

# COVID-19 Lockdown Exit Analysis

## 18th Feb 2021

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### News Highlights

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#### **COVID-19 under reporting in India?**

Although India has reported over ten million Covid-19 cases the true number is likely to be markedly higher. [A study of a representative sample of households in the state of Karnatka suggested cases the real figures may have been up to 95 times higher](#), throwing up questions about the total caseload figures for the country as a whole, and about how effective and successful India's approach to tackling COVID-19 has been to date.

#### **Human challenge trial in the UK - a first of its kind - has begun**

For the first time, volunteers will be infected with COVID-19 in the UK in a so-called 'human challenge' study. [It is designed to assess how much virus is needed for infection, how the body responds, and the profile of those who develop symptoms](#). The study will be carried out on ninety healthy volunteers aged eighteen to thirty, who will be infected with the original virus variant.

#### **Johnson & Johnson supply concerns in the U.S.?**

Drugmaker Johnson & Johnson is likely to receive regulatory approval for its COVID-19 vaccine in the coming weeks, but inventory is limited to a few million doses. [The drugmaker intends to supply 100 million doses to the U.S. in the first half of 2021, but distribution is likely to be backloaded](#). Vaccine supplies have hindered inoculation efforts in the USA to date, with Pfizer and Moderna supplying fewer than 72 million doses out of the 200 million pledged to be delivered by the end of March so far.

#### **Questions about vaccine efficacy remain**

The vaccine developed by Pfizer and BioNTech may offer reduced antibody protection against the new COVID-19 variant first identified in South Africa, [A lab study found antibody protection is reduced, although the vaccine still neutralises the virus](#), it remains unclear how much antibody protection is needed for complete protection. Consequently, the drugmakers are in talks with regulators about producing an updated version or booster shot.

### Lockdown Exit

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#### **Brazil's coronavirus vaccine rollout beset by supply problems**

Authorities in Rio de Janeiro and several other Brazilian cities have said they would pause some coronavirus jabs because of a shortage of vaccines, as supply bottlenecks threaten to slow the inoculation programme in Latin America's largest nation. A number of municipalities including Rio, home to 6.7m people, have in recent days paused first injections — or said they intend to — because of a lack of supply, with priority given to those waiting for a second shot. Salvador, home to almost 3m residents, has suspended first vaccine doses for health workers and the elderly. "We are waiting for a new delivery from the federal government so we can proceed with the vaccination schedule in our city," Bruno Reis, Salvador's mayor, tweeted this week.

<https://www.ft.com/content/5e87e275-ca37-4e4c-ae4c-6b21c15c0d11>

### **In Naples, Muslim families struggle to bury coronavirus victims**

When Ahmed Aden Mohamed brought his mother, Zahra Gassim Alio, to the hospital with knee pain, he never imagined that it would be the last time he saw her alive. After a series of complications, Alio was exposed to the coronavirus and she died soon after. When he went to the hospital to collect her body, Mohamed realised how complicated it would be to lay her to rest. Since his city of Naples, in southern Italy, did not have a Muslim cemetery, he was faced with a difficult decision: have his mother's body cremated, which is forbidden in Islam, or bury her in one of the two closest Muslim cemeteries, both of which are about 150km (93 miles) away. The lack of a Muslim cemetery in Naples, Italy's third-largest city, and one with a fast-growing Muslim community, has been a challenge for many families for several years. But the coronavirus pandemic has made things even harder.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2021/2/17/no-place-to-rest-muslims-left-without-burial-spaces-in-naples>

### **'Wildly unfair': UN boss says 10 nations used 75% of all vaccines**

The United Nations chief has sharply criticised the "wildly uneven and unfair" distribution of COVID-19 vaccines, pointing out that just 10 countries have administered 75 percent of all vaccinations. Addressing a high-level meeting of the UN Security Council on Wednesday, Antonio Guterres said 130 countries have not received a single dose of vaccine. "At this critical moment, vaccine equity is the biggest moral test before the global community," he said. Guterres called for an urgent Global Vaccination Plan to bring together those with the power to ensure fair vaccine distribution - scientists, vaccine producers and those who can fund the effort - to ensure all people in every nation get inoculated as soon as possible. The secretary-general further called on the world's leading economic powers in the Group of 20 to establish an emergency task force that should have the capacity to bring together "the pharmaceutical companies and key industry and logistics actors". Guterres said a meeting on Friday of the Group of Seven top industrialised nations "can create the momentum to mobilise the necessary financial resources".

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/2/17/un-chief-urges-global-plan-to-reverse-unfair-vaccine-access>

### **Slovakia and Croatia in talks with Russia over Sputnik coronavirus vaccine**

Croatia and Slovakia are in talks with Russia about buying its Sputnik V coronavirus vaccine, local media reported Wednesday. "It is timely for the government to start talks with the Russian side about supplies of Sputnik V," Slovakian Prime Minister Igor Matovič said on Facebook, adding that his government will discuss the matter Thursday and that he's in favor of the jab. Sputnik is a "great vaccine with great efficiency," he said.

<https://www.politico.eu/article/slovakia-and-croatia-in-talks-with-russia-over-sputnik-coronavirus-vaccine/>

### **Brussels gives vaccine strategy an injection**

The European Commission on Wednesday moved to give its slow-rolling vaccine strategy a booster shot. Battered after weeks of criticism over production delays and other missteps, Commission President Ursula von der Leyen laid out her long-term vaccine promises. She vowed to speed up the approval of vaccines to fight new coronavirus variants and expand genomic sequencing of those variants. She pledged to look into an EU-wide emergency authorization process to more swiftly approve other vaccines. She talked about a new "clinical trial network" and said the EU would buy more vaccines overall through the bloc's joint procurement program. But what von der Leyen could not — and did not — promise was to immediately make more vaccines available to citizens whom she admitted were rightly frustrated that other countries like the U.K. and Israel have raced ahead.

<https://www.politico.eu/article/european-commission-coronavirus-vaccine-strategy-boost-ursula-von-der-leyen-stella-k-yrakides-thierry-breton/>

### **Johnson & Johnson has only a few million COVID vaccine doses in stock as likely launch nears**

Johnson & Johnson has only a few million doses of its experimental COVID-19 vaccine in its inventory even as likely U.S. regulatory authorization is only a few weeks away, White House officials said on Wednesday. J&J remains committed to providing 100 million doses by June but deliveries are likely to be “back-end loaded” as J&J works with the U.S. government to boost supply, Jeffrey Zients, the White House’s COVID-19 response coordinator, said during a press call. “Across the last few weeks we’ve learned that there is not a big inventory of Johnson and Johnson. There’s a few million doses that we’ll start with,” Zients said.

<https://in.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-white-house/johnson-johnson-has-only-a-few-million-covid-19-vaccine-doses-in-stock-as-likely-launch-nears-idINKBN2AH2DD>

### **New Zealand releasing Auckland from brief COVID-19 lockdown**

New Zealand will lift a COVID-19 lockdown of its largest city of Auckland and ease restrictions across the rest of the country from midnight on Wednesday, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said. Auckland’s nearly 2 million residents were plunged into a snap three-day lockdown on Monday, after a more contagious COVID-19 variant that first emerged in Britain was detected in a family of three. Health authorities reported three new locally transmitted cases of COVID-19 on Wednesday, all of them from the same home as the child who tested positive on Sunday.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-newzealand-ardern-idUSKBN2AH0BA>

### **Victoria state to end snap lockdown, allow fans at Australian Open**

A five-day snap lockdown in Australia’s Victoria state will end on Wednesday, officials said as they reported no new cases in a cluster linked to a quarantine hotel in the city of Melbourne. State Premier Daniel Andrews said most mobility restrictions will be lifted at midnight, but masks will remain mandatory both indoors and outdoors when social distancing rules cannot be followed. “In a broader sense, we are safe and open,” Andrews said in a televised media conference, but cautioned the latest outbreak had not yet been fully contained. The lifting of restrictions will allow at least some spectators at the Australian Open tennis tournament in Melbourne, where players have competed in empty stadiums during the lockdown.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-australia/victoria-state-to-end-snap-lockdown-allow-fans-at-australian-open-idUSKBN2AG2M8?il=0>

### **Scottish pupils to begin returning to school from Monday**

Pupils in Scotland will begin returning to schools from Monday, Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon said, but the move would mean wider COVID-19 lockdown restrictions may have to stay in place longer. Sturgeon announced that a phased return would go ahead as previously planned with some age groups allowed to return next week, and others dependent on the success of that move and data on overall infection rates. “We are very deliberately choosing to use the very limited headroom we have right now to get at least some children back to school, because children’s education and wellbeing is such an overriding priority,” she told the Scottish parliament on Tuesday.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-health-coronavirus-scotland/scottish-pupils-to-begin-returning-to-school-from-monday-idUSKBN2AG1PY>

### **Covid: Melbourne and Auckland snap lockdowns to end**

The Australian state of Victoria and the New Zealand city of Auckland will both exit snap lockdowns on Thursday. Authorities in Australia said they had gained control of a hotel quarantine cluster in Melbourne, which prompted a five-day lockdown. New Zealand will lift curbs put in place in Auckland three days ago, despite three new local cases. Both countries, known for their strict measures, have seen relatively few deaths and cases during the pandemic.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-australia-56092753>

### **New Zealand ends lockdown after deciding outbreak contained**

A lockdown in the New Zealand city of Auckland will end at midnight, the government announced

Wednesday after concluding a coronavirus outbreak had been contained. "This is good news," Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said. The move to end the lockdown came as health authorities said the outbreak had grown by three cases to six in total. But Ardern said the additional cases were to be expected because they involved close contacts. Ramped-up testing indicates the outbreak hasn't spread far.

<https://apnews.com/70a1da6f3471990b915552f81929c90b>

### **Calls to overhaul Victoria's hotel quarantine system ramp up**

Victoria's latest COVID-19 leak from hotel quarantine has ramped up calls to completely overhaul the system, with one expert warning the current system put in place by Premier Daniel Andrews can't be trusted to keep the community safe from future breaches. Leading infectious disease expert Professor Lindsay Grayson said Mr Andrews' current approach to hotel quarantine is "placing the rest of the country at risk". "It should be removed from the national quarantine program until proven safe," he told the Sydney Morning Herald.

<https://www.news.com.au/lifestyle/health/health-problems/calls-to-overhaul-victorias-hotel-quarantine-system-ramp-up/news-story/3df8e7d70ac3213b1dd5a92270294e20>

### **Australia's second-largest city comes out of 3rd lockdown**

Melbourne will relax its third lockdown on Wednesday after authorities contained the spread of a COVID-19 cluster centered on hotel quarantine. The Victoria state government has yet to say whether spectators will be allowed to return to the Australian Open tennis tournament under the same conditions as before the five-day lockdown. Health authorities will soon settle on a final crowd figure for the final days of the tournament, Victoria Premier Daniel Andrews said.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/australias-secondlargest-city-comes-out-of-3rd-lockdown-melbourne-daniel-andr-ews-australia-city-ap-b1803224.html>

### **Auckland lockdown to end despite three new cases of Covid-19**

New Zealand has reported three new locally transmitted cases of Covid-19, as prime minister Jacinda Ardern surprised many by announcing Auckland's three-day lockdown would end at midnight. Ardern said she did not believe community transmission was "widespread", as new cases were minimal, and wastewater testing had reported negative results in the country's largest city. The rest of the country will drop to Level 1 restrictions. "I wanted enough time at a cautious level to give us reassurance," Ardern said. "Much better to have 72 hours in [lockdown]... than have 72 hours of unchecked spread."

<https://www.msn.com/en-gb/news/world/auckland-lockdown-to-end-despite-three-new-cases-of-covid-19/ar-BB1dK4xe>

## **Exit Strategies**

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### **COVID-19: UK calls for temporary ceasefires to allow vaccine rollout in world's war zones**

British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab is calling for a UN resolution for ceasefires across the globe to allow those living in war zones to get COVID vaccines. As he chairs a UN Security Council meeting on Wednesday, Mr Raab will urge world leaders to agree a resolution for negotiated vaccine ceasefires. The foreign secretary believes there is a "moral duty to act" in order to prevent more than 160 million people being excluded from vaccines because of instability and conflict, including in Yemen, Somalia and Ethiopia.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-uk-calls-for-temporary-ceasefires-to-allow-vaccine-rollout-in-worlds-war-zones-12220410>

### **Pfizer and BioNTech reach agreement with European Union for 200 million doses of Covid-19 vaccine**

Pfizer and BioNTech said they have reached an agreement to supply the European Union with another 200 million doses of their Covid-19 vaccine. The US and German companies said in a

statement that the doses come on top of the 300 million initially ordered. The EU's executive Commission has an option to request a further 100 million doses. They said the 200 million doses are expected to be delivered this year, with an estimated 75 million of them in the second quarter.

<https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/19096934.pfizer-biontech-reach-agreement-european-union-200-million-doses-covid-19-vaccine/?ref=rss>

### **NYC's rich neighbourhoods get disproportionate share of coronavirus vaccines**

New York City's vaccines are going disproportionately to wealthier neighbourhoods in Manhattan and Staten Island, according to data the city released on Tuesday. The disparities highlight the inequities of a vaccine drive that has already been criticised for what New York Mayor Bill de Blasio called "profound" racial disparities. White residents composed almost half the people who had at least one dose, despite being only a third of the population. More than a quarter of those getting the coronavirus vaccine are nonresidents, who tend to be younger and are more likely to be White than those living in the city.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/new-york-covid-vaccine-rich-b1803486.html>

### **Covid-19: NI vaccination programme extended to carers**

Northern Ireland's Covid-19 vaccination programme has been extended to include carers and more people with underlying health conditions. The vaccine rollout will be divided between GP practices and the seven regional vaccination centres. Northern Ireland's vaccine rollout is running weeks ahead of schedule, Health Minister Robin Swann has said. On Wednesday, the Department of Health recorded six more Covid-19 related deaths, taking its death toll to 2,015.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-56102348>

### **Biden to Boost Funds for COVID-19 Tests in Schools, Shelters: White House**

The Biden administration plans to provide \$650 million to expand COVID-19 testing for elementary and middle schools, as well as homeless shelters and other underserved congregate settings, the White House said in a statement on Wednesday. It will also spend \$815 million to increase U.S. manufacturing of testing supplies and \$200 million for virus genome sequencing, the statement said.

<https://www.usnews.com/news/us/articles/2021-02-17/biden-to-boost-funds-for-covid-19-tests-in-schools-shelters-white-house>

### **Gaza gets its first COVID-19 vaccine shipment, officials say**

Gaza received its first shipment of COVID-19 vaccines on Wednesday after Israel approved the transfer through its border with the Hamas Islamist-run territory, Israeli and Palestinian officials said.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-palestinians-vacci-idUSKBN2AH13X>

### **Switzerland Plans Cautious Easing of Pandemic Lockdown From March**

Switzerland plans to make its first "cautious steps" towards ending its coronavirus lockdown next month, the government said on Wednesday, contrasting with neighbours that are sticking with many restrictions. In the first step, shops, museums and libraries are due to reopen from March 1. Zoos, gardens and sports facilities will also be reopened, with a final decision to come on Feb. 24. Ministers have been caught being caught between health experts supporting stricter limits and struggling businesses calling for a reopening, but a easing in the number of infections has allowed the government to change course. "The efforts of the last few months are now paying off, the population has been very disciplined," said Health Minister Alain Berset.

<https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2021-02-17/switzerland-plans-cautious-easing-of-pandemic-lockdown-from-march>

### **Covid: Boris Johnson to focus on 'data, not dates' for lockdown easing**

Boris Johnson says it is "absolutely right" to take a "data not dates" approach to leaving lockdown,

stressing England will ease measures "cautiously". The prime minister said he would set out "what we can" in a road map for easing restrictions on Monday. "We want to be going one way from now on, based on the incredible vaccination rollout," he said. It follows a call from scientists for a data-led approach to lifting measures. Speaking at a mass vaccination centre in Cwmbran, south Wales, Mr Johnson said relaxation of measures would be done in "stages" and that the reopening of hospitality was one of the last things to return after the first lockdown.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-56095552>

### **German vaccination programme accelerating, but variants raise stakes: minister**

Germany is set to speed up its vaccination programme, but even with declining case numbers the rapid spread of more infectious variants of the coronavirus means nobody should drop their guard, Health Minister Jens Spahn said on Wednesday. Spahn told a news conference that Germany would have received a total of 10 million vaccine doses by the end of next week. Some 4 million people, mostly carers and care home residents, have so far been vaccinated. He added that a government programme to offer everyone free, rapid antigen coronavirus tests from March, financed from the public purse, would also help slow the spread of the virus. The German government has faced criticism for its relatively slow pace of vaccinations, and business is increasingly impatient for an easing of the lockdown, now in its fourth month, especially with case numbers drifting downwards. While vaccination was voluntary, Spahn urged the public to take up the offer of a jab: "If you wait, you risk serious illness," he said.

<https://www.thechronicleherald.ca/news/german-vaccination-programme-accelerating-but-variants-raise-stakes-minister-553356/>

### **Angela Merkel's Potential Successors Laschet, Soeder Spar on Covid Lockdown Exit**

The two leading conservative contenders to succeed Angela Merkel as chancellor took contrasting approaches to exiting Germany's coronavirus lockdown, as campaigning ahead of September elections gradually gains steam. Armin Laschet, the newly elected head of Merkel's Christian Democrats, took an unusual swipe at Merkel's pandemic policy, saying at a party event earlier this week that the government shouldn't treat voters like "under-aged children" incapable of making their own decisions. His chief rival, Markus Soeder, fired back on Wednesday in a veiled attack.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-02-17/potential-merkel-heirs-spar-over-pandemic-in-campaign-kickoff>

### **New prime minister, Mario Draghi, vows to speed up Italy's Covid vaccinations**

Italy's new prime minister, Mario Draghi, has pledged to speed up the country's coronavirus vaccination programme as he presented his government's priorities before a confidence vote in the upper house of parliament on Wednesday. In his much-anticipated maiden speech, Draghi, who was sworn into office on Saturday, said the government's first duty was to "fight the pandemic by all means and safeguard the lives of citizens". His promise came after Italy recorded 336 more coronavirus deaths on Tuesday, bringing the total to 94,171 - the highest in Europe after the UK - and amid concerns over rapidly spreading Covid-19 variants. "The virus is everyone's enemy," Draghi said. "It is in memory of those who are no longer here that our commitment grows".

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/feb/17/new-prime-minister-mario-draghi-vows-to-speed-up-italys-covid-vaccinations>

### **Boris told not to lift lockdown quickly as NHS at capacity 'for six more weeks'**

The NHS is expected to remain at full capacity for at least another six weeks, warned a leading health official who urged the prime minister not to ease lockdown yet. Chief Executive of NHS Providers,

<https://metro.co.uk/2021/02/17/boris-told-not-to-lift-lockdown-quickly-as-nhs-at-capacity-for-six-more-weeks-14095093/>

### **Vaccination about to pick up pace in Germany - health minister**

Italy's new prime minister, Mario Draghi, has pledged to speed up the country's coronavirus vaccination programme as he presented his government's priorities before a confidence vote in the upper house of parliament on Wednesday. In his much-anticipated maiden speech, Draghi, who was sworn into office on Saturday, said the government's first duty was to "fight the pandemic by all means and safeguard the lives of citizens". His promise came after Italy recorded 336 more coronavirus deaths on Tuesday, bringing the total to 94,171 - the highest in Europe after the UK - and amid concerns over rapidly spreading Covid-19 variants. "The virus is everyone's enemy," Draghi said. "It is in memory of those who are no longer here that our commitment grows".

<https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-germany-vaccine/vaccination-about-to-pick-up-pace-in-germany-health-minister-idUSL8N2KN33E>

### **Boris Johnson charting path to re-open UK economy within months**

Prime Minister Boris Johnson is plotting a staged exit from lockdown that would see the United Kingdom's battered economy returning to work over the next five months after leaping ahead of most of the world on vaccinating its people. The novel coronavirus, which emerged in China in late 2019, has killed 2.4 million people worldwide, upended normal life for billions and tipped the United Kingdom into its worst slump in 300 years. After moving faster than all other Western peers bar Israel to vaccinate its population, the United Kingdom's \$3 trillion economy is aiming to be among the first major Western economies to return to some semblance of normality - though still far behind the furnaces of global growth in China.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-health-coronavirus-britain/great-escape-uk-to-return-to-work-by-july-daily-mail-says-idUSKBN2AH0MU>

### **Vaccines, drugs, testing key to easing lockdown safely - UK's Raab**

Vaccines, drugs and testing at scale are key to easing lockdown measures safely, Britain's foreign minister Dominic Raab said on Wednesday as the government prepares to set out a roadmap on how to loosen restrictions. "The two or three things that are going to be really important if we are to ease out of lockdown safely and responsibly are, yes of course, the vaccine and... the drugs... but also this lateral flow testing, being able to do it at scale," he told Sky News.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-britain-raab-tests/vaccines-drugs-testing-key-to-easing-lockdown-safely-uks-raab-idUSS8N2JN0BL>

### **White House announces plans to ramp up COVID testing**

The White House announced new efforts on Wednesday to expand and improve testing for the coronavirus, as the United States ramps up efforts to vaccinate Americans. In a news briefing, Carole Johnson, the nation's new COVID-19 testing coordinator, announced that the federal government would invest \$1.6bn to increase nationwide testing. "We need to test broadly and rapidly to turn the tide of this pandemic but we still don't have enough testing and we don't have enough testing in all the places it needs to be," Johnson said during a news briefing.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/2/17/wh-announces-plans-to-ramp-up-covid-19-testing-across-the-us>

### **Colombia, Mexico roll out vaccine, Brazil suffers shortages**

Head nurse Veronica Luz Machado, who for months has battled the coronavirus pandemic from an intensive care unit in the northern Colombian city of Sincelejo, became the first person in the Andean country to receive a COVID-19 vaccine on Wednesday. Beginning with Machado, Colombia will kick off its plan to immunise 35.2 million people with vaccines acquired through a raft of bilateral deals as well as the World Health Organization-backed COVAX mechanism. "The pandemic really changed our lives completely, particularly for me and my colleagues, because we were facing an unknown virus, we didn't know how to respond," Machado, who works at Hospital Universitario, said in a government broadcast earlier this week, before receiving the first shot of Pfizer-BioNTech's two-

dose vaccine. "It's a risk that health workers face every day when we leave our homes to come to work in what we enjoy, in what we are passionate about. I was very afraid," Machado, a nurse for more than two decades, added.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/2/17/colombia-rolls-out-vaccine-brazils-campaign-halted>

### **Germany dashes hopes of businesses for quick reopening of economy**

German Economy Minister Peter Altmaier on Tuesday dashed hopes of business lobby groups for a quick reopening of the economy, saying the country should not rush to ease coronavirus restrictions as this could risk another wave of infections. "Business can't flourish if we get a third wave of infections," Altmaier told German television before a virtual meeting with representatives of 40 industry associations. The minister said he recognised that lots of businesses were desperate for a prospect of an end to the current lockdown, but added that Germany was proceeding with caution for fear of new coronavirus variants in neighbouring countries.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-germany-economy/germany-dashes-hopes-of-businesses-for-quick-reopening-of-economy-idUSKBN2AG1G1>

## **Partisan Exits**

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### **Unprotected African health workers die as rich countries buy up COVID-19 vaccines**

On 6 January, gastroenterologist Leolin Katsidzira received a troubling message from his colleague James Gita Hakim, a heart specialist and noted HIV/AIDS researcher. Hakim, chair of the department of medicine at the University of Zimbabwe, had fallen sick and had tested positive for COVID-19. He was admitted to a hospital in Harare 10 days later and moved to an intensive care unit (ICU) after his condition deteriorated. He died on 26 January. It is a crushing loss to Zimbabwean medicine, Katsidzira says. "Don't forget: We have had a huge brain drain. So people like James are people who keep the system going," he adds. Scientists around the world mourned Hakim as well. He was "a unique research leader, a brilliant clinical scientist and mentor, humble, welcoming and empowering," wrote Melanie Abas, a collaborator at King's College London.

<https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2021/02/unprotected-african-health-workers-die-rich-countries-buy-covid-19-vaccines>

### **Glasgow priest Canon Tom White takes legal action against ministers to stop UK divide on lockdown right to worship**

A Glasgow priest has launched a legal action to stop a north-south divide on the right to worship during lockdown. Canon Tom White whose St Alphonsus parish is in the heart of the city's famous Barras has issued a pre-action letter to the Scottish Government demanding it ends the blanket ban on places of worship. A response must be made before Tuesday February 23. Lockdown measures designed to stop the spread of coronavirus have forced places of worship to shut.

<https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/19096949.glasgow-priest-canon-tom-white-takes-legal-action-ministers-stop-uk-divide-lockdown-right-worship/?ref=rss>

### **'Public hanging' outside church in protest of 'unnecessary' lockdown of hospitality trade in Spain's Costa Blanca**

A chef mannequin was hung from a lamp-post in Torrevieja as hospitality workers protested against what they see as an unnecessary lockdown of trade. Almost 200 people turned up at the central plaza yesterday, February 16, to voice their anger as the Valencian government continued the enforced closure of bars, cafes and restaurants

<https://www.theolivepress.es/spain-news/2021/02/17/public-hanging-outside-church-in-protest-of-unnecessary-lockdown-of-hospitality-trade-in-spains-costa-blanca/>

### **US state gives vaccines to aides for elderly, drawing criticism**

Halee Barlow cannot wait for the COVID-19 vaccine. But it is not for her. She is desperate to get her

father vaccinated – and soon. Brian Barlow, of Sutton, Massachusetts, about 77 kilometres (48 miles) west of Boston, is terminally ill with liver cancer and immuno-compromised enough to put him at higher risk for serious illness or death from the disease caused by the coronavirus. The stress of the pandemic and the wait for a vaccine are fraying nerves in Barlow’s family. “It makes it feel like we’re working against the clock,” she told Al Jazeera. “The more time we wait, the less time we have to really spend with him.” At 72, Barlow’s father is three years younger than residents now permitted to get the vaccine under the second phase of the state plan. The next leg of the phase – for people 65 years and older, people with two or more medical conditions listed by the state and residents and staff of low-income and affordable senior housing – is scheduled to start on February 18 but it is unclear when he will get an appointment for a jab.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/2/18/us-state-gives-covid-vaccines-to-elderly-aides-drawing-criticism>

### **World first: UK to deliberately infect volunteers with COVID**

The United Kingdom is set to become the first country in the world to deliberately expose volunteers to the novel coronavirus in a so-called human challenge study hoped to eventually aid the development of vaccines and treatments. Up to 90 healthy volunteers aged between 18 and 30 will be exposed to the virus in a “safe and controlled environment” during the trial, which will begin within a month, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) said in a statement on Wednesday.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/2/17/uk-to-conduct-world-first-covid-19-human-trial>

### **Continued Lockdown**

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#### **France Covid Lockdown: Government Says Too Early to Reopen Bars, Restaurants**

French government spokesman Gabriel Attal says it’s too early to re-open restaurants, bars, culture and sports venues as the number of coronavirus cases and deaths remain on a “high plateau.” “The pressure remains high,” Attal told reporters after a cabinet meeting in Paris. He said ministers were preparing the conditions to re-open these venues so as to prepare for when the situation will allow it.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-02-17/french-govt-says-too-early-to-reopen-bars-restaurants-venues>

#### **New Zealand considers Auckland lockdown extension as two more Covid cases found**

A coronavirus outbreak in New Zealand grew by two cases Wednesday to five in total as lawmakers considered whether to extend a lockdown in Auckland. The nation's largest city was put into a three-day lockdown on Sunday after three unexplained cases were found in the community. It was the first lockdown in six months in a nation which so far has managed to successfully stamp out the spread of the disease. The original cases from the latest outbreak were a mother, a father, and their daughter, who attends high school. Health authorities said the two new cases were a high school classmate, who was a close contact of the daughter, and the classmate's sibling. However, ramped-up testing has not indicated the virus has spread further. Laboratories processed more than 17,000 individual tests on Tuesday, authorities said, and they also tested wastewater samples which came back negative.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/auckland-new-zealand-covid-cases-lockdown-extension-b1803273.html>

#### **Ukraine extends COVID-19 lockdown but some regions can ease up**

Ukraine will prolong a lockdown until the end of April but will allow regions with fewer COVID-19 cases to ease restrictions, Prime Minister Denys Shmygal said on Wednesday. Regions will be put into green, yellow, orange and red zones depending on the scale of new infections, he told a televised cabinet meeting.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-ukraine-lockdown-idUSL8N2KN2EP>

### **Scientific Viewpoint**

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### **Pfizer says South African variant could significantly reduce vaccine protection**

A laboratory study suggests that the South African variant of the coronavirus may reduce antibody protection from the Pfizer Inc/BioNTech SE vaccine by two-thirds, and it is not clear if the shot will be effective against the mutation, the companies said on Wednesday.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-vaccines-variants-idUSKBN2AH2VG>

### **Senate panel endorses bill seeking P500M indemnification fund for COVID-19 vaccine side effects**

The Senate Finance Committee has endorsed for plenary approval a measure that would ensure availability of national funds to compensate Filipinos in case they die or experience serious side effects after receiving COVID-19 shots. Senator Sonny Angara, who serves as the chair of the panel, sponsored Bill No. 2057 or the proposed COVID-19 Vaccination Program Act of 2021 on Tuesday. It consolidated the bills related to COVID-19 vaccines filed by other lawmakers. Under the bill, P500 million will be provided for the COVID-19 National Indemnity Fund. The money will be sourced from the contingent fund of the national budget. State insurance agency PhilHealth was tasked to oversee its administration. A special task group composed of medical and vaccine experts will conduct post-vaccination monitoring of patients.

<https://www.cnnphilippines.com/news/2021/2/17/COVID-19-vaccine-indemnification-fund-Senate.html>

### **Study Investigates COVID-19 in Pregnant Patients with Rheumatologic Disease**

A new study has found that among patients with rheumatologic disease, pregnancy is not associated with increased self-reported COVID-19, but is associated with a shorter duration of COVID-19 symptoms and a higher prevalence of loss of smell or taste. The study, by researchers from Hospital for Special Surgery (HSS), in New York City, appears online first in the journal Arthritis Care & Research.

<https://apnews.com/press-release/pr-newswire/pandemics-public-health-new-york-pregnancy-and-childbirth-coronavirus-pandemic-acc3fa9cbfc8f1f2c6d6b0f4a0d1af99>

### **Experts say India's Covid-19 'human barricade' to keep cases under control**

With falling rates of Covid-19 infection in India and surveys suggesting nearly 300 million people may already have antibodies, some experts believe the worst of the disease has passed, despite a recent uptick in two hard-hit states. "There is a human barricade for the virus," said Bhramar Mukherjee, an epidemiologist at the University of Michigan, who with a team of researchers, has been modeling the trajectory of the outbreak in India. "By the end of March, we should see a very slow, steady decline (in cases)," she added. Cases that were rising by nearly 100,000 a day in September are now growing at just 10,000 a day. And India's official number of total infections, which was projected to surpass that of the United States in late 2020, now stands at 11 million, well behind the US tally of about 28 million.

<https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/experts-say-india-s-covid-19-human-barricade-to-keep-cases-under-control-101613567028418.html>

### **'India's COVID-19 infections grossly underestimated'**

India's southern state of Karnataka alone may have had 31.5 million cases of COVID-19 or nearly 95 times greater than have been reported, says a new study that puts a question mark on the 10 million plus cases reported for the whole country so far. Published this month in the Journal of the American Medical Association, the study is based on data collected from a representative sample of households in 20 districts of Karnataka, home to 70 million of India's 1.3 billion people. As of Monday, 15 February, according to Worldometers, India had recorded 10,916,589 cases of COVID-19, second only to the US with 28,261,470 cases. Brazil came in third with 9,834,513 cases.

<https://www.scidev.net/global/news/indias-covid-19-infections-grossly-underestimated/>

### **Lockdown may have boosted well-being for some**

A study of people who care for children finds that COVID-19 lockdowns have provided some unexpected benefits. Survey respondents report four areas of personal growth that have been given an opportunity to flourish when busy lives were interrupted. People reported positive changes in their family relationships, spiritual well-being, and more. The study suggests ways we may emerge from the pandemic strengthened by the experience.

<https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/lockdown-may-have-boosted-well-being-for-some>

### **Covid-19: World's first human trials given green light in UK**

Healthy, young volunteers will be infected with coronavirus to test vaccines and treatments in the world's first Covid-19 "human challenge" study, which will take place in the UK. The study, which has received ethics approval, will start in the next few weeks and recruit 90 people aged 18-30. They will be exposed to the virus in a safe and controlled environment while medics monitor their health. The UK has given doses of a Covid vaccine to more than 15 million people. Human challenge studies have played a vital role in pushing the development of treatments for a number of diseases, including malaria, typhoid, cholera and flu.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-56097088>

### **'NHS workers will need help to manage the trauma of the pandemic'**

There's no doubt some occupational groups have had a particularly tough time, especially NHS workers. Many NHS staff have dealt with inordinate numbers of critically ill patients. Some have been trying to provide care in a far from ideal situation, knowing that doing so will lead to poor outcomes for their patients. This is having an impact on their mental health. My recent study of staff working in critical care during the pandemic showed they report more than twice the rate of probable post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) found in military veterans who've recently experienced combat. While the situations may be different, there might be some lessons we can learn from studies of PTSD in military veterans to help NHS workers cope during the pandemic.

<https://nursingnotes.co.uk/opinion/nhs-workers-will-need-help-to-manage-the-trauma-of-the-pandemic/>

### **Contact tracing alone has little impact on curbing Covid spread, report finds**

Contact tracing alone has a marginal impact on Covid transmission, curbing the spread of the disease by just 2% to 5%, official estimates show. The figures come after Dido Harding, who heads the government's £22bn test-and-trace programme in England, suggested it was set to substantially reduce the spread of coronavirus this spring. Newly published data behind that assertion shows the vast majority of the impact of test and trace is down to people self-isolating. An army of contact tracers has been hired to track down close contacts of those who test positive for Covid, and ask them to self-isolate. The contact tracers also remind people of the need to quarantine after a positive test.

[https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/feb/16/contact-tracing-alone-has-little-impact-on-curbing-covid-spread-report-finds?CMP=Share\\_AndroidApp\\_Other](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/feb/16/contact-tracing-alone-has-little-impact-on-curbing-covid-spread-report-finds?CMP=Share_AndroidApp_Other)

### **Pregnancy tied to estimated 70% higher COVID-19 rate**

Pregnant women in Washington state were infected with COVID-19 at a 70% higher rate than others of similar ages, with nonwhite women shouldering a disproportionate burden, according to a study published yesterday in the American Journal of Obstetrics & Gynecology. Noting that population-based estimates of coronavirus infections in pregnancy are unreliable due to incomplete recording of pregnancy status or inclusion of only hospitalized patients, a team led by researchers from the University of Washington in Seattle analyzed data from 240 pregnant COVID-19 patients at 35 healthcare systems, capturing 61% of the state's annual births, from Mar 1 to Jun 30, 2020.

<https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2021/02/pregnancy-tied-estimated-70-higher-covid-19-rate>

### **FDA could reject AstraZeneca's COVID vaccine on efficacy and manufacturing shortfalls: analyst**

It was bad enough when a study released last week concluded that AstraZeneca's COVID-19 vaccine was largely ineffective against the aggressive B.1.351 variant that recently emerged in South Africa. Now, analysts are wondering whether inconsistent manufacturing of the vaccine for the clinical trials may have muddied the results—concerns that could give the FDA pause when considering the vaccine for emergency use. That was the conclusion of a note SVB Leerink analysts sent to clients Wednesday, in which they laid out both the bear and bull cases for FDA authorization of AstraZeneca's COVID vaccine. The bottom line? The bear case is worrisome, they said. One major concern SVB Leerink cited is that AstraZeneca is manufacturing its vaccine on a "distributed" basis, meaning it's not centralized, but spread over multiple sites and contract partners. The material used to make the vaccine for the South Africa trial came from a company in India, and it's not clear where it was manufactured or whether the results from that trial truly reflect the properties of the vaccine that's being developed for the U.S.

<https://www.fiercepharma.com/pharma/fda-could-reject-astra-zeneca-s-covid-vaccine-efficacy-and-manufacturing-shorts-falls-analyst>

### **Pfizer, Moderna pledge more mRNA vaccine doses to Europe after AZ supply concerns**

After a coronavirus vaccine supply feud between top officials in Europe and COVID-19 vaccine player AstraZeneca, officials there are doubling down on their purchase of an alternative technology. This week, the bloc finalized the purchase of 350 million additional mRNA vaccine doses. Pfizer and BioNTech struck a deal with the European Commission to supply 200 million more doses of their mRNA-based COVID-19 vaccine, Comirnaty, to the European Union, with the option to sell an additional 100 million doses at a later date. The move comes after a factory upgrade in Belgium prompted the companies to temporarily reduce shipments with an eye on delivering "significantly more" doses in the second quarter. The sale comes on top of 300 million Comirnaty doses the partners sold to the EU in November, bringing the bloc's total order up to 500 million shots. The new 200-million-dose tranche will be rolled out in 2021, with some 75 million doses pegged for delivery in the second quarter.

<https://www.fiercepharma.com/manufacturing/pfizer-and-moderna-ramp-up-covid-19-vaccine-orders-europe>

### **In lab experiment, Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine less potent against coronavirus variant**

The Pfizer-BioNTech Covid-19 vaccine loses some potency against the coronavirus variant that first appeared in South Africa, researchers reported Wednesday, based on lab experiments. What the findings mean for how well the vaccine will protect real people from the variant, called B.1.351, is hard to tell. But clinical data from three other vaccines — those from AstraZeneca, Novavax, and Johnson & Johnson — have already shown the shots are not as powerful at blocking symptomatic Covid-19 cases caused by B.1.351 as by other forms of the virus. In the new study, which was published Wednesday in the New England Journal of Medicine, researchers from Pfizer, BioNTech, and the University of Texas Medical Branch examined how well blood taken from people who had received the companies' shot fought off a virus engineered to have the key mutations found in B.1.351. They reported that there was about a two-thirds drop in neutralization power against the variant compared to other forms of the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus.

<https://www.statnews.com/2021/02/17/pfizer-biontech-vaccine-less-potent-against-coronavirus-variant/>

### **The myth of 'good' and 'bad' Covid vaccines: Why false perceptions overlook facts, and could breed resentment**

Mike Ryan, the World Health Organization's health emergencies director, had a conversation recently with his mother, the kind that lots of public health people are having these days, much to their dismay. Ryan's mother was concerned about one of the Covid-19 vaccines in use in Ireland, where she lives. The one made by AstraZeneca. Clinical trials had shown the vaccine offered protection against the disease, but less than the vaccine made by Moderna or the one made by Pfizer and BioNTech. Ryan's mother was worried the vaccine might not be good enough.

<https://www.statnews.com/2021/02/17/the-myth-of-good-and-bad-covid-vaccines-why-false-perceptions-overlook-facts-and-could-breed-resentment/>

### **Lab studies suggest Pfizer, Moderna vaccines can protect against coronavirus variant**

A new report published in the New England Journal of Medicine on Wednesday suggests that Pfizer-BioNTech's Covid-19 vaccine can protect people against concerning new coronavirus variants, including one first seen in South Africa called B.1.351. For the study, researchers at Pfizer and the University of Texas Medical Branch genetically engineered versions of the virus to carry some of the mutations found in B.1.351. They tested them against blood samples taken from 15 people who had received two doses of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine as part of a clinical trial. While the blood serum samples produced less neutralizing antibody activity, it was still enough to neutralize the virus, they wrote in a letter to the journal. This is in line with other studies. And it's well within what is seen with other viruses, one of the researchers said.

<https://edition.cnn.com/2021/02/17/health/pfizer-vaccine-south-africa-variant/index.html>

### **South Africa launches vaccine roll-out with Johnson & Johnson jab**

South Africa has kicked off its vaccination campaign against COVID-19 by injecting healthcare workers with the shot developed by Johnson & Johnson as part of an observational study. The first healthcare worker was inoculated at 1pm (11:00 GMT) on Wednesday at the Khayelitsha District Hospital in Cape Town, following the arrival of 80,000 vaccine doses at Johannesburg's international airport the night before. President Cyril Ramaphosa, along with Health Minister Zweli Mkhize and Deputy Health Minister Joe Phaahla, were also among the first to be vaccinated. "This day marks a milestone for South Africa. Finally, the vaccines are here, and they are being administered," Ramaphosa told reporters as he sought to allay any fears among South Africans sceptical about an inoculation drive that has been hit by delays and the spread of misinformation. "I'd like to invite South Africans to take this up so that we can all be safe and we can all be healthy."

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/2/17/south-africa-begins-vaccine-rollout-through-observational-study>

### **Exclusive: Two variants have merged into heavily mutated coronavirus**

Two variants of the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus that causes covid-19 have combined their genomes to form a heavily mutated hybrid version of the virus. The "recombination" event was discovered in a virus sample in California, provoking warnings that we may be poised to enter a new phase of the pandemic. The hybrid virus is the result of recombination of the highly transmissible B.1.1.7 variant discovered in the UK and the B.1.429 variant that originated in California and which may be responsible for a recent wave of cases in Los Angeles because it carries a mutation making it resistant to some antibodies. The recombinant was discovered by Bette Korber at the Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico, who told a meeting organised by the New York Academy of Sciences on 2 February that she had seen "pretty clear" evidence of it in her database of US viral genomes.

<https://www.newscientist.com/article/2268014-exclusive-two-variants-have-merged-into-heavily-mutated-coronavirus/>

## **Coronavirus Resurgence**

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### **COVID-19: Another 738 deaths and 12,718 cases in UK - as over 15.9m have had first vaccine dose**

The UK has reported another 12,718 coronavirus cases and 738 further deaths - and almost 16 million people have now had their first dose of a vaccine. While the number of new infections is higher than the 10,625 reported yesterday, deaths are down slightly from Tuesday's 799 fatalities. Overall, the numbers are lower than what they were a week ago, when 13,013 new cases were confirmed alongside 1,001 deaths.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-another-738-deaths-and-12-718-cases-in-uk-as-over-15-9m-have-had-first-vaccine-dose>

[e-dose-12220865](#)

### **Global COVID-19 cases drop, but more nations report variants**

In its weekly snapshot of the pandemic yesterday, the World Health Organization (WHO) said cases and deaths continue to drop, mainly driven by steep declines in the two highest-burden countries, the United States and the United Kingdom. Also, the B117 virus variant has now been detected in 94 countries spanning all six WHO regions, with local transmission occurring in 47.

<https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2021/02/global-covid-19-cases-drop-more-nations-report-variants>

### **Health experts call for tight new lockdown as British COVID-19 variant sweeps through Italy**

Leading health authorities in Italy fear the British variant will soon trigger a surge in COVID-19 infections and fatalities unless a strategy is implemented

<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/world/article-health-experts-call-for-tight-new-lockdown-as-british-covid-19-variant/>

## **New Lockdown**

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### **'Karnataka will go to square one': Minister on lockdown amid Covid clusters in Bengaluru**

Karnataka has registered over 9,46,000 Covid-19 cases till now of which 12,273 people died and 927,924 have recovered. The state is among the worst hit regions in the country along with Maharashtra and Kerala. Karnataka health minister Dr K Sudhakar said on Wednesday that economic activity in the state had been severely hit in the past 10 months due to the ongoing coronavirus disease (Covid-19) pandemic and added that the overall situation would go back to square one if a lockdown is imposed again. Karnataka has registered over 9,46,000 Covid-19 cases till now of which 12,273 people died and 927,924 have recovered. The state is among the worst hit regions in the country along with Maharashtra and Kerala.

<https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/ktaka-will-go-to-square-one-minister-on-lockdown-amid-covid-clusters-in-bluru-101613557529743.html>

### **Maharashtra CM warns of lockdown again as Covid cases rise in state**

If Covid-related norms are not followed, the state government will be forced to reimpose a lockdown, warned chief minister Uddhav Thackeray on Tuesday. The state has reported a steady rise in cases in the last few days. "People have become carefree. It is for the people to decide if they want a lockdown or want to continue living with the small restrictions like now," said Thackeray, while directing local administrations to crack down on citizens and establishments that are found violating Covid-19 norms and standard operating procedures (SOPs).

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/mumbai/cm-warns-of-lockdown-again-as-covid-cases-rise-in-state/articleshow/81013995.cms>