

COVID-19 Lockdown Exit Analysis

16th Apr 2021

Overnight NewsRoundup

Variants fuel COVID-19 surge, but scientists voice optimism for vaccines

- COVID-19 cases are surging across the world, fuelled by highly contagious variants of the coronavirus that are popping up far from where they were first detected. The spread of these variants, scientists say, highlights how tiny, random changes in the virus's genetic code threaten to undo progress in beating back a global pandemic that has killed at least three million people. Concerning variants are now spreading in the U.S. and Canada, Europe and Latin America.
- Scientists say variants can be brought under control with now-familiar public health measures such as mask wearing and social distancing, despite evidence that some strains might evade the immune response triggered by vaccination or a past infection.
- [In the UK, for instance, where the variant B.1.1.7 drove a deadly outbreak during the winter, new cases have slowed to a trickle after a strict lockdown and rapid vaccination drive.](#)
- Scientists are also hopeful that the current crop of vaccines will at least limit the numbers of people falling gravely ill and dying of COVID-19, even if the variants weaken the vaccines' effectiveness at preventing infection. Vaccine makers are already testing new versions of their shots that are being retuned to attack these new variants. **Progress, though, depends on bringing the volume of COVID-19 cases under control**, both to save lives and to limit the virus's opportunities to alight upon yet more advantageous mutations that could propel future waves of infection.

India played down new mutant COVID-19 strain to avoid panic - but this may have backfired

- India is in the middle of a ferocious COVID-19 second wave, recording record levels of new COVID-19 cases almost daily, overtaking Brazil to become the second most affected country in the world.
- One of the factors propelling the second wave is the emergence of a new, fast-spreading Indian variant of the virus, which has been called 'a double mutant variant,' because it has two mutations. [It has been found in 61% of samples put through gene sequencing in Maharashtra, the worst hit Indian state, as the Indian Express recently reported, strengthening suspicions that the current case surge in India is powered by this more transmissible strain.](#)
- Labelled B.1.617, the double mutant variant was first detected in India but has now been found in eight countries, with 70% of all samples containing the mutations originating from India.
- There had been early warnings from the eastern region of Maharashtra back in February, when genome sequencing of the infected blood samples found the E848K mutation in a sample from Amravati and the N440K mutation in another from the same place. The E848K mutation seen in the Brazilian and South African variants increases the virus' transmissibility. The N440K mutation help the virus evade the body's immune response.
- 'Had it been more widely known that a faster spreading variant was at play and it was capable of immune escape, perhaps more care could have been taken by authorities,' said Gautam Menon who teaches physics and biology at Sompat's Ashoka University.

Concerns rise about the spread of a new coronavirus variant in London

- Surge testing has been expanded to four London boroughs as concern grows that the test and trace programme cannot contain a coronavirus variant that has shown signs of vaccine resistance.
- [A total of 56 cases of the variant first identified in South Africa were found in the week to April 14, according to data released on Thursday, taking the total confirmed cases since it was first detected in December to 600.](#)
- 'Surge testing works until the day that it doesn't,' said Danny Altmann, professor of immunology at Imperial College London, adding that the variant could 'completely devastate us' if health officials were unable to prevent it from spreading nationwide - like B.1.1.7 did at the end of last year.
- While the first case of 501Y.V2 found in Southwark was believed to be linked to the initial cluster in Lambeth and Wandsworth, genomic sequencing indicated that the Barnet case was unconnected.
- The new cases have caused concern in the government as several of those infected had received at least one shot of either the AstraZeneca or Pfizer vaccine, suggesting the variant may have been able to resist vaccine protection, according to one test and trace official.

COVID variant pushes Cambodia to brink of national tragedy

- Cambodia is in the grip of its worst outbreak of the coronavirus since the pandemic began more than a year ago, WHO has said, warning that the Southeast Asian nation is on the verge of a national tragedy. In less than a week, Cambodia has recorded more than 1,000 cases of the virus and as of last Wednesday 35 people had died. That tally compares with less than 500 cases during the whole first year of the pandemic and no COVID-19 related deaths reported at all.
- [On Thursday, the government ordered all residents of Phnom Penh and neighbouring district Ta Khmau to stay at home unless they needed to buy food or seek medical treatment.](#)
- The lockdown comes in the middle of the Khmer New Year, a three-day national holiday which usually sees thousands of Cambodians travel to their home provinces to celebrate festivities with families.
- Cambodian health experts said the B.1.1.7 variant - first detected in the UK - mean that unless they can halt the outbreak Cambodia's fragile health system could be at high risk of being overwhelmed, which would have disastrous consequences. The outbreak has been traced back to a quarantine breach by a group who arrived from Dubai, one of the 90 countries where the B.1.1.7 variant has spread to.

India, Brazil grapple with massive COVID-19 surges

- India's cases topped 200,000 today with some of its major cities announcing new restrictions, as Brazil's outbreak continues to overwhelm many of the country's hospitals, a situation Doctors Without Borders said today is a humanitarian catastrophe.
- [India reported a single-day record high of 200,739 cases and the burden has pushed the country's oxygen production to full capacity over the last 2 days,](#) with the health ministry announcing it now needs to import 50,000 metric tons, according to Reuters. Media reports describe patients waiting for hospital beds to open up and even patients on oxygen being placed two to a bed.
- The new wave of lockdowns is raising fears in India again of a mass exodus from the cities, heightening the risk of people carrying the virus to more rural areas that are not equipped to handle it.
- In Brazil, Doctors Without Borders said intensive care units were at capacity in 21 of its 27 states, and hospitals across the country are struggling with shortages of oxygen for treatment.

and sedatives for intubation. It also said the country has a critical need for rapid antigen tests to quickly confirm infections in an effort to limit the virus spread.

- Brazil's Fiocruz Institute also warned that the P1 SARS-CoV2 variant fuelling the nation's COVID-19 outbreak, is evolving in ways that would make it more able to evade antibodies. Researchers said the changes are similar to the B1351 variant, first seen in South Africa.

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<https://www.wsj.com/articles/variants-fuel-covid-19-surge-but-scientists-voice-optimism-for-vaccines-11618479003>

India played down new mutant Covid strains to avoid panic - but this may have backfired

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India is currently in the middle of a ferocious second wave, recording 1,61,736 new Covid-19 cases on Tuesday, overtaking Brazil to become the second-most affected country in the world. One of the factors propelling the second wave is the emergence of a new, fast-spreading Indian variant of the virus. It is being called a "double mutant" variant because it has two mutations. It has been found in 61% of samples put through genome sequencing in Maharashtra, the worst hit state in India, as the Indian Express reported on April 14, strengthening suspicions that the current surge is powered by a more transmissible strain. Labelled B.1.617, the double mutant variant was first detected in India, but has been now found in eight countries, with 70% of samples containing the mutations originating from India.

<https://scroll.in/article/992172/india-played-down-new-mutant-covid-strains-to-avoid-panic-but-this-may-have-backfired>

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<https://www.ft.com/content/d1a18cef-68ff-4f37-b5d7-ad522b2bbf68>

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India and Thailand reported record daily coronavirus cases on Thursday, as a new wave of infections, combined with a shortage of hospital beds and vaccines, threatens to slow Asia's recovery from the pandemic. India breached 200,000 daily infections for the first time on Thursday and the financial hub of Mumbai entered a lockdown, as many hospitals reported shortages of beds

and oxygen supplies. "The situation is horrible. We are a 900-bed hospital, but there are about 60 patients waiting and we don't have space for them," said Avinash Gawande, an official at the Government Medical College and Hospital in Nagpur, a commercial hub in Maharashtra.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus/hospitals-run-short-of-beds-as-asias-covid-19-cases-surge-idUSKBN2C213T>

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India's cases topped 200,000 today with some of its major cities announcing new restrictions, as Brazil's outbreak continues to overwhelm many of the country's hospitals, a situation Doctors Without Borders said today is a humanitarian catastrophe. The World Health Organization (WHO) has said different parts of the world are facing different COVID situations, with some parts of Europe seeing promising signs of declining cases.

<https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2021/04/india-brazil-grapple-massive-covid-19-surges>

India's biggest cities shut down as new virus cases hit 200K

India's two largest cities imposed stringent restrictions on movement and one planned to use hotels and banquet halls to treat coronavirus patients as new infections in the country shot past 200,000 Thursday amid a devastating surge that is straining a fragile health system. The soaring cases and deaths come just months after India thought it had seen the worst of the pandemic — and have forced the country to delay exports of vaccines abroad. India is a major producer of COVID-19 shots, and its pivot to focus on domestic demand has weighed heavily on global efforts to end the pandemic. New Delhi announced stay-at-home orders for the weekend, though essential workers will be able to move about if they have a pass from local authorities. Restaurants, malls, gyms and spas will be shut down.

<https://apnews.com/article/migrant-workers-mumbai-weddings-india-coronavirus-pandemic-766287564341fc7b4281b208bfdad630>

COVID variant pushes Cambodia to brink of 'national tragedy'

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Cambodia is in the grip of its worst outbreak of the coronavirus since the pandemic began more than a year ago, the World Health Organization (WHO) has said, warning that the Southeast Asian nation is on the verge of a "national tragedy". In less than a week, Cambodia has recorded more than 1,000 cases of the virus. As of Wednesday, 35 people had died. Cambodia had previously experienced only small clusters of COVID-19 that were quickly controlled, but Dr Li says the emergence of the variant of COVID-19 that was first detected in the UK — known officially as the B.1.1.7 variant — meant things were different this time. "The B.1.1.7 variant spreads more easily between people and can cause serious illness," she said. "Many countries with strong health systems have been overwhelmed by this variant. We need to ensure the same doesn't happen to Cambodia."

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/4/15/uk-covid-variant-pushes-cambodia-to-brink-of-national-tragedy>

Cambodia launches lockdown in capital as COVID-19 outbreak spreads

Cambodia brought in a coronavirus lockdown in Phnom Penh and a satellite district of the capital on Thursday in a bid to contain a spike in coronavirus cases in a country that up until recently had largely managed to contain infections. Under the lockdown, which Prime Minister Hun Sen announced late on Wednesday, most people are banned from leaving home except for going to work, to buy food or for medical treatment. Police manning checkpoints on Thursday in Phnom Penh asked motorists to show work documents and identity cards in order to pass, television footage on local media showed. In a voice message posted on his official Facebook page, Hun Sen warned Cambodia was on the brink of "death valley" and urged people to work together to avoid calamity.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-cambodia/cambodia-launches-lockdown-in-capital-as-covid-19-outbreak-spreads-idUSL4N2M8160>

Shortage of intubation drugs threatens Brazil health sector

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Reports are emerging of Brazilian health workers forced to intubate patients without the aid of sedatives, after weeks of warnings that hospitals and state governments risked running out of critical medicines. One doctor at the Albert Schweitzer municipal hospital in Rio de Janeiro told the Associated Press that for days health workers diluted sedatives to make their stock last longer. Once it ran out, nurses and doctors had to begin using neuromuscular blockers and tying patients to their beds, the doctor said. "You relax the muscles and do the procedure easily, but we don't have sedation," said the doctor, who agreed to discuss the sensitive situation only if not quoted by name. "Some try to talk, resist. They're conscious."

<https://apnews.com/article/brazil-rio-de-janeiro-health-coronavirus-pandemic-latin-america-2890dfee359633ee7b049944b66070ab>

Brazil in talks to import emergency COVID-19 medications amid shortages

Brazil is negotiating with other countries, including Spain, to receive emergency medications needed for intubated COVID-19 patients, Health Minister Marcelo Queiroga said on Thursday. Brazilian hospitals are running low on sedatives, and reports have emerged this week of the seriously ill being tied down and intubated without effective sedatives.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/brazil-talks-import-emergency-covid-19-medications-amid-shortages-2021-04-15/>

Past peak? Chile raises hopes vaccines, lockdowns are turning tide against COVID-19

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Chile's health authorities said on Thursday they believed a dip in the record case numbers the Andean nation has seen over the past week represents a "stabilization" of a second COVID-19 wave thanks to strict lockdowns and a rapid vaccination program that has fully inoculated a third of the population. Health minister Enrique Paris told reporters he hoped the 9,000 record daily cases reached last week represented the peak of the latest outbreak. "Once we reach that peak, we expect not a reduction but a stabilization and then a return to smaller numbers of positive patients," he said.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/past-peak-chile-raises-hopes-vaccines-lockdowns-are-turning-tide-against-covid-2021-04-15/>

Australian population unlikely to be vaccinated until end of next year

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Leading public health experts have warned the Australian population is unlikely to get COVID-19 vaccinations until the end of next year without a dramatic boost in Pfizer vaccine supplies. University of NSW epidemiologist Professor Mary-Louise McLaws said extra vaccine supplies were needed by September to get the general population vaccinated by May or June 2022. "I don't think we will vaccinate our population until the end of next year," she said. The warning comes as the federal government looks to states and territories to set up mass vaccination centres as it goes back to the drawing board to work out how to complete its COVID-19 vaccination program.

https://www.smh.com.au/national/australian-population-unlikely-to-be-vaccinated-until-end-of-next-year-20210413-p57ivo.html?utm_medium=Social&utm_source=Twitter#Echobox=1618465952

Patchy deliveries, limited access disrupt jab drive across Africa

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Many people in African countries who have received their first shot of a COVID-19 vaccine do not

know when they will get the second one due to delivery delays, according to the continent's top public health official. "We cannot predict when the second doses will come and that is not good for our vaccination programme," John Nkengasong, the head of the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC), told reporters on Thursday. Africa lags behind most other regions in COVID-19 vaccinations, with just under 14 million doses of mostly AstraZeneca vaccines having been administered on the continent of 1.3 billion.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/4/15/patchy-deliveries-disrupt-africas-coronavirus-vaccination-cdc>

Make coronavirus vaccines patent-free, former world leaders urge Biden

President Joe Biden is being urged to suspend patents for coronavirus vaccines. The move would allow developing countries to produce the vaccines on their own. The request came in a letter signed by over 100 Nobel laureates and 75 former world leaders.

<https://www.businessinsider.com/former-world-leaders-urge-biden-suspend-covid-19-vaccine-patents-2021-4>

Global officials urge rich countries to donate COVID jabs now

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Top officials from the United Nations, the World Bank and the Gavi Vaccine Alliance have urged rich countries to donate excess COVID-19 vaccine doses to an international effort to supply low- and middle-income countries. At Thursday's virtual event hosted by Gavi to boost support for the COVAX equitable vaccine sharing initiative, the officials also appealed for another \$2bn by June for the programme, which is aiming to buy up to 1.8 billion doses in 2021.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/4/15/global-officials-urge-rich-countries-to-donate-coronavirus-jabs>

Pfizer CEO says third Covid vaccine dose likely needed within 12 months

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Pfizer CEO Albert Bourla said people will "likely" need a booster dose of a Covid-19 vaccine within 12 months of getting fully vaccinated. He also said it's possible people will need to get vaccinated against the virus annually.

<https://www.cnn.com/2021/04/15/pfizer-ceo-says-third-covid-vaccine-dose-likely-needed-within-12-months.html>

Mixing Covid vaccines could mean booster jab is not needed, claims professor

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Mixing vaccines may give such strong protection against Covid-19 — including variants — that a booster jab is not needed in the autumn, a leading medical expert said today. Sir John Bell, Regius Professor of Medicine at Oxford University and a member of the UK's Vaccine Taskforce, stressed that research being led by his colleague Professor Matthew Snape may deliver another breakthrough in the battle against coronavirus. "The work that Matthew Snape and others are doing in this study to look at comparisons may give us a mix that actually gives us some better immune response that means we are better able to deal with the South Africa variant, the Brazilian variant, and dozens of other variants that are now popping up all over the world," he told Sky News.

<https://www.standard.co.uk/news/health/mix-and-match-covid-vaccine-variant-booster-jab-john-bell-b929822.html>

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<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus/hospitals-run-short-of-beds-as-asias-covid-19-cases-surge-idUSKBN2C213T>

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The Americas are not behaving like a region experiencing an ever-graver outbreak of COVID-19, the director of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) warned on Wednesday. This rise in infections is alarming but not surprising given relaxed restrictions used to curb virus transmission, PAHO Director Carissa Etienne said at a weekly news conference, adding that vaccination will not be enough to stop this wave of contagion. "Highly transmissible variants are spreading, and social distancing measures are not as strictly observed as before," Etienne said. "We are not acting like a region in the midst of a worsening outbreak."

<https://uk.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-americas/americas-not-behaving-as-if-in-midst-of-worsening-covid-19-crisis-regional-health-official-warns-idUKKBN2C12AM>

Olympic Games may yet be cancelled due COVID-19, says senior Japanese ruling party official

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A senior Japanese ruling party official said cancelling this year's Olympics in Tokyo remains an option if the coronavirus crisis becomes too dire, as a fourth wave of infections surges less than 100 days from the planned start of the Games. "If it seems impossible to do it any more, then we have to stop, decisively," Toshihiro Nikai, secretary general of the Liberal Democratic Party, said in comments to broadcaster TBS. Cancellation is "of course" an option, Nikai said. "If the Olympics were to spread infection, then what are the Olympics for?" he added.

<https://www.skysports.com/olympics/news/15234/12275817/olympic-games-may-yet-be-cancelled-due-covid-19-says-senior-japanese-ruling-party-official>

WHO: Europe has surpassed 1 million COVID-19 deaths

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A top official from the World Health Organization says Europe has surpassed 1 million deaths from COVID-19 and the situation remains "serious," with about 1.6 million new cases reported each week in the region.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/who-europe-has-surpassed-1-million-covid19-deaths-who-covid-hans-kluge-gen-eva-europe-b1831886.html>

'We have never seen anything like this': Health officials issue plea for public's help to bring COVID-19 cases down

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"We are really not in a good place and things could go very badly in Ottawa in the next few weeks in terms of our hospitals' abilities to keep up," said Ottawa's deputy medical officer of health, Dr. Brent Moloughney. "We have never seen anything like this before." With hospitals in the city expanding intensive care units and CHEO, for the first time, opening ICU beds to adult patients, the pressure on the health system is becoming unsustainable, Moloughney said. "If this trend continues, the health care system will have extreme difficulty keeping up." While vaccinations are ramping up, Moloughney says the city will not be able to vaccinate its way out of the current crisis. Only the efforts of the public to stay home and follow public health advice to reduce transmission will make a difference.

<https://ottawacitizen.com/news/local-news/we-have-never-seen-anything-like-this-health-officials-issue-plea-for-public-s-help-to-bring-covid-19-cases-down>

Why are so many babies dying of Covid-19 in Brazil?

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There is a misconception that children are at zero risk for Covid, says Dr Fatima Marinho, who is also a senior adviser to the international health NGO Vital Strategies. Marinho's research has found that a shockingly high number of children and babies have been affected by the virus. Between February 2020 and 15 March 2021, Covid-19 killed at least 852 of Brazil's children up to the age of nine, including 518 babies under one year old, according to figures from the Brazilian Ministry of Health. But Dr Marinho estimates that more than twice this number of children died of Covid. A serious problem of underreporting due to lack of Covid testing is bringing the numbers down, she says. Dr Marinho calculated the excess of deaths by unspecified acute respiratory syndrome during the pandemic, and found that there were 10 times more deaths by unexplained respiratory syndrome than in previous years. By adding these numbers, she estimates that the virus in fact killed 2,060 children under nine years old, including 1,302 babies.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-56696907>

Moderna eyes beefed-up vaccine production with the help of U.S.-brokered manufacturing talks: report

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The feds already had a hand in Merck and Johnson & Johnson's "wartime" COVID-19 production pact. Now, Moderna is reportedly in government-brokered talks with a potential manufacturing partner. Moderna on Tuesday met with specialty drugmaker Nexus Pharmaceuticals to discuss manufacturing of its mRNA-based COVID-19 vaccine at the company's new factory in Wisconsin, Reuters reports, citing sources close to the matter. Nexus hasn't produced COVID-19 shots so far, but its plant has the capacity to process and fill some 30 million doses a month, the sources told the news service. The meeting was set up by senior White House officials, including David Kessler, the former FDA chief who now heads up the nation's pandemic response, and Tim Manning, the country's COVID-19 supply coordinator, the news outlet wrote. They've also brokered talks between Nexus and Johnson & Johnson, the sources said.

<https://www.fiercepharma.com/manufacturing/moderna-eyes-new-vaccine-production-partner-government-brokered-talk-report>

Plugging Vaccine Shortfalls and New Purchases

Hungary in talks to plug expected shortfall in COVID-19 vaccine deliveries

Hungary's government is in talks with all possible suppliers to make up for an expected shortfall of half a million vaccine doses against COVID-19, Prime Minister Viktor Orban's chief of staff said on Thursday. Hungary has been at the forefront of the European Union's inoculation drive, while its death rates have also been among the highest in the world. As of Thursday, it had vaccinated 3.1 million people, or nearly a third of its population. "Inoculations require vaccines and we know that another one of the shots ordered by Brussels will be missing, the (Johnson & Johnson) vaccine will not arrive. That means half a million fewer shots," Gergely Gulyas told an online briefing.

<https://www.yahoo.com/news/hungary-talks-plug-expected-shortfall-092716683.html>

Iran to purchase 60 million COVID-19 vaccines from Russia

Iran has finalized a deal with Russia to purchase 60 million doses of Sputnik V coronavirus vaccine, the state-run IRNA news agency reported Thursday. The report quotes Iran's ambassador to Russia, Kazem Jalali, as saying the contract has been "signed and finalized" for enough vaccinations to inoculate 30 million people. Jalali said Iran will receive the vaccines by the end of the year. On

Saturday, Iran began a 10-day lockdown amid a fourth wave of coronavirus infections. Authorities ordered most shops closed and offices restricted to one-third capacity in cities declared as “red zones” with the highest infection rates.

<https://apnews.com/article/world-news-iran-coronavirus-pandemic-russia-a621235653a9a2fa2b7a8584fbb575a5>

1 in 5 Americans say they won't get COVID-19 vaccine

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A poll published yesterday from Monmouth University found that 1 in 5 Americans remain unwilling to get the COVID-19 vaccine. Partisanship continues to be the defining factor determining which Americans are willing to get vaccinated and which are not: 43% of Republicans say they will avoid the vaccine, compared with just 5% of Democrats, and 22% of independents say they want to avoid getting the vaccine altogether. A new Quinnipiac University poll shows 45% of Republicans are unwilling to get the vaccine. A poll from the University of Michigan also suggests age may be a factor. Only 20% of teens and young adults polled last October said they were unwilling to get vaccinated, and that percentage shrank to 15% last month.

<https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2021/04/1-5-americans-say-they-wont-get-covid-19-vaccine>