

COVID-19 Lockdown Exit Analysis

5th Feb 2021

News Highlights

African Union vaccine plan wins endorsement of sixteen African countries

Sixteen African countries have signed on to a plan developed by the African Union (AU) to procure COVID-19 vaccines. [The AU has secured around 670 million vaccine doses, as part of a plan to inoculate sixty percent of the continent's 1.3 billion people over the next three years.](#) Sixteen countries have now asked the AU's Vaccine Acquisition Task team (AVATT) for 114 million doses, which they may receive in the next two to three weeks.

Fears over new strains in the USA

Dr Celine Grouder, a member of the Biden administration's COVID-19 advisory board, has expressed concerns over new strains of COVID-19 which have been found in 33 U.S. states. ['They're more virulent, can cause more death, and some of them may even escape the immune response, whether it's natural or from the vaccine.'](#) she warned. As such, she said, 'until everybody who wants to get vaccinated can be vaccinated, we really do need to double down on the masking and social distancing.'

As first vaccine schedules under COVAX announced, continued fears grow over inequality

The COVAX initiative has [issued its first interim forecast for distribution of COVID-19 vaccines to low and middle income nations.](#) The news comes as experts warn of 'deadly consequences' due to inequalities in the global vaccine supply. Of inoculations carried out thus far, the poorest countries account for 0.01 percent. [The fifty wealthiest countries, meanwhile, account for seventy percent. This 'could prolong or even worsen this terrible pandemic.'](#) according to the IFRC.

Continued confusion and controversy over hotel quarantine in the UK

The UK will begin its [new policy of mandated quarantine in hotels on February 15th for those arriving from certain countries, in order to prevent the spread of new,](#) more virulent variant strains. However, it has been far from smooth sailing so far, with criticism of the delay in implementing the policy and a lack of detail. [Prime Minister Boris Johnson said more details would be unveiled Thursday, only to be contradicted by a spokesperson who said it will be next week instead](#) - leaving hotels and everyone in the dark still.

Lockdown Exit

Sixteen African nations show interest in AU COVID vaccine plan

Africa CDC director says countries asked for 114 million doses in total and allocations could be announced within three weeks. Sixteen African countries have shown interest in securing COVID-19 vaccines under an African Union (AU) plan, and allocations could be announced in the next three weeks, the head of the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has said. While many rich nations have already begun mass inoculation drives, only a few African countries have started vaccinations, and the 55-member African Union hopes to see 60 percent of the continent's 1.3 billion people immunised in the next three years.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/2/4/sixteen-african-nations-show-interest-in-au-vaccine-plan>

New Covid strains 'may even escape the immune response,' says Biden Covid advisor

Three highly contagious mutations of Covid have been detected in at least 33 states across the U.S., according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "They're more virulent, can cause more death, and some of them may even escape the immune response, whether it's natural or from the vaccine," said Dr. Celine Gounder. Gounder said that she's "concerned" that people will let their guards down in March and that it could potentially lead to another surge.

<https://www.cnn.com/2021/02/04/biden-covid-advisor-new-covid-strains-may-escape-immune-response.html>

How to heal the 'mass trauma' of Covid-19

When the pandemic is over, how should we process the memories of what happened? Ed Prideaux discovers counter-intuitive answers from the science of trauma. "After the pandemic ends, the effects of the mass trauma it has inflicted will linger across societies for years. How might we understand this mental fallout? And what does the science of trauma suggest that we should - and shouldn't - do in order to heal?" "Covid-19 is a mass trauma the likes of which we've never seen before. Our most complex social extensions, and the building-blocks of our personal realities, have been coloured indelibly. The ways we live and work together, and view each other as common citizens: everything means something different in the viral era, and with potentially traumatic effect. All pandemics end, however. And this one will. But to forget the trauma, move on, and pay it no mind, won't help. It'd be a disservice to history and our own minds. Maybe to the future, too. "

<https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20210203-after-the-covid-19-pandemic-how-will-we-heal>

Restaurants face 'wave of bankruptcies' after lockdowns

The food services sector has been hit hard by the Coronavirus pandemic, but governments are struggling to find ways to reopen safely. On Monday, Italy eased restrictions in sixteen regions, allowing restaurants and museums to reopen after months of closure. But the country remains an exception in Europe. In Brussels, the streets of the normally lively city centre have been eerily empty for more than three months now. To make matters worse, the sector has had to adjust to wildly zig-zagging policy decisions over the past year that have varied enormously between different countries.

<https://www.euractiv.com/section/agriculture-food/news/restaurants-face-wave-of-bankruptcies-after-lockdowns/>

Macron's Lockdown Conundrum Will Decide France's Recession Fate

The French economy is on the brink of tipping into another recession, depending on President Emmanuel Macron's next move to contain the Covid-19 pandemic. If the government replaces the current curfew with a seven-week nationwide lockdown similar to November's, the economy would shrink 1% in the first quarter after a 1.3% contraction at the end of last year, national statistics agency Insee estimates. If France keeps current restrictions unchanged, the economy would grow 1.5%.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-02-04/macron-s-lockdown-conundrum-will-decide-france-s-recession-fate>

Face masks mandatory beyond WA lockdown

West Australians will be required to wear face masks while out in public and be restricted to seated service at bars and restaurants for another week when the state emerges from lockdown. WA has posted four consecutive days of no new community COVID-19 cases, paving the way for metropolitan Perth, the Peel region and South West to exit lockdown at 6pm on Friday. But Premier Mark McGowan has announced a range of restrictions will remain in place for Perth and Peel until 1201am on Sunday February 14.

<https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/7114081/face-masks-mandatory-beyond-wa-lockdown/>

'Dodged a bullet': Expert explains why WA may have escaped COVID spread

Amid questions of how Western Australia could have escaped further community spread, an

infectious disease expert has dispelled suggestions the security guard dubbed Case 903 might have been a false positive. Senior Australian infectious disease experts are also at odds over the effectiveness or benefit of WA's short, sharp lockdown. A security guard who worked at one of Perth's quarantine hotels tested positive to the highly infectious UK strain of COVID-19 on Saturday and dozens of locations around the city have been established as possible exposure sites. But extensive testing over the past three days has not produced any further cases of community spread. Professor Adrian Esterman from the University of South Australia told 6PR's Gareth Parker the reason might be that Case 903 was one of those people who was not very infectious.

<https://www.watoday.com.au/national/western-australia/dodged-a-bullet-expert-explains-why-wa-may-have-escaped-covid-spread-20210204-p56zhy.html>

Britain's COVID-19 hotel quarantine policy to start Feb. 15

Britain's hotel quarantine policy for travellers arriving from COVID-19 hot spots will start on Feb. 15, the government announced on Thursday after critics said it was not moving fast enough to bring in the measures. The mandatory 10-day stay in government-provided accommodation, first announced last month, is designed to tighten borders against new variants of the coronavirus which could endanger Britain's vaccination programme. Opposition lawmakers have criticised Boris Johnson's government for not implementing the plan more quickly, saying the delay was putting lives at risk. The prime minister said on Wednesday details would be announced on Thursday, only to be contradicted by his spokesman less than 24 hours later.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-britain-quarantine/britains-covid-19-hotel-quarantine-policy-to-start-feb-15-idUSKBN2A42OC?il=0>

Why Israel Can't Celebrate Its Vaccine Success Yet

Israel is still struggling to contain the virus. This isn't because the vaccine is failing, but because many Israelis still refuse to follow restrictions imposed to limit the spread of infections. Israel began its vaccination program by inoculating its oldest citizens and those with serious underlying conditions. In cities with high levels of vaccination, there's been a 50% drop in confirmed cases, a 40% decrease in hospitalizations and there are 15% fewer serious patients. "The vaccine's effect is profound," says Professor Eran Segal of the Weizmann Institute. The virus's reproduction rate is under the magic number of one, meaning infection rates should continue to decline. Even so, January has been a cruel month in which Covid-19 claimed 1,400 fatalities, about a third of total deaths since the start of the pandemic. Most of these were elderly patients for whom the vaccine didn't arrive in time. If Israel is bending the curve, it isn't doing it as fast as it could be.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2021-02-04/israel-can-t-celebrate-its-vaccine-success-yet>

Exit Strategies

COVID-19 vaccine inequality could cause 'deadly consequences,' experts warn

Around 70% of the total coronavirus vaccine doses administered globally have been in the 50 wealthiest countries compared to only 0.1% administered in the 50 poorest countries, according to analysis by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC). The IFRC described the disparity as alarming and said it could result in "deadly and devastating" consequences, warning that if large areas across the globe remain unvaccinated, the virus will carry on circulating and mutating. "This is alarming because it is unfair, and because it could prolong or even worsen this terrible pandemic," Jagan Chapagain, Secretary General of the IFRC, said.

<https://cnnphilippines.com/world/2021/2/5/covid-vaccine-inequality-could-cause-deadly-consequences.html>

Coronavirus vaccines: More than 250,000 in NI have received Covid jab

More than a quarter-of-a-million people in Northern Ireland have received their first Covid-19 vaccine, Arlene Foster has said. The first minister said 263,735 people have received their first jab, with 25,539 people receiving both. The R - or reproduction - number in the community is now sitting

between 0.75 and 0.85. Mrs Foster said it was not the time to "ease up" but "push on" against the virus with lockdown restrictions. She said hospitals and intensive care units were still under significant pressure

<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-55940087>

Outrage as 'people jump queue for a coronavirus vaccine' after being sent NHS link

Non-priority groups including Public Health England workers and friends of NHS staff have been jumping the queue for the coronavirus vaccine jab. Over a hundred members of PHE staff at Porton Down, Wiltshire, have had the treatment, even though they are not in any of the qualifying categories. The director at the facility insisted they were spare doses that would have gone to waste if they had not been used - but would not comment on the total

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-9224203/Outrage-people-jump-queue-coronavirus-vaccine-sent-NHS-link.html>

Why Are So Many Health-Care Workers Resisting the Coronavirus Vaccine?

Despite confronting the damage of covid-19 firsthand—and doing work that puts them and their families at high risk—U.S. health-care workers express similar levels of vaccine hesitancy as people in the general population. Recent surveys suggest that, over all, around a third of health-care workers are reluctant to get vaccinated against covid-19. (Around one in five Americans say they probably or definitely won't get vaccinated; nationwide, hesitancy is more common among Republicans, rural residents, and people of color.) The rates are higher in certain regions, professions, and racial groups. This hesitancy is less outright rejection than cautious skepticism. It's driven by suspicions about the evidence supporting the new vaccines and about the motives of those endorsing them. The astonishing speed of vaccine development has made science a victim of its own success

<https://www.newyorker.com/science/medical-dispatch/why-are-so-many-health-care-workers-resisting-the-covid-vaccine>

Iran receives its first batch of foreign coronavirus vaccine

Iran on Thursday received its first batch of foreign-made coronavirus vaccines as the country struggles to stem the worst outbreak of the pandemic in the Middle East. The shipment consists of 500,000 doses of Russian-made Sputnik V vaccines which arrived at Tehran's Imam Khomeini International Airport from Moscow, the semi-official Fars news agency reported. Also Iranian state TV quoted Tehran's ambassador to Russia, Kazem Jalali, as saying that Iran has ordered 5 million doses from Russia. The next batches are to arrive on Feb. 18 and Feb. 28, said Jalali.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/iran-receives-its-first-batch-of-foreign-coronavirus-vaccine-iran-coronavirus-vaccines-vaccine-coronavirus-country-b1797692.html>

COVID-19: Hotels 'kept in the dark' over quarantine plan as further details pushed back to next week

Further details on the plans for quarantine hotels will be released next week - not today as the prime minister had suggested. Boris Johnson announced at a Downing Street news conference on Wednesday that the health secretary would be detailing further rules for travellers arriving in England in a statement to the Commons on Thursday. However, Downing Street issued a statement saying no announcements on the issue will be made today. Ministers have been under fire for failing to come forward with details as to when the scheme will come into effect, a week after it was first announced.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-hotels-kept-in-the-dark-over-quarantine-plan-as-further-details-pushed-back-to-next-week-12208364>

COVAX publishes first interim vaccine distribution forecast

The Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance and the

World Health Organization, as co-leads of the COVAX initiative for equitable global access to COVID-19 vaccines, alongside key delivery partner UNICEF, are pleased to publish COVAX's first interim distribution forecast. Building on the publication of the 2021 COVAX global and regional supply forecast, the interim distribution forecast provides information on early projected availability of doses of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine in 1st quarter of 2021 and the AstraZeneca/Oxford vaccine candidate in first half of the year to COVAX Facility participants.

<https://en.mercopress.com/2021/02/04/covax-publishes-first-interim-vaccine-distribution-forecast>

COVID-19: MEPs want to ensure developing countries' access to vaccines

COVID-19 vaccines should be produced also in developing countries to overcome the pandemic, development MEPs told Commissioner Urpilainen on Thursday. "Distributing vaccines globally is our exit strategy from the pandemic," International Partnership Commissioner Jutta Urpilainen told the Development Committee, adding that the Commission will coordinate a "common EU vaccine sharing mechanism", in which EU countries can donate part of their vaccines through the COVAX program, especially when vaccine production is scaled up. The EU is also seeking to scale up production capacity in developing countries and to contribute to strengthening their regulatory framework in the pharmaceutical field, she said

<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20210201IPR96811/>

Covid: UK 'past the peak' but levels 'forbiddingly' too high to relax lockdown

It is too soon to imagine the relaxation of lockdown restrictions in England, with infection levels of coronavirus "still forbiddingly high", the prime minister has said, though the UK is thought to be "past the peak". Boris Johnson said the UK's Covid vaccination programme has provided "some signs of hope", with 10 million people having received their first jab, but he warned the NHS is still "under huge pressure". The PM said his plan remains to set out a plan, on February 22, for an exit out of lockdown but the "level of infection is still forbiddingly high for us to imagine relaxation of currently guidelines".

<https://www.itv.com/news/2021-02-03/covid-uk-past-the-peak-but-levels-forbiddingly-too-high-to-relax-lockdown>

COVID: No special freedoms for the vaccinated in Germany

The German Ethics Council on Thursday spoke out against lifting restrictions for individuals who have been vaccinated against COVID-19. Germany has been in partial lockdown since November. Vaccinations started at the end of December with people over 80 and their carers front of the line. There is currently a shortage of vaccines in Germany, and it will take several months for a majority of people to be immunized and become eligible for the lifting of restrictions. Over the past few weeks tourism agencies, event managers and some politicians had suggested allowing those who have been vaccinated to travel, eat in restaurants, attend concerts and other events which would involve close contact with a high number of other people.

<https://www.dw.com/en/covid-no-special-freedoms-for-the-vaccinated-in-germany/a-56454942>

German health minister open to deconfinement before end of winter

German Health Minister Jens Spahn is in favour of starting to relax coronavirus measures before the end of winter, he said on Thursday. "We can't stay in this harsh confinement all winter, our society wouldn't stand it well," Spahn told regional press group Funke. In addition, "the figures are encouraging, we are seeing a significant downward trend in new infections," the minister added. However, Spahn did not want to commit to a start of deconfinement from the start of February, whereas the restrictions have been programmed for the moment to last until the 14th of the current month.

<https://www.brusselstimes.com/news/world-all-news/152791/german-health-minister-open-deconfinement-before-end-winter-jens-spahn-coronavirus-restrictions/>

North Korea to receive nearly 2 million AstraZeneca vaccine doses in first half of the year

North Korea has requested COVID-19 vaccines and is expected to receive nearly two million doses of the AstraZeneca-Oxford COVID-19 vaccine by the first half of this year, said agencies leading the COVAX vaccine-sharing programme. The COVAX Facility will distribute 1.99 million doses of the vaccine produced by the Serum Institute of India, according to the COVAX interim distribution report on Wednesday (Feb 3).

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asia/north-korea-covid-19-vaccine-astrazeneca-covax-who-14111534>

Western Australia lifts lockdown as raft of restrictions kick in

Western Australia is preparing to take steps out of its snap five-day lockdown with a raft of restrictions to be lifted at 6pm on Friday. Premier Mark McGowan said the state will forge ahead with lifting its lockdown after a week-long testing blitz uncovered no new cases as of 8pm on Thursday. People in the Perth and Peel areas will be free to leave their homes from tomorrow night, with masks mandatory both indoors and outdoors and on public transport. However, masks will not be required during vigorous outdoor exercise. Community sports may also resume.

<https://www.msn.com/en-au/news/australia/western-australia-lifts-lockdown-as-raft-of-restrictions-kick-in/ar-BB1do5Vh?viewall=false&c=15334124169855211043&mkt=en-us>

Johnson says will set out more on lockdown plans on February 22

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said on Wednesday he hoped to announce more details on Feb. 22 about Britain's route map out of the COVID-19 lockdown and plans to ease restrictions. "On February the 22nd, we will be setting out in as much detail as we can about where we see the dates, what the timetable could be, the earliest dates by which we want to do what - you remember what we did last year - setting out a route map, we'll do that again," he said.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-health-coronavirus-britain-date-idUSKBN2A32QC>

Hungary PM flags easing of lockdown after Easter, economy rebounding in Q2

Hungary's vaccination drive will accelerate and could potentially enable the country to ease coronavirus restrictions in April after Easter, Prime Minister Viktor Orban said on Thursday. Nationalist Orban, who will face parliamentary elections in early 2022, is under pressure to reopen the economy. Finance Minister Mihaly Varga said the economy was likely to shrink again in the first quarter but that the second quarter could be a turning point. Hungary has already vaccinated nearly 250,000 people using Pfizer and Moderna's vaccines and, first in the European Union, has signed deals to buy large quantities of Russia's Sputnik COVID-19 vaccine and Chinese company Sinopharm's vaccine.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/hungary-economy/update-2-hungary-pm-flags-easing-of-lockdown-after-easter-economy-rebounding-in-q2-idUSL8N2KA37F>

Kaduna, Zipline sign agreement for drone-delivered COVID-19 vaccines

In Nigeria, Kaduna State Government has signed a deal with medical delivery firm Zipline that will allow drone shipment of COVID-19 vaccines without significant state investment in cold-chain storage. Zipline in a Reuters report noted that its end-to-end cold chain distribution capability can safely deliver even the Pfizer vaccine which would allow Kaduna health facilities to bypass purchases of ultra-low freezers and enable on-demand deliveries of precise amounts of COVID-19 vaccines.

<https://guardian.ng/news/kaduna-zipline-sign-agreement-for-drone-delivered-covid-19-vaccines/>

The Health 202: How West Virginia beat other states in administering coronavirus vaccines

The Biden administration will start shipping extra coronavirus vaccine doses straight to pharmacies, hoping to speed the process of getting shots into arms. But in West Virginia — which has administered the vaccines faster than any other state except Alaska — officials lament that the new allocations will not be going directly to the state to distribute. "We're appreciative of any help we're given, but we would appreciate it more if we would get it delivered to us and in our system," James

Hoyer, the director of the Joint Interagency Task Force for Vaccines in West Virginia, said yesterday. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2021/02/04/health-202-how-west-virginia-beat-other-states-administering-coronavirus-vaccines/>

Concerns raised over queue-jumping as PHE workers given Covid vaccine

More than 100 Public Health England workers have been given a Covid jab despite not falling into any of the priority categories, the Guardian can reveal. The decision to vaccinate staff at PHE's site in Porton Down, Wiltshire, has raised questions internally at the agency about how those involved were allowed to jump the queue for their first doses of the vaccine. The move has also sparked fears that it will undermine the public health message about the importance of vaccinating priority groups first – a strategy that PHE helped to draw up and promote.

https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/feb/04/concerns-raised-over-queue-jumping-as-phe-workers-given-covid-vaccine?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other

COVID-19 challenges continue across US

As the United States continues to roll out doses of the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines, states continue to struggle with how best to reach the elderly and minorities, groups at greater risk for severe COVID-19. In Mississippi, 38% of state residents are black—the highest in the nation—but only 17% of the state's vaccine recipients have identified as black. An NBC News analysis on that state shows several barriers to accessing the vaccine: Many residents live far from a drive-thru vaccination site and lack access to a car. Similarly, announcements made about open vaccination slots and registration times are missed by people without reliable internet access.

<https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2021/02/covid-19-challenges-continue-across-us>

Gilead forecasts 2021 growth, strong remdesivir COVID-19 sales

Gilead Sciences Inc on Thursday forecast its 2021 results above Wall Street estimates after posting a 26% rise in fourth-quarter 2020 revenue, driven by sales of its antiviral drug, remdesivir, which is used to treat COVID-19 patients. Shares of Gilead were up 2.5% in extended trading. Gilead said the COVID-19 pandemic continues to affect its sales, including its treatments for hepatitis C and HIV, due to fewer people going to their doctors. It expects a gradual recovery in underlying market dynamics starting the second quarter of this year. Remdesivir, which is sold under the brand name Veklury, brought in \$1.9 billion in the fourth quarter ended Dec. 31, above analysts' estimates of \$1.34 billion. Excluding Veklury, Gilead said its quarterly sales fell 7%.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-gilead-sciences-results/gilead-forecasts-2021-results-above-wall-street-estimates-idUSKBN2A42V7?il=0>

Partisan Exits

Wisconsin governor clashes with lawmakers over statewide mask mandate to curb coronavirus

Wisconsin Governor Tony Evers renewed his statewide mask-wearing mandate on Thursday, defying votes by the Republican-controlled legislature to repeal his earlier order requiring face coverings in public spaces to curb the spread of the coronavirus. The governor issued his latest decree of a public health emergency hours after the state Assembly voted 52-42 to end his previous mask mandate, adopting a resolution the Senate approved a week ago. Seven Republicans in the Assembly joined the body's entire Democratic caucus on Thursday in opposing the repeal. The showdown followed months of rancor and legal battles between Evers, a Democrat elected in 2018, and the Republican-dominated legislature over a series of restrictions he has imposed on social and business life during the COVID-19 pandemic.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-wisconsin/wisconsin-governor-clashes-with-lawmakers-over-statewide-mask-mandate-to-curb-coronavirus-idUSKBN2A431D?il=0>

Cuomo hit with lawsuit over Covid-19 vaccinations for inmates

Public defenders filed a lawsuit against Gov. Andrew Cuomo Thursday, seeking to force him to allow prisoners to get the Covid-19 vaccine. Two men currently locked up at Rikers Island who want to get vaccinated are named as plaintiffs in the class action lawsuit, brought on behalf of everyone incarcerated at Rikers and other city jails. Legal advocates have demanded that Cuomo allow access to the shot behind bars, where the coronavirus is raging, but the state so far has not budged on expanding eligibility.

<https://www.politico.com/states/new-york/albany/story/2021/02/04/cuomo-hit-with-lawsuit-over-covid-19-vaccinations-for-inmates-1361881>

Tory lockdown-sceptic chair pushes for all Covid-19 restrictions to be lifted by end of May

The Chair of a Tory lockdown-sceptic group has urged ministers to lift all Covid-19 restrictions by the end of May. Mark Harper, who chairs the Covid Recovery Group (CRG), which is made up of lockdown-sceptic Tory MPs, said he thought the Government could "get rid of restrictions completely" by the end of May. But it comes amid fears the virus could still go through some communities "like wildfire" - as take-up of vaccinations in some hotspots was as little as 50%. And while Chief Medical Officer Chris Whitty said last night that the UK was probably past the peak of infections, he said they remain "incredibly high" - and could rise quickly - plunging the NHS "back into trouble extraordinarily fast".

<https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/politics/tory-lockdown-sceptic-chair-pushes-23443585>

U.S. Senate Democrats push ahead on road to new COVID-19 relief

The U.S. Senate, in the throes of a marathon debate over the shape of President Joe Biden's \$1.9 trillion coronavirus aid plan, voted overwhelmingly on Thursday to exclude upper-income Americans from a new round of direct payments to help stimulate the economy. By a vote of 99-1, the Senate approved an amendment recommending that high-income earners not qualify for a new round of government checks that could amount to \$1,400 for individuals. Republican Senator Rand Paul was the lone dissenter. Details of the income cap would still have to be worked out in subsequent legislation. "The decent compassionate thing is for us to target the relief to our neighbors who are struggling every day to get by" during the coronavirus pandemic, said Democratic Senator Joe Manchin, author of the proposal.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-usa-congress/u-s-senate-democrats-push-ahead-on-road-to-new-covid-19-relief-idUSKBN2A421V>

Philippines Vaccine Scandal

How the consequences of a 2016 dengue vaccination drive caused controversy and led to lasting fears among Filipinos. When the Philippines rolled out a vaccine to protect against the mosquito-borne virus, dengue, in 2016, it marked a world first. But within months, parents claimed their children had died due to the vaccine, and the programme was cancelled.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/program/101-east/2021/2/4/philippines-vaccine-scandal>

Continued Lockdown

UK home-working rises to highest since June on COVID lockdown

The proportion of British workers working solely from home rose to 36% in the week to Jan. 31, its highest since June when the country was emerging from its first coronavirus lockdown and up from 34% the week before,

<https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-britain-economy-idUSS8N2IB05A>

Fears lockdown could drag on as 'scientists move goalposts on reopening UK'

Rishi Sunak is concerned scientific advisers are 'moving the goalposts' for easing Covid restrictions, potentially delaying the end of lockdown, reports say. The Chancellor fears the experts are focusing

on bringing case numbers down, instead of the initial target of protecting the NHS and saving lives, the Telegraph reports. According to the newspaper, Mr Sunak wants this lockdown to be the last and has told allies the country is nearing a 'fat lady sings' moment for lifting the restrictions. Boris Johnson has insisted there will be a 'gradual and phased' approach to lifting restrictions, with the national lockdown in place until at least March 8, and a review before then in mid-February.

https://metro.co.uk/2021/02/04/lockdown-could-drag-on-as-scientists-move-goalposts-on-reopening-uk-14019957/?ico=more_text_links

Istanbul's population falls as countryside beckons during COVID

Istanbul's population fell last year for the first time in at least two decades as coronavirus lockdowns shuttered Turkey's commercial capital and attracted people to the countryside. The population of Istanbul province shrank 0.4% to 15.46 million, reversing record 3% growth the year before, according to data published by the statistics office on Thursday. The trend followed patterns seen elsewhere around the world during the pandemic. For decades, Turks from around the country of over 83 million have flocked to Istanbul seeking work and opportunities. But since the coronavirus hit, the government has implemented curfews to curb socializing and restricted opening hours for shops and restaurants, making young professionals reassess what they get for their money in big cities. Surrounding provinces were the beneficiaries, with the population of Tekirdag to the west up 2.4% to 1.1 million and Kocaeli to the east up 2.3% to 2 million. The pandemic also struck Istanbul's tourism sector and universities with tens of thousands of seasonal workers and college students staying away for much of the last year.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2021/2/4/istanbuls-population-falls-as-countryside-beckons-during-covid>

Scientific Viewpoint

COVID-19: Mix and match coronavirus vaccine trial results to be available by summer

Covid trial in UK examines mixing different vaccinesBBC NewsWho should get which coronavirus vaccine?The Indian ExpressMore than 10 million people receive first dose of COVID-19 vaccine in UKGOV.UKCoronavirus vaccine calculator shows when you'll get first and second doseBirmingham LiveView Full coverage on Google News

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-volunteer-recruitment-begins-for-study-that-will-mix-and-match-vaccines-12207762>

Covid-19 patients are most infectious one day BEFORE symptoms appear, study reveals

Covid-19 patients are at their most infectious one day before they develop symptoms, a mathematical study reveals. Researchers used a computer model to process data on viral load — the amount of coronavirus a person is infected with — and how it decreases throughout infection. Previous studies have found viral load aligns with infectivity and also increases the likelihood of death, meaning an infected person with a high amount of the virus in their system is more infectious and also at greater risk of dying from Covid-19.

<https://www.msn.com/en-us/health/medical/covid-19-patients-are-most-infectious-one-day-before-symptoms/ar-BB1domWH>

Covid-19: International travel 'biggest impact' on deaths

International travel had the biggest impact on Covid death rates for countries hit in the pandemic's first wave, a study has found. Researchers in Aberdeen focused on the world's worst affected 37 countries. They examined factors including border arrivals, population density, the percentage of people living in urban areas, age, and health issues. The team said early restrictions on international travel could have made a difference in the spread. The study looked at counties including America, the UK, Spain, France, Italy and Brazil, and focused on the early stages of the pandemic. They found an increase of one million international arrivals was associated with a 3.4% rise in the mean daily increase in Covid-19 deaths.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-north-east-orkney-shetland-55919040>

COVID's mental-health toll: how scientists are tracking a surge in depression

As the COVID-19 pandemic enters its second year, new fast-spreading variants have caused a surge in infections in many countries, and renewed lockdowns. The devastation of the pandemic — millions of deaths, economic strife and unprecedented curbs on social interaction — has already had a marked effect on people's mental health. Researchers worldwide are investigating the causes and impacts of this stress, and some fear that the deterioration in mental health could linger long after the pandemic has subsided. Ultimately, scientists hope that they can use the mountains of data being collected in studies about mental health to link the impact of particular control measures to changes in people's well-being, and to inform the management of future pandemics.

<https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-021-00175-z>

WHO team in Wuhan says discussions open, meetings frank

World Health Organization investigators looking for clues into the origin of the coronavirus in the central Chinese city of Wuhan say the Chinese side has provided a high level of cooperation but caution against expecting immediate results from the visit

<https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/team-wuhan-discussions-open-meetings-frank-75677174>

Danish scientists see tough times ahead as they watch more contagious COVID-19 virus surge

On its face, the curve of COVID-19 infections in Denmark looks reassuring enough. A nationwide lockdown has led numbers to plummet from more than 3000 daily cases in mid-December 2020 to just a few hundred now. But don't be fooled. "Sure, the numbers look nice," says Camilla Holten Møller of the Statens Serum Institute, who heads a group of experts modeling the epidemic. "But if we look at our models, this is the calm before the storm." That's because the graph really reflects two epidemics: one, shrinking fast, that's caused by older variants of SARS-CoV-2, and a smaller, slowly growing outbreak of B.1.1.7, the variant first recognized in England and now driving a big third wave of the pandemic there. If B.1.1.7 keeps spreading at the same pace in Denmark, it will become the dominant variant later this month and cause the overall number of cases to rise again, despite the lockdown, Holten Møller says. "It is a complete game changer."

<https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2021/02/danish-scientists-see-tough-times-ahead-they-watch-more-contagious-covid-19-virus-surge>

Covid: South African and Brazilian coronavirus variants among 4,000 worldwide, vaccines minister says

There are 4,000 coronavirus mutations worldwide, a senior minister has said, but the UK is now capable of sequencing and manufacturing new vaccines designed to tackle new strains. Vaccines minister Nadhim Zahawi said the UK is "in a really strong position" to deal with new variants due to having "around 50% of the world's genome sequencing capability" which means variants can be identified "rapidly". Despite claiming the UK's "ability to sequence and then manufacture [new vaccines] at scale" is in a "good place", there are serious concerns about South African and Brazilian variants having an impact on the immunisation programme. A door-to-door testing blitz of 80,000 homes in eight postcode areas of England is underway to contain all cases of the South African variant of Covid-19 after 105 cases were identified.

<https://www.itv.com/news/2021-02-04/covid-south-african-and-brazilian-coronavirus-variants-among-4000-worldwide-vaccines-minister-says>

Oxford Covid vaccine team is working on a 'second generation' jab - here's how long it could take

Researchers who worked on the Oxford/AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccine are already working on a so-called "second generation" Covid jab, designed to be effective against mutated strains of the virus.

While the existing vaccine is thought to be effective against the 'Kent' strain which emerged in the South East of England, there are concerns about other strains which are starting to appear all over the world. New Covid variants have been identified in South Africa and Brazil recently, prompting worries that existing vaccines may not be entirely effective against these.

<https://www.scotsman.com/health/coronavirus/oxford-covid-vaccine-team-working-second-generation-jab-heres-how-long-it-could-take-3123836>

Cambodia approves emergency use of China's Sinopharm COVID-19 vaccine

Cambodia has officially approved the emergency use of China's Sinopharm COVID-19 vaccine in the Southeast Asian country, according to a Ministry of Health statement on Thursday. "The Ministry of Health of the Kingdom of Cambodia authorized the emergency use of Sinopharm COVID-19 vaccine that has been developed by the Beijing Institute of Biological Products Co., Ltd of the People's Republic of China," Health Minister Mam Bunheng said in the statement. Cambodian Prime Minister Samdech Techo Hun Sen said on Thursday that the first batch of Sinopharm vaccine donated by China will arrive in Cambodia on Sunday, Feb. 7. "When the vaccine arrives at the Phnom Penh International Airport, I will go to receive it by myself," he wrote on his official Facebook page.

http://www.china.org.cn/world/Off_the_Wire/2021-02/04/content_77189191.htm

Singapore approves Moderna COVID-19 vaccine

Singapore on Wednesday approved the use of a second COVID-19 vaccine for individuals 18 years and above. The Moderna COVID-19 vaccine is the second to be approved after the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine currently being used. The Expert Committee has independently reviewed the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine's safety and efficacy data for different population segments in Singapore, and has been briefed by The Health Sciences Authority (HSA) on its full range of considerations in granting interim authorisation, and is satisfied with its safety and efficacy. "In assessing the suitability of vaccine candidates for specific population groups, the Expert Committee took into consideration the safety, efficacy and tolerability of the vaccine and data adequacy of clinical trials. The Moderna COVID-19 vaccine demonstrated a high vaccine efficacy of 94%, and its safety profile is consistent with the standards set for other registered vaccines used in the immunisation against other diseases," a release on the Ministry of Health website stated.

<https://www.connectedtoindia.com/singapore-approves-moderna-covid-19-vaccine-8876.html>

Mexico approves emergency use of Russia's Sputnik V COVID-19 vaccine and orders more than 7 million doses

Mexico authorized the use of the Russian Sputnik V vaccine on Tuesday. The approval of the coronavirus vaccine comes a week after President Andrés Manuel López Obrador reached an agreement with President Vladimir Putin. During Tuesday's announcement, Deputy Health Minister Hugo López-Gatell said Mexico will receive 7.4 million vaccine doses between February and April. The government also started the second phase of its vaccination process for people over the age of 60. The coronavirus pandemic has slammed Mexico with 159,333 confirmed deaths - the third-most in the world - and 1,874,092 cases

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-9214861/Mexico-signs-contract-millions-Russian-Sputnik-V-vaccine-doses.html>

New Zealand gives provisional approval to Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine

The Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine has been provisionally approved for use in New Zealand, where the government will begin vaccinating frontline healthcare and border workers in the coming months. Jacinda Ardern, the prime minister, said the approval was a positive step in the country's fight against Covid-19, of which there have been fewer than 2,000 cases nationally. In New Zealand the approval of medicines and vaccines falls under Medsafe, which also provides independent advice to the government. Although the assessment of the Pfizer vaccine was fast-tracked in New Zealand, it

was not given the pace of an “emergency” medicine as the virus has been largely under control.

<https://www.msn.com/en-au/news/world/new-zealand-gives-provisional-approval-to-pfizerbiontech-vaccine/ar-BB1dkOEZ>

Nicaragua approves Russian COVID-19 vaccine

Nicaragua’s government said Wednesday that it had approved Russia’s Sputnik V COVID-19 vaccine for emergency use. “Nicaragua is advancing in its negotiations with Russia to supply” the vaccine, said the government outlet El 19 Digital. It was the first vaccine approved in Nicaragua, which still awaits its first doses. The government had said in January that it had initiated efforts to acquire vaccines from various laboratories around the world and hoped to vaccinate 3.7 million people in an initial stage.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/nicaragua-approves-russian-covid19-vaccine-nicaragua-vaccine-government-co-vid-ap-b1797208.html>

AstraZeneca vaccine approved for use in Ireland by Minister for Health

Ireland has received a major boost in the vaccine rollout plan, as the AstraZeneca vaccine has been approved for use in the country. COVID-19 Vaccine AstraZeneca is given as two injections into the arm, the second between 4 to 12 weeks after the first. The Government's target of vaccinating 700,000 people by the end of March was contingent on the arrival of 600,000 AstraZeneca doses. However, 300,000 vaccines will be delivered instead as a result of a delay.

<https://www.buzz.ie/news/astrazeneca-vaccine-approved-for-use-in-ireland-by-minister-for-health-416188>

Novavax Sees U.K. Vaccine Approval First; in Talks With FDA

A new Covid-19 vaccine from Novavax Inc. is likely to get its first approval in the U.K., and the company is discussing with U.S. regulators whether trial data from other countries could be part of the shot’s review, Chief Executive Officer Stan Erck said. The company announced late Thursday that the vaccine was effective in big trials in the U.K. and South Africa, though its protective power appeared to be reduced in South Africa, where a worrisome mutation is prevalent. Novavax is still recruiting patients for a trial in the U.S. and Mexico, but the U.S. Food and Drug Administration could consider authorizing the vaccine based on the results from abroad, Erck said in an interview on Bloomberg Television. “We are hoping we can take that data package to the FDA and have them evaluate our vaccine based on the U.K. data while we are running a phase 3 trial in the U.S.,” Erck said. “We are talking to them. We don’t have a definitive answer yet.”

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-01-29/novavax-ceo-sees-u-k-vaccine-approval-first-in-talks-with-fda>

COVID-19: Fourth vaccine could be approved in weeks as trial shows it is effective against UK variant

A fourth COVID-19 vaccine could be approved for use in the UK within weeks after late-stage trials suggested it was 89% effective in preventing coronavirus. The prime minister has said the Novavax jab is now going to be assessed by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA). If approved, the vaccine would start to be rolled out in the second half of 2021. The UK has already ordered 60 million doses, which are going to be manufactured in Stockton-on-Tees.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-fourth-vaccine-could-be-approved-in-weeks-as-trial-shows-it-is-effective-against-uk-variant-12201833>

Sinovac Applies for Conditional Approval of Covid-19 Vaccine in China

China's medicine regulator is reviewing a second domestically developed Covid-19 vaccine for conditional approval. The CoronaVac inoculation developed by Sinovac Biotech Ltd has been given to tens of thousands of people in China under an emergency use programme launched in July targeting specific groups with high infection risks.

<https://www.caixinglobal.com/2021-02-04/sinovac-applies-for-conditional-approval-of-covid-19-vaccine-in-china-101660120.html>

EU drugs watchdog partners with regulators on COVID-19 vaccines, drugs

Europe's drugs regulator said on Thursday it had started sharing COVID-19 vaccine and treatment expertise with its counterparts in several countries, aiming to speed up regulatory processes around the world. The pilot aims to speed up development and assessment of COVID-19 medicines and make them available to the public faster, the European Medicines Agency said, adding that the collaboration comes "at a time when vaccine hesitancy has increased." It said that the collaboration, which began in December, will promote overall transparency and may increase public trust in the vaccines and therapeutics as regulatory decisions are open to peer-review.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-regulators-collaborat-idUSL4N2KA32D>

UK launches world-first COVID-19 study evaluating a mixed-vaccine regimen

A world-first study has launched in the UK with the aim of examining the safety and efficacy of mixing different vaccines for COVID-19 as part of a two-dose regimen. Patients involved in the 13-month clinical study will receive different COVID-19 vaccines for one of their two doses. The study, which has received £7m in UK government funding, will be the first in the world to evaluate whether different vaccines can be used safely and effectively for two-dose regimes. In a statement, the Department of Health and Social Care said that the study participants could either receive AstraZeneca (AZ)/Oxford University's vaccine for their first dose and Pfizer/BioNTech's vaccine for the second, or vice versa.

http://www.pmlive.com/pharma_news/uk_launches_world-first_covid-19_study_evaluating_a_mixed-vaccine_regimen_1362705

UK to test mixed COVID-19 vaccine dosing strategy

In the latest global COVID-19 developments, the United Kingdom today announced the launch of the first study to explore giving different COVID-19 vaccines in a two-dose regimen, and a new study added more evidence that the B117 variant is deadlier than the standard version of the virus. The trial of a mixed-vaccine strategy comes as governments look for ways to protect as many people as possible as quickly as possible with vaccines, amid short supply and the threat of more contagious and lethal coronavirus variants.

<https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2021/02/uk-test-mixed-covid-19-vaccine-dosing-strategy>

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<https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2021/02/uk-test-mixed-covid-19-vaccine-dosing-strategy>

Could combining Pfizer's and AZ's COVID-19 vaccines fill supply gaps? U.K. researchers aim to find out

Given that the COVID-19 vaccines from Pfizer and AstraZeneca each require one dose, followed a few weeks later by a booster shot, could the two products be used interchangeably? That's the question researchers from the Oxford Vaccine Group have set out to answer with a new clinical trial designed to address a mounting problem: The demand for COVID vaccination in many locales around the world is far outstripping the supply. Oxford's 13-month study will recruit more than 800 volunteers in England, who will receive one of four different combinations of the vaccines. Half the participants will get two doses of the same vaccine, while the others will receive one dose of either the Pfizer or AstraZeneca vaccine, followed by a booster of the other company's product.

<https://www.fiercepharma.com/pharma/could-combining-pfizer-s-and-az-s-covid-19-vaccines-fill-supply-gaps-uk-resea>

[rchers-set-out](#)

Johnson & Johnson submits application for Covid-19 vaccine to FDA

Pharmaceutical giant Johnson & Johnson said Thursday it has applied to the Food and Drug Administration for an emergency use authorization for its one-dose Covid-19 vaccine, setting in motion a process that is all but sure to see a third such vaccine authorized. If given the green light by the agency, J&J's vaccine will likely start being used in late February or early March, though initial supplies are expected to be extremely limited. The FDA has already authorized a vaccine developed by Pfizer and its partner BioNTech, as well as one developed by Moderna. Both of those vaccines require two doses.

<https://www.statnews.com/2021/02/04/johnson-johnson-submits-application-for-covid-19-vaccine-to-fda/>

Johnson & Johnson asks US to approve single-dose COVID jab

Johnson & Johnson said on Thursday it has asked United States health regulators to authorize its single-dose COVID-19 vaccine for emergency use. The drugmaker's application to the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) follows its January 29 report in which it said the vaccine had a 66 percent rate of preventing infections in its large global trial. J&J's single-shot vaccine could help boost supply and simplify the US immunisation campaign, amid concerns of fresh surges due to the more contagious UK coronavirus variant and the potential of lower vaccine efficacy against the variant that first emerged in South Africa. Unlike the two currently authorized vaccines from Pfizer Inc/BioNTech SE and Moderna Inc, J&J's does not require a second shot or need to be shipped frozen. After the company's application, regulators will need time to analyse the data and an advisory committee will need to meet. The company's chief scientific officer said last month J&J was on track to roll out the vaccine in March.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2021/2/4/johnson-johnson-asks-us-to-approve-single-dose-covid-jab>

'Insufficient data': Switzerland declines to approve AstraZeneca vaccine

Switzerland will not approve the AstraZeneca vaccine, saying there is insufficient data to do so. This may have implications for the country's vaccination plan. The Swiss regulatory authority said Wednesday that data submitted by AstraZeneca were not sufficient for it to authorize use of the Anglo-Swedish firm's Covid vaccine, saying "new studies" were needed. The decision is not final, with the Swiss government instead saying more data on the safety, efficacy and quality of the vaccine is needed to make an accurate approval assessment. "The data currently available do not point to a positive decision regarding benefits and risks," Swissmedic said in a statement

<https://www.thelocal.ch/20210203/insufficient-data-switzerland-declines-to-approve-astrazeneca-vaccine>

Novavax submits coronavirus vaccine to Health Canada for approval

Canada's hopes of speeding up COVID-19 vaccinations brightened slightly over the weekend as regulators began work to approve a new inoculation, even as the federal government sought to head off any restrictions on vaccine shipments from Europe. Pharmaceutical company Novavax quietly submitted its COVID-19 vaccine to Health Canada for regulatory approval on Friday, less than two weeks after Ottawa finalized a deal with the Maryland-based company for 52 million doses of the shot. Because of the emergency nature of the pandemic Health Canada is accepting applications for vaccines before the final trial data is ready, allowing the review team to start poring over the documents on an ongoing basis, rather than waiting until everything is finished.

<https://globalnews.ca/news/7610676/health-canada-novavax/>

Oxford/AstraZeneca Covid vaccine given full approval by EU regulator

The European Medicines Agency has authorized the Oxford/AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccine for use in all adult age groups after days of doubt. A month after it received approval in the UK, the EU's regulator declared the vaccine safe for general use across the 27 member states. The shot is the third Covid-19 vaccine given the green light by the EMA, after ones made by Pfizer and Moderna.

Both were authorised for all adults. There had been concerns that a lack of data about the effects of the vaccine on older people could put authorisation for those aged over 65 in doubt.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jan/29/oxford-astrazeneca-covid-vaccine-full-approval-eu-regulator>

Regulatory approval of COVID-19 vaccine for restricted use in clinical trial mode

Covaxin is India's first indigenous vaccine against severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), developed through a collaboration between Bharat Biotech and the National Institute of Virology, which is a branch of the Indian Council of Medical Research, the Indian official authority for medical research. The development team isolated a strain of SARS-CoV-2 from patients with asymptomatic infection and developed a vaccine on a Vero cell-line manufacturing platform to deliver the inactivated coronavirus strain. On Jan 3, 2021, the vaccine was granted approval "for restricted use in emergency situation in public interest as an abundant precaution, in clinical trial mode",¹ which raised several concerns across the scientific society.²

[https://www.thelancet.com/journals/laninf/article/PIIS1473-3099\(21\)00045-1/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/laninf/article/PIIS1473-3099(21)00045-1/fulltext)

Coronavirus Resurgence

COVID-19: Another 915 die with coronavirus in UK - as one in five adults has first vaccine dose

Another 915 people have died with coronavirus in the UK, according to the latest government data. This compares to the 1,322 fatalities that were reported yesterday. It comes as Health Secretary Matt Hancock said the UK remained on track to complete the vaccination of the top four priority groups - 15 million people - by 15 February,

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-another-915-die-with-coronavirus-in-uk-as-one-in-five-adults-has-first-vaccine-dose-12208600>

COVID-19: 15.3% of England's population estimated to have had coronavirus by mid-January

About one in seven people in private households in England had contracted coronavirus by mid-January, according to Office for National Statistics (ONS) estimates. The figure is equivalent to 6.9 million people - 15.3% of the population. The estimate is up from one in nine people in December last year, and one in 11 people in November. The numbers are the proportion of the population who are likely to have tested positive for antibodies to COVID-19, based on blood test results from a sample group aged 16 and over.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-15-3-of-englands-population-estimated-to-have-had-coronavirus-by-mid-january-12207328>

Coronavirus Northern Ireland: 10 further Covid-19 deaths recorded by Department of Health

The Department of Health has reported a further 10 coronavirus related deaths. According to the latest update, four of the fatalities are said to have occurred within the current reporting period, and six outside of it. The death toll in Northern Ireland now stands at 1,899, according to the DoH. Thursday's dashboard update reports a further 412 positive cases of the virus, bringing the total number of positive cases to 105,637 since the start of the pandemic. Over the past seven days, the Department says 3,205 individuals have tested positive in Northern Ireland. There are currently 671 Covid-19 confirmed patients in hospital and 68 in intensive care.

<https://www.belfastlive.co.uk/news/health/coronavirus-northern-ireland-10-further-19768988>

Variant detected in UK reported in Italian town

The Netherlands has become the latest European country to limit AstraZeneca's coronavirus vaccine to people aged under 65, despite the European Union approving it for all ages. France, Germany, Belgium, Denmark and Sweden are among the other countries to put age limits on the vaccine,

which was developed by the company with Oxford University. "Because the immune system starts to function less well with increasing age, the council considers the vaccine suitable for people up to the age of 65," the Dutch Health Council said in a statement. The council said it "recommends that the first available doses of the vaccine from AstraZeneca be used in elderly people aged 60 to 65 years".

<https://www.rte.ie/news/coronavirus/2021/0204/1194968-coronavirus-global/>

Yet again, the virus has us all holding our breath

Here we go again. Victoria had just reached 28 days without community coronavirus transmission, but on the back of one positive case finds itself desperately trying to limit another outbreak. With the possibility that a tennis hotel quarantine worker is infected with the highly infectious UK super-strain, there is little room for mistakes or lack of urgency. Premier Daniel Andrews is right to concede that, particularly with the new mutation reaching our shores, the likelihood of it breaching the revamped hotel quarantine program is heightened. And while the rollout of COVID-19 vaccination appears on track for later this month, herd immunity is not expected to be reached for many months, leaving no room for dropping the ball.

<https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/yet-again-the-virus-has-us-all-holding-our-breath-20210204-p56zgt.html>

To avoid lockdown, France cracks down on Covid rule breakers

The scene at the small Parisian cafe looks almost normal: smokers queueing for a pack of cigarettes, gamblers buying lottery tickets or picking up betting slips for the races. That is, until the police walk in, reminding customers, and the owner, that nothing is the same in the Covid pandemic. "There are too many people here, count them," an officer orders his team.

<https://www.rfi.fr/en/to-avoid-lockdown-france-cracks-down-on-covid-rule-breakers>

New Lockdown

Sudden lockdowns in Hong Kong leave some residents trapped in shops, hair salons overnight

In one operation, a 10-year-old girl getting a haircut was separated from her mother who had left to buy food. Health experts divided on the wisdom of the strategy, with one saying residents should avoid leaving their homes late at night

<https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/health-environment/article/3120407/hong-kong-coronavirus-fourth-wave-sudden>

Qatar reimposes restrictions amid surge in COVID-19 infections

The measures affect education, leisure and business activities as the Gulf country seeks to head off a potential second wave. Qatar has reimposed a series of coronavirus-related restrictions on education, leisure and business activities, including closing indoor swimming pools and theme parks and restricting restaurant capacities. The measures came into effect on Thursday, a day after they were first announced as the country battles a surge in new COVID-19 infections.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/2/4/qatars-renewed-covid-19-restrictions-come-into-effect>