The British government said huge swathes of England would be placed under its strictest COVID-19 restrictions as a highly infectious virus variant sweeps the country, pushing the number of cases to a record level. Britain reported almost 40,000 new infections as the mutated variant of the coronavirus, which could be up to 70% more transmissible than the original, causes the number of cases and hospital admissions to soar.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-health-coronavirus-britain-christmas-idUSKBN28X0V7>

Israel imposing third national COVID-19 lockdown

Israel will impose a third national lockdown to fight surging COVID-19 infections, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Thursday, as the country pursues a vaccination campaign. The restrictions will come into effect on Sunday evening and last for 14 days, pending final cabinet approval, a statement from Netanyahu's office said. They include the closure of shops, limited public transport, a partial shutdown of schools and a one-kilometre (two-thirds of a mile) restriction on travel from home, except for commuting to workplaces that remain open, and to purchase essential goods. Such measures will cost Israel's economy about three billion shekels (\$932.6 million) a week, the Finance Ministry said.

<https://uk.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-israel/israel-imposing-third-national-covid-19-lockdown-idUSKBN28Y100>

Israel speeds vaccines, locks down in hope of March exit from pandemic

Israel will enter what officials hope will be its last coronavirus lockdown on Sunday as they ramp up vaccinations to a pace Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said may allow an emergence from the pandemic by March. If realised, that could help Netanyahu's re-election hopes after missteps that include lifting a first lockdown with a premature declaration of victory in May, inconsistent enforcement of curbs and sluggish economic relief. After beginning vaccinations a week before the European Union's roll-out on Sunday, Israel's centralised health system is now administering around 70,000 shots daily. Netanyahu wants that raised to 150,000 by next weekend, with the opening of 24/7 vaccination stations among proposals.

<https://uk.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-israel/israel-speeds-vaccines-locks-down-in-hope-of-march-exit-from-pandemic-idUKL8N2J704Q>

Widespread Boxing Day lockdown looms as UK bans South Africa travellers

Millions more people will be under the toughest coronavirus restrictions from Boxing Day as the UK implemented a travel ban on South Africa amid concerns over another new strain of Covid-19.

Health Secretary Matt Hancock warned the “highly concerning” new variant is believed to be more transmissible than the mutant strain that resulted in the creation of the new Tier 4 restrictions. It is believed to be behind an increase in cases in South Africa, and has been discovered in two people in the UK thought to be contacts of those who travelled between the two countries in the last few weeks.

<https://uk.finance.yahoo.com/news/widespread-boxing-day-lockdown-looms-002912281.html>