

# COVID-19 Lockdown Exit Analysis

## 6th Dec 2021

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### Lockdown Exit

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#### **Omicron's Spread Exposes South Africa's Vaccination Struggles, Public Distrust**

South Africa's sputtering Covid-19 vaccine rollout, hampered first by dose shortages and more recently public distrust, has left many of its 60 million people potentially exposed as the new Omicron variant spreads across the country. In recent days, more people have turned out to get their shots amid warnings from scientists and the World Health Organization about Omicron, which has driven a sharp increase in Covid-19 infections in the country's most populous province of Gauteng, home to Johannesburg, over the past two weeks.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/omicrons-spread-exposes-south-africas-vaccination-struggles-public-distrust-11638712983>

#### **Clues to Omicron Variant's U.S. Spread Include Test Samples, Sewage**

Covid-19 test samples and wastewater are helping researchers across the U.S. figure out how widespread the Omicron variant might be. Surveillance is more robust in the U.S. than when the Alpha or Delta variants of the Covid-19 virus emerged, public-health officials and experts say. A fault in some commonly used Covid-19 tests also helps scientists flag potential Omicron cases. But gaps remain, particularly from one part of the country to another. Nearly 30% of known Covid-19 cases were sequenced and shared online in Vermont during the past three months, according to an international database of genetic sequences called GISAID, compared with some 1% in Oklahoma. "We've greatly increased the number that we have been sequencing, but they're not equally distributed," said Julie Swann, department head of Industrial and Systems Engineering at North Carolina S

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/clues-to-omicron-variants-u-s-spread-include-test-samples-sewage-11638700202>

#### **COVID-19 curbs China's power in Indo-Pacific, risks of war 'significant' - report**

The coronavirus pandemic has weakened China's power in the Indo-Pacific, and the region's deepening security uncertainties present a "significant" risk of war, the Lowy Institute said in a report on Sunday. U.S. allies in the region and key balancing powers such as India have never been more dependent on American capacity and willingness to sustain a military and strategic counterweight in response to China's rise, said the Sydney-based foreign policy think tank.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/covid-19-curbs-chinas-power-indo-pacific-risks-war-significant-report-2021-12-05/>

#### **We Have to Live With Covid. Here's How We Get Our Lives Back**

Two years into the pandemic, the emergence of yet another Covid-19 variant has brought home the fact that the virus is here to stay. That means the world will need to find long-term strategies to co-exist with delta, omicron and the strains to come. As governments reopen at varying paces, there are things individuals and companies can do to navigate a careful return to some kind of normalcy. Simple but permanent changes in how people live and work can limit the risks. "So far, the governments have been responsible for people's behavior but I don't think they will intervene so much anymore, and it's becoming individual choice," said Benjamin Cowling, a professor of epidemiology at the University of Hong Kong.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-12-03/we-have-to-live-with-covid-here-s-how-we-get-our-lives-back>

#### **Covid Vaccine Inequity Could Get Worse With Omicron Emergence**

"Inequity derives from scarcity, and when there's scarcity those with resources will use their resources to meet their own needs first," said Richard Hatchett, head of the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations. "So the question would be -- if this proves to be a really dangerous variant -- will countries rush to secure supplies?" CEPI is discussing the potential deployment of modified vaccines with other partners in Covax, the global vaccine distribution program, he said. Covax is in a more advantageous position than it was early in the crisis when it was still being formed, and any shortage of shots shouldn't last as long this time, but the concern "is real," he said. "If the data suggests we really do need to be introducing an omicron vaccine, we're going to be wanting to move as quickly as we can to secure doses to reduce the inequity that could otherwise potentially emerge," he said.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-12-02/omicron-threatens-to-prolong-pain-in-bid-to-vaccinate-the-world>

### **Omicron Leaves Britons Stranded Due to Lack of Quarantine Space**

The U.K.'s sudden decision to quarantine Britons returning from southern Africa due to the omicron Covid variant has left travelers stranded because rooms are unavailable in the government booking system. South Africa and nine other nations were placed on the U.K.'s so-called pandemic red list last week, meaning Britons already in those countries must quarantine in designated hotels for 10 days on their return to the U.K. -- at a cost of 2,285 pounds (\$3,030) per person or 3,715 per couple. But travelers are struggling to book rooms due to high demand, leading many to fear they won't be able to get home in time for Christmas. Boris Johnson's government is facing accusations it wasn't prepared for the policy change.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-12-03/omicron-leaves-britons-stranded-due-to-lack-of-quarantine-space>

### **Special Report: U.S. rushed contracts to COVID-19 suppliers with troubled plants**

In all, less than 20% of the companies awarded fast-track contracts examined by Reuters were experienced manufacturers with a clean FDA record for their U.S. plants in the two years prior. Four of every five either had no U.S. manufacturing experience, poor domestic inspection results or serious recalls before their COVID contract awards, Reuters found. "These are red flags," said Peter Lurie, a former FDA associate commissioner who is now president of the Center for Science in the Public Interest. "The government ought to be able to find companies in this country that aren't tainted by previous poor performance."

<https://www.reuters.com/world/the-great-reboot/us-rushed-contracts-covid-19-suppliers-with-troubled-plants-2021-12-02/>

### **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.

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

### **South Korea tightens social distancing to fight virus wave**

Starting next week, private social gatherings of seven or more people will be banned in the densely populated capital Seoul and nearby metropolitan areas, which have been hit hardest by a delta-driven spread that threatens to overwhelm hospital capacities. Gatherings will be limited to eight people in areas outside the capital region, officials said Friday. Adults will also be required to verify their vaccination status through apps to use restaurants, movie theaters, museums, libraries and other indoor venues. Most of these venues will admit only fully vaccinated adults, while restaurants

and coffee shops will be allowed to accept one adult in each group who isn't fully vaccinated or vaccinated at all.

<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-business-health-seoul-south-korea-44388b0d27d9b5be1bf9d1d997eab6bf>

### **WHO says vaccine makers right to adjust COVID jabs**

The World Health Organisation said Omicron has been detected in 38 countries but there are no reported deaths so far from the new COVID-19 variant. WHO spokesperson Christian Lindmeier also said it is "commendable" that makers of COVID-19 vaccines are planning for the "likelihood" of needing to adjust their products to protect against the Omicron variant. WHO chief scientist Soumya Swaminathan urged people not to panic over the emergence of the Omicron coronavirus variant and said it was too early to say if COVID-19 vaccines would have to be modified to fight it. Swaminathan said during an interview at the Reuters Next conference on Friday that the right response was to be prepared and cautious and not to panic in face of the new variant.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/12/3/new-york-becomes-fourth-us-state-to-confirm-omicron-live>

### **Germany imposes curbs on unvaccinated, considers jab mandate**

German Chancellor Angela Merkel has said unvaccinated people will be excluded from non-essential shops, and cultural and recreational venues in Germany, and parliament will consider imposing a general vaccine mandate. Speaking on Thursday after a meeting with federal and state leaders, Merkel said the measures were necessary in light of concerns that hospitals in Germany could become overloaded amid a surge in COVID-19 infections, which are more likely to be serious in those who have not been vaccinated. "The situation in our country is serious," Merkel told reporters in Berlin, calling the measures an "act of national solidarity". She said officials agreed to require masks in schools, impose new limits on private meetings and aim for 30 million vaccinations by the end of the year. The plans include a blanket ban on entering venues, including bars, restaurants and cinemas for anyone who has not been vaccinated or recovered from COVID, according to a document signed off by the leaders.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/12/2/germany-unvaccinated-curbs-covid-vaccine-mandate>

## **Exit Strategies**

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### **Omicron Sounds Death Knell for Globalization 2.0**

On top of an intensifying cold war between the U.S. and China and other seismic changes, the rapid spread of Covid-19's newest variant could finish off our most recent phase of global integration.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2021-12-05/omicron-sounds-death-knell-for-globalization-2-0>

### **Omicron Is Unavoidable But It's Not Time to Give In to Covid Panic**

The fear is threefold: that omicron is more contagious, able to evade our pre-existing Covid antibodies and causes more serious disease. We won't know anything for certain for a few weeks. Luckily, Faye Flam makes some reassuring points. For example, though it's possible that the virus has made all three of those evolutionary advances, it's unlikely. Evolutionary pressure favors variants that spread faster, which is why delta took over in the U.S. earlier this year. There's no evolutionary pressure to make the virus more deadly.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2021-12-05/omicron-is-unavoidable-but-it-s-not-time-to-give-in-to-covid-panic>

### **Covid Vaccines in Italy: New Rules Target Anti-Vax Supporters, Protests**

Italy, which has one of Europe's highest vaccination rates, is further cracking down on the small minority that has so far refused the shot. As of Monday, a green pass -- which is proof of vaccination, recovery or a recent negative test -- will be required for buses, metro, local trains and hotels. It's already compulsory for working, long-distance travel and most indoor venues. A new "reinforced"

green pass, which can be obtained only with the vaccine or after recovering from Covid, will be required for many leisure activities, including eating inside restaurants, and going to theaters, cinemas, sporting and other public events.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-12-05/italy-reinforces-strict-covid-rules-targeting-vaccine-holdouts>

### **German COVID-19 rules put off shoppers, says retailer group**

The tighter restrictions Germany has introduced to try to limit the spread of COVID-19 are putting people off from shopping in the usually busy run-up to Christmas, the country's association of retailers (HDE) said on Sunday. The HDE said sales in bricks-and-mortar non-food retail were down an average of 26% in the last week compared to the pre-crisis year of 2019, according to a survey of some 1,600 firms. Clothing retailers were particularly hard hit, with sales down 35% on the pre-crisis level.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/retail-consumer/german-covid-19-rules-put-off-shoppers-says-retailer-group-2021-12-05/>

### **Nigeria plans COVID booster shots after Omicron cases: Live**

Zambia has detected its first cases of the Omicron coronavirus variant, as the "highly transmissible" new variant spread to more than 40 countries since it was first detected in South Africa last week. The country's health ministry said on Saturday that three people tested positive for COVID-19 in the past week. It added that two of the three infected had travelled abroad recently. A woman who had not travelled abroad had mild symptoms, it said.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/12/4/factbox-latest-on-the-worldwide-spread-of-the-coronavirus>

### **Germany: incoming minister advises against Christmas travel**

Germany's incoming transport minister is advising people against traveling over Christmas as the country tries to stem a wave of coronavirus infections. Federal and state leaders on Thursday announced tough new restrictions that largely target unvaccinated people, preventing them from entering nonessential stores, restaurants, sports and cultural venues. In a longer-term move, parliament will consider a general vaccine mandate. Volker Wissing, whose pro-business party has designated him as transport minister in the incoming government, told Sunday's edition of the Bild am Sonntag newspaper that "in the current situation, it seems more sensible to spend Christmas in a small group at home and not to plan big trips across the country." "Winter 2021 will be more dramatic than winter 2020," he added.

<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-business-lifestyle-health-travel-d5cb2d658afec5aeb84c3a028cba0c44>

### **Australia to Start Vaccinations for Young Children Early 2022**

Australia will begin vaccinating young children starting early next year once authorities receive final approvals in the coming weeks. Australia's pharmaceutical regulator, the Therapeutic Goods Administration, has provisionally approved a one-third dose of Pfizer's vaccine for children aged 5-11 years, Health Minister Greg Hunt said in a statement Sunday. Subject to final approvals, the authorities will begin vaccinations starting Jan. 10, he said. Final recommendations from the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation are expected in the coming weeks, and the program will be timed to provide at least one dose to the kids ahead of the new school year in 2022, Hunt said.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-12-04/australia-to-start-vaccinating-young-children-from-early-2022>

### **Brazil's Rio cancels New Year celebration as pandemic continues**

The mayor of Rio de Janeiro canceled New Year's Eve celebrations after Brazil confirmed the first known cases of the Omicron coronavirus variant in Latin America's biggest country. Eduardo Paes tweeted on Saturday that he would follow the recommendations of Rio de Janeiro state to cancel the celebrations, despite the city's own view to the contrary. "We respect science," Paes tweeted, saying

there are dissenting opinions between scientific committees in the city and the state, but he would rather stick with the most restrictive one. "The city's committee says it can go ahead and the state's says no. So it can't take place. Let's cancel the official New Year's Eve celebration in Rio," the tweet said.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/brazils-rio-cancels-new-year-celebration-pandemic-continues-2021-12-04/>

### **U.K. to Require Pre-Arrival Covid Tests for All Travellers**

The U.K. will require all travelers to take a pre-flight Covid-19 test within 48 hours prior to their flight regardless of their vaccine status, a surprise government move that prompted a swift and angry reaction from the airline industry. The measure, which takes effect on Dec. 7, will be temporary and be reviewed as the omicron outbreak develops, Health Secretary Sajid Javid said. More than 150 people across the U.K. have been identified with the new variant.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-12-04/u-k-to-require-pre-arrival-covid-tests-for-all-travelers>

### **Singapore Extends Travel Curbs to More Places With Omicron Spike**

Singapore will require additional testing for travelers and extend travel curbs to more African countries, as it rolls out more measures to allow it time to figure out how to deal with the omicron coronavirus variant. All travelers on its so-called vaccinated travel lanes will have to be put on a daily testing regime over seven days using self-administered rapid testing, the Ministry of Health said in a statement on Friday. This measure, coming into effect from Dec. 7, is on top of on-arrival polymerase chain reaction for air travelers, as well as supervised rapid testing at test centers on days three and seven after arrival.

[https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-12-03/singapore-extends-travel-curbs-to-more-places-with-omicron-spike?utm\\_source=google&utm\\_medium=bd&cmpld=google](https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-12-03/singapore-extends-travel-curbs-to-more-places-with-omicron-spike?utm_source=google&utm_medium=bd&cmpld=google)

### **Belgium Extends School Holiday in Attempt to Break Virus Wave**

Belgium ordered primary schools to extend the Christmas holiday in its third attempt to break a Covid-19 wave that's among the worst in Europe after experts singled out unvaccinated children as a catalyst of infections in broader society. Virtual schooling will be required at least half of the time for children 12 years and older starting Monday, Prime Minister Alexander De Croo said at a briefing in Brussels. Other new measures include a ban on indoor events with more than 200 participants, and a mandate to wear masks from the age of six.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-12-03/belgium-extends-school-holiday-in-attempt-to-break-virus-wave>

### **U.S. ships 9 mln COVID-19 vaccine doses to Africa, 2 mln worldwide**

The United States on Friday sent 9 million doses of COVID-19 vaccine doses to countries in Africa and another 2 million doses to other nations, the White House said. "Today, we are shipping 9 million vaccine doses to Africa and another 2 million worldwide. We need every country to step up with the same urgency and ambition as the US," White House spokesman Kevin Munoz said in a post on Twitter.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us-ships-9-mln-covid-19-vaccine-doses-africa-2-mln-worldwide-2021-12-03/>

### **Omicron may throw wrench in companies' plans to return to office**

Company executives are beginning to consider different permanent work models for their employees as the coronavirus pandemic, and the spread of the Omicron variant, destabilize their latest return-to-office plans. With Omicron so new, companies are struggling to understand how the variant might affect their operations and profits. Most have taken a wait-and-see stance as they weigh how fast the variant may spread and its potential harmfulness, although Alphabet Inc's Google was indefinitely delaying its return-to-office plan around the world

<https://www.reuters.com/business/autos-transportation/omicron-may-throw-wrench-companies-plans-return-office-2021-12-03/>

### **BioNTech CEO says likelihood of annual COVID-19 vaccines increasing**

The likelihood that people will need to have an annual COVID-19 vaccine, similar to the influenza shot, is increasing, German company BioNTech, chief executive and co-founder Ugur Sahin told the Reuters Next conference on Friday.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/biontech-ceo-says-likelihood-annual-covid-19-vaccines-increasing-2021-12-03/>

### **Variants, boosters turn rich-poor vaccine gap into chasm**

The global initiative to share coronavirus vaccines fairly already scaled back its pledge to the world's poor once. Now, to meet even that limited promise, COVAX would have to deliver more than a million doses every hour until the end of the year in some of the world's most challenging places.

<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-health-business-coronavirus-vaccine-pandemics-5053ab9a4c6288e1b70ccd67aa34c504>

### **Auckland reopens as New Zealand tries new virus approach**

Bars, restaurants and gyms reopened in Auckland on Friday as the last major parts of a lockdown that lasted more than 100 days ended. New Zealand has begun a new phase in its coronavirus response in which there won't be lockdowns but people will be required to be fully vaccinated — and prove it with vaccine passes — in order to access many services. The government decided that vaccination rates were high enough to switch to the new system, with about 87% of people aged 12 and over fully vaccinated. In Auckland, which has been at the center of the nation's outbreak, the rate is over 90%.

<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-health-business-travel-lifestyle-6cd763cfbf2a917ed1830a218a89386b>

### **Biden unveils new plan to combat Omicron**

US President Joe Biden has unveiled new measures to combat COVID-19, saying the emergence of the Omicron variant increases the urgency for booster vaccines. Biden's plan includes tighter restrictions for international travellers, and expanding access to at-home testing. Meanwhile, German Chancellor Angela Merkel said on Thursday that people who are not vaccinated will be excluded from non-essential shops, cultural and recreational venues, and parliament will consider a general vaccine mandate that would come into force from February.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/12/2/wrapup-1-first-omicron-case-in-u-s-adds-to-global-alarm-over-virus-variant>

## **Partisan Exits**

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### **How a Vaccine Side-Effect Database Sowed Doubt in Vaccinations**

Midway into the pandemic, University of Alabama epidemiologist Bertha Hidalgo realized her Covid communication strategy needed a makeover. She was skipping basic biology lessons in favor of simply telling people the best ways to moderate their behavior in response to the virus. Instead of helping people better understand the virus, her approach sometimes backfired, introducing more doubt instead of less. "My method was, 'These are the facts and this is what you need to do,'" she said. What she quickly learned was that people didn't have enough base knowledge to accept what she was presenting as fact.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-12-05/how-a-vaccine-side-effect-database-sowed-doubt-in-vaccinations>

### **Hundreds march against COVID-19 restrictions in Belgium**

Belgian police used water cannon and tear gas Sunday to disperse some rowdy protesters in Brussels after most demonstrators marched peacefully to protest tightened COVID-19 restrictions that aim to counter a surge of coronavirus infections. Thousands came to reject the new measures

announced Friday, the third week in a row that the government has tightened its rules as an avalanche of new cases strains the country's health services, depriving people with other life-threatening diseases of treatment.

<https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/hundreds-march-against-covid-19-restrictions-in-belgium/ar-AARuaQk>

### **Australia's Covid Update: Parliament to Close After Staffer Infected**

Australia's Parliament House will be closed to the public for the foreseeable future after a political staffer for Greens leader Adam Bandt tested positive for the coronavirus. The staffer is fully vaccinated and tested positive upon return to Melbourne after attending parliament last week, a spokesperson for Bandt said in a statement. Bandt, who is vaccinated, and other employees who were in Canberra last week tested negative for the virus, according to the statement. Given the positive result, officials "have decided that Parliament House should close to the public until further notice," the Department of Parliamentary Services said in a separate statement. Authorities said they are investigating possible close contacts, exposure locations in parliament as well as in the broader community.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-12-05/australia-s-parliament-closed-after-political-staffer-gets-covid>

### **More than 40000 march in Vienna against coronavirus lockdown**

More than 40,000 people marched through Vienna on Saturday to protest against a lockdown and plans to make vaccinations compulsory to curb the coronavirus pandemic. Faced with a surge in infections, the government last month made Austria the first country in Western Europe to reimpose a lockdown and said it would make vaccinations mandatory from February. People carried signs saying: "I will decide for myself", "Make Austria Great Again", and "New Elections" - a nod to the political turmoil that has seen three chancellors within two months - as crowds gathered.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/thousands-march-vienna-against-coronavirus-lockdown-2021-12-04/>

### **Germany's Scholz Sets 30 Million-Shot Goal to Start His Term**

Sitting alone in a blacked-out studio, a somber soundtrack lending gravitas to his five-minute monologue, Olaf Scholz implored the people of Germany to get real and get vaccinated. A full year after the first Covid-19 shots were administered and the world hoped to turn the corner on the pandemic, Germany finds itself overwhelmed by a fourth wave of infections more destructive than previous outbreaks. Politicians and scientists point to the relatively low level of full protection, which stands at 69% in Germany. That means almost 17 million people age 12 and older aren't properly vaccinated, including more than 4 million age 60 and up, the most vulnerable group.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-12-02/all-olaf-scholz-wants-for-christmas-is-30-million-covid-shots>

### **Brazilian Supreme Court orders probe into Bolsonaro for linking COVID-19 vaccines to AIDS**

A Brazilian Supreme Court justice ordered on Friday that a probe be opened into President Jair Bolsonaro for having said during a live broadcast on multiple social media platforms in October that COVID-19 vaccines may raise the chance of contracting AIDS. Bolsonaro, who has declined to take the vaccine, was temporarily suspended from both Facebook and YouTube after his comments. The decision by Justice Alexandre de Moraes came in response to a request from a Senate investigative committee, known in Portuguese as a CPI, which found in October that Bolsonaro committed nine crimes related to his widely criticized handling of the coronavirus pandemic, including crimes against humanity.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/brazilian-supreme-court-orders-probe-into-bolsonaro-linking-covid-19-vaccines-2021-12-03/>

### **Gilead Recalls 55,000 Vials of Covid Drug Due to Glass Shards**

Gilead Sciences Inc. said it was recalling two lots of its Covid-19 drug remdesivir in the U.S. after receiving a complaint about glass particles in the vials that was confirmed by a company

investigation.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-12-04/gilead-recalls-55-000-vials-of-covid-drug-due-to-glass-shards>

### **Biden and Local Officials Avoid Lockdowns, New Mask Mandates in Omicron Fight**

President Biden and many state and local leaders are urging Americans to wear masks and take other precautions in response to the Omicron variant but are largely avoiding endorsing broad mask mandates and lockdowns that marked earlier stages of the pandemic. The steps reflect a view that the pandemic is in a different phase, with vaccines and boosters available, as well as a recognition that many Americans won't accept a return to the toughest restrictions. "The fatigue is high, as well as the mental-health impact," said John Anzalone, a Democratic pollster who advised Mr. Biden's presidential campaign. "People are in a mentality of how to live with Covid." Some workers, business owners and congressional Republicans have pushed back against Mr. Biden's efforts to require more people to get vaccinated, and the continuing impact of Covid-19 on supply chains and inflation has presented lingering challenges for the president.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/biden-omicron-covid-masks-vaccine-mandates-11638574233>

### **Faith in Singapore Leaders Hit by Record Covid Wave, Poll Shows**

Singaporeans' trust in their government's ability to manage Covid-19 fell as community cases soared when the worst wave hit early last month, according to the Institute of Policy Studies. The survey showed the proportion of people who believed the authorities had shown good political leadership fell to a low of 53% during Oct. 28 to Nov. 1, compared to around 70% in the July to early September period, results released Thursday showed. It has since improved to almost 60%. Older respondents were more likely to be disgruntled, amid constant reminders to vaccinate and avoid social gatherings, according to the survey. "As Singapore carefully plans its next moves and learns to live with the virus, it must also balance the diverse needs of different groups with the overall needs of society," the survey said. The IPS polled about 500 people during specific periods of the country's pandemic journey, such as when stricter measures were introduced to counter the virus spread.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-12-02/faith-in-singapore-leaders-hit-by-record-covid-wave-poll-shows>

### **Opinion | Vaccine Hesitancy Is About Trust and Class**

First, people are unlikely to trust institutions that do little for them. And second, public health is no longer viewed as a collective endeavor, based on the principle of social solidarity and mutual obligation. People are conditioned to believe they're on their own and responsible only for themselves. That means an important source of vaccine hesitancy is the erosion of the idea of a common good.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/12/03/opinion/vaccine-campaigns-are-built-on-trust-in-some-places-it-is-in-short-supply.html>

## **Scientific Viewpoint**

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### **Covid Therapy News and Research: Bii Says 80% Cut of Hospitalization**

Bii Biosciences Ltd. said additional results of a late-stage study of a Covid-19 therapy confirmed a significantly reduced risk of death and hospitalization. The topline data readout from the National Institutes of Health-sponsored trial showed combined hospitalization and death risk cut by 80% for "non-hospitalized Covid-19 patients at high risk of clinical progression," the Chinese company said in a Hong Kong stock exchange filing Sunday. That's was in line with a 78% reduction disclosed in August, based on an interim analysis. In-vitro testing data suggest the therapy is able to treat those with Covid-19 variants including delta, Bii said, while efforts are ongoing to determine effects against the emerging omicron variant.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-12-05/bii-says-covid-therapy-shows-80-cut-to-hospitalization-death>

### **Lilly's Covid-19 Antibody Treatment Authorized for Use in Children**

Eli Lilly & Co.'s monoclonal antibody drug has been cleared for emergency use in children under the age of 12, the Food and Drug Administration said on Friday. The authorization is the first for an antibody drug to treat young children, including newborns, who have tested positive for Covid-19 or been exposed to the virus and who are at high risk of developing severe cases including hospitalization or death. "Now all patients at high risk of severe Covid-19, including children and newborn babies, have an option for treatment and post-exposure prevention," said Patrizia Cavazzoni, director of the FDA's Center for Drug Evaluation and Research. Children under one year of age who are exposed to the virus that causes Covid-19 may be at particularly high risk of severe disease, said Dr. Cavazzoni. She emphasized, however, that antibody drug treatment isn't a substitute for vaccination, which is authorized for children five years of age and up.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/lillys-covid-19-antibody-treatment-authorized-for-use-in-children-11638568015>

### **Omicron Mutations Signal Vaccine Evasion, But Similar Symptoms**

As fears of another global surge of Covid-19 cases send jitters through global markets, spur a new round of travel bans and cause Americans to rethink their holiday plans, scientists studying the omicron variant are getting the first hints of what's in store for the months to come. The new variant's mutations suggest that it is likely to evade the protections of vaccines to at least some extent, but that it is unlikely to cause more severe illness than previous versions of the coronavirus. These early hypotheses appear in line with real-world observations from places like South Africa, where infections have included the vaccinated and previously ill but appear so far largely mild.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-12-04/omicron-mutations-signal-vaccine-evasion-but-similar-symptoms?srnd=markets-vp>

### **Omicron variant may have picked up a piece of common-cold virus**

The Omicron variant of the virus that causes COVID-19 likely acquired at least one of its mutations by picking up a snippet of genetic material from another virus - possibly one that causes the common cold - present in the same infected cells, according to researchers. This genetic sequence does not appear in any earlier versions of the coronavirus, called SARS-CoV-2, but is ubiquitous in many other viruses including those that cause the common cold, and also in the human genome, researchers said.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/omicron-variant-may-have-picked-up-piece-common-cold-virus-2021-12-03/>

### **Omicron Cases at Norway Christmas Party Provide Clues on New Variant's Spread**

An Omicron outbreak at a Norwegian Christmas party is providing an early, if still anecdotal, data point on the ease through which the new variant spreads between vaccinated people, and how mild its symptoms at times can be. Before Scatec AS A, a Norway-based renewable-energy company, hosted the annual holiday party, it took all the major safety precautions, said Stian Tvede Karlsen, a company spokesman. Only vaccinated employees were invited. All had to take a rapid test the day before. The party, at Louise, an upscale Oslo restaurant serving seafood and Scandinavian fare, included about 120 people, several of whom had just returned from South Africa, where the company has a solar-panel project. More than half of those present have since tested positive for Covid-19, with at least 13 confirmed to have the new variant in what appears to be the world's biggest Omicron outbreak outside southern Africa—and a glimpse into how it fares in a highly-vaccinated population.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/omicron-cases-at-norway-christmas-party-provide-clues-on-new-variants-spread-11638554033>

### **Most Covid Vaccines Will Work as Boosters, Study Suggests**

People looking for a booster shot of a Covid-19 vaccine probably don't need to fret about what brand

it is: Many combinations of shots are likely to provide strong protection, according to a large new study. In a comparison of seven different vaccine brands, British researchers found that most of them prompted a strong immune response, with the mRNA shots from Moderna and Pfizer-BioNTech eliciting the largest responses. The study was published on Thursday in *The Lancet*. These are welcome data for policymakers," said Merryn Voysey, a statistician at the University of Oxford who was not involved in the study. "The most significant take-home message here is that there are a large number of excellent boosting options for third doses."

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/12/02/health/covid-booster-shots-mix-and-match.html>

### **Key Omicron Findings May Be Known in Days, WHO Scientist Says**

Urgent studies to understand how effective Covid vaccines are against omicron have begun in a global collaboration that may yield answers in a few days, a World Health Organization scientist said. Some 450 researchers around the world have begun work to isolate the highly mutated variant from patient specimens, grow it in the lab, verify its genomic sequence, and establish methods to test it in blood-plasma samples, said Ana-Maria Henao-Restrepo, who co-leads the WHO's research and development blueprint for vaccines and innovations during outbreaks and pandemics.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-12-03/key-omicron-findings-may-be-known-in-days-who-scientist-says>

### **How Scientists Race Against Omicron and Future Variants**

What happens when two nasty Covid-19 variants get together and share their most effective mutations? Omicron and delta have brought us closer to the answer, says Peter White, a virologist at the University of New South Wales who warns of the inevitability of a new Covid-19 "super strain." He joined Stephanie Topp, a global public health expert at James Cook University in Townsville, Australia, and Bloomberg Opinion columnist David Fickling for a Twitter Spaces discussion on the implications of the newest coronavirus variant shaking up the world. Leading the conversation, which has been lightly edited for length and clarity, is Bloomberg Opinion columnist Anjani Trivedi.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2021-12-03/omicron-and-delta-pave-the-way-for-a-new-super-variant>

### **WHO's top scientist says Omicron could displace Delta**

The World Health Organization's chief scientist told the Reuters Next conference on Friday the Omicron variant could become dominant because it is highly transmissible, but that a different vaccine may not be needed. Soumya Swaminathan also said it was too early to say whether Omicron is milder than other variants of the coronavirus that causes COVID-19 and cast doubt over its origin, saying it was far from certain it emerged in southern Africa. "It is possible that it could become (the) dominant variant," Swaminathan said, adding that it was however impossible to predict. The Delta variant now accounts for 99% of infections globally, she said.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/who-chief-scientist-says-omicron-quite-infectious-must-not-panic-2021-12-03/>

### **BioNTech CEO says vaccine upgrade on the cards, ready to move quickly**

BioNTech should be able to adapt its coronavirus vaccine relatively quickly in response to the Omicron variant, and the next few weeks will show how urgently an upgrade is needed, its CEO Ugur Sahin told the Reuters Next conference on Friday. Sahin said people should continue to seek the established shot, developed with Pfizer as it very likely continues to protect against severe disease. "I believe in principle at a certain timepoint we will need a new vaccine against this new variant. The question is how urgent it needs to be available," Sahin said.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/biontech-ceo-says-can-adapt-vaccine-quickly-omicron-2021-12-03/>

### **Slovakia's COVID-19 case record inflated by system glitch**

Slovakia reported 15,278 new COVID-19 cases on Friday, the highest number in a single day since the pandemic broke out, but the Health Ministry said a technical issue inflated the number. "The reason for today's high number of positive test results is additional data, which did not pass from laboratories to the information system on Nov. 30," the ministry said. The ministry did not specify the actual number of cases detected on Thursday. The country of 5.5 million has 3,404 people hospitalised with the illness, including 630 in intensive care.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/slovakias-covid-19-case-record-inflated-by-system-glitch-2021-12-03/>

### **Valneva says no conclusions to be drawn on its COVID shot from UK booster study**

French biotech firm Valneva said on Friday no conclusions should be drawn on the effectiveness of its COVID-19 vaccine by a British study, which found it was the only shot out of seven that offered no immunity boost when given to people previously immunized with Pfizer's vaccine. Shares in Valneva fell by up to 24% on Friday following the publication of results of Britain's COV-Boost study, which looked at the effectiveness of alternative vaccines as boosters for people who previously received Pfizer or AstraZeneca shots.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/valneva-says-no-conclusions-be-drawn-its-covid-shot-uk-booster-study-2021-12-03/>

### **WHO chief scientist urges people not to panic over Omicron**

The International Monetary Fund is likely to lower its global economic growth estimates due to the new Omicron variant of the coronavirus, the global lender's chief said at the Reuters Next conference on Friday in another sign of the turmoil unleashed by the ever-changing pandemic. Omicron has spread rapidly to at least 40 countries since it was first reported in South Africa last week, officials say, and many governments have tightened travel rules to try to keep it out

<https://www.reuters.com/world/omicron-marches-biden-prepares-us-grim-winter-2021-12-03/>

### **Omicron likely less severe due to vaccine, prior infection: India**

India's health ministry says the severity of COVID-19 disease from the Omicron variant in the country could be low due to vaccination and widespread exposure to the Delta variant that infected nearly 70 percent of the population by July. "Given the fast pace of vaccination in India and high exposure to Delta variant as evidenced by high seropositivity, the severity of the disease is anticipated to be low," it said in a statement on Friday.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/12/3/omicron-less-severe-vaccination-india-covid>

### **Germany: 1 in 100 infected with virus, health minister says**

Germany's health minister said Friday that more than 1% of the population is currently infected with the coronavirus, and he called on citizens to get vaccinated if they haven't done so yet. The country confirmed 74,352 new daily COVID-19 cases and 390 additional deaths, figures published by the federal disease control agency showed. According to the Robert Koch Institute's calculations, some 925,800 people in Germany are considered actively infected with the virus.

<https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/germany-1-in-100-infected-with-virus-health-minister-says/ar-AARq9xU>

### **'The fire that's here': US is still battling delta variant**

While all eyes are on the new and little-understood omicron variant that is popping up around the country, the delta form of the coronavirus isn't finished wreaking havoc in the U.S., swamping hospitals with record numbers of patients in the Midwest and New England. "Omicron is a spark that's on the horizon. Delta variant is the fire that's here today," said Dr. Nirav Shah, director of the state Center for Disease Control and Prevention in Maine, where an unprecedented 334 people were in the hospital with COVID-19 as of midweek. The U.S. recorded its first confirmed omicron infection on Wednesday, in a Californian who had been to South Africa, where the variant was first identified a week ago. Several more cases were reported Thursday — five in the New York City area and one each in Minnesota, Hawaii and Colorado — under circumstances suggesting the variant has begun

spreading within the U.S.

<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-omicron-delta-35397a5d0e07e0306687cc5f41d92155>

### **WHO says measures used against delta should work for omicron**

Measures used to counter the delta variant should remain the foundation for fighting the coronavirus pandemic, even in the face of the new omicron version of the virus, World Health Organization officials said Friday, while acknowledging that the travel restrictions imposed by some countries may buy time. While about three dozen countries worldwide have reported omicron infections, including India on Thursday, the numbers so far are small outside of South Africa, which is facing a rapid rise in COVID-19 cases and where the new variant may be becoming dominant. Still, much remains unclear about omicron, including whether it is more contagious, as some health authorities suspect, whether it makes people more seriously ill, or whether it can evade vaccine protection.

<https://apnews.com/77142314f66839f0aa15d47c8d0850a8>

### **BioNTech CEO says likelihood of annual COVID-19 vaccines increasing**

The likelihood that people will need to have an annual COVID-19 vaccine, similar to the influenza shot, is increasing, German company BioNTech, chief executive and co-founder Ugur Sahin told the Reuters Next conference on Friday.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/biontech-ceo-says-likelihood-annual-covid-19-vaccines-increasing-2021-12-03/>

## **Coronavirus Resurgence**

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### **Two hippos in Belgian zoo test positive for COVID-19**

Two hippos have tested positive for COVID-19 at Antwerp Zoo in Belgium in what could be the first reported cases in the species, zoo staff said. Hippos Imani, aged 14, and 41-year-old Hermien have no symptoms apart from a runny nose, but the zoo said the pair had been put into quarantine as a precaution. "To my knowledge, this is the first time in this species. Worldwide, this virus has been reported mainly in great apes and felines," said the zoo's vet, Francis Vercommen.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/two-hippos-belgian-zoo-test-positive-covid-19-2021-12-04/>

### **Chile says detects first case of Omicron variant of the coronavirus**

Chilean health authorities reported on Saturday that they detected the first case of the Omicron variant of the coronavirus in a person who had arrived in the copper-producing South American country from Africa. The foreign patient residing in Chile arrived in the country on Nov. 25 from Ghana with a recently-taken negative COVID-19 test. But a subsequent test taken upon arrival in Chile was positive and then sequenced. "The passenger, who had two doses of the Pfizer vaccine, is currently in good health and fulfilling his isolation," the secretary of health of the Valparaiso region in Chile said in a statement.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/chile-says-detects-first-case-omicron-variant-coronavirus-2021-12-04/>

### **Zambia records Omicron cases as new strain spreads**

Zambia has detected its first cases of the Omicron coronavirus variant, as the "highly transmissible" new variant spread to more than 40 countries since it was first detected in South Africa last week. The country's health ministry said on Saturday that three people tested positive for COVID-19 in the past week. It added that two of the three infected had travelled abroad recently. A woman who had not travelled abroad had mild symptoms, it said.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/12/4/factbox-latest-on-the-worldwide-spread-of-the-coronavirus>

### **Covid Outbreak on Cruise Ship Approaching New Orleans**

Ten people aboard a Norwegian Cruise Line ship approaching New Orleans have tested positive for COVID-19, officials said Saturday night. The Norwegian Breakaway had departed New Orleans on Nov. 28 and is due to return this weekend, the Louisiana Department of Health said in a news

release. Over the past week, the ship made stops in Belize, Honduras and Mexico. More than 3,200 people are on board the ship, officials said. According to the statement, Norwegian “has been adhering to appropriate quarantine and isolation protocols as new cases and exposures have been identified aboard this vessel.”

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-12-05/covid-outbreak-on-cruise-ship-approaching-new-orleans>

### **Beijing, Shanghai Hit as China's Covid Outbreak Picks Up Steam**

China’s two largest cities are seeing cases of Covid-19 pick up once again, as an outbreak in the north spread to six provinces and led to 91 new locally-transmitted infections reported on Friday. The country’s political and financial hubs of Beijing and Shanghai detected one and two new cases respectively. Inner Mongolia, where the latest flare up is concentrated, reported almost five dozen infections, according to the National Health Commission. The findings mean the latest wave, which had been mostly limited to the remote northwestern region, could sweep across the nation and pose another challenge amid falling temperatures.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-12-03/beijing-shanghai-hit-as-china-s-covid-outbreak-picks-up-steam>

### **WHO urges Asia-Pacific to ready for Omicron-driven surge in infections**

Asia-Pacific countries should boost their healthcare capacity and fully vaccinate their people to prepare for a surge in COVID-19 cases fuelled by the Omicron variant, officials at the World Health Organization (WHO) said on Friday. First detected in southern Africa last month and dubbed a "variant of concern" by the WHO, scientists are still gathering data to establish how contagious Omicron is, and the severity of the illness it causes. It has been reported in at least two dozen countries, and started gaining a foothold in Asia this week, with cases reported from Australia, Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Malaysia and India. Many governments have responded by tightening travel rules.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/who-urges-asia-pacific-ready-omicron-driven-surge-infections-2021-12-03/>

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

On Wednesday night, the borough, one of London’s poorest, suffered a large dose of bad news. A local health official announced on Twitter that a case of COVID with the new Omicron variant had been detected, and encouraged people to get their vaccines and take regular COVID tests. During the height of the second wave, Barking and Dagenham, Redbridge, and Newham, three neighbouring boroughs in east London, saw the country’s highest infection rates. They were dubbed the “COVID triangle”.

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