

COVID-19 Lockdown Exit Analysis

7th Dec 2021

Lockdown Exit

Nearly 70 ICU medics at Spanish hospital COVID-19 positive after Christmas party

Nearly 70 nurses and doctors working in the intensive care unit at a Spanish hospital have tested positive for COVID-19 after attending a Christmas party, health authorities said on Monday. Sixty-eight medics at the University Regional Hospital in Malaga had been diagnosed with the coronavirus, the Andalusian regional government said. Health authorities said they were investigating the source of the infection but added all 68 attended a Christmas party on Dec. 1 at which 173 people were present.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/nearly-70-icu-medics-spanish-hospital-covid-19-positive-after-christmas-party-2021-12-06/>

Philippines tentatively reopens schools as COVID-19 cases ease

Some children in the Philippines' capital Manila returned to school on Monday after a near two-year suspension as the country, which has imposed some of the world's toughest coronavirus curbs, tries to get life back to normal. Wearing face masks and sitting at desks fitted with plastic screens, the children are part of a trial at 28 schools in the capital region. The government aims to reopen all schools in January. Against the backdrop of mass vaccination drives and falling virus cases, parents cautiously welcomed the move.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/philippines-tentatively-reopens-schools-covid-19-cases-ease-2021-12-06/>

England has community transmission of Omicron variant, health minister says

Britain's health minister said on Monday there is now community transmission of the Omicron variant of the coronavirus across regions of England but it is too early to say if this will "knock us off our road to recovery". Defending the introduction of stricter rules to slow the spread of the virus, Sajid Javid told parliament the government was "leaving nothing to chance" while scientists assessed the variant, which was first reported in South Africa last month. Javid said there are now 261 Omicron cases in England, 71 in Scotland and four in Wales - a total of 336.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/england-has-community-transmission-omicron-variant-health-minister-says-2021-12-06/>

Exit Strategies

Suspected Omicron case aboard Norwegian cruise ship is South African crew member

A South African crew member suspected of having the Omicron variant of COVID-19 is among the 17 cases of the virus detected on a cruise ship that disembarked in New Orleans over the weekend, the cruise line said on Monday. U.S. officials are closely monitoring the latest variant, which has been detected in at least a third of states, to try to ascertain its severity amid a rise in COVID-19 cases in recent weeks.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/least-17-covid-cases-found-aboard-cruise-ship-new-orleans-2021-12-06/>

Some Covid-19 policies fuel violence against women and girls

The emergence of the Omicron variant of SARS-CoV-2 with its many mutations has rightly sparked global concern. Another Covid-related issue that should also spark concern, but continues to fly under the radar, is the endemic violence directed toward women and girls around the world that has

been heightened by responses to the pandemic. On a recent visit to a tribal village in South India, I met with children, elders, and teachers, who told me how their lives have been affected by Covid-19. The implementation of crucial, but often blunt, public health measures such as stay-at-home policies and the disruption of key services like schools and health facilities have significantly eroded social well-being, isolation, income, and educational attainment. They have also increased violence against many women and girls.

<https://www.statnews.com/2021/12/06/covid-19-policies-fuel-violence-against-women-girls/>

Covid-19 news: Australia plans to vaccinate five to 11-year-olds

Five to 11-year-olds in Australia could get a coronavirus vaccine as early as 10 January, following provisional approval by the nation's drugs regulator. A one-third dose of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine was approved as safe and effective for this age group by the Therapeutic Goods Administration. The rollout is subject to approval by the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation. Like adults, the 2.3 million eligible children will receive two doses of the vaccine at least three weeks apart. In the UK, covid-19 vaccinations are only available for those aged 12 and over. But the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency is currently adjudicating on whether under-12s should also get jabbed. The US and Israel began offering the vaccine to 5 to 11-year-olds last month

<https://www.newscientist.com/article/2237475-covid-19-news-australia-plans-to-vaccinate-five-to-11-year-olds/>

Canadian employers, facing labor shortage, accommodate the unvaccinated

Canada's tight labor market is forcing many companies to offer regular COVID-19 testing over vaccine mandates, while others are reversing previously announced inoculation requirements even as Omicron variant cases rise. Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's government adopted one of the strictest inoculation policies in the world for civil servants and has already put more than 1,000 workers on unpaid leave, with thousands more at risk.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/canadian-employers-facing-labor-shortage-accommodate-unvaccinated-2021-12-05/>

New York mayor plans vaccination mandate for private-sector employers

New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio said on Monday he planned to issue a COVID-19 vaccine mandate for private-sector employers that will go into effect on Dec. 27, calling it a "pre-emptive strike." Several indicators on Monday showed the spread of COVID-19 were increasing in the most populous city in the United States, including the percentage of people who are testing positive for the virus, according to data from New York City.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/new-york-mayor-issue-private-sector-employer-covid-19-vaccination-mandate-msnbc-2021-12-06/>

Germany plans to make vaccination compulsory for some jobs

The incoming German government wants to make COVID-19 vaccinations mandatory from March 16 for people working in hospitals, nursing homes and other medical practices, according to a copy of draft legislation seen by Reuters on Sunday. Germany has been reticent about making vaccines compulsory for fear of exacerbating a shortage of medical and nursing home staff, but support has grown for the idea as the country has faced surging infections in a fourth wave of the pandemic. The Social Democrats, Greens and Free Democrats, which are set to form the new German government on Wednesday, are set to present the legislation to parliament in the coming week.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/germany-plans-make-vaccination-compulsory-some-jobs-draft-2021-12-05/>

COVID shots are finally arriving, but Africa can't get them all into arms

When a group arrived at the Sekenani health clinic in rural Kenya for their COVID-19 vaccines recently, staff told them there were no doses left and that they should come back soon. For some, it meant a long wasted journey on foot and a day away from their cattle herds. Yet Narok county,

where the clinic is located, was not short of vaccines; nearly 14,000 doses were sitting in a fridge in the nearest town, 115 km away. A mix-up with county officials meant Sekenani did not get enough, two health workers said.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/covid-shots-are-finally-arriving-africa-cant-get-them-all-into-arms-2021-12-06/>

S.Korea's COVID-19 rules put some vaccinated foreigners in limbo

South Korea imposed stricter measures on Monday to contain growing coronavirus infections and the Omicron variant, leaving some foreign residents vaccinated overseas effectively barred from places such as restaurants, cafes and cinemas. South Korea recognises the vaccination status of Korean citizens who were vaccinated overseas but not foreigners, unless they entered the country under a quarantine exemption. Some foreign residents, particularly from Europe and the United States, were vaccinated earlier in the year when South Korea had not yet made vaccines available and were not eligible for the quarantine exemptions that were extended to certain people in business, education or for humanitarian reasons.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/skoreas-covid-19-rules-put-some-vaccinated-foreigners-limbo-2021-12-06/>

Partisan Exits

France can avoid return to lockdown and still save Christmas -PM

France will close nightclubs ahead of Christmas and tighten social distancing measures in response to the emergent Omicron variant of the coronavirus but there is no need for new lockdowns or curfews, Prime Minister Jean Castex said on Monday. Castex said a fifth wave of the pandemic was now surging through the country. But he said that with 52 million people now vaccinated - nearly 90% of those eligible - the situation is better than in previous outbreaks and there is no need for drastic measures to save Christmas.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/france-close-discos-four-weeks-ahead-year-end-2021-12-06/>

COVID-19: Boris Johnson denies government acted too late in bringing back pre-departure tests amid spread of Omicron variant

The prime minister has rejected suggestions the government acted too late in reintroducing travel restrictions after the discovery of the Omicron variant of COVID-19. "We're still waiting to see exactly how dangerous it is, what sort of effect it has in terms of deaths and hospitalisations," Boris Johnson said about the variant. From tomorrow, pre-departure tests for all travellers are being brought back amid the spread of the Omicron variant of COVID-19. It follows on from the reintroduction of day two PCR tests for anyone who enters the UK from abroad. Nigeria has also become the latest African country to be added to the travel red list.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-minister-denies-government-acted-too-late-in-bringing-back-pre-departure-tests-amid-spread-of-omicron-variant-12488117>

Italy begins lockdown of the unvaccinated: Only the double jabbed will be able to fully participate in public life using a 'super green pass' from TODAY

Italy has brought in tougher restrictions for unvaccinated people as the holidays draw near, excluding them from indoor restaurants, theatres and museums to reduce the spread of coronavirus and encourage vaccine skeptics to get their jabs. Only those who have the 'Super Green Pass', which requires Italians to be double-jabbed rather than providing a negative Covid test result, will be able to fully participate in public life from Monday. Italian police will be checking whether those visiting indoor restaurants, bars, concerts, sports events, theatres and public events, have the 'super' green health pass until January 15. The restrictions follow a steady rise of Covid cases in Italy for the past six weeks, with 15,021 infections recorded on Sunday, and a concern about the new Omicron variant which is believed to be more transmissible than the Delta strain.

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10279341/Italy-begins-lockdown-unvaccinated-double-jabbed-able-participate-public-life.html>

Anti-lockdown protesters hit with water cannons and tear gas in Belgium

Belgium became the latest European country to see disorder linked to reimposed Covid-19 restrictions on Sunday. Police deployed water cannon and tear gas to disperse protesters in Brussels rallying against new measures designed to slow the winter wave. The government announced new rules for the third Friday in a row last week in a bid to dampen infections and take pressure of the struggling health system. Thousands chanted 'freedom, freedom' while others carried anti-vax placards as the crowd headed towards the headquarters of the European Union.

<https://metro.co.uk/2021/12/06/belgium-anti-lockdown-protesters-hit-with-water-cannons-and-tear-gas-15723986/>

Scientific Viewpoint

Canada enters deals to procure Merck and Pfizer's Covid-19 antiviral pills

The Government of Canada has entered agreements with Merck and Pfizer to procure courses of their Covid-19 oral antiviral pills. According to the agreement with Merck (MSD), Canada will obtain 500,000 courses of the company's oral antiviral, molnupiravir, on obtaining authorisation from Health Canada. The government also holds options to procure up to 500,000 additional courses of the pill. In June, Merck entered a deal valued at about \$1.2bn with the US Government to supply molnupiravir.

<https://www.pharmaceutical-technology.com/news/canada-deals-merck-pfizer-antiviral/>

Argentina approves Sputnik Light Covid-19 shot as standalone and booster

The Ministry of Health of Argentina has granted approval for Russia's single-dose Sputnik Light vaccine as a standalone and a booster vaccine for Covid-19. This vaccine is based on human adenovirus serotype 26, which is also used in Russia's Sputnik V vaccine as the first component, the Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) said. According to data from 28,000 participants in Moscow, Russia, Sputnik Light given as standalone demonstrated an efficacy of 70% against Covid-19 infection from the Delta variant during the initial three months following inoculation. The shot was found to have an effectiveness of 75% in people aged below 60 years.

<https://www.pharmaceutical-technology.com/news/argentina-approves-sputnik-light/>

Runny-nosed hippos test positive for Covid-19 in Belgium

Two hippos at a zoo in Antwerp, Belgium, have tested positive for Covid-19, in what is believed to be the first such infection reported in the species. The hippos, named Imani and Hermien, have shown no symptoms "other than runny noses," according to a news release from the zoo. How the animals were exposed to the virus is unknown -- their caretakers have not shown any Covid-19 symptoms and all tested negative for the virus, the release said.

<https://www.cnn.com/2021/12/05/americas/covid-19-hippos-belgium-intl/index.html>

COVID-19 vaccines: Antibody levels might help speed up approval

Health authorities only approve the use of COVID-19 vaccines that have gone through rigorous clinical trials. Scientists assess whether a vaccine is effective by checking whether participants in a trial develop the infection after having the vaccine. In the present study, researchers find that a person's antibody response could serve as a correlate of effectiveness, instead of whether people develop the infection. Using this proposed measure could speed up the regulatory approval of future vaccines.

<https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/covid-19-vaccines-do-antibody-levels-indicate-effectiveness>

South Africa's Biovac to start making Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine in early 2022 - exec

South Africa's Biovac Institute will start making Pfizer-BioNTech's, COVID-19 vaccine early next year after receiving the drug substance from Europe, a Pfizer executive said on Monday. Biovac's "fill and finish" deal with Pfizer, announced in July, will make it one of the few companies processing

COVID-19 shots in Africa, where many countries have struggled to access sufficient doses during the pandemic. "We expect that the Cape Town facility will be incorporated into our supply chain by the end of this year," Patrick van der Loo, Pfizer regional president for Africa and the Middle East, told a conference in Kigali on vaccine manufacturing in Africa.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/south-africas-biovac-start-making-pfizer-biontech-covid-19-vaccine-early-2022-2021-12-06/>

Novartis working on pan-coronavirus oral treatment, CEO says

Novartis hopes to still play a role in the development of COVID-19 treatments with research ongoing for a pill that could work broadly against coronaviruses, not just the one that causes COVID-19, chief executive Vas Narasimhan told Reuters. In an interview following his recent presentation at Total Health last week, the head of the Swiss drugmaker pointed to Novartis' manufacturing support to COVID-19 vaccine and drug makers when asked if it had been on the sidelines during the pandemic. "Now I would have loved for some of our own clinical trials to have worked out, but they didn't. I mean, that's part of the deal," Narasimhan said.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/novartis-working-pan-coronavirus-oral-treatment-ceo-says-2021-12-06/>

Next pandemic could be more lethal than COVID, vaccine creator says

Future pandemics could be even more lethal than COVID-19 so the lessons learned from the outbreak must not be squandered and the world should ensure it is prepared for the next viral onslaught, one of the creators of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine said. The novel coronavirus has killed 5.26 million people across the world, according to Johns Hopkins University, wiped out trillions of dollars in economic output and turned life upside down for billions of people. "The truth is, the next one could be worse. It could be more contagious, or more lethal, or both," Sarah Gilbert said in the Richard Dumbleby Lecture, the BBC reported. "This will not be the last time a virus threatens our lives and our livelihoods."

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/next-pandemic-could-be-more-lethal-than-covid-oxford-vaccine-creator-says-2021-12-06/>

Gilead recalls 2 lots of COVID-19 drug Veklury after finding glass particulates in vials

Gilead Sciences' surprise blockbuster Veklury has braved its share of efficacy critiques. Now, the drug has run up against a manufacturing glitch. Gilead is recalling two lots of the COVID-19 antiviral Veklury, also known as remdesivir, after a customer complaint flagged the presence of glass particulates. Gilead confirmed the complaint through its own investigation, the company said Friday. Veklury was among the vanguard of COVID-19 treatments last year. It remains the first and only coronavirus med to snag a full FDA approval. Despite questions about its efficacy, the antiviral has enjoyed a resurgence in the second half of 2021 thanks to the spread of virus variants and elevated hospitalization rates.

<https://www.fiercepharma.com/manufacturing/gilead-recalls-two-lots-covid-19-drug-veklury-after-investigation-confirms-glass>

AstraZeneca weighs spinning out COVID-19 products into separate company

AstraZeneca recently bundled its COVID-19 vaccine and antibody treatment into a separate division. But there's a chance that the new unit might not stay with it for long. The British drugmaker is considering the potential listing of the newly created vaccines and immune therapies division into a separate entity as part of a review of the best path forward, Bloomberg reported, citing people with knowledge of the discussions. In a statement shared with Fierce Pharma, AstraZeneca said it has "no plans" to list the division. Separating the business would be an answer to earlier concerns that tapping into COVID-19 might have been a distraction for the company. But senior executives are evaluating various possibilities with advisers and could eventually decide against a spinoff, the

people said, according to the news service.

<https://www.fiercepharma.com/pharma/astrazeneca-weighs-spinning-division-covid-19-vaccine-antibodies-into-separate-company>

Mixing Pfizer, AstraZ COVID-19 shots with Moderna gives better immune response -UK study

A major British study into mixing COVID-19 vaccines has found that people had a better immune response when they received a first dose of AstraZeneca or Pfizer-BioNTech shots followed by Moderna nine weeks later, according to the results on Monday. "We found a really good immune response across the board..., in fact, higher than the threshold set by Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine two doses," Matthew Snape, the Oxford professor behind the trial dubbed Com-COV2, told Reuters. The findings supporting flexible dosing will offer some hope to poor and middle income countries which may need to combine different brands between first and second shots if supplies run low or become unstable.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/mixing-pfizer-astraz-covid-19-shots-with-moderna-gives-better-immune-response-uk-2021-12-06/>

Omicron may raise re-infection risk; booster protection documented

A summary of some recent studies on COVID-19. They include research that warrants further study to corroborate the findings and that has yet to be certified by peer review. Re-infection risk may be higher with Omicron variant. Survivors of previous infection with the virus that causes COVID-19, known as SARS-CoV-2, may be at higher risk for re-infection with the Omicron variant than with earlier versions of the virus, according to preliminary findings.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/omicron-may-raise-re-infection-risk-booster-protection-documented-2021-12-06/>

Early data from South Africa hints Omicron variant may cause less severe Covid, but more research is needed

As the world waits for studies that give a clear picture of the Omicron variant, early clinical data emerging from South Africa hint at a virus that may cause less severe cases of Covid-19. The South African Medical Research Council posted a report Saturday of the early experiences at several hospitals in Gauteng Province, where Omicron was first spotted in the country. Strikingly, most hospitalized patients who tested positive for Covid did not need supplemental oxygen. Few developed Covid pneumonia, few required high-level care, and fewer still were admitted to intensive care.

<https://www.statnews.com/2021/12/04/omicron-covid19-south-africa-data/>

Coronavirus Resurgence

Brazil reports 108 COVID-19 deaths in 24 hours - ministry

Brazil has had 4,385 new cases of the novel coronavirus reported in the past 24 hours, and 108 deaths from COVID-19, the health ministry said on Monday. The South American country has now registered 22,147,476 cases since the pandemic began, while the official death toll has risen to 615,744, according to ministry data, in the world's third worst outbreak outside the United States and India and its second-deadliest. With 65% of the population fully vaccinated, the rolling 14-day average of COVID deaths has fallen to 211 per day, compared to the toll of almost 3,000 a day at the peak of the pandemic in April.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/brazil-reports-108-covid-19-deaths-24-hours-ministry-2021-12-06/>

The US is averaging more than 100,000 new Covid-19 cases a day, the highest level in two months

For the first time in two months, the US is averaging more than 100,000 new Covid-19 cases each

day, shortly after millions of Americans traveled for the Thanksgiving holiday. The seven-day moving average of new cases was 121,437 as of Saturday, according to data from Johns Hopkins University (JHU). Prior to this week, the US last topped the 100,000-cases-a-day mark in early October.

<https://www.cnn.com/2021/12/05/health/us-coronavirus-sunday/index.html>

Covid-19: Omicron cases confirmed in West Midlands

Five cases of the new Omicron variant of Covid-19 have been identified in the West Midlands. Sandwell Council said it had found one case and the infected person and their contacts were already self-isolating before it was confirmed. Warwickshire's director of public health confirmed two county cases of the variant, linked to overseas travel. A case in Newcastle-under-Lyme, Staffordshire, has also been linked to travel abroad, the county council said. A single case involving the variant had been found in the area, Telford and Wrekin Council announced.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-59551496>

India detects seven more Omicron cases, making 12 in all

India's tally of reported cases of the heavily mutated Omicron variant of the coronavirus rose to 12 on Sunday after the state of Maharashtra said it had detected seven new cases. Local media also said a new case had been reported in New Delhi. India expects Omicron, which scientists say appears to be the most contagious variant so far, to be less damaging than the currently dominant Delta, which caused a devastating wave of infections in March and April.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/india/india-reports-highest-covid-19-fatalities-since-july-states-update-tallies-2021-12-05/>

Namibia detects Omicron coronavirus variant in 18 of 19 samples

Namibia has detected the Omicron coronavirus variant in 18 of 19 samples sequenced between Nov. 11-26, its health ministry said on Monday. Although the southern African country has sequenced relatively few samples, the finding suggests the variant first flagged by neighbouring South Africa and Botswana late last month, and since labelled "of concern" by the World Health Organization, is also highly prevalent in Namibia. Namibia's Omicron cases were detected predominantly in and around the capital Windhoek, a region that recorded 536 out of 695 new infections countrywide in the first five days of December.

<https://www.reuters.com/lifestyle/science/namibia-detects-omicron-coronavirus-variant-18-19-samples-2021-12-06/>

Thailand detects first case of Omicron variant

Thailand has detected its first case of the Omicron coronavirus variant in a U.S. citizen who had travelled to the country from Spain late last month, a health official said on Monday. The confirmed case in the man, who had arrived on Nov. 29, makes Thailand the 47th country to have found the new variant, Opas Karnkawinpong, Director-General of the Department of Disease Control, told a news conference.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/thailand-detects-first-potential-case-omicron-variant-2021-12-06/>

Omicron variant found in nearly one-third of U.S. states

The Omicron variant of the coronavirus has spread to about one-third of U.S. states, but the Delta version remains the majority of COVID-19 infections as cases rise nationwide, U.S. health officials said on Sunday. Though the emergence of the new variant has caused alarm worldwide, Dr. Anthony Fauci, the top U.S. infectious disease official, told CNN "thus far it does not look like there's a great degree of severity to it." He added that it was too early to draw definitive conclusions and that more study is needed.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/fauci-says-he-hopes-us-travel-ban-southern-africa-can-be-lifted-reasonable-2021-12-05/>

Croatia confirms its first two cases of COVID-19 Omicron variant

Croatia confirmed on Monday its first two cases of the Omicron variant of coronavirus, the state health institute said. "We are not sure about the source of the infection as neither of those two people had travelled abroad. We believe they got infected at a business meeting at which both participated," said Bernard Kaic, an epidemiologist at the state health institute. Guests from abroad had been present at the business meeting, he added.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/croatia-confirms-its-first-two-cases-covid-19-omicron-variant-2021-12-06/>

South Africa readies hospitals as Omicron variant drives new COVID-19 wave

South Africa is preparing its hospitals for more admissions, as the Omicron coronavirus variant pushes the country into a fourth wave of COVID-19 cases, President Cyril Ramaphosa said on Monday. Omicron was first detected in southern Africa last month and has triggered global alarm as governments fear another surge in infections. South Africa's daily infections surged last week to more than 16,000 on Friday from roughly 2,300 on Monday.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/south-africa-readies-hospitals-omicron-variant-drives-new-covid-19-wave-2021-12-06/>

Britain reports 43992 new COVID-19 cases, 54 deaths

Britain on Sunday reported 43,992 new cases of COVID-19 and 54 deaths within 28 days of a positive test for the virus. That compares with 42,848 cases and 127 deaths reported on Saturday. Earlier, Britain's health security agency said it had identified 86 new cases of the Omicron coronavirus variant, taking the total to 246

<https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/britain-reports-43992-new-covid-19-cases-54-deaths-2021-12-05/>

Italy tightens curbs on unvaccinated as COVID-19 cases rise

Italy tightened curbs on Monday on people still not vaccinated against COVID-19, limiting their access to an array of places and services. The measures were announced last month, even before the discovery of the Omicron variant, and come as cases of coronavirus are starting to tick up across the country, albeit at a slower rate than in many other European nations. Under the new rules, only people who have been vaccinated or have recently recovered from COVID-19 can access indoor seating at bars and restaurants, visit museums, go to cinemas and clubs and attend sporting events.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/italy-tightens-curbs-unvaccinated-covid-19-cases-rise-2021-12-06/>

Russia reports first cases of Omicron COVID-19 variant - agencies

Russia on Monday reported its first confirmed cases of the new Omicron variant of the coronavirus, Russian news agencies reported, in two people who returned from South Africa. Interfax cited consumer health regulator Rospotrebnadzor as saying that 10 people who returned from South Africa had tested positive for COVID-19. RIA said Omicron had been detected in two arrivals from South Africa.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-reports-first-cases-omicron-covid-19-variant-agencies-2021-12-06/>