

COVID-19 Lockdown Exit Analysis

3rd Dec 2021

Lockdown Exit

UK Covid cases soar past 50,000 for a second time in seven days as numbers reach the highest since October

The UK has reported a further 53,945 daily Covid infections, with cases passing the 50,000 mark for the second time in the last seven days and reaching the highest daily total since mid-October. A further 45,880 people in England tested positive in the last 24-hour period, while 3,002 cases were recorded in Scotland, 2,791 in Wales and 2,272 in Northern Ireland. It marks the highest number of daily infections since 18 October, when there were 56,710 daily cases, amid concerns that the UK could see a surge in infections this winter.

https://inews.co.uk/news/uk-covid-cases-soar-past-50000-for-a-second-time-in-seven-days-as-numbers-reach-the-highest-since-october-1332331?ito=social_itw_thepaper

New Zealand's COVID-19 re-opening plans leave Maori feeling exposed

As New Zealand prepares to ease its COVID-19 pandemic controls and global isolation after nearly two years, health risks for its under-vaccinated indigenous Maori are posing a challenge for Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern. Some of the world's toughest pandemic measures enforced by the South Pacific nation are easing on Friday, with businesses reopening nationwide after Ardern's government abandoned its elimination strategy in the face of the contagious Delta variant. Domestic border curbs in the pandemic epicentre Auckland are due to end mid-December and international borders restrictions will loosen progressively from January.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/new-zealands-covid-19-re-opening-plans-leave-maori-feeling-exposed-2021-12-02/>

UK study finds mRNA COVID-19 vaccines provide biggest booster impact

COVID-19 vaccines made by Pfizer and Moderna that use mRNA technology provide the biggest boost to antibody levels when given 10-12 weeks after the second dose, a British study published on Thursday has found. The "COV-Boost" study was cited by British officials when they announced that Pfizer and Moderna were preferred for use in the country's booster campaign, but the data has only been made publicly available now. The study found that six out of the seven boosters examined enhanced immunity after initial vaccination with Pfizer-BioNTech's vaccine, while all seven increased immunity when given after two doses of AstraZeneca's (AZN.L) vaccine. "A third dose will be effective for many of the vaccines we've tested and in many different combinations," Professor Saul Faust, an immunologist at the University of Southampton and the trial's lead, told reporters.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/uk-study-finds-mrna-covid-19-vaccines-provide-biggest-booster-impact-2021-12-02/>

Exit Strategies

Finland to limit children's COVID-19 vaccines to high-risk households

Children in Finland aged five and over should be vaccinated against COVID-19 if they or someone in their household are at high risk of severe infection, the Finnish Health Institute recommended on Thursday, opting against shots for all children. The government is expected to accept the recommendation. The institute said the vaccinations could start as soon as Finland obtains approved shots.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/finland-limit-childrens-covid-19-vaccines-high-risk-households-2021-12-02/>

Germany could make Covid vaccination mandatory, says Merkel

Vaccination could become mandatory in Germany from February, Angela Merkel has said, as she announced what her successor as chancellor, Olaf Scholz, described as “a lockdown of the unvaccinated”. As more EU countries confirmed cases of the Omicron variant, which the bloc’s health agency said could make up more than half of all infections on the continent within months, Merkel described the situation as “very serious”. Meeting with Scholz and Germany’s 16 state leaders for emergency talks on Thursday on tougher measures to stem rocketing Covid cases, the outgoing chancellor said an “act of national solidarity” was required.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/dec/02/germany-could-make-covid-vaccination-mandatory-says-merkel>

Biden launching winter COVID-19 booster, testing campaign

President Joe Biden is set to kick off a more urgent campaign for Americans to get COVID-19 booster shots Thursday as he unveils his winter plans for combating the coronavirus and its omicron variant with enhanced availability of shots and vaccines but without major new restrictions. The plan includes a requirement for private insurers to cover the cost of at-home COVID-19 tests and a tightening of testing requirements for people entering the U.S. regardless of their vaccination status.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/joe-biden-americans-white-house-washington-centers-for-disease-control-and-prevention-b1968356.html>

Canadian airports warn of 'chaos' amid new COVID-19 testing rules

Canada's plan to require novel coronavirus tests for all but U.S. arrivals on international flights risks causing "chaos" and long lines if all passengers are expected to get tested at airports, industry groups said. The move, announced Tuesday, comes as the travel season kicks into gear and could stretch airport resources as well as testing holiday-makers' patience, they said.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/canadian-airports-warn-chaos-amid-new-covid-19-testing-rules-2021-12-02/>

U.S. to require private health insurance companies cover at-home COVID-19 tests

U.S. President Joe Biden on Thursday laid out his strategy to fight the Omicron and Delta coronavirus variants over the winter, including free and insurer-funded at-home COVID-19 testing and new requirements for international travelers. The U.S. government will require private health insurers to reimburse their 150 million customers for 100% of the cost of over-the-counter, at-home COVID-19 tests, administration officials said, and make 50 million more tests available free through rural clinics and health centers for the uninsured.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-require-private-health-insurance-companies-cover-at-home-covid-19-tests-2021-12-02/>

Germany to impose restrictions on unvaccinated to break COVID surge

Germany on Thursday imposed restrictions on the unvaccinated as it sought to break a dramatic surge in daily coronavirus infections exacerbated by the discovery of the Omicron strain. Outgoing Chancellor Angela Merkel and her successor Olaf Scholz agreed with leaders of Germany's 16 states to bar the unvaccinated from access to all but the most essential businesses such as grocery stores, pharmacies and bakeries. They also agreed to pass legislation in the national parliament to make vaccination mandatory.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/germany-impose-restrictions-unvaccinated-break-covid-surge-2021-12-02/>

U.N. chief slams COVID-19 'travel apartheid' as unacceptable

United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said on Wednesday that travel restrictions imposed over COVID-19 that isolate any one country or region as "not only deeply unfair and punitive - they are ineffective." Speaking to reporters in New York, Guterres said the only way to reduce the risk of transmission while allowing for travel and economic engagement was to repeatedly test travelers, "together with other appropriate and truly effective measures."

<https://www.reuters.com/world/un-chief-slams-covid-19-travel-apartheid-unacceptable-2021-12-01/>

Dutch say pre-flight tests needed as most COVID passengers from S.Africa were vaccinated

Dutch health authorities on Thursday said most of the 62 people who tested positive for COVID-19 after arriving on two flights from South Africa last week had been vaccinated, lending weight to a call for pre-flight testing regardless of vaccination status. In addition, all 14 passengers who were later found to have been infected with the Omicron variant were vaccinated, health officials said on Thursday.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/dutch-covid-19-quarantine-ends-most-safrica-passengers-authorities-2021-12-02/>

UK agrees deals for 114 million more Moderna and Pfizer COVID-19 doses

Britain said on Wednesday it had agreed deals to buy 114 million more Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna COVID-19 vaccine shots, saying it had sped up signing the new contracts in light of the emergence of the new Omicron variant. The deal involves an additional 60 million Moderna shots and 54 million Pfizer doses for next year and 2023, and will also include access to any modified vaccinations if they are needed to combat the Omicron strain or any other variant, the British health ministry said.

<https://www.reuters.com/markets/europe/uk-agrees-deals-114-million-more-moderna-pfizer-covid-19-doses-2021-12-01/>

Italy approves COVID-19 vaccination for 5-11 year olds

Italy's medicines agency AIFA on Wednesday gave the go-ahead for the use of Pfizer-BioNTech's COVID-19 vaccine for children between the ages of five and 11. AIFA's decision, which was widely expected, came after the European Union's drug regulator (EMA) took the same step on Nov. 25.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/italy-approves-covid-19-vaccination-5-11-year-olds-2021-12-01/>

Pakistan expands COVID vaccination drive amid Omicron fears

Pakistan's government will step up COVID-19 vaccination efforts and is expanding the criteria for vaccine booster shots, amid fears of the Omicron variant, authorities say. On Wednesday, the leadership of the National Command and Operation Centre (NCOC), which is heading the country's COVID-19 response efforts, held a meeting in the capital Islamabad to review steps to curb the spread of the virus.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/12/2/pakistan-expands-covid-vaccination-drive-amid-omicron-fears>

Biden's new Covid plan: more boosters, free home testing, and 'monoclonal antibody strike teams'

President Biden will announce a new plan Thursday afternoon for combating the Omicron variant of the coronavirus. The plan includes a new campaign to increase uptake of booster shots, new policies meant to provide Americans with free at-home coronavirus tests, and more stringent policies on international travel. Public health officials still don't know much about the Omicron variant, including whether it causes milder symptoms than other forms of the coronavirus, or whether it is more transmissible than other variants. The first case of the Omicron variant detected in the United States was announced by U.S. health officials on Wednesday.

<https://www.statnews.com/2021/12/02/757561/>

Partisan Exits

Facebook, Instagram remove Chinese network over fake 'Swiss biologist' COVID claims

Facebook owner Meta Platforms Inc said on Wednesday it had removed accounts used by an influence operation originating in China that promoted claims of a fake "Swiss biologist" saying the United States was interfering in the search for COVID-19's origins. Meta said in a report the social media campaign was "largely unsuccessful" and targeted English-speaking audiences in the United States and Britain and Chinese-speaking audiences in Taiwan, Hong Kong and Tibet.

<https://www.reuters.com/technology/facebook-instagram-remove-chinese-network-over-fake-swiss-biologist-covid-claims-2021-12-01/>

Bristol Myers is sued for refusing COVID-19 vaccine religious exemptions

Bristol Myers Squibb Co was sued on Wednesday by four employees who said the drugmaker refused to grant them religious exemptions from its COVID-19 vaccination requirement, and threatened to fire them on Dec. 6 for remaining unvaccinated. The plaintiffs in the proposed class action filed in Manhattan federal court accused Bristol Myers of violating a federal civil rights law known as Title VII by "systematically manufacturing" reasons to refuse religious accommodations.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/bristol-myers-is-sued-refusing-covid-19-vaccine-religious-exemptions-2021-12-01/>

The Fifth Circuit Court got the science wrong on OSHA's vaccination mandate

Before the Sixth Circuit was randomly chosen for this task, the New Orleans-based Fifth Circuit preemptively put a hold on the mandate, issuing an opinion that bitingly characterized OSHA's emergency temporary standard as "staggeringly overbroad." But the Fifth Circuit's opinion got the underlying science completely wrong. For that reason alone, the Sixth Circuit needs to reverse the Fifth's order and start over with a clean slate that accurately encompasses the scientific evidence on the transmission of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes Covid-19, the health consequences of the virus, and the prevention of Covid-19.

<https://www.statnews.com/2021/12/02/fifth-circuit-court-got-science-wrong-on-osha-vaccination-mandate/>

Scientific Viewpoint

Italy approves Pfizer and BioNTech's Covid-19 vaccine for children

The Italian Medicines Agency (AIFA) has approved the use of the Pfizer and BioNTech Covid-19 vaccine, Comirnaty, for children aged five to 11 years. The Covid-19 vaccine is approved to be administered in two doses at a gap of three weeks. The dosage for this age group is indicated to be a third of the authorised 30µg dose given to adults and adolescents. AIFA's Technical Scientific Commission (CTS) noted that the vaccine showed a high efficacy level with no warning signals highlighted in terms of safety, according to the data submitted by the companies. The CTS stated that "although SARS-CoV-2 infection is certainly more benign in children, in some cases it can be associated with serious consequences, such as the risk of developing multisystem inflammatory syndrome (MIS-c), which may also require hospitalisation in intensive care."

<https://www.pharmaceutical-technology.com/news/italy-pfizer-biontech-covid-19-vaccine-children/>

New Covid-19 drug Sotrovimab that could be effective against the Omicron variant approved by regulators

The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency has authorised the drug for use in people with mild to moderate Covid-19 symptoms but who are at a higher risk of developing severe disease. Work will now be done to see if the drug will be effective against the new Omicron strain,

<https://inews.co.uk/news/health/new-covid-19-drug-could-be-effective-against-omicron-variant-approved-by-regulators-1331045?ITO=msn>

COVID-19: 'Trigger' behind extremely rare AstraZeneca vaccine blood clots may have been discovered

Scientists led by a team from Arizona State University and Cardiff University worked with AstraZeneca to investigate the causes of thrombosis with vaccine-induced immune thrombocytopenia (VITT). TTS, which involves the formation of blood clots, is a life-threatening condition seen in a very small number of people after receiving the Oxford-AstraZeneca or Johnson & Johnson vaccines. The scientists say they now believe they have identified how a protein in the blood is attracted to a key component of the vaccine.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-trigger-behind-extremely-rare-astrazeneca-vaccine-blood-clots-may-have-been-discovered-12484255>

Covid-19 variants may not evolve to be less dangerous, says Neil Ferguson

People should not assume that Covid will evolve to become a milder disease, a senior scientist has warned, adding that the threat posed by the Omicron coronavirus variant will not be clear until the end of December. Prof Neil Ferguson, head of the disease outbreak analysis and modelling group at Imperial College London, told MPs on Wednesday that while evolution would drive Covid to spread more easily the virus might not become less dangerous. "Most of the transmission has already happened by the time people get hospitalised," Ferguson told the Commons science and technology committee. "The virus cares about replicating very fast within the respiratory tract and getting out into the environment. If that happens to kill somebody 10 days later the virus really doesn't care."

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/dec/01/covid-19-variants-omicron-may-not-evolve-less-danger-time-nervt-g-uk>

Pfizer begins application for Canada's approval of COVID-19 pill

Pfizer Inc said it had started the real-time submission of its application seeking Health Canada's approval of its oral COVID-19 antiviral drug candidate. The pill, PF-07321332, is designed to block a key enzyme needed for the coronavirus to multiply. The move comes after the Canadian government announced that it was in advanced talks with Pfizer and Merck & Co Inc regarding a purchase agreement for their COVID-19 antiviral drugs, as the country attempts to control the spread of the Omicron coronavirus variant.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/pfizer-begins-application-canadas-approval-covid-19-pill-2021-12-01/>

Cuba to upgrade homegrown COVID-19 vaccine to confront Omicron

Cuban health authorities said that researchers in the communist-run country are upgrading its homegrown COVID vaccines to ensure protection against the new Omicron variant. The Caribbean island nation, whose economy hinges on tourism, sharply eased entry requirements in mid-November following a successful inoculation drive with domestically developed vaccines. Both infections and deaths from COVID-19 have dropped off to 2% or less of their peaks, according to a Reuters tally.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/cuba-upgrade-homegrown-covid-19-vaccine-confront-omicron-2021-12-01/>

S.African data suggests Omicron gets around some, not all immunity

The Omicron variant appears able to get around some immunity but vaccines should still offer protection against severe disease, according to the latest data from South Africa where it is fast overtaking Delta to become the dominant variant.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/safrica-festival-halted-after-36-test-positive-covid-site-2021-12-01/>

EU regulator begins real-time review of Valneva's COVID-19 shot

The European Union's drug regulator said on Thursday it had started a rolling review of the inactivated-virus COVID-19 vaccine from French biotech firm Valneva, weeks after the EU signed a deal with the company for supplies of the shot. The decision to start the real-time review was based on preliminary studies that suggest the vaccine, VLA2001, triggers an antibody response against the coronavirus, the European Medicines Agency (EMA) said.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/eu-regulator-begins-rolling-review-valneva-covid-19-vaccine-2021-12-02/>

China accelerating research into COVID-19 shots targeting Omicron -state media

China is accelerating research and development of COVID-19 vaccines targeting the Omicron variant, a health official said on Thursday, amid concerns among global scientists that it may spread more quickly than other strains. Mainland China has not detected any Omicron case yet. "We are

rapidly pushing forward the research and development of Omicron-specific vaccines based on different technologies," Zheng Zhongwei, who heads a group tasked with COVID-19 vaccine development in China, told state broadcaster CCTV.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/china-accelerating-research-into-covid-19-shots-targeting-omicron-state-media-2021-12-02/>

Britain approves GSK-Vir antibody-based COVID-19 treatment

Britain's drug regulator on Thursday approved GSK and Vir Biotechnology's antibody based COVID-19 treatment, Xevudy, for people with mild-to-moderate COVID-19 who are at high risk of developing severe disease. The approval comes as GSK separately announced the treatment has shown to work against the Omicron variant.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/britain-approves-gsk-vir-antibody-based-covid-19-treatment-2021-12-02/>

Severe COVID tied to high risk of death, mostly by other causes, within year

Survivors of severe COVID-19—especially those younger than 65 years—may be at more than twice the risk of dying within the next year than those who had mild or moderate illness or were never infected, finds a study today in *Frontiers in Medicine*. Another finding of the analysis of electronic health records of 13,638 patients who tested positive or negative for COVID-19 is that only 20% of those who had severe COVID-19 (requiring hospitalization) and died did so because of complications of their infection, such as abnormal blood clotting, respiratory failure, or cardiovascular problems. Rather, 80% were due to different reasons typically considered unrelated to COVID-19. "Since these deaths were not for a direct COVID-19 cause of death among these patients who have recovered from the initial episode of COVID-19, this data suggests that the biological insult from COVID-19 and physiological stress from COVID-19 is significant," wrote the University of Florida at Gainesville researchers.

<https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2021/12/severe-covid-tied-high-risk-death-mostly-other-causes-within-year>

Aspen Pharmacare, pursuing J&J vaccine license, aims to shore up local capacity and quash shot inequality in Africa

History is repeating for Aspen Pharmacare. Nearly 20 years ago, as Africa grappled with an HIV epidemic, Aspen pioneered the first generic antiretroviral on the continent. Now, it has a chance to do something similar with Johnson & Johnson's COVID-19 vaccine. This time, however, the South African drugmaker's contribution could be even more of a "game changer," thanks to the scope of the pandemic and the disproportionate toll it's taken on Africa, an Aspen executive told *Fierce Pharma*. Aspen earlier this week signed a nonbinding term sheet with two J&J subsidiaries in a bid to license and sell the company's single-dose COVID-19 vaccine in Africa. The potentially "monumental" agreement is big for two reasons, Stavros Nicolaou, Ph.D., group senior executive of strategic trade at Aspen Pharma Group, said in an interview.

<https://www.fiercepharma.com/manufacturing/j-j-covid-19-partner-aspen-pharmacare-eyes-looks-to-shore-up-local-capacity-and-quash>

Another fight for Covid long-haulers: having their pain acknowledged

After his second hospitalization for acute Covid-19, Tony Marks expected to get better. Then pain invaded the 54-year-old software executive's arms and legs. At first, he felt like he was covered by deep bruises, although nothing was visible on his skin. These days, he told me, he feels like he's being beaten repeatedly with a baseball bat. Pain is increasingly being recognized as a key feature of what is commonly called long Covid, in which symptoms persist after the acute phase of the viral infection ends. In a recent study from Italy, for example, one-third of Covid long-haulers had symptoms of fibromyalgia or widespread muscle or bone pain. Other research links Covid-19 to neuropathic pain — often described as burning, stabbing, or feeling like electrical shocks — that

results from damage to the nervous system. Pain, which also includes headache, ranks among the top symptoms of long Covid in large longitudinal studies.

<https://www.statnews.com/2021/12/02/long-covid-pain-not-acknowledged/>

Some experts suggest Omicron variant may have evolved in an animal host

When Covid-19 variants arise, the accepted wisdom is that the constellation of mutations they contain developed in an immunocompromised person who contracted the virus and couldn't shake the infection. But some scientists have an alternative theory for where the latest variant of concern, Omicron, may have acquired the unusual mutations that stud its spike protein. They speculate the virus could have evolved in another animal species. The theory goes that some type of animal, potentially rodents, was infected with the SARS-CoV-2 virus sometime in mid-2020. In this new species, the virus evolved, accumulating roughly 50 mutations on the spike protein before spilling back over into people.

<https://www.statnews.com/2021/12/02/some-experts-suggest-omicron-variant-may-have-evolved-in-an-animal-host/>

Coronavirus Resurgence

COVID-19: WHO deploying surge team to South Africa as reinfections rise amid Omicron outbreak

The World Health Organisation (WHO) is set to deploy a surge team to South Africa to help deal with the new Omicron COVID variant outbreak. The team will be sent to Gauteng province to help with surveillance and contact tracing as experts warned the new variant could be causing an increase in COVID reinfections across the country. WHO regional emergency director for Africa, Salam Gueye, also said it was providing technical assistance to boost the production and distribution of medical oxygen in Botswana - another country where Omicron has been detected.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-who-deploying-surge-team-to-south-africa-as-reinfections-rise-amid-omicron-outbreak-12484423>

Covid-19 Victoria: Covid cases surge in Victoria as state records 1419 new infections and ten deaths

Victoria has recorded 1,149 new infections and ten deaths on Thursday. It marks the largest spike in daily cases since 1,471 cases on November 1. Health Minister confirmed there were no cases of new Omicron variant

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10264945/Covid-19-Victoria-Covid-cases-surge-Victoria-state-records-1419-new-infections-ten-deaths.html>

Sweden says could impose new COVID-19 measures next week

Sweden could impose new restrictions as early as next week to fight the coronavirus pandemic and a rising tide of infections, its public health agency said on Thursday. New measures could include general advice such as keeping a distance from other people and wearing a face mask on public transport, the agency said, but gave no precise details. It also said it might recommend employers to enable staff to "to some degree" work from home.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/swedish-health-agency-says-may-impose-new-covid-19-measures-next-week-2021-12-02/>

Lebanon reintroduces some COVID-19 prevention measures

Lebanon will impose a night-time curfew starting Dec. 17 on non-vaccinated people for three weeks and make full vaccination mandatory for all workers in several sectors due to concerns over the spread of coronavirus, the COVID-19 committee said on Wednesday. Vaccination will be mandatory for all civil servants and workers in the health, education, tourism and public transport sectors as of Jan. 10, the committee said. A new coronavirus variant found in South Africa and detected in several countries was determined as a variant of concern by the World Health Organization last week and

has led to strengthening COVID-19-related restrictions around the world.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/lebanon-reintroduces-some-covid-19-prevention-measures-2021-12-01/>

S.Korea hits new COVID-19 record, halts quarantine exemptions to block Omicron

South Korea's daily coronavirus case numbers rose to a new high on Thursday, as authorities halted quarantine exemptions for fully vaccinated inbound travellers for two weeks in a bid to fend off the Omicron variant. The Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency (KDCA) reported 5,266 cases for Wednesday, a day after the daily tally rose above 5,000 for the first time amid concerns over a sharp rise in patients with severe symptoms. South Korea will require a 10-day quarantine for all inbound travellers for two weeks starting Friday, halting exemptions given earlier to fully vaccinated people, the KDCA said.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/skorea-hits-new-covid-19-record-halts-quarantine-exemptions-block-omicron-2021-12-02/>

German ICUs expect COVID peak to hit hospitals at Christmas

Germany is likely to reach a peak of its fourth wave of COVID-19 infections by mid-December and this could mean 6,000 intensive care beds occupied by Christmas, the country's association for intensive care medicine (DIVI) said on Wednesday. Andreas Schuppert, a forecaster for the DIVI association, told a news conference he was "moderately optimistic" the peak in new cases would come in the next two weeks, but warned this would take time to have its full impact on hospitals.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/german-state-reports-four-fully-vaccinated-people-infected-with-omicron-2021-12-01/>

Omicron and delta spell return of unpopular restrictions

"The only thing we can do is to listen to the rules, follow them and hope it's not getting worse. For me it's no problem. I'm a nurse. I know how sick people get," said Wilma van Kampen. Hubert Bruls, who as mayor of the Dutch city of Nijmegen banned a protest last weekend, said he sympathized with the frustration but was prepared to carry out the national rules. "There was a lot of disappointment in the effects of vaccination. Everybody did their best, we had one of the highest rates of vaccinations, and it wasn't enough. Infections are higher than ever. I myself was a little disappointed, but we have to look ahead," he said.

<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-business-health-europe-israel-e5ccccf1b07b39d39a31f8b46857a1f9>

African Union health watchdog CDC appeals for calm over Omicron

The African Union's health watchdog has appealed for calm over Omicron, the new, heavily mutated coronavirus variant which has prompted many countries to impose new restrictions. The variant was first reported to the World Health Organization (WHO) by South Africa a week ago, and has quickly showed up across continents, deepening fears of another deadly wave of infections and signalling that the nearly two-year battle against the pandemic is not over. But John Nkengasong, head of the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC), on Thursday urged moderation. "We are very concerned but are not worried that the situation cannot be managed," he told a press briefing. "There is no need to panic. We are not defenceless."

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/12/2/no-need-to-panic-africa-cdc-appeals-for-calm-over-omicron>

As Omicron is detected in a deprived London borough, fears rise

On an overcast day in Newham, a London borough, it looks like business as usual on Green Street as customers buy groceries, jewellery and new South Asian outfits. But a sense of stoicism is sometimes interrupted by fear as people worry about what another coronavirus wave could mean. By January this year, COVID-19 mortality rates were about three times higher in Newham - 441 deaths per 100,000 people - the worst-hit London borough, compared with 150 deaths in Camden, the least affected area of the capital. Everyone's face here is now covered in line with recent

government guidance that made mask-wearing in shops and public transport mandatory once again, as COVID resurges.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/12/2/as-omicron-is-detected-in-a-deprived-london-borough-fears-rise>

Delta surge remains strong as world sizes up Omicron threat

As the world responds to newly emerged Omicron variant, the battle against Delta (B.1.1.7)-driven surges continues, with activity showing signs of a plateau last week, the World Health Organization (WHO) said yesterday in its weekly snapshot of the pandemic. With the Omicron variant adding a new wrinkle to a pandemic about to enter its third year, the World Health Assembly (WHA)—meeting in a special session for only the second time in its 73-year-old history—today agreed to begin drafting and negotiating an international agreement to boost pandemic preparedness and response.

<https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2021/12/delta-surge-remains-strong-world-sizes-omicron-threat>

Second U.S. case of Omicron variant indicates domestic transmission

Health officials on Thursday reported the country's second Covid-19 infection from the Omicron variant in a Minnesota resident who notably did not travel internationally recently, unlike the first case. The case in Minnesota is an adult male who had been vaccinated and, in early November, received a booster shot. He lives in Hennepin County, which includes Minneapolis, state health officials said. He developed mild symptoms on Nov. 22, was tested on Nov. 24, and no longer has symptoms. The man had been in New York City in the days leading up to feeling sick and attended the Anime NYC 2021 convention at the Javits Center from Nov. 19 to Nov. 21. Minnesota health officials are collaborating with New York City authorities and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on their case investigation.

<https://www.statnews.com/2021/12/02/second-us-case-omicron-variant-indicates-domestic-transmission/>

First known U.S. Omicron case found in fully vaccinated overseas traveler

The United States on Wednesday identified its first known COVID case caused by the Omicron variant, discovered in a fully vaccinated patient who traveled to South Africa, as scientists continue to study the risks the new version could pose. Public health officials said the infected person, who had mild and improving symptoms, returned to the United States from South Africa on Nov. 22 and tested positive seven days later.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/us-reports-first-case-omicron-variant-2021-12-01/>