

COVID-19 Lockdown Exit Analysis

1st Dec 2021

Lockdown Exit

Austria extends COVID-19 lockdown by 10 days

An Austrian parliamentary committee on Tuesday, as widely expected, approved a decree extending the country's COVID-19 lockdown by 10 days, bringing its total duration to 20 days, which the government has said is the longest it will last. Faced with surging daily coronavirus infections, the conservative-led government introduced the lockdown on Monday of last week, the first country in Western Europe to reimpose a lockdown this autumn.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/austria-extends-covid-19-lockdown-by-10-days-2021-11-30/>

The race is on to trace the new COVID-19 variant

Governments around the world are urgently scouring databases for recent cases of COVID-19 infections, screening travellers and decoding the viral genomes of the new variant as they try to measure how far it has spread. The pace of the work highlights the pressure on governments and public health authorities to decide quickly whether they need to take unpopular, economically damaging steps to curb Omicron's spread. Data shows it was circulating before it was officially identified in southern Africa last week and it has since been detected in more than a dozen countries read more . Work to establish if it is more infectious, deadly or evades vaccines will take weeks.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/race-is-trace-new-covid-19-variant-2021-11-30/>

Singapore close to vaccinating all eligible people against COVID-19

Singapore's COVID-19 vaccination rate has risen to 96% of the eligible population and authorities are now racing ahead to administer booster shots amid concerns over the Omicron variant. The health ministry of the city-state, which has among the highest vaccination rates in the world, said late on Tuesday that it had updated the official vaccination rate to account for a small drop in the population. As of Nov. 29, 96% of the eligible population had completed the full vaccination regimen, updated from 94%, the ministry said. That translates to about 86% of the total population of about 5.5 million.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/singapore-close-vaccinating-all-eligible-people-against-covid-19-2021-12-01/>

CDC says it is moving to tighten international COVID-19 testing rules

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) confirmed late Tuesday it is working to impose stricter COVID-19 testing rules for air travelers entering the United States amid concerns about a new COVID-19 variant. The CDC confirmed in a statement it is working to revise its current Global Testing Order "for travel as we learn more about the Omicron variant; a revised order would shorten the timeline for required testing for all international air travelers to one day before departure to the United States."

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/cdc-says-it-is-moving-tighten-international-covid-19-testing-rules-2021-12-01/>

UK PM Johnson says boosters should give higher protection from Omicron

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson on Tuesday said that it was likely booster COVID-19 vaccinations would increase protection against severe disease from the new Omicron variant even if effectiveness against infection was reduced. "The answer is everywhere and always to get the booster because we think it's overwhelmingly likely that the booster (and) getting vaccinated will

give you more protection," he told broadcasters.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uk-pm-johnson-says-boosters-should-give-higher-protection-omicron-2021-11-30/>

How South African scientists spotted the Omicron COVID variant

On Friday Nov. 19, Raquel Viana, Head of Science at one of South Africa's biggest private testing labs, sequenced the genes on eight coronavirus samples - and got the shock of her life. The samples, tested in the Lancet laboratory, all bore a large number of mutations, especially on the spike protein that the virus uses to enter human cells. "I was quite shocked at what I was seeing. I questioned whether something had gone wrong in the process," she told Reuters, a thought that quickly gave way to "a sinking feeling that the samples were going to have huge ramifications".

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/how-south-african-scientists-spotted-omicron-covid-variant-2021-11-30/>

Exit Strategies

Mandatory Covid Vaccine in Greece: \$114 Monthly Fine for Refusal Among Over 60s

Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis announced mandatory Covid-19 vaccination for all Greeks above 60 years of age before a cabinet meeting in Athens on Tuesday, in an effort to tackle the new omicron variation threat ahead of the festive season. Those who refuse to get vaccinated will have to pay a monthly fine of 100 euros (\$114) for each month they don't get jabbed, starting on Jan. 16, according to Mitsotakis. The penalty will be imposed by the tax authorities directly to those who haven't been inoculated and the funds collected will be given to Greek hospitals fighting the pandemic.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-11-30/greece-to-impose-monthly-fines-on-unvaccinated-people-over-60>

Rwanda Offers Covid Vaccine Boosters, Joining Few African Nations

Rwanda became one of the few African nations offering coronavirus-vaccine booster doses on Tuesday, according to the nation's Ministry of Health. The shots will be administered to people 50 years old and above, as well as those as young as 30 years, but with non-communicable diseases, the ministry said in a statement. The exercise begins from the capital, Kigali. Rwanda joins African nations, including Seychelles, Mauritius and South Africa, that are administering booster shots to various categories of people such as the elderly and health-care workers. Nations across the world are quickly moving to give additional doses amid new Covid-19 variants, including the recent Omicron that was first detected in southern Africa.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-11-30/rwanda-joins-few-african-nations-offering-covid-vaccine-boosters>

Austria pushes on with plan for mandatory Covid vaccines

Germany's chancellor-to-be, Olaf Scholz, supports making vaccination against Covid-19 mandatory, German media have reported, as neighbouring Austria is debating how to enforce obligatory jabs from February. Scholz, a Social Democrat, who is expected to be sworn in as Angela Merkel's successor in the coming week, reportedly told a meeting of regional leaders he was in favour of a cross-party initiative to make vaccines mandatory, as well as requiring customers at non-essential stores to show proof of vaccination or recovery from the virus. "As a delegate I would certainly vote in favour, to make that very clear," Der Spiegel reported Scholz as saying. The outgoing finance minister proposed a general vaccine mandate coming into effect from the end of February, by which everyone should have had a theoretical chance to receive two doses of vaccine of their own accord.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/30/austria-pushes-on-with-plan-for-mandatory-covid-vaccines>

Making Covid-19 vaccines mandatory was once unthinkable. But European countries are showing it can work

Earlier this month, Austria took a step once unthinkable for a Western democracy: It announced that Covid-19 vaccinations would become compulsory for its entire population. Up until then, governments around the world had rejected the idea of a universal coronavirus vaccine mandate, opting instead for incentives and other "nudges" to motivate people to get shots. Even in authoritarian states, like China, it is not mandatory policy. Austria's extraordinary move came just days after it introduced a lockdown for the unvaccinated — a restriction that went farther than other European nations in singling out the people who have been driving a worrying surge in hospitalizations.

<https://www.cnn.com/2021/11/30/europe/covid-vaccine-mandates-austria-europe-cmd-intl/index.html>

Germany's Scholz supports mandatory vaccines - sources

Germany's federal and regional governments agreed on Tuesday to take action to counter a fourth wave of COVID-19, including stepping up the vaccination campaign and restricting contact, especially for unvaccinated people. Facing a surge in cases over the last few weeks and warnings from virologists that exponential growth rates would overload hospitals, outgoing Chancellor Angela Merkel held video talks with her successor, Olaf Scholz, and regional leaders.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/rise-german-covid-19-infections-flattens-2021-11-30/>

Omicron: Vaccine nationalism will only perpetuate the pandemic

The United Kingdom and wealthy European nations are in a panic. Unsurprisingly, hoarding huge swaths of the global vaccine supply has enabled the emergence of dangerous new variants of COVID-19. And once again, rich countries are punishing the victims of global vaccine inequality by slamming shut the borders to anyone from southern African nations.

<https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/omicron-vaccine-nationalism-will-only-perpetuate-the-pandemic/ar-AARdZcb>

Rich countries must stop blocking the COVID vaccine patent waiver

The COVID-19 crisis and measures taken by states to mitigate, prevent and contain the spread of the virus have had an immeasurable impact on lives and livelihoods of the nearly eight billion people on the planet. The pandemic and many state responses have brought on what the United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres has described as a parallel "pandemic of human rights abuses" and the exacerbation of poverty and inequality worldwide. The World Health Organization has called on governments to place human rights at the heart of their pandemic responses, including by ensuring universal access to COVID-19 vaccines, therapeutics and health technologies. They are globally understood as public health goods and access to them is part of the human right to health.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/11/30/rich-countries-must-stop-blocking-the-covid-vaccine-patent-waiver>

Omicron brings COVID-19 vaccine inequity 'home to roost'

The emergence of the new omicron variant and the world's desperate and likely futile attempts to keep it at bay are reminders of what scientists have warned for months: The coronavirus will thrive as long as vast parts of the world lack vaccines.

<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-omicron-variant-inequality-65898ec544463b26ca78ba1e696edf19>

Mask mandates to tackle Omicron come into force in England

New mask mandates and other measures aimed at curbing the spread of the Omicron coronavirus variant came into force in England on Tuesday, as Prime Minister Boris Johnson eyes an expanded booster programme to help increase protection against COVID-19. From Tuesday morning, face masks are compulsory on transport and in shops, banks and hair salons.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/mask-mandates-tackle-omicron-come-into-force-england-2021-11-30/>

COVAX allocates 4.7 mln AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine doses to N.Korea

The global vaccine-sharing network COVAX has set aside 4.73 million doses of AstraZeneca Plc's COVID-19 shot for shipment to North Korea, one of the very few countries that haven't started

vaccination, according to its allocation plan. The plan follows an earlier offer for nearly two million doses of the shot that the reclusive state had rejected due to concerns over side effects, according to a South Korean think-tank

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/covax-allocates-47-mln-astrazeneca-covid-19-vaccine-doses-nkorea-2021-11-30/>

India promises more COVID-19 shots to Omicron-hit Africa after Chinese move

India stands ready to "expeditiously" send more COVID-19 vaccine to Africa to help fight the Omicron variant, New Delhi said late on Monday after China pledged 1 billion doses to the continent. India and China have close ties with many African countries but Beijing has pumped much more money into the region, and on Monday promised to invest another \$10 billion

<https://www.reuters.com/world/india/india-promises-more-covid-19-shots-omicron-hit-africa-after-chinese-move-2021-11-30/>

U.S. CDC says all adults should get COVID-19 booster shots

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said on Monday everyone aged 18 years and older should get a booster shot, as it looks to tackle a new and highly infectious strain of the coronavirus that is quickly spreading across the globe. The update comes after President Joe Biden on Monday called for wider vaccination to curb the spread of the Omicron coronavirus variant, which was first detected in southern Africa.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-cdc-says-all-adults-18-over-should-get-covid-19-booster-shots-2021-11-29/>

Britain expands COVID booster programme as eight more Omicron cases found

Britain will offer a COVID-19 booster shot to all adults in a bid to accelerate its vaccination programme amid concern over the new Omicron coronavirus variant, as eight more cases were found in the country. Britain as a whole has reported 11 cases of the new variant, which the World Health Organization said on Monday was likely to spread internationally and posed a very high risk of infection surges

<https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/britain-unveil-new-booster-guidance-omicron-variant-spreads-2021-11-29/>

Partisan Exits

The life and tragic death of John Eyers - a fitness fanatic who refused the vaccine

Argument aside, it was a great get-together. "John was on really good, funny form," says Jenny. They went for dinner at a Turkish restaurant and played darts in the garden. John scored a bullseye with his eyes closed and bragged about it all weekend. There was only one other difficult moment, when the family went to a local health club. John refused to wear a mask. The twins had a fight in reception. "I said: 'John, put your face mask on,'" Jenny remembers. "'He said: 'You aren't my mother - don't tell me what to do.'" John eventually acquiesced, then made another easy joke. They went swimming and played tennis and forgot about it. A perfect weekend, then. Twins enjoying each other's company after the enforced separation of the pandemic. Neither had any idea it would be their last time together.

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/nov/30/life-tragic-death-john-eyers-fitness-fanatic-who-refused-covid-vaccine>

COVID-19: Public inquiry should examine 'mishandling' by NHS 111 service during first wave of pandemic

Families who have lost loved ones to coronavirus believed the public inquiry into pandemic should examine the alleged "mishandling" of the crisis by the NHS 111 service. The COVID-19 Bereaved Families for Justice group said the role of the telephone advice service in the early days of the crisis was to "alleviate the burden on the NHS", with "horrific consequences". Despite an extra 700 call handlers being added, the service was "swamped" as the first wave hit and operators were making

life and death decisions with just 10 weeks of training, it argued.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-public-inquiry-should-examine-mishandling-by-nhs-111-service-during-first-wave-of-pandemic-12482565>

Vegan dies of Covid-19 after refusing vaccine over animal testing

A vegan man who rejected the Covid-19 vaccine citing concerns about animal cruelty, died regretting his decision, his wife said. Glynn Steel “begged for the vaccine,” his wife Emma Steel said, before he was shifted to life support. But by then it was too late for the vaccine to be effective on him, she said. “The last thing Glynn (Steel) said to me was ‘I have never felt so ill, I wish that I had the vaccine’,” Ms Steel, who is double-vaccinated, told The Sun.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/world/vegan-covid-vaccine-animal-testing-b1966574.html>

Russian coronavirus-denying monk given prison sentence

A rebel Russian monk who castigated the Kremlin and denied that the coronavirus existed was convicted Tuesday on accusations of encouraging suicides and given a 3½-year prison sentence. The monk, Father Sergiy, was arrested in December 2020 on charges of inciting suicidal actions through sermons in which he urged believers to “die for Russia,” breaching the freedom of conscience and making arbitrary moves. He rejected the accusations and his lawyers said they would appeal Tuesday’s ruling by Moscow’s Ismailovo District Court.

<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-health-europe-suicides-moscow-1fb9bd30f4b1209e07bd61471f16d822>

Scientific Viewpoint

Testing, vaccines, sequencing: experts call for multi-pronged approach to Omicron

As new cases of the Omicron coronavirus variant are uncovered across the globe and threaten to spread in America, US officials are reacting by urging vaccinations and boosters instead of imposing restrictions which have increasingly provoked political fights. But the US should quickly invest in other tools as well, experts said, including testing, genomic sequencing and surveillance, better communication, and a strong focus on global vaccine equity to prevent the emergence of new variants. All of that would prepare America better to deal with a variant that many experts suspect is probably already inside the country, even if undetected so far.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/30/testing-vaccines-sequencing-omicron-experts>

UAE approves Sputnik Light as universal booster shot against COVID-19 - RDIF

The United Arab Emirates has approved Russia's Sputnik Light vaccine as a universal booster shot against COVID-19, Russian sovereign wealth fund RDIF said on Tuesday. The Russian Direct Investment Fund, which markets the vaccine abroad, said Sputnik Light can be administered six months after the second dose of any other vaccine used in the United Arab Emirates.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/uae-approves-sputnik-light-universal-booster-shot-against-covid-19-rdif-2021-11-30/>

Becton confident its COVID-19 tests will detect Omicron variant

Becton Dickinson and Co (BDX.N) said on Tuesday it was confident that its COVID-19 tests would be able to detect the new coronavirus variant Omicron. The company sells a variety of tests for COVID-19, including antigen and PCR tests. In October, it started shipping at-home rapid COVID-19 tests in the United States that can confirm results using an entirely automated smartphone app. Becton also said it had conducted analyses of the variant using all available genome sequences from the Global Initiative on Sharing All Influenza Data (GISAID) — the largest database of novel coronavirus genome sequences in the world.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/becton-says-confident-its-covid-19-tests-will-detect-omicron-variant-2021-11-30/>

Regeneron says its COVID-19 antibody drug could be less effective against Omicron

Regeneron Pharmaceuticals Inc's COVID-19 antibody drug could be less effective against Omicron, it said on Tuesday, adding to fears about the efficacy of existing treatments after Moderna's top boss raised similar concerns about the company's vaccine. Global markets tumbled after comments from Moderna's chief executive officer rekindled worries that the variant may weigh on a nascent global economic recovery.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/regeneron-says-covid-19-drug-could-be-less-effective-against-omicron-variant-2021-11-30/>

It is high time we start preparing for future pandemics

Five million lives worldwide have already been lost to COVID-19, and the World Health Organization Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator (WHO/ACT-A) grimly predict five million more lives will be lost to the disease in months to come. Alarmingly also, COVID-19 cases will swell from the 260 million confirmed so far to 460 million by the end of 2022. The damage from COVID-19 has been so catastrophic that, when the World Health Assembly (WHA) meets in a special session, starting November 29, its task is nothing less than preventing such a tragedy from re-occurring. The damage from COVID-19 has been so ruinous that we now need an internationally binding agreement to prevent future outbreaks from ever becoming pandemics again.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/11/27/it-is-high-time-we-start-preparing-for-future-pandemics>

Pfizer now expects to produce 80 mln courses of COVID-19 pill, CEO tells CNBC

Pfizer Inc now expects to manufacture 80 million treatment courses of its experimental COVID-19 antiviral drug, up from a previous forecast of 50 million, Chief Executive Officer Albert Bourla said in a CNBC interview on Monday. Earlier this month, Pfizer said it expects to manufacture 180,000 treatment courses by the end of this year and at least 50 million courses by the end of next year, including 21 million in the first half of 2022. "We can right now commit to 80 million doses ... thanks to our manufacturing machine," Bourla told CNBC.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/pfizer-expects-produce-80-mln-courses-covid-19-antiviral-pill-cnbc-reporter-2021-11-29/>

EU could approve shot against new Covid variant in 3-4 months

The EU drug regulator said on Tuesday it could approve vaccines adapted to target the Omicron variant of the coronavirus within three to four months if needed, but that existing shots would continue to provide protection. Speaking to the European Parliament, European Medicines Agency (EMA) executive director Emer Cooke said it was not known if drugmakers would need to tweak their vaccines to protect against Omicron, but the EMA was preparing for that possibility.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/eu-drug-watchdog-chief-could-approve-covid-19-shot-against-new-variant-3-4-2021-11-30/>

U.S. FDA panel to weigh Merck's COVID-19 antiviral drug

A panel of expert advisers to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration on Tuesday narrowly voted to recommend the agency authorize Merck & Co's antiviral pill to treat COVID-19. If the FDA authorizes the drug, it would be the first at-home treatment for the virus nearly two years into the pandemic. The authorization would likely be limited to patients at high risk of developing severe disease, although the exact population would be defined by the agency. Merck published data last week suggesting the drug was significantly less effective than previously thought, reducing hospitalizations and deaths in its clinical trial of high-risk individuals by around 30%.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/us-fda-panel-weigh-mercks-covid-19-antiviral-drug-2021-11-30/>

COVID-19 vaccine makers start work on Omicron-tailored shots

BioNTech, Moderna and Johnson & Johnson are working on vaccines that specifically target Omicron

in case their existing shots are not effective against the new coronavirus variant, the companies said on Monday. The variant's emergence has triggered a strong global response as countries worried that it could spread fast even in vaccinated populations impose travel curbs and other restrictions. BioNTech SE said it had started work on a vaccine tailored to Omicron, along with partner Pfizer <https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/moderna-can-take-months-ship-omicron-specific-vaccine-ceo-says-cnbc-2021-11-29/>

COVID-19 reinfection less likely to be severe; cardiac stress test useful for unexplained lingering breathlessness

Reinfections with the virus that causes COVID-19 are rarely severe, new findings suggest. Researchers in Qatar compared 1,304 individuals with a second SARS-CoV-2 infection with 6,520 people infected with the virus for the first time. The odds of developing severe disease were 88% lower for people with second infections, the researchers reported online on Wednesday in The New England Journal of Medicine.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/covid-19-reinfection-less-likely-be-severe-cardiac-stress-test-useful-2021-11-29/>

Celltrion signs COVID-19 antibody therapy supply deals with Europe

South Korean biotech company Celltrion's distribution arm has signed supply deals for its monoclonal antibody to treat COVID-19 with nine European countries, Celltrion Healthcare said on Tuesday. The European Commission earlier this month approved the company's antibody therapy Regkirona, granting marketing authorisation for adults with COVID-19 who are at increased risk of progressing to a severe condition. The first batch of 50,000 doses will be shipped to Europe this year and the company is in talks with 47 other nations including in Asia, Central and South America and the Middle East, Celltrion said in a statement.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/celltrion-signs-covid-19-antibody-therapy-supply-deals-with-europe-2021-11-30/>

WHO warns that new virus variant poses 'very high' risk

The World Health Organization warned Monday that the global risk from the omicron variant is "very high" based on the early evidence, saying the mutated coronavirus could lead to surges with "severe consequences." The assessment from the U.N. health agency, contained in a technical paper issued to member states, amounted to WHO's strongest, most explicit warning yet about the new version that was first identified days ago by researchers in South Africa. It came as a widening circle of countries around the world reported cases of the variant and moved to slam their doors in an act-now-ask-questions-later approach while scientists race to figure out just how dangerous the mutant version might be. Japan announced it is barring entry to all foreign visitors, joining Israel in doing so. Morocco banned all incoming flights. Other countries, including the U.S. and members of the European Union, have moved to prohibit travelers arriving from southern Africa.

<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-omicron-variant-covid-restrictions-82e53a7a17d1a4c30031065d389bda37>

US tracking of virus variants has improved after slow start

After a slow start, the United States has improved its surveillance system for tracking new coronavirus variants such as omicron, boosting its capacity by tens of thousands of samples per week since early this year. Viruses mutate constantly. To find and track new versions of the coronavirus, scientists analyze the genetic makeup of a portion of samples that test positive. They're looking at the chemical letters of the virus's genetic code to find new worrisome mutants, such as omicron, and to follow the spread of known variants, such as delta. It's a global effort, but until recently the U.S. was contributing very little. With uncoordinated and scattershot testing, the U.S. was sequencing fewer than 1% of positive specimens earlier this year. Now, it is running those

tests on 5% to 10% of samples. That's more in line with what other nations have sequenced and shared with global disease trackers over the course of the pandemic.

<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-science-health-united-states-ef0b9a54e62a8617a84549a44f0b5c56>

Final US hurdle for Merck's COVID-19 pill: FDA panel review

A panel of U.S. health advisers on Tuesday narrowly backed a closely watched COVID-19 pill from Merck, setting the stage for a likely authorization of the first drug that Americans could take at home to treat the coronavirus. The Food and Drug Administration panel voted 13-10 that the antiviral drug's benefits outweigh its risks, including potential birth defects if used during pregnancy. "I see this as an incredibly difficult decision with many more questions than answers," said panel chair Dr. Lindsey Baden of Harvard Medical School, who voted in favor of the drug. He said FDA would have to carefully tailor the drug's use for patients who stand to benefit most.

<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-science-business-health-medication-6932faff66f9295417b2b1f5e02a2165>

Coronavirus Resurgence

COVID-19: Don't socialise unless necessary to help slow Omicron variant spread, says UKHSA chief Dr Jenny Harries

Boris Johnson has urged people not to cancel Christmas parties or school nativity plays despite a health chief encouraging Britons to cut back on unnecessary socialising ahead of the festive season. Dr Jenny Harries, chief executive of the UK's Health Security Agency (UKHSA), said everyone can do their bit by reducing the number of social contacts they have - and by "not socialising when we don't particularly need to". But the PM rejected Dr Harries' call, insisting that he had already put in place a package of "balanced and proportionate measures" in response to the threat posed by the new Omicron variant.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-dont-socialise-unless-necessary-to-help-slow-omicron-variant-spread-says-uk-health-chief-12483022>

Nine more from Munster test positive for COVID-19 in South Africa

Munster have nine new COVID-19 cases in their camp in South Africa, the Irish rugby team said on Tuesday, taking the total count to 10. Both staff and players have tested positive and will quarantine in a hotel in Cape Town, joining the first player who returned a positive test on Sunday. Welsh side Cardiff also said they had two positive cases over the weekend. Munster did not say if any of the positive tests were for the new Omicron variant of the virus, which was first detected in southern Africa.

<https://www.reuters.com/lifestyle/sports/nine-more-munster-test-positive-covid-19-south-africa-2021-11-30/>

Forty-two cases of COVID-19 Omicron variant confirmed in 10 EU states

Forty-two cases of the COVID-19 Omicron variant have been confirmed in 10 European Union countries, the head of the EU's public health agency said on Tuesday. Authorities in the 27-nation EU were analysing another six "probable" cases, Andrea Ammon, who chairs the European Centre for Disease prevention and Control (ECDC), told an online conference organised by the EU's Slovenian presidency. She said the confirmed cases were mild or without symptoms, although in younger age groups.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/forty-two-cases-covid-19-omicron-variant-confirmed-10-eu-states-2021-11-30/>

German and Austrian COVID-19 incidence rate falls, stable in Netherlands

Germany's federal and regional governments agreed on Tuesday to take action to counter a fourth wave of COVID-19, including stepping up the vaccination campaign and restricting contact, especially for unvaccinated people. Facing a surge in cases over the last few weeks and warnings

from virologists that exponential growth rates would overload hospitals, outgoing Chancellor Angela Merkel held video talks with her successor, Olaf Scholz, and regional leaders. "There is agreement that the fourth wave has led to an extremely serious, in some regions dramatic situation in our healthcare system to which federal and state governments will respond jointly and decisively," said government spokesman Steffen Seibert.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/rise-german-covid-19-infections-flattens-2021-11-30/>

Map: Tracking the Omicron variant

The Omicron coronavirus variant has been detected in at least 19 countries since November 24. On Monday, the World Health Organization (WHO) warned that the global risk from the spread of Omicron was "very high" and urged 194 member nations to speed the delivery of vaccinations to high-risk groups. No Omicron-linked deaths have yet been reported, though further research is needed to assess its potential to escape protection against immunity induced by vaccines and previous infections, the WHO added. The map below highlights the countries that have reported Omicron cases. (The map will be updated as more information becomes available)

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/11/30/map-tracking-the-omicron-variant-interactive>

1st French omicron case on Indian Ocean island of Reunion

Japan and France confirmed their first cases of the new variant of the coronavirus on Tuesday as countries around the world scrambled to close their doors or find ways to limit its spread while scientists study how damaging it might be.

<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-science-health-oceans-mozambique-08b63b7e889463b1627623da26a86da4>

Spain detects first Omicron case, COVID-19 infections rise

Spain has detected its first case of the Omicron variant of the coronavirus in a 51-year-old man who arrived from South Africa on Sunday after a layover in Amsterdam, Madrid's regional health authority said on Monday as Spain's overall infection rate rose. The microbiology unit at Madrid's Gregorio Maranon hospital, which sequenced and confirmed the new variant, added in a separate post on Twitter that the patient was in fair condition with mild symptoms.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/spain-detects-first-omicron-case-covid-19-2021-11-29/>

Rise in German COVID-19 infections flattens

Germany's federal and regional governments agreed on Tuesday to take action to counter a fourth wave of COVID-19, including stepping up the vaccination campaign and restricting contact, especially for unvaccinated people. Facing a surge in cases over the last few weeks and warnings from virologists that exponential growth rates would overload hospitals, outgoing Chancellor Angela Merkel held video talks with her successor, Olaf Scholz, and regional leaders.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/rise-german-covid-19-infections-flattens-2021-11-30/>

France registers biggest jump in COVID-19 hospital patients since spring

France registered its biggest jump in coronavirus-related hospital admissions since the spring, health ministry data showed on Monday. The number of patients in intensive care units with COVID-19 jumped by 117 to 1,749 people, the biggest increase since March-April, when the ICU number rose by more than 100 per day on several days. The number of people in hospital with the virus jumped by 470 to 9,860, the biggest one-day increase since March 29. Compared with a week ago, the number of COVID-19 patients was up more than 18%, the biggest week-on-week increase this year.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/france-registers-biggest-jump-covid-19-hospital-patients-since-spring-2021-11-29/>

Norwegians should wear face masks in crowded places, PM says

Norwegians should wear face masks on crowded public transport, in shopping malls and in taxis following a record surge in coronavirus infections, Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Stoere said on Tuesday. He stopped short of issuing mask mandates, as called for by some municipalities, urging instead an accelerated drive to give booster shots to all adults.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/norwegians-should-wear-face-masks-crowded-places-pm-says-2021-11-30/>

Omicron vaccine warning triggers fresh global selloff

There was a fall in world share markets and scramble to safer currencies and bonds on Tuesday after the CEO of drugmaker Moderna warned that COVID-19 vaccines are unlikely to be as effective against the new Omicron variant. Europe's main bourses jolted 1.4% lower early on, oil shed 3%, Australia's currency which is highly sensitive to global economic confidence hit a year low while Japan's safe-haven yen, German government bonds and gold all rose.

<https://www.reuters.com/markets/europe/global-markets-wrapup-2-2021-11-30/>

Australia on alert as first Omicron community case confirmed

Australian authorities on Tuesday confirmed a person with COVID-19 had the new Omicron variant after disclosing that the person had been active in the community, but urged calm as they weighed up the severity of the strain. The fully vaccinated person visited a busy shopping centre in Sydney while likely infectious, officials said. All passengers in the person's flight were asked to self-isolate for 14 days regardless of their vaccination status. The additional case brings Australia's total number of infections with the new variant to six. But it is the first case where the person appeared to be active in the community. All other cases have been in quarantine and are asymptomatic or display very mild symptoms.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/australia-national-cabinet-meet-amid-omicron-worries-2021-11-29/>

Omicron was in Netherlands days earlier than first thought

The Netherlands' RIVM health institute disclosed that patient samples dating from Nov. 19 and 23 were found to contain the variant. It was on Nov. 24 that South African authorities reported the existence of the highly mutated virus to the World Health Organization. That indicates omicron had a bigger head start in the Netherlands than previously believed.

<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-science-health-oceans-mozambique-08b63b7e889463b1627623da26a86da4>

Brazil and Japan report first cases of the omicron variant

Brazil and Japan joined the rapidly widening circle of countries to report cases of the omicron variant Tuesday, while new findings indicate the mutant coronavirus was already in Europe close to a week before South Africa sounded the alarm. The Netherlands' RIVM health institute disclosed that patient samples dating from Nov. 19 and 23 were found to contain the variant. It was on Nov. 24 that South African authorities reported the existence of the highly mutated virus to the World Health Organization. That indicates omicron had a bigger head start in the Netherlands than previously believed. Together with the cases in Japan and Brazil, the finding illustrates the difficulty in containing the virus in an age of jet travel and economic globalization. And it left the world once again whipsawed between hopes of returning to normal and fears that the worst is yet to come.

<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-science-health-oceans-mozambique-08b63b7e889463b1627623da26a86da4>

US deaths get even redder

The gap in Covid's death toll between red and blue America has grown faster over the past month than at any previous point. In October, 25 out of every 100,000 residents of heavily Trump counties died from Covid, more than three times higher than the rate in heavily Biden counties (7.8 per 100,000). October was the fifth consecutive month that the percentage gap between the death rates

in Trump counties and Biden counties widened.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/08/briefing/covid-death-toll-red-america.html>