

# COVID-19 Lockdown Exit Analysis

## 17th Feb 2021

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### News Highlights

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#### **Mexico sees cases pass the two million mark**

The health ministry in Mexico has announced [the total number of confirmed COVID-19 cases in the country has surpassed the two million mark](#), after 8,683 new infections with the novel coronavirus were reported on Tuesday. Deaths stand well in excess of 175,000. However, the country's true number of cases is likely to be substantially more than reported.

#### **AstraZeneca vaccine wins Australian approval**

Australia's medical regulator has granted provisional approval for the AstraZeneca vaccine, as the country prepares to roll out its inoculation programme. [The government has said it has ordered enough doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine to cover its population](#). It has also approved the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine, the first doses of the Pfizer vaccine arrived Monday. The first doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine will arrive in March. That vaccine is to be largely manufactured in-country.

#### **Amidst falling deaths, UK expands its list of the most vulnerable as lockdown exit is prepared**

An additional approximate 1.7 million people in the UK have been classified at increased risk from COVID-19, following a population risk assessment. [Of these, 820,000 fall outside the over-70 age bracket and will be offered a vaccine and prioritised](#). Deaths in the country are falling, but levels still remain high with experts issuing caution about exiting the current lockdown. [Prime Minister Boris Johnson is expected to announce a 'cautious but irreversible' lockdown roadmap next week](#).

#### **Developing nations look to China for vaccines**

The Sinopharm vaccine manufactured in China is being sought by a number of developing countries. [This comes as high-income nations account for the majority of the world's COVID-19 vaccinations](#), as a result of vaccines being largely manufactured in the west. Lower-income countries could be left as long as one year behind their wealthier counterparts in terms of inoculations as a result, hence developing nations are turning to the Sinopharm vaccine. It has a self-reported 79% efficacy, but clinical data is not publicly available, leading to concern low-income countries are effectively forced to turn to a 'less trustworthy product.'

### Lockdown Exit

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#### **Peru's ex-president sought COVID jab out of turn, doctor says**

The doctor leading a coronavirus vaccine trial in Peru has said former President Martin Vizcarra got a COVID-19 jab out of turn, as a scandal over government officials receiving vaccines before the general public continues to roil the South American nation. Dr German Malaga testified in parliament on Tuesday that Vizcarra, who previously said he had been inoculated as a clinical trial volunteer, was not, in fact, a volunteer. "He asked me for two vaccines," Malaga, of the Cayetano Heredia University in Lima running the trial, told a virtual session of a congressional commission. Vizcarra's wife also received a shot. Malaga said Vizcarra had approached him about being vaccinated on

October 1, when the drug was being rolled out to 12,000 trial volunteers. Vizcarra knew he would be getting the real vaccine from Chinese company Sinopharm, the doctor added.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/2/16/peru-ex-president-sought-covid-jab-out-of-turn-doctor-says>

### **Mexico surpasses 2 million coronavirus cases; more than 175,000 deaths**

Mexico's total number of coronavirus cases crossed 2 million with another 8,683 cases recorded on Tuesday, the health ministry said. The country's tally of infections now stands at 2,004,575. Mexico also reported 1,329 additional fatalities, bringing the total to 175,986 deaths. The government says the real number of infected people is likely significantly higher than the confirmed cases.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-mexico-tally/mexico-surpasses-2-million-coronavirus-cases-more-than-175000-deaths-idUSKBN2AH08W?il=0>

### **UK retail must stay open when third lockdown ends - Ocado chairman**

Britain's retail sector must stay open when it emerges from the latest coronavirus lockdown, sector veteran Stuart Rose said on Tuesday. Prime Minister Boris Johnson is due to set the path out of a third lockdown which has closed all non-essential shops on Feb. 22. "The short term need is for us to have some clarity. We need to have confidence that when we re-open again we will stay open," Rose, the current chairman of Ocado and a former boss of Marks & Spencer, told BBC radio.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-health-coronavirus-britain-retail/uk-retail-must-stay-open-when-third-lockdown-ends-ocado-chairman-idUSKBN2AG00Q>

### **Australia approves AstraZeneca vaccine, bolstering inoculation programme**

Australia's medical regulator granted provisional approval for AstraZeneca Plc's COVID-19 vaccine on Tuesday, bolstering a national inoculation programme it plans to begin rolling out next week. The vaccine boost came as Australia's second-most populous state neared the likely end of a five-day snap lockdown sparked by a fresh cluster of cases. The federal government says it has ordered enough of the AstraZeneca vaccine, which will mostly be manufactured in Australia, to cover the country's population of 25 million people. It has also ordered enough doses of a vaccine jointly developed by Pfizer Inc and BioNTech, which is being manufactured offshore, for a fifth of the population.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-australia/australia-approves-astrazeneca-vaccine-bolstering-inoculation-programme-idUSKBN2AG03N>

### **French unemployment falls to pre-crisis levels in fourth-quarter, skewed by lockdown**

Unemployment in France fell to pre-pandemic levels in the fourth quarter of 2020, though the data was partially skewed by a six-week COVID-19 lockdown during which jobseekers were unable to register as jobless, the INSEE statistics office said. Unemployment in the euro zone's second biggest economy fell 1.1 percentage points to 8%, official data showed on Tuesday. That compared with a revised 9.1% in the third quarter and 8.1% in the last three months of 2019.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-france-economy-unemployment/french-unemployment-falls-to-pre-crisis-levels-in-fourth-quarter-skewed-by-lockdown-idUSKBN2AG0GF>

### **What will life look like after lockdown?**

British prime minister Boris Johnson has said he is "optimistic" about the prospect of lifting the current national lockdown to contain the coronavirus pandemic while also pleading with the public to remain "patient". Mr Johnson is due to unveil a "roadmap to recovery" on 22 February, laying out a timeline for the easing of the social restrictions his government introduced in early January to quell the spread of Covid-19, which has claimed 117,000 lives in the UK since March 2020 and worsened when the country was hit by a brutal second wave of infections towards the end of the year.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/coronavirus-pandemic-lockdown-lift-restrictions-b1802832.html>

### **South Korea warns against lax distancing as daily COVID-19 count hits one-month high**

South Korea's Prime Minister Chung Sye-kyun on Wednesday warned against the loosening enforcement of social distancing rules after the number of new coronavirus cases hit the highest levels in nearly 40 days. The government relaxed distancing curbs on Saturday to take effect starting this week, after getting on top of a third wave of COVID-19 outbreaks that peaked at around 1,200 daily cases in late December. But the numbers shot back up in just three days, topping 600 for the first time in 39 days on Tuesday, after a ban on nighttime entertainment facilities was lifted and a restaurant curfew extended by one hour to 10 p.m.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-southkorea/south-korea-warns-against-lax-distancing-as-daily-covid-19-count-hits-one-month-high-idUSKBN2AH04F>

## **Exit Strategies**

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### **Fears over Covid vaccine access in Pakistan as private imports sanctioned**

Pakistan will allow private companies to import coronavirus vaccines and has exempted the vaccines from price caps in a divisive move that health experts fear will create vast inequalities in access. The country has been scrambling to secure vaccine supplies but so far only the Chinese-made Sinopharm treatment is being deployed. This month 500,000 doses were donated to Pakistan. Like many other countries, Pakistan has been relying on the Gavi/World Health Organization Covax vaccine initiative, but has yet to receive any of the 17m doses it is expecting. The cabinet granted permission for unlimited imports of coronavirus vaccines, which could be sold to customers.

<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/feb/15/pakistan-allow-private-firms-import-coronavirus-vaccines>

### **COVID-19 vaccine priority groups expanded as 1.7m added to shielding list**

In England, more than 800,000 extra patients will be prioritised for COVID-19 vaccination after a major expansion of the shielding list based on data from a risk assessment tool. Around 1.7m additional patients have been identified as being at increased risk from COVID-19 based on a combination of factors including age, ethnicity, BMI and medical conditions or treatments. Of these, around 820,000 are outside the over-70 age group already offered a first dose of COVID-19 vaccine by the NHS and will now be prioritised for a jab. These patients have been identified through a population risk assessment by NHS Digital, based on a risk prediction tool called 'QCovid', developed by the University of Oxford and thought to be the world's only reliable COVID-19 risk prediction model.

<http://www.gponline.com/covid-19-vaccine-priority-groups-expanded-17m-added-shielding-list/article/1707508>

### **Boris Johnson's cautious tone suggests slow way out of lockdown, say scientists**

Scientists and business leaders said that Boris Johnson's ultra-cautious new tone on Covid-19 suggests he will keep many restrictions in place for longer, despite the success of the vaccine roll-out. The Prime Minister said he wants "really, really low" case numbers and warned against allowing more dangerous new strains of Covid to be incubated in the population. Kate Nicholls, of Hospitality UK, said the change of tone was "worrying" for owners who face ruin, some within weeks, unless they can open their doors. Scientists said the language was significant because it suggested that the Government was being advised against the strategy being pressed by Tory MPs and many firms, which is to sanction a rise in case numbers from May when all 32 million "at-risk" people are due to have been safely vaccinated.

<https://www.msn.com/en-gb/news/newslondon/boris-johnson-e2-80-99s-cautious-tone-suggests-slow-way-out-of-lockdown-say-scientists/ar-BB1dJkQS>

### **COVID-19: Phased return of schools in Scotland to begin on Monday, Nicola Sturgeon announces**

The phased return of pupils to classrooms in Scotland will begin on Monday, the first minister has confirmed. Nicola Sturgeon revealed the news in a statement to the Scottish parliament, as she said

the country's lockdown would continue until "at least" the beginning of March and "possibly for a further period beyond that". She told MSPs the shutdown was working - with fewer COVID-19 patients in hospital and intensive care - but cautioned that "even a slight" easing of restrictions could see cases "start rising rapidly again".

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-phased-return-of-schools-in-scotland-to-begin-on-monday-nicola-sturgeon-announces-12219913>

### **UK health chiefs urge caution over lockdown as COVID deaths fall -**

UK health chiefs have urged caution over any relaxation of lockdown rules amid signs that the impact of vaccination and social distancing regulations are beginning to work. Prime minister Boris Johnson is expected to announce a "cautious but irreversible" roadmap for the relaxation of lockdown rules early next week. Dr Layla McCay, director at the NHS Confederation representing hospitals and clinics, said the downward trend in deaths is good news and is "testament to the monumental efforts" from the NHS to care for patients along with the impact of lockdown. But she added: "However, we must remember that there is a long way to go yet, as the number of deaths from COVID is still very high, and still accounts for some 42.6% of all deaths in England and Wales, the third highest proportion recorded during the pandemic.

<https://pharmaphorum.com/news/uk-health-chiefs/>

### **England's route out of Covid lockdown taking shape but timings unclear**

While the government has said very little about how lockdown restrictions in England will start to be relaxed, there is a lot to be read between the lines. With a week to go before Boris Johnson spells out his roadmap for lifting the lockdown, leaks about new rules and timetables being discussed in multiple meetings across Whitehall will be filtering into newspapers. The chronology now seems to be taking shape. There is a hope of allowing a small easing of restrictions at the same time as schools reopen, to allow people to meet one other person for a coffee in the park, say, rather than just for exercise, without running the risk of being moved on by police. That would put the whole country under something similar to the tier 4 rules that were in place across swathes of England in December. Apart from schools reopening, the difference to a full lockdown is only subtle.

<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/feb/15/englands-route-out-of-covid-lockdown-taking-shape-but-timings-unclear>

### **Squeezed out of the race for Western vaccines, developing countries turn to China**

As Peru is caught in the throes of a brutal second wave, millions of people are putting their faith in one country to turn the deadly tide. Peru has joined developing nations from North Africa to the Andes in counting on China for help. For these customers, the vaccines developed in Chinese laboratories and now being distributed globally could hold the solution to a massive problem: how to inoculate their populations after bigger and richer nations have pushed them to the back of the line for the more reliable vaccines developed in the West.

<https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/squeezed-out-of-the-race-for-western-vaccines-developing-countries-turn-to-china/ar-BB1dIOSJ>

### **Victoria's snap lockdown to end on Wednesday**

Victoria's snap five-day lockdown will end as planned at 11:59 on Wednesday after senior Andrews government ministers met to confirm the plans on Tuesday night. The Herald Sun is reporting ministers met on Tuesday to finalise plans to end the lockdown "barring any mystery cases" emerging overnight. Key government ministers will reconvene on Wednesday morning to confirm the plan to reopen the state after it was plunged into a five-day lockdown following the emergence of less than 20 cases from hotel quarantine.

[https://www.skynews.com.au/details/\\_6232624267001](https://www.skynews.com.au/details/_6232624267001)

### **Australia's Victoria 'well placed' to start easing COVID-19 curbs, premier says**

Australia's Victoria state is well placed to begin easing out of a snap five-day coronavirus lockdown on Wednesday, Premier Daniel Andrews said, as it reported just two new COVID-19 infections on Tuesday. Andrews reported two new COVID-19 cases on Tuesday, bringing the recent cluster to a total of 19 people. "This strategy is working," Andrews told reporters. "We are well-placed to be able to make changes tomorrow night. As I said yesterday, I'm not in a position to definitively commit to that, because these next 24 hours will be crucial," Andrews said.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-australia/australias-victoria-well-placed-to-start-easing-covid-19-c-urbs-premier-says-idUSL1N2KM01C>

### **Syringe shortage hampers Japan's COVID-19 vaccination drive**

Fears are growing in Japan – where an inoculation drive against COVID-19 will begin on Wednesday – that millions of doses of Pfizer vaccine could be wasted because of a shortage of special syringes that maximise the number of shots from each vial. The government has made urgent requests, but manufacturers are struggling to ramp up production fast enough, creating the latest headache for Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga, who suffers from weak public support.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/2/16/syringe-shortage-hampers-japans-covid-19-vaccination-drive>

### **Israel blocks shipment of Russian Sputnik V vaccine to Gaza**

Israel has stopped 1,000 doses of Russia's Sputnik V coronavirus vaccine that are intended for front-line medical workers from entering the besieged Gaza Strip. The Palestinian group Hamas which governs the Gaza Strip on Tuesday blasted Israel's refusal to allow vaccine doses destined for Gaza health workers through its blockade of the territory as a "violation" of international law. Israel – which is carrying out one of the world's fastest vaccination campaigns per capita – has faced international calls to share its stocks as an occupying power with Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/2/16/palestinians-say-israel-blocking-shipment-of-vaccines-to-gaza>

### **'Vaccine nationalism' will hurt all countries: New WTO chief**

The World Trade Organization's (WTO) incoming chief has warned against "vaccine nationalism" that would slow progress in ending the COVID-19 pandemic and could erode economic growth for all countries – rich and poor. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala told the Reuters news agency that her top priority is to ensure the WTO does more to address the pandemic, saying members should accelerate efforts to lift export restrictions slowing trade in needed medicines and supplies.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2021/2/16/vaccine-nationalism-will-hurt-all-countries-new-wto-chief>

### **South Africa to share COVID vaccine as Europe weighs J&J vaccine**

In the latest international COVID-19 developments, South Africa health officials announced they will share the country's AstraZeneca-Oxford vaccine with other African nations, and in Europe, Johnson & Johnson submitted its request for an emergency use authorization for its single-dose COVID-19 vaccine. South Africa recently announced a pause on the rollout of AstraZeneca-Oxford vaccine, following early study findings that it appears have little impact on mild-to-moderate disease from the B1351 variant that is dominant in the country. It followed that development with an announcement that it would temporarily switch to using the unapproved Johnson & Johnson vaccine.

<https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2021/02/south-africa-share-covid-vaccine-europe-weighs-jj-vaccine>

### **Biden to refocus on COVID-19 relief as severe weather limits vaccination**

President Joe Biden will host a town hall meeting tonight in Milwaukee to address his \$1.9 billion COVID-19 relief bill, and bring Americans' focus back to the pandemic after former President Donald Trump's second impeachment trial ended this weekend, the Washington Post reported. In addition to promised relief checks for families, the Biden administration today said it is once again increasing the number of vaccine doses given to states each week—from 11 million to 13.5 million, according to White House press secretary Jen Psaki. Psaki also said the federal government continues to

increase its partnerships with commercial pharmacies, and will send 2 million doses of vaccine to local pharmacies this week.

<https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2021/02/biden-refocus-covid-19-relief-severe-weather-limits-vaccination>

### **Hotel quarantine rollout in England 'an absolute joke', says border official**

Border staff received guidelines on how to execute England's new "red list" quarantine rules in an email two and a half hours before they came into force in a rollout that one worker described as "an absolute joke". British and Irish nationals or UK residents arriving from a list of 33 countries are now required to book a 10-day quarantine package costing £1,750 per adult, as the government seeks to limit the spread of new and potentially more dangerous coronavirus variants arriving from abroad. Border Force sources told the Guardian that all immigration control staff had received a lengthy email with five attachments, detailing official guidance for carrying out the new checks at the border, at 9.25pm on Sunday. The rules came into effect at midnight.

[https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/feb/15/hotel-quarantine-rollout-in-england-an-absolute-joke-says-border-official?CMP=Share\\_AndroidApp\\_Other](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/feb/15/hotel-quarantine-rollout-in-england-an-absolute-joke-says-border-official?CMP=Share_AndroidApp_Other)

## **Partisan Exits**

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### **COVID-19: 'Progress' made on vaccine hesitancy amid 'pandemic of disinformation', NHS chief says**

"Meaningful progress" is being made in the campaign to overcome COVID vaccine hesitancy, but it is happening amid a "pandemic of disinformation", the head of the NHS in England has said. The country is fighting a "dual epidemic" and must take on both coronavirus and disinformation with "equal vigour", Sir Simon Stevens said at Monday's Downing Street news conference. He added that progress is being made on uptake among black and south Asian communities, and believes the involvement of local religious leaders will help build momentum.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-progress-made-on-vaccine-hesitancy-amid-pandemic-of-disinformation-nhs-chief-says-12218667>

### **Spoons boss slams 'absurd' outdoor drinking plan after lockdown**

In England, JD Wetherspoon boss Tim Martin has rubbished the idea of only reopening outdoor areas in pubs as a 'random' idea that will leave jobs hanging in the balance. The chain's founder dismissed the notion that the Covid risk could be reduced by allowing customers to sit in beer gardens while keeping indoor spaces closed to the public. He also branded the suggestion of vaccine passports allowing entry to supermarkets and hospitality venues as 'extreme' as he addressed tentative plans to reopen pubs in April. The idea has been shot down by Boris Johnson, who said it is more likely to apply to people travelling abroad.

<https://metro.co.uk/2021/02/16/spoons-boss-slams-absurd-outdoor-drinking-plan-after-lockdown-14089586/>

### **German business groups berate government over lockdown extension**

The German government is coming under mounting attack from business groups angry at its refusal to ease the country's coronavirus restrictions, as pressure grows for an exit strategy out of one of Europe's longest shutdowns. "Businesses are growing increasingly desperate, and angry," said Guido Zöllick, head of DEHOGA, the German association of hotels and restaurants. "More and more fear for their existence." He was speaking after a crisis meeting with German economy minister Peter Altmaier where 40 groups representing the hospitality industry, tourism, retail trade and other sectors lambasted the government's pandemic policies.

<https://www.ft.com/content/7882a2ac-d62a-433c-a327-35efeae4b71>

### **Madrid: an island in a sea of coronavirus restrictions**

Compared to other major European capitals, Madrid is swimming against the tide with regard to its

Covid-19 strategy. Although most of Europe's main cities are imposing heavy restrictions on both mobility and social activities in a bid to curb the spread of the coronavirus, the Spanish capital is opting for relaxing restrictions despite a 14-day incidence rate of 625 cases per 100,000 inhabitants. In fact, while Lisbon, London, Paris, Rome, Berlin, Athens and Brussels remain in partial lockdown, Madrid plans to put the curfew and closing times in the hospitality sector back an hour. The Swedish capital, Stockholm, which took a controversial early approach to fighting the virus by trusting to individual responsibility, is one of the few big European cities to take a similar line. But experts warn of the risks of relaxing restrictions when transmission remains high.

[https://english.elpais.com/spanish\\_news/2021-02-16/madrid-an-island-in-a-sea-of-coronavirus-restrictions.html](https://english.elpais.com/spanish_news/2021-02-16/madrid-an-island-in-a-sea-of-coronavirus-restrictions.html)

### **Police storm gym operating in Melbourne during lockdown**

Dozens of police have stormed a gym in Melbourne's north operating under Victoria's lockdown, with three men arrested. Late this afternoon officers swarmed on the Campbellfield gym, open against the Chief Health Officer's directives during lockdown. "We can't afford to close the gym so we've been trading as per normal during the lockdown," Al Pope, part-owner of the gym told 9News. Mr Pope said about 175 people came through for a casual session today, plus normal members, and no masks were worn.

<https://www.9news.com.au/national/gym-illegally-operating-in-melbourne-during-lockdown/0743de4b-8194-44f5-9945-bdd000364b7c>

### **Dutch coronavirus curfew upheld temporarily after legal setback**

Appellate judges ruled on Tuesday that a night-time curfew would remain in place in the Netherlands pending a government appeal of a lower-court ruling that found the measure lacked legal justification. Prime Minister Mark Rutte's coronavirus policy was dealt a major blow earlier in the day when a district court in The Hague said his government had failed to make clear why it was necessary to use emergency powers at this stage of the pandemic. The government requested and was granted an injunction, or emergency order, in which the three-judge appellate panel in The Hague agreed to suspend that ruling and uphold the curfew pending the outcome of the appeal to be heard on Friday.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-netherlands-curfew-idUSL1N2KM0K4>

### **COVID-19: Test and Trace 'now working really, really well', says Serco boss**

The boss of an outsourcing giant involved in the much-criticised coronavirus Test and Trace programme has admitted it took "some time to settle down" but argued it was "now working really, really well". Speaking to Sky News, Serco chief executive Rupert Soames also rejected comparisons with the widely hailed COVID-19 vaccination rollout, arguing his firm had been "plunged straight into it" last year while there had been time to plan for the administration of jabs. The UK now had "the largest and most successful test and tracing system in Europe", Mr Soames told the Ian King Live programme.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-test-and-trace-now-working-really-really-well-says-serco-boss-12219905>

### **Covid: Dutch crisis as court orders end to Covid curfew**

A court in The Hague has told the Dutch government that an overnight curfew to reduce the spread of coronavirus should be lifted, ruling that it breaches the right to free movement. The court said the 21:00 to 04:30 curfew was imposed by an emergency law when there was no "acute emergency". Later, a higher court ruled that the curfew could stay in place pending an appeal on Friday. The curfew, imposed in January, led to rioting in several Dutch cities. Police were patrolling streets near the Dutch parliament on Tuesday evening but no unrest has been reported so far.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-56084466>

### **Israel blocks shipment of Russian Sputnik V vaccine to Gaza**

Israel has stopped 1,000 doses of Russia's Sputnik V coronavirus vaccine that are intended for front-

line medical workers from entering the besieged Gaza Strip. The Palestinian group Hamas which governs the Gaza Strip on Tuesday blasted Israel's refusal to allow vaccine doses destined for Gaza health workers through its blockade of the territory as a "violation" of international law.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/2/16/palestinians-say-israel-blocking-shipment-of-vaccines-to-gaza>

### **Lebanon begins vaccinations with sceptics a major hurdle**

Lebanon's COVID-19 vaccination roll-out has begun, but there remain concerns the most vulnerable people in the country may be left out of the campaign or excluded altogether. Regardless of nationality or legal status, anyone living in Lebanon is supposed to be covered under its vaccination campaign, including refugees and migrant labourers, who count for about 1.5 million of the estimated six million people living here. "For refugees, one of the problems that we've noticed are very low registration — it could be a lack of awareness, or a lack of trust in the process," said Aya Majzoub, Human Rights Watch's Lebanon and Bahrain researcher. Of the almost 540,000 people who have registered in Lebanon for the vaccine so far, slightly more than 11,000 are Syrian or Palestinian, the two largest non-Lebanese populations in the country. Migrant labourers, the majority of whom hail from Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Sri Lanka and the Philippines, appear to be completely ineligible, as per a statement by the country's Ministry of Labour last week.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/2/16/lebanon-begins-vaccinations-with-sceptics-a-major-hurdle>

### **Biden extends foreclosure moratorium for struggling US homeowners**

United States President Joe Biden extended a federal moratorium on foreclosures and mortgage forbearance policies on Tuesday, giving the more than 10 million homeowners who are behind on payments additional months of assistance as the coronavirus pandemic continues to ravage the US economy. Biden's announcement extends the moratorium on foreclosures through the end of June after it was due to expire at the end of next month. The policy also extends the mortgage forbearance window until June 30 and provides up to six months of additional mortgage payment relief for the 2.7 million Americans who are already receiving it, the White House said in a statement.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2021/2/16/biden-extends-foreclosure-moratorium-for-struggling-homeowners>

## **Continued Lockdown**

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### **'They're just fed up': parents and teenagers on life in the second UK lockdown**

Remote education does not just mean a new system of learning, but missing out on day-to-day interactions with friends and losing the traditional structure of weekdays. While teachers work to engage students from home, there are concerns about the impact of lockdown on school attainment and social development. As many students break for half-term, teenagers and their families have spoken about how the second lockdown has affected them. 'I'm so scared about next year and the prospect of doing formal exams' - Remote learning has "definitely been a struggle", said 17-year-old Aisha Qureshi. She is in her first year of A-levels, after having her GCSE exams cancelled last year.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/feb/16/just-fed-up-families-teenagers-life-second-uk-lockdown>

### **Germans 'sick and tired' as long lockdown hits national mood**

Once Europe's poster child in the battle against Covid-19, Germany has turned into a problem child with the pandemic threatening to spin out of control - even after two months of a strict national lockdown that has frayed nerves, eroded faith in the government and darkened the country's mood. German leaders had to scramble on Monday to defend a controversial decision to shut its borders to the Czech Republic and parts of Austria to foreign travellers, including commuting workers, in a desperate bid to slow the spread of a highly infectious coronavirus mutation from the United Kingdom.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/world/europe/article/3121890/coronavirus-germans-sick-and-tired-long-lockdown-hits-national>

## **Zimbabwe Extends COVID-19 Lockdown As Nation Receives 200,000 Doses of China's Sinopharm Vaccine**

Every life lost, is a big loss to us. I therefore extend the national lockdown by two weeks. This will see the reduction of active cases and monitoring of cases in incubation."

<https://www.voazimbabwe.com/a/zimbabwe-sinopharm-lockdown-extension/5779147.html>

## **Covid 19 coronavirus: Fears for south Aucklanders' mental health amid third lockdown**

South Aucklanders already struggling to feed their families could be hit hard by the stresses of a third Covid-19 lockdown, a prominent Māori leader says. Manukau Urban Maori Authority (MUMA) chairman Bernie O'Donnell said since the first lockdown in 2020, the organisation has been busy helping families in south Auckland via its food bank and social services. O'Donnell, who is also a member of the Auckland District Health Board, said most people have been focused on feeding their families and putting a roof over their heads. "But it's the issues we don't see, like how our psyches are impacted by this," he said.

<https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/covid-19-coronavirus-fears-for-south-aucklanders-mental-health-amid-third-lockdown/VEUBAHGQQ2TNMDT6WEALK44KE/>

## **No new virus cases raise hopes New Zealand will end lockdown**

For a second consecutive day, New Zealand reported no new community cases of the coronavirus on Tuesday, raising hopes that a lockdown in Auckland will be lifted Wednesday. Just how three family members contracted the disease remains a mystery. After the cases were found, top lawmakers hurriedly placed New Zealand's largest city into a three-day lockdown, the nation's first in six months. COVID-19 Response Minister Chris Hipkins said the final decision by lawmakers on whether to lift the restrictions will depend on any new information or cases that crop up over the next 24 hours. "A day when we get zero positive test results is always a good day," Hipkins said.

<https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/virus-cases-raise-hopes-zealand-end-lockdown-75913197>

## **'No choice': Hunger forces Zimbabweans break COVID lockdown rules**

John Kwarabu, 36, knew he would be forced to stay at home when Zimbabwe's authorities announced a 30-day coronavirus lockdown early last month. His job, hawking mobile phone appliances in the central business district of the capital, Harare, did not fall under essential service providers, the only population segment exempted from restrictions barring movement. With the curbs set to take effect on January 5, Kwarabu decided to head to his rural home in Hwedza, some 130km (81 miles) from Harare, to plant food crops for two weeks. His stay, however, was cut short when his wife called him after a week, telling him that food had already run out for herself and their three children. "I had no choice. I couldn't let my family starve," said Kwarabu, sitting on the concrete slab in front of a building in the capital. Following his return, he has been risking arrest and fines as he boards a bus from Tafara - a sprawling suburb north of Harare - without a permit to head to the city centre and try to earn a living. On good days, he manages to sell a few items - USB cables, chargers and power banks - from the stock he had before the lockdown was imposed and buys food for his family.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/2/16/zimbabweans-worry-as-new-coronavirus-lockdown-looms>

## **Scientific Viewpoint**

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### **Call for nurses to join Covid-19 vaccine side effects study**

Nurses and other health professionals from the UK are being encouraged to take part in a safety study of the Oxford/AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccine in order to tackle possible side effects. They are also being asked to urge patients to sign up to the study,

<https://www.nursingtimes.net/news/coronavirus/call-for-nurses-to-join-covid-19-vaccine-side-effects-study-16-02-2021/>

## **Bristol children as young as six can take part in Oxford University coronavirus vaccine trial**

Bristol has been selected as one of four locations to take part in a world-first coronavirus vaccine trial for children. The University of Oxford study will recruit up to 300 child volunteers nationally, aged between six and 17 years old, to investigate if the current Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine is effective in protecting children. As well as the Oxford site, three partner sites in London, Southampton and at Bristol Royal Hospital for Children will run the trial. It launched today (Monday, February 15) and the first vaccinations are expected to commence later this month. Recruitment for Bristol's is open to all BS postcodes via the trial website, which states that participants from Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups are "particularly welcome" to take part. The length of the study is one year and participants will be asked to attend five visits, with anyone under the age of 16 requiring parental consent.

<https://www.bristolpost.co.uk/news/bristol-news/bristol-children-young-six-can-5006729>

## **My Teens Are Coronavirus Vaccine Guinea Pigs**

The day after my teenagers got their first shots in the Moderna Covid vaccine trial, I found my 13-year-old daughter, Zoe, sprawled out in bed during a distance-learning art class. Under a pile of blankets, she said she had chills. My heart skipped a beat. Any other time I would have worried about her missing school or Nordic ski practice, but this time I was elated when her temperature peaked at 100.5 degrees. A fever meant she was probably reacting to a real mRNA vaccine, and not a placebo. Maybe she'd won the vaccine lottery! When Pfizer and Moderna were granted emergency authorization to license their vaccines in December, the shots were approved for people as young as 16 and 18, respectively. But in order to end the pandemic, many experts said that younger children will need to be vaccinated.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/16/parenting/teen-coronavirus-vaccine-trial.html>

## **North Korean hackers attempted to steal Pfizer coronavirus vaccine**

South Korea's National Intelligence Service claim North Korea tried stealing data The NIS claim hackers targeted vaccine manufacturer Pfizer to steal information North Korea has continuously claimed it has not had a single Covid-19 case Last month it was reported North Korea was starting to develop its own vaccine

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-9265515/North-Korean-hackers-attempted-steal-Pfizer-coronavirus-vaccine.html>

## **Covid vaccine impact revealed in over-80s blood tests**

England's vaccination programme is starting to pay off, with the over-80s age group now the most likely to test positive for coronavirus antibodies, Office for National Statistics testing suggests. Blood tests reveal more over-80s than any other age group in England are showing signs of some immunity against Covid infection. This comes as Covid deaths have fallen. But overall, deaths are still 40% above the five-year average.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-56083905>

## **Why the three biggest vaccine makers failed on Covid-19**

As pharmaceutical companies raced to develop Covid-19 vaccines, crossing the finishing line in record time, the world's three biggest vaccine makers were also-rans. GlaxoSmithKline, Merck and Sanofi are now left playing catch-up, after upstarts including Moderna and BioNTech demonstrated their mastery of new technologies that will shape the industry for years to come. New Jersey-based Merck recently dropped its vaccine development programme completely, while Paris-based Sanofi and the UK's GSK are having to redo an early-stage trial of the jab they are jointly developing, after a dosing mistake.

<https://www.ft.com/content/657b123a-78ba-4fba-b18e-23c07e313331>

## **Covid-19 could cause potentially dangerous 'nodules' on patients' EYEBALLS due to inflammation triggered by the virus, scientists warn**

From a dry cough to a high fever, coronavirus is known to be linked to a range of unpleasant symptoms. Now, a new study has revealed another potential side effect - nodules on the eyeballs. Researchers have warned that coronavirus infection may trigger inflammation of the eyeballs and lead to the formation of mysterious nodules at the back of the organ. Experts do not yet know what causes these nodules or the impact they have on a patient's long-term health. However, a study of 129 French patients who had severe Covid-19 and underwent MRI scans revealed nine of them (seven per cent) suffered abnormalities.

<https://www.msn.com/en-us/health/medical/covid-can-cause-potentially-dangerous-nodules-on-patients-eyeballs/ar-B1dJn5z>

## **GPs could offer common asthma drug as early Covid-19 intervention**

A common asthma drug, Budesonide, which could be given by GP surgeries as an early community intervention, has been found to reduce Covid-19 symptoms. In a small trial at the University of Oxford, the steroid inhaler was given seven days after the onset of Covid-19 symptoms and appeared to significantly reduce the need for critical care. The researchers also reported persistent symptoms, seen after 28 days, were reduced with the asthma drug. The study, which has yet to be peer-reviewed, involved 146 people who had tested positive for Covid-19, half of whom were given 800 mg of Budesonide twice a day and the other half received the usual care.

<https://www.pulsetoday.co.uk/news/clinical-areas/respiratory/gps-could-offer-common-asthma-drug-as-early-covid-19-intervention/>

## **SA asks Serum Institute to take back 1 million vaccine doses — report**

SA has asked the Serum Institute of India to take back the one million Covid-19 vaccine doses the company had sent in early February, The Economic Times reported on Tuesday, a week after the country said it will put on hold use of AstraZeneca's shot in its vaccination programme. Serum Institute of India, which is producing AstraZeneca's shot, has emerged as a key vaccine supplier. One million doses of the Covid-19 vaccine landed in SA last week and another 500,000 were due to arrive in the next few weeks. The company did not immediately respond to a Reuters request for comment.

<https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2021-02-16-sa-asks-serum-institute-to-take-back-1-million-vaccine-doses-report/>

## **Novavax signs deal with SK Bioscience for 40 mln vaccine doses for S. Korea**

U.S. drug developer Novavax Inc said on Monday it has signed a license agreement with South Korea manufacturer SK Bioscience to produce 40 million doses of its COVID-19 vaccine for South Korea. "Concurrently, SK Bioscience has finalized an advance purchase agreement with the Korean government to supply 40 million doses of NVX-CoV2373 to the Republic of Korea beginning in 2021," Novavax said in a statement <https://bit.ly/37eMKB2>.

<https://financialpost.com/pmnbusiness-pmn/novavax-signs-deal-with-sk-bioscience-for-40-mln-vaccine-doses-for-s-korea>

## **WHO authorizes AstraZeneca's COVID vaccine for emergency use**

The World Health Organization has granted an emergency authorization to AstraZeneca's coronavirus vaccine, a move that should allow the U.N. agency's partners to ship millions of doses to countries as part of a U.N.-backed program to tame the pandemic. In a statement Monday, the WHO said it was clearing the AstraZeneca vaccines made by the Serum Institute of India and South Korea's AstraZeneca-SKBio. The WHO's green light for the AstraZeneca vaccine is only the second one the U.N. health agency has issued after authorizing the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine in December. Monday's announcement should trigger the delivery of hundreds of millions of doses to countries

that have signed up for the U.N.-backed COVAX effort, which aims to deliver vaccines to the world's most vulnerable people.

<https://apnews.com/article/who-astrazeneca-vaccine-emergency-use-3270b68714c77cf4b292ad25a147323f>

### **Another new coronavirus variant seen in the UK**

Scientists have identified another new variant of coronavirus in the UK with some potentially troubling mutations. B.1.525 appears similar to the South African variant which prompted door-to-door tests in areas where it has been found. Researchers from Edinburgh University have found 38 cases so far - 2 in Wales and 36 in England - in samples dating back to December. It has been seen in other countries, including Denmark, Nigeria and the US. UK experts are studying it to understand what risk it poses. It is too soon to say if it should be added to the UK's list of "variants of concern" and whether mass testing for it should happen. So, for now, it is a "variant under investigation".

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-56082573>

### **Brazil says Amazon COVID-19 variant three times more contagious**

A coronavirus variant identified in the Brazilian Amazon may be three times more contagious but early analysis suggests vaccines are still effective against it, the country's health minister said on Thursday, without providing evidence for the claims. Under pressure as the variant hammers the jungle city of Manaus with a devastating second wave of infections, Health Minister Eduardo Pazuello sought to reassure legislators that the surge of recent months was unexpected but coming under control.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/2/12/brazil-says-amazon-covid-variant-three-times-more-contagious>

### **COVID-19: Scientists identify new coronavirus variant with potentially concerning mutations**

Scientists have identified another new coronavirus variant in the UK which has potentially concerning mutations. B.1.525, the new variant, contains a genetic change called E484K which is also found in the Brazilian and South African variants. Public Health England (PHE) has said there is no evidence that the mutations in the new variant make the virus more transmissible or cause severe disease. Laboratory studies have shown that viruses with the E484K mutation can escape human defences, making them more efficient at evading natural and vaccine-triggered immunity

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-scientists-identify-new-coronavirus-variant-with-potentially-concerning-mutations-12220007>

### **Fauci wins \$1 million Israeli prize for 'defending science'**

The Dan David Foundation, which is based at Tel Aviv University, said on Monday that Fauci has won the prize for "courageously defending science in the face of uninformed opposition during the challenging COVID crisis," the Seattle Times reported. "As the COVID-19 pandemic unraveled, [Fauci] leveraged his considerable communication skills to address people gripped by fear and anxiety and worked relentlessly to inform individuals in the United States and elsewhere about the public health measures essential for containing the pandemic's spread," the foundation's awards committee said.

<https://thehill.com/homenews/news/538897-fauci-wins-1-million-israeli-prize-for-defending-science>

### **Initial sky-high UK in-hospital COVID death rate fell sharply**

The in-hospital death rate among adult COVID-19 patients in England early in the pandemic was 31% but declined significantly over time, with older age, male sex, low socioeconomic status, Asian or mixed ethnicity, and underlying conditions signaling poor outcomes, according to a retrospective, observational study published yesterday in The Lancet Respiratory Medicine. A team led by a researcher from University College London used the National Health Service Hospital Episode Statistics administrative dataset to estimate in-hospital deaths and contributing factors among 91,541 COVID-19 patients at 500 hospitals from Mar 1 to May 31, 2020.

<https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2021/02/initial-sky-high-uk-hospital-covid-death-rate-fell-sharply>

### **U.K. inspects AstraZeneca vaccine partner's India manufacturing, setting stage for supply boost**

AstraZeneca set up a globetrotting supply network for its COVID-19 vaccine to deliver doses around the world, but it hasn't tapped regional producers to ease delivery shortfalls elsewhere. But that could change—and soon. British regulators are inspecting one of the drugmaker's biggest production partners, Serum Institute of India, which signed on to manufacture AstraZeneca's shot for its home country and other global markets. Sources close to the matter told Reuters about the manufacturing audit. A green light from the U.K.'s Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) could clear the way for AstraZeneca to import the India-made shots to the U.K. and EU, which has struggled to beef up vaccine supplies after AZ said it would cut first-quarter deliveries last month.

<https://www.fiercepharma.com/manufacturing/serum-institute-india-up-for-british-audit-as-astrazeneca-looks-to-boost-covid-19>

## **Coronavirus Resurgence**

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### **Coronavirus: Deaths among over-80's fall faster as vaccine impact emerges**

Deaths among people over 80 is falling faster than with other age groups, suggesting the UK's vaccine programme is starting to have an impact on the coronavirus pandemic. According to analysis of the latest data, the proportion of deaths among the over-80s, as a seven day average, have dropped by almost 50 per cent between 31 January to 10 February. This compares to a fall of 39 per cent for those aged under 80 over the same period.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/health/coronavirus-deaths-vaccine-lockdown-b1803071.html>

### **A coronavirus vaccine entrepreneur held an indoor conference. Now dozens of attendees have the virus.**

Last month, entrepreneur Peter Diamandis stood on a purple-lit stage inside the offices of one of his tech companies in Culver City, Calif., as hundreds listened online to his presentation. The summit was not completely virtual, though. Dozens of attendees, some of whom had traveled from abroad, also sat in the indoor space that Diamandis pledged would be safe thanks to regular testing, vitamins and doctors on-site. Instead, nearly three weeks later, at least 24 people who attended the conference have tested positive for the coronavirus — including Diamandis himself.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2021/02/16/peter-diamandis-summit-coronavirus-outbreak/>

### **COVID-19: Another 799 coronavirus deaths and 10,625 cases in UK - as over 15.5 million have had first vaccine dose**

Another 799 COVID-related deaths and 10,625 more cases have been reported in the UK in the last 24 hours, government data shows. This is down from the 1,052 deaths and 12,364 cases recorded this time last week. Yesterday, a total of 230 fatalities and 9,765 infections were reported; however, it's important to note that figures can differ widely early in the week due to a reporting lag from the weekend.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-another-799-coronavirus-deaths-and-10-625-cases-in-uk-as-over-15-5-million-have-had-first-vaccine-dose-12219964>

### **Palestinian refugees in Lebanon three times more likely to die with COVID-19**

Palestinian refugees in Lebanon are three times more likely to die with COVID-19 than the population as a whole, according to U.N. figures that highlight the pandemic's outsized impact on the community. An estimated 207,000 Palestinian refugees live in Lebanon after being driven from their homes or fleeing the conflict surrounding Israel's 1948 creation, the vast majority in cramped camps where social distancing is impossible.

<https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/palestinian-refugees-in-lebanon-three-times-more-likely-to-die-with-covid-19/>

[ar-BB1dJp3m](#)

### **COVID-19: Experts left puzzled by sudden drop in coronavirus cases in India**

Scientists have been left confused by the plummeting rate of coronavirus infections in India - particularly because the country was at one point on course for the biggest toll worldwide. Nearly 100,000 infections were reported each day during India's peak, but this has taken an unexplained tumble since September to around 11,000 a day. Official figures in November also showed 90% of New Delhi's critical care beds with ventilators were filled, whereas just 16% were full last Thursday.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-experts-left-puzzled-by-sudden-drop-in-coronavirus-cases-in-india-12219684>

### **Suspected cases of coronavirus variant now in 2 Manitoba First Nations**

A second First Nations community in Manitoba is under lockdown following the potential discovery of a highly infectious coronavirus variant. On Monday, the chief of Pimicikamak, also known as Cross Lake First Nation about 530 kilometres north of Winnipeg, confirmed the community has seen at least one suspected case of the coronavirus variant first detected in the United Kingdom. Chief David Monias said in a statement the sample has been sent to the National Microbiology Laboratory in Winnipeg for confirmation.

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/another-blow-pauiingassi-first-nation-pimicikamak-highly-contagious-variant-covid-19-1.5914653>

### **As the virus crisis drags on, hard-hit French youth struggle**

On a recent evening, Leïla Ideddaim waited to receive a bag of food, along with hundreds of other French young people who are unable to make ends meet. She saw the chitchat that accompanied the handout as a welcome byproduct, given her intense isolation during the pandemic. The 21-year-old student in hotel and restaurant management has seen her plans turned upside down by the virus crisis. With restaurants and tourist sites shuttered and France under a 6 p.m. curfew, her career prospects are uncertain. Odd jobs that were supposed to keep her going during her studies are hard to come by.

<https://apnews.com/article/paris-france-coronavirus-pandemic-restaurants-59cb0184f0673310e5707f25620d86d4>

### **Coronavirus pandemic back on upward trend in Poland - minister**

The COVID-19 pandemic is on the rise again in Poland, the health minister said on Tuesday, a worrying turnaround after case numbers stabilised following a second wave of infections last autumn. Poland has loosened some of its COVID-19 restrictions, and scenes of partying tourists at Poland's main ski resort at the weekend have raised fears of a new rise in infections. "The reversal in the trend has become a fact," Health Minister Adam Niedzielski wrote on Twitter. "The trend for the weekly growth rate (seven-day moving average) is positive for the first time since mid-November (excluding post-holiday anomalies)." On Tuesday, Poland reported 5,178 new cases of the novel coronavirus and 196 deaths. The European Union member states has reported a total of 1,596,673 cases and 41,028 deaths.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-poland/coronavirus-pandemic-back-on-upward-trend-in-poland-minister-idUSL8N2KM2LC>

### **Four reasons experts say coronavirus cases are dropping in the United States**

The rate of newly recorded infections is plummeting from coast to coast and the worst surge yet is finally relenting. But scientists are split on why, exactly, it is happening. Some point to the quickening pace of coronavirus vaccine administration, some say it's because of the natural seasonal ebb of respiratory viruses and others chalk it up to social distancing measures. And every explanation is appended with two significant caveats: The country is still in a bad place, continuing to notch more than 90,000 new cases every day, and recent progress could still be imperiled, either by new fast-spreading virus variants or by relaxed social distancing measures.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2021/02/14/why-coronavirus-cases-are-dropping/>

## **New Lockdown**

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### **Amid Rising Cases, Mumbai Mayor's Lockdown Caution**

As Mumbai records a surge in Covid cases, a lockdown is a possibility, a top Mumbai official warned today. But whether the city will go into lockdown mode once again would depend on the people, said Mumbai Mayor Kishori Pednekar. The Mayor noted that most people travelling on trains did not wear masks. "It's a matter of concern. Most people travelling in trains don't wear masks. People must take precautions or we will head towards another lockdown," Kishori Pednekar said. "Whether a lockdown will be implemented again is in the hands of people."

<https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/another-mumbai-lockdown-amid-rising-coronavirus-cases-what-mayor-kishori-pednekar-said-2371730>

### **COVID-19: Another 'Lockdown' in Maharashtra? This district shuts down schools, colleges, imposes restrictions**

While the countrywide coronavirus caseload is decreasing, the situation in Maharashtra's Akola is completely opposite as a sudden rise in the infections has raised the administration's concern. To control the spread of COVID-19, strict rules have been implemented in the district till February 28. The administration has restricted social gatherings and has disallowed more than 50 people in functions like weddings. Schools and colleges have also been ordered to close and there is a ban on a gathering of five or more people.

<https://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-covid-19-another-lockdown-in-maharashtra-this-district-shuts-down-schools-colleges-imposes-restrictions-2875565>