

COVID-19 Lockdown Exit Analysis

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Overnight News Roundup

Regular booster vaccines are the future in battle with COVID-19 virus, top UK genome experts says

- Sharon Peacock, who heads COVID-19 genomics UK (COG-UK) which has sequenced nearly half of all the novel coronavirus genomes so far globally, said international cooperation was needed in the 'cat and mouse' battle with the virus
- Peacock said she was confident regular booster shots - such as for influenza - would be needed to deal with future variants but that the speed of vaccine innovation meant those shots could be developed at pace and rolled out to the population
- Three main coronavirus variants - which were first identified in Britain (known as B.1.1.7), Brazil (known as P1) and South Africa (known as B.1.351) - are under particular scrutiny
- Peacock said she was most worried about the B.1.351. 'It is far more transmissible, but it also has a change in gene mutation, which we refer to as E484K, which is associated with reduced immunity - so our immunity is reduced against the virus,' Peacock said
- 'We are already tweaking the vaccines to deal with what the virus is doing in terms of evolution - so there are variants arising that have a combination of increased transmissibility and an ability to evade our immune response,' she said
- 'We have to appreciate that we were always going to have to have booster doses; immunity to coronavirus does not last forever,' Peacock told Reuters at the non-profit Wellcome Sanger Institute's 55-acre campus outside Cambridge
- STAT news pointed out that when the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, an expert panel that makes policy recommendations to the U.S. CDC, met on Dec 1st to vote on who should be at the front of the line for Covid vaccines, some 32,000 computers were streaming the meeting at that point - an example of the extent of public transparency being conveyed about the process
- This means that during the pandemic many people have learnt a lot more about the vaccine development process and are starting to understand it in more depth. This heralds an opportunity if messages continue to be transparent as faith in vaccinations rise. So let's seize this opportunity for the benefit of all of us

Vaccine development transparency - a crucial tipping point for society

Exclusive: Regular booster vaccines are the future in battle with COVID-19 virus, top genome expert says

Regular booster vaccines against the novel coronavirus will be needed because of mutations that make it more transmissible and better able to evade human immunity, the head of Britain's effort to sequence the virus's genomes told Reuters. Sharon Peacock, who heads COVID-19 Genomics UK (COG-UK) which has sequenced nearly half of all the novel coronavirus genomes so far mapped globally, said international cooperation was needed in the "cat and mouse" battle with the virus. "We have to appreciate that we were always going to have to have booster doses; immunity to coronavirus doesn't last forever," Peacock told Reuters at the non-profit Wellcome Sanger Institute's 55-acre campus outside Cambridge.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-britain-peacock-ex-idUSKBN2B70V2>

For the first time in decades, vaccines are having a moment. Will it last?

Rupali Limaye got her first dose of Covid-19 vaccine a couple of weeks ago. "I bawled," she admitted without the slightest hint of embarrassment. It so happens that Limaye is a staunch proponent of vaccination; she works at the International Vaccine Access Center at Johns Hopkins University. But her reaction is not uncommon. Talk to anyone working in or volunteering at Covid vaccination clinics, and you'll hear tales about the joy, the relief, the shedding of the cloak of dread that has weighed people down during our difficult period of pandemic isolation. "I don't think many people felt grateful for vaccines before Covid," Ruth Karron, director of the Johns Hopkins Center for Immunization Research, told STAT. "I think it is a reset."

<https://www.statnews.com/2021/03/15/for-the-first-time-in-decades-vaccines-are-having-a-moment-will-it-last/>

AstraZeneca under the microscope

Germany, Italy, France suspend AstraZeneca shots amid safety fears, disrupting EU vaccinations

Portugal extended a ban on flights to and from Britain and Brazil by another two weeks on Monday to March 31, with only humanitarian and repatriation flights allowed, the interior ministry said in a statement. Direct commercial or private flights to and from the countries have been banned since January to limit the spread of novel coronavirus variants. As of March 7, passengers flying indirectly to Portugal from Britain or Brazil have also had to present a negative COVID-19 test taken 72 hours before departure and quarantine for two weeks upon arrival.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus/germany-italy-france-suspend-astrazeneca-shots-amid-safety-fears-disrupting-eu-vaccinations-idUSKBN2B722U>

Thailand clears AstraZeneca use as potential side-effects divide Europe

Thailand will start using the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine on Tuesday after a brief delay over safety concerns, officials said, with Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha and cabinet members due to be first in line to get shots. Thailand was on Friday the first country outside of Europe to suspend use of the AstraZeneca shot, on which its mass vaccination campaign is heavily reliant. Authorities in Ireland, Denmark, Norway, Iceland and the Netherlands have halted their use of the vaccine over blood clotting issues, while Indonesia has decided to hold off until a World Health Organization review. Thailand has much riding on the vaccine's safety and efficacy and the country will from June be one of its regional manufacturers. Thailand has reserved the first 61 million doses for its population.

https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-thailand-idUKKBN2B70HV?taid=604f0718b7d77200018e5205&utm_campaign=trueAnthem:+Trending+Content&utm_medium=trueAnthem&utm_source=twitter

Covid-19: Netherlands suspends use of AstraZeneca vaccine

The Netherlands has become the latest country to suspend use of the Oxford-AstraZeneca coronavirus vaccine over concerns about possible side effects. The World Health Organization (WHO) and the European Medicines Agency (EMA) say there is no indication of a link between the vaccine and reports of blood clots. Eight countries have so far fully suspended the AstraZeneca vaccinations. The WHO told Reuters it was important that vaccination campaigns continued. "It is normal for countries to signal potential adverse events. This does not mean that the events are linked to vaccination but it's good practice to investigate them," the agency was quoted as saying.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-56397157>

Oxford Covid-19 vaccine: Nicola Sturgeon says 'no evidence' AstraZeneca jab causes blood clots, as Netherlands and Republic of Ireland pause use

Nicola Sturgeon has backed scientific advice from the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) that insists the AstraZeneca vaccine is safe, after a number of countries paused their use of the jab. This morning it emerged that the Netherlands and Republic of Ireland had stopped

administering the vaccine as a “precautionary measure”, over concerns that it can cause blood clots in some recipients. Speaking at the Scottish Government’s daily briefing, the First Minister said: “In the UK, the decision to suspend use of the vaccine is a matter for the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency. The MRHA has confirmed to us that there is no current evidence of an increase in blood clots being caused by the AstraZeneca vaccine.”

<https://www.scotsman.com/health/coronavirus/oxford-covid-19-vaccine-nicola-sturgeon-says-no-evidence-aztrazenece-a-jab-causes-blood-clots-as-netherlands-and-republic-of-ireland-pause-use-3166229>

Germany suspends AstraZeneca vaccine amid clotting concerns

Germany, France, Italy and Spain became the latest countries Monday to suspend use of AstraZeneca’s COVID-19 vaccine over reports of dangerous blood clots in some recipients, though the company and European regulators have said there is no evidence the shot is to blame. AstraZeneca’s is just one of three vaccines in use on the continent. But the cascading number of nations raising the alarm is another setback for the European Union’s vaccination drive, which has been plagued by shortages and other hurdles and is lagging well behind the campaigns in Britain and the U.S. The EU’s drug regulatory agency called a meeting for Thursday to review experts’ findings on the AstraZeneca shot and decide whether action needs to be taken. The furor comes as much of Europe is tightening restrictions on schools and businesses amid surging cases of COVID-19.

<https://apnews.com/article/business-europe-germany-coronavirus-pandemic-0ab2c4fe13370c96c873e896387eb92f>

Which countries have stopped using AstraZeneca’s COVID vaccine?

More than a dozen countries, mostly in Europe, have suspended the use of AstraZeneca’s COVID-19 vaccine amid fears the shot may have caused some recipients to develop serious blood clots. Germany, Italy, France, and Spain on Monday became the latest nations to halt the rollout, following moves by Ireland, Bulgaria, Denmark, Norway, and The Netherlands. Other countries have stopped using certain batches of the vaccine, which is jointly produced with the United Kingdom’s University of Oxford. As fears grew, AstraZeneca said a review of its safety data revealed no evidence of an increased risk of blood clots. The review covered more than 17 million people vaccinated in the United Kingdom and the European Union. The EU’s medicines regulator – the European Medicines Agency (EMA) – and the World Health Organization (WHO) have also expressed confidence in the safety of the vaccine.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/3/15/which-countries-have-halted-use-of-astrazenecas-covid-vaccine>

Covid-19: Evidence does not suggest AstraZeneca jab linked to clots, MHRA says

People should still get their Covid vaccine despite several EU countries pausing use of the Oxford-AstraZeneca jab amid concern about blood clots, the UK medicines regulator has said. The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency said evidence “does not suggest” the jab causes clots. The Netherlands has become the latest country to suspend use of the jab following reports of serious clotting. But the World Health Organization says there is no reason to stop using it. Dutch officials said the move was precautionary following reports from Denmark and Norway about side effects including blood clots. Manufacturer AstraZeneca has said there is no evidence of a link between the two.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-56397592>

Coronavirus: WHO stresses no link between AstraZeneca vaccine and blood clots

France and Germany are among the latest countries to pause use of the Oxford-AstraZeneca coronavirus vaccine. It comes amid reports of blood clotting - but the World Health Organization says it is safe. The UK medicines regulator says people should carry on getting their vaccines and evidence “does not suggest” the jab causes clots

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/live/uk-56398877>

COVID-19: AstraZeneca defends its vaccine after more countries suspend its use over clotting concerns

France and Germany are among the latest countries to pause use of the Oxford-AstraZeneca coronavirus vaccine. It comes amid reports of blood clotting - but the World Health Organization says it is safe. The UK medicines regulator says people should carry on getting their vaccines and evidence "does not suggest" the jab causes clots

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-oxford-vaccine-chief-assures-astrazeneca-jab-is-safe-as-more-nations-suspend-use-over-clotting-concerns-12245626>

More vaccine trials, more vaccine deals with governments

Moderna begins testing next-generation coronavirus vaccine

Moderna Inc said on Monday it had dosed the first participant in an early-stage study of a new COVID-19 vaccine candidate that could potentially be stored and shipped in refrigerators instead of freezers. The company said its new candidate could make it easier for distribution, especially in developing countries where supply chain issues could hamper vaccination drives.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-moderna-idUSKBN2B710E>

First Participants Dosed in Phase 1 Study Evaluating mRNA-1283, Moderna's Next Generation COVID-19 Vaccine

Moderna a biotechnology company pioneering messenger RNA (mRNA) therapeutics and vaccines, today announced that the first participants have been dosed in the Phase 1 study of mRNA-1283, the Company's next generation COVID-19 vaccine candidate. "We are pleased to begin this Phase 1 study of our next generation COVID-19 vaccine candidate, mRNA-1283," said Stéphane Bancel, Chief Executive Officer of Moderna. "Our investments in our mRNA platform have enabled us to develop this next generation vaccine candidate, which is a potential refrigerator-stable vaccine that could facilitate easier distribution and administration in a wider range of settings, including potentially for developing countries.

<https://finance.yahoo.com/news/first-participants-dosed-phase-1-133100060.html>

Exclusive: Ocugen plans to sell 100 million Indian vaccine doses in U.S. in 2021

Ocugen Inc plans to sell 100 million doses of India's state-backed COVID-19 vaccine in the United States this year, the U.S. firm's chief executive Shankar Musunuri told Reuters on Monday. Musunuri said Ocugen, a Pennsylvania-based biopharmaceutical firm, was aiming to launch the Indian-developed vaccine in the United States in the second quarter of 2021, initially with imported shots before beginning production there. The United States has already authorised COVID-19 vaccines developed by Pfizer/BioNTech, Moderna and Johnson & Johnson for emergency use. India's two-dose COVAXIN has been found to be 81% effective in an interim analysis of late-stage trial data on some 26,000 people in India, its developers Bharat Biotech and the state-run Indian Council of Medical Research said this month.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-india-vaccine/exclusive-ocugen-plans-to-sell-100-million-indian-vaccine-doses-in-u-s-in-2021-idUKL4N2LD1FF>

Brazil signs Pfizer deal for 100 million vaccine doses: source

Brazil has signed a deal with Pfizer Inc to purchase 100 million doses of its COVID-19 vaccine, a person with direct knowledge of the matter said on Monday. Brazilian officials have flagged their interest in a deal since President Jair Bolsonaro joined Pfizer executives on a video call last week, burying the hatchet after months of recriminations about stalled negotiations.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-brazil-pfizer/brazil-signs-pfizer-deal-for-100-million-vaccine-doses-source-idUSKBN2B72LX?il=0>

Unthinkable? EU considers Russia's Sputnik V vaccine

Publicly, the EU has dismissed Russia's global coronavirus vaccine supply campaign as a propaganda stunt by an undesirable regime. Behind the scenes, the bloc is turning to Moscow's Sputnik V shot as it tries to get its stuttering efforts to vaccinate its 450 million people back on track, EU diplomatic and official sources told Reuters. An EU official who negotiates with vaccine makers on behalf of the bloc told Reuters that EU governments were considering launching talks with Sputnik V developers and that it would take requests from four EU states to start the process. Hungary and Slovakia have already bought the Russian shot, the Czech Republic is interested, and the EU official said Italy was considering using the country's biggest vaccine-producing bioreactor at a Reithera plant near Rome to make Sputnik V.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/3/15/unthinkable-eu-considers-russias-sputnik-v-vaccine>

Exclusive: Mexico focuses vaccine loan request on U.S. stockpile of AstraZeneca doses

Portugal extended a ban on flights to and from Britain and Brazil by another two weeks on Monday to March 31, with only humanitarian and repatriation flights allowed, the interior ministry said in a statement. Direct commercial or private flights to and from the countries have been banned since January to limit the spread of novel coronavirus variants. As of March 7, passengers flying indirectly to Portugal from Britain or Brazil have also had to present a negative COVID-19 test taken 72 hours before departure and quarantine for two weeks upon arrival.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-mexico-usa-exclusi/exclusive-mexico-focuses-vaccine-loan-request-on-u-s-stockpile-of-astrazeneca-doses-idUSKBN2B72RB?il=0>

Infection rates spiking

French must avoid lockdown as infections hold above 26,000: PM says

France must do everything to avoid a new coronavirus lockdown as pressure on hospitals grows, Prime Minister Jean Castex said on Sunday as the country reported more than 26,000 new cases. The French government has so far resisted pressure from some health experts to impose a new, third lockdown in the face of rising case numbers. Instead it has imposed a 6 p.m. nationwide curfew and weekend lockdowns in two regions struggling to contain outbreaks while big shopping centres have been required to close. "We have to use all weapons available to avoid a lockdown. I've never hid it, let's vaccinate, protect ourselves, get tested," Castex said in an interview on website Twitch.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-france-idUSKBN2B60LA>

Czech Republic: What's behind world's worst COVID infection rate?

With a population of 10.7 million and about 1.4 million COVID cases to date, the Czech Republic has the highest per capita infection rate in the world. Its death toll - a grim 22,000 people - is also concerning. On March 1, Prime Minister Andrej Babis introduced the strictest lockdown so far. People are banned from travelling within the country, between districts, and cannot visit one another. All retailers, except essential shops such as supermarkets, are closed. The surge in cases comes as the so-called Kent-variant, a highly infectious strain first discovered in the UK, makes its way through the country, pushing Czech hospitals and the economy to the brink of collapse. Leading expert in viral sequencing, Jan Pačes from the Academy of Sciences, talks to Al Jazeera about the severity of the pandemic and calls on the government to take stricter precautions.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/3/15/czech-republic-whats-behind-worlds-worst-covid-infection-rate>

India records this year's worst single-day spike in COVID cases

India has recorded 26,291 new coronavirus cases, its highest single-day spike this year, taking the total caseload to 11,385,339, according to official data. The number of deaths linked with COVID-19 increased to 158,725 with 118 more fatalities being recorded on the day, the federal health ministry update said on Monday. India, which has the largest virus caseload after the United States and Brazil, saw a downward trend in infections at the end of 2020, but the numbers have been rising again in recent weeks.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/3/15/india-records-this-years-worst-single-day-spike-in-covid-cases>

Protection for care workers

Addiction and behavioral health care workers should have access to Covid-19 testing and vaccines

At the beginning of the pandemic, the U.S. government and private organizations rushed to support health care workers — and rightfully so — with massive ramp-ups in making available personal protective equipment and testing supplies to ensure that frontline workers had the resources they needed to keep themselves, their patients, and their families as safe as possible. These providers have been now been given priority to get the Covid-19 vaccines that are being rolled out across the country. But one group of health care workers has been excluded from these efforts: those who work in behavioral health and addiction treatment centers.

<https://www.statnews.com/2021/03/15/addiction-behavioral-health-care-workers-should-have-access-to-covid-19-testing-and-vaccines/>

France raises prospect of mandatory Covid-19 jabs for healthcare staff

The French government is making a last push to convince healthcare workers to be vaccinated against Covid-19, before deciding whether to make the jab mandatory to improve uptake. Olivier Veran, health minister, has written an open letter to healthcare workers urging them to get vaccinated “quickly” to protect “our collective security and the capacity of our health system”. Alain Fischer, an immunologist who advises the French government on the vaccine rollout, told the Senate last week that if the pace did not roughly double “in the next 15 days”, the state would have to discuss making the jab mandatory for workers in the sector.

<https://www.ft.com/content/cebe8cf7-fe2c-4420-95d0-0eb32ddb1497>

New Lockdowns

Punjab to go under strict lockdown as Covid-19 third wave intensifies

Punjab registered 1,653 new Covid-19 cases on Sunday, the highest daily rise since June, government statistics showed, the latest in a steady rise in infections in recent weeks after months of limited spread. The last time the densely populated province reported such a high number of cases was during the first wave on June 24, 2020, when it confirmed 1,655 infections. The provincial tally now stands at 185,468, the government portal keeping track of the outbreak in Pakistan showed. The majority of cases, 973, were reported in Lahore, followed by 81 in Gujranwala, 76 in Sialkot, and 73 in Rawalpindi.

<https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2021/03/14/punjab-to-go-under-strict-lockdown-as-covid-19-third-wave-intensifies/>

Most of Italy to shut down to tackle rising Covid-19 cases

The entire country will be put on lockdown for three days over the Easter weekend says Italy's leaders.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p099pb6p>

Norway's capital introduces tightest restrictions of pandemic

Norway's capital will close all middle and high schools and limit visitors in private homes to two people until early April to fight the spread of the coronavirus, the Governing Mayor of Oslo said on Monday.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-norway/norways-capital-introduces-tightest-restrictions-of-pandemic-idUSKBN2B72Q7?edition-redirect=in>

Vaccine hesitancy

Afraid of Needles? Don't Let It Keep You From a Covid-19 Vaccine.

Most people aren't particularly fond of needles. But to a significant number of people, the fear of

needles goes beyond merely inducing anxiety into a more dangerous area, in which the fear prevents them from seeking out needed medical care. And as the world's hopes of returning to a post-pandemic normal rest largely on people's willingness to take a Covid-19 vaccine, experts and health care professionals are assuring those people that there are ways to overcome this fear. "It would be heartbreaking to me if a fear of needles held someone back from getting this vaccine, because there are things we can do to alleviate that," said Dr. Nipunie S. Rajapakse, an infectious diseases expert at the Mayo Clinic in Minnesota.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/15/health/covid-vaccine-needle-fear.html>

Covid-19 pandemic: Trump urged to encourage supporters to get jabs

The top US infectious disease expert says it would be "a game-changer" if ex-President Donald Trump encouraged Republicans to get the Covid vaccine. "It will make all the difference in the world," Dr Anthony Fauci told Fox News Sunday. "He's a very widely popular person among Republicans." A recent US opinion poll showed as many as 49% of Republican male supporters did not want to get vaccinated. Mr Trump last month said "everybody, go get your shot" at a conservative forum. It was the first time he publicly encouraged Americans to do so. He has not commented on the issue since then.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-56397150>

People with immune issues - at 'high risk' for COVID-19 - remain hesitant about vaccination. Here's what experts say.

Joanne Troutman always knew she was going to get vaccinated against COVID-19. She's a strong supporter of vaccines and runs a United Way in rural Pennsylvania that offers services to people who are in need. But she admitted some apprehension about what would happen after the needle plunged into her shoulder. Troutman has struggled with autoimmune disease for years. Would the immune trigger send her disease into overdrive again? Like many people who are immunocompromised, Troutman is thrilled to have a shot to protect against the virus, and an end to the infection fear that has been so paralyzing over the past year.

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/health/2021/03/15/covid-19-vaccines-immune-issues-cancer-organ-transplants-hiv/4639884001/>

US Prison Guards Refusing Vaccine Despite COVID-19 Outbreaks

In Massachusetts, more than half the people employed by the Department of Correction declined to be immunized. A statewide survey in California showed that half of all correction employees will wait to be vaccinated. In Rhode Island, prison staff have refused the vaccine at higher rates than the incarcerated, according to medical director Dr. Justin Berk. And in Iowa, early polling among employees showed a little more than half the staff said they'd get vaccinated. As states have begun COVID-19 inoculations at prisons across the country, corrections employees are refusing vaccines at alarming rates, causing some public health experts to worry about the prospect of controlling the pandemic both inside and outside. Infection rates in prisons are more than three times as high as in the general public. Prison staff helped accelerate outbreaks by refusing to wear masks, downplaying people's symptoms, and haphazardly enforcing social distancing and hygiene protocols in confined, poorly ventilated spaces ripe for viral spread.

<https://www.usnews.com/news/health-news/articles/2021-03-15/us-prison-guards-refusing-vaccine-despite-covid-19-outbreaks>

Hungarian far-right party protests lockdown

Demonstrators in Hungary's capital broke a ban on public gatherings on Monday to demand an end to the country's lockdown restrictions, even as a surge in COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations sweeps the country. The demonstration was organized by a far-right party, Mi Hazánk Mozgalom (Our Homeland Movement), and joined by some 1,000 people. The group broke through a police

cordon and marched to Hungary's parliament in central Budapest. They demanded an end to pandemic restrictions that have been in effect for more than four months and have placed a heavy burden on the country's economy.

<https://apnews.com/article/hungary-budapest-coronavirus-pandemic-economy-ecd0b637126258601ca249f35b5b874>

3