

COVID-19 Lockdown Exit Analysis

9th Dec 2021

Lockdown Exit

Act now to curb Omicron's spread, WHO's Tedros tells world

Governments need to reassess national responses to COVID-19 and speed up vaccination programmes to tackle Omicron, though it is too early to say how well existing shots will protect against the new variant, the World Health Organization said on Wednesday. The variant's global spread suggests it could have a major impact on the COVID-19 pandemic, and the time to contain it is now before more Omicron patients are hospitalised, WHO director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said. "We call on all countries to increase surveillance, testing and sequencing," he told a media briefing. "... Any complacency now will cost lives."

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/act-now-curb-omicrons-spread-whos-tedros-tells-world-2021-12-08/>

Record COVID cases in S Korea as 'immunity wanes among elderly'

South Korea's daily count of COVID-19 cases has surpassed 7,000 for the first time, with experts attributing the record jump to waning immunity among older people. The Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency (KCDA) reported 7,175 new cases on Wednesday, 2,221 more than the previous day. It said infections were rising particularly among older adults who had "suffered a drop in vaccine efficacy, and children who have yet to receive their first doses", according to the Yonhap news agency. The number of critically ill patients also reached an all-time high of 840, up from 66 the previous day.

<https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/record-covid-cases-in-s-korea-as-e2-80-98immunity-wanes-among-elderly-e2-80-99/ar-AARANsl>

UK's Johnson orders probe of staff party during lockdown

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson on Wednesday ordered an inquiry and said he was "furious" after a leaked video showed senior members of his staff joking about holding a lockdown-breaching Christmas party. The video has poured fuel on allegations that officials in the Conservative government flouted coronavirus rules they imposed on everyone else. Its release came as Johnson urged people to work from home and introduced vaccine passes for crowded venues to try and slow the spread of the new omicron variant. "I understand and share the anger up and down the country" at officials seeming to make light of lockdown rules, Johnson said. "I was also furious to see that clip," he told lawmakers in the House of Commons. "I apologize unreservedly for the offense that it has caused up and down the country, and I apologize for the impression it gives."

<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-health-lifestyle-christmas-europe-32571c5c7a550c8b418acb9e28e9815b>

Work from home again: UK tightens rules amid omicron spread

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced tighter restrictions Wednesday to stem the spread of the omicron variant, urging people in England to again work from home and mandating COVID-19 passes for entrance into nightclubs and large events. Johnson said it was time to impose stricter measures to prevent a spike of hospitalizations and deaths as the new coronavirus variant spreads rapidly in the community. "It has become increasingly clear that omicron is growing much faster than the previous delta variant and is spreading rapidly all around the world," he said in a press conference. "Most worryingly, there is evidence that the doubling time of omicron could currently be

between two and three days.”

<https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/work-from-home-again-uk-tightens-rules-amid-omicron-spread/ar-AARCntl>

Fans must show vaccine pass to attend top-level games in England

Fans in England will need to show proof of double vaccination against COVID-19 or a negative test to attend top-level sport after British Prime Minister Boris Johnson imposed tougher COVID-19 restrictions in the country on Wednesday. The British government has made the NHS COVID Pass mandatory for any event with more than 10,000 people in a bid to slow the spread of the Omicron coronavirus variant.

<https://www.reuters.com/lifestyle/sports/fans-must-show-vaccine-pass-attend-top-level-games-england-2021-12-08/>

South Africa's Covid cases hit highest level in five MONTHS

Covid cases in Omicron-stricken South Africa spiralled to their highest level in five months today — but early data suggests the mutant strain is milder than Delta. The country's National Institute for Communicable Diseases has recorded another 19,842 infections over the past 24 hours, more than double the number last Wednesday. This was also the highest number of infections detected on a single day since early July, when the nation's Delta wave was dying down. Despite doctors on the ground in South Africa insisting that Omicron is causing only mild illness, today's 374 hospital admissions are up 170 per cent in a week.

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10289137/South-Africas-Covid-cases-hit-highest-level-five-MONTHS.html>

Pfizer booster vaccine CAN beat Omicron: Company says top-up dose bolsters protection from two jabs

Pfizer's Covid booster jab triggers a 25-fold increase in antibody levels against Omicron, company said today. The vaccine-maker said three injections provide a 'more robust' defence against the variant. Third dose triggers antibody response against Omicron similar to that seen against older strains after two jabs. South Africa study shows 40-times less Pfizer-triggered antibodies can fight against Omicron infection. Sweden found that drop in the body's ability to neutralise Omicron, but decline is smaller than feared. WHO official said Omicron is likely more transmissible than other variants, but data suggests it is less severe. But Germany study found double-jabbed people do not produce any neutralising antibodies against Omicron.

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10287457/WHO-says-Omicron-no-worse-variants-jabs-work-against-it.html>

COVID cases spike even as US hits 200M vaccine milestone

The number of Americans fully vaccinated against COVID-19 reached 200 million Wednesday amid a dispiriting holiday-season spike in cases and hospitalizations that has hit even New England, one of the most highly inoculated corners of the country. New cases in the U.S. climbed from an average of nearly 95,000 a day on Nov. 22 to almost 119,000 a day this week, and hospitalizations are up 25% from a month ago. The increases are due almost entirely to the delta variant, though the omicron mutation has been detected in about 20 states and is sure to spread even more. Deaths are running close to 1,600 a day on average, back up to where they were in October. And the overall U.S. death toll less than two years into the crisis could hit another heartbreaking milestone, 800,000, in a matter of days.

<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-health-pandemics-dc8943700b4a65fe1031a7f6ab40026d>

Exit Strategies

Maine activates National Guard amid hospital bed shortage

Maine's governor activated as many as 75 members of the Maine National Guard on Wednesday to help expand capacity at health care facilities. The state is dealing with a surge in COVID-19 that has challenged its hospitals. A record of 379 people were hospitalized Wednesday with the virus. Democratic Gov. Janet Mills said the guard members will be used in non-clinical support roles. That

will include supporting nursing facilities and helping to administer monoclonal antibodies to prevent serious illness from the virus and keep patients out of critical care, Mills said. Mills and other state officials said those steps will free up hospital beds. The announcement came as the state's largest hospital, Maine Medical Center, said it has postponed about 50% of surgeries because of the burden of COVID-19 on the facility.

<https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/us/maine-activates-national-guard-amid-hospital-bed-shortage/ar-AARCs4p>

Covid-19: Children aged five to 11 to be offered vaccine in Ireland

Covid-19 vaccinations will be offered to children aged five to 11 in the Republic of Ireland. Irish Health Minister Stephen Donnelly has accepted advice from the National Immunisation Advisory Committee (NIAC). About 480,000 primary school children in the Irish Republic will be offered a vaccine. According to RTÉ, it is likely to be January before the main vaccination programme begins, but some children may get their vaccine this month. The vaccine for this age group will be a lower dose than that given to older children. The NIAC strongly recommended that a vaccine should be given to children aged five to 11 who have an underlying condition, are living with a younger child with complex medical needs or living with an immunocompromised adult.

https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-59579582?at_custom4=25191E44-5819-11EC-99D6-19BF4744363C&at_custom2=twitter&at_medium=custom7&at_custom1=%5Bpost+type%5D&at_campaign=64

Spain approves COVID vaccine for children in 5-11 age group

Spain's health ministry gave the go-ahead Tuesday for children between ages 5 and 11 to be vaccinated against COVID-19 amid a rise in coronavirus infections in recent weeks. Italy and Austria have also been inoculating children since the European Union's drug regulator on Nov. 25 authorized Pfizer's coronavirus vaccine for use on that age group. The European Medicines Agency's decision opened the way for jabs to be administered to millions of elementary school pupils across the continent. The Spanish health ministry tweeted news of the approval, following the decision of an expert committee. The rollout is due to begin Dec. 15, two days after the first of 3.2 million child vaccines arrive in Spain

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/spain-covid-madrid-hans-kluge-pfizer-b1971343.html>

Getting ready for Christmas: Omicron spurs French to get COVID shots

French archivist Adele Bellot went on Tuesday to get a booster shot against COVID-19 with one aim in mind - to save Christmas. "Christmas is coming soon and there are elderly people in my family. I really want to protect them from getting infected, that's it," she said, after getting her third shot in a vaccination center in Vitry-sur-Seine, just outside Paris. With the holidays nearing and a fifth wave of the pandemic surging through France amid worries over the new Omicron variant, vaccination centers are at full stretch. More than 9 million French people have received a booster. The Doctolib health app said 464,000 appointments for a booster had been made across France through its system on Monday alone.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-france-vaccination-idUSKBN2IM1P9>

Romanian government to ease some COVID-19 restrictions

The Romanian government will ease some COVID-19 restrictions on Wednesday, eliminating a night curfew and an obligation to wear face masks outdoors ahead of winter holidays, officials said on Tuesday. The European Union state reported 1,421 new daily COVID-19 cases and 107 deaths on Tuesday, far off record highs reported in October and early November during its deadliest wave of the pandemic.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/romanian-government-ease-some-covid-19-restrictions-2021-12-07/>

Exclusive: Up to 1 million COVID vaccines expired in Nigeria last month

Up to one million COVID-19 vaccines are estimated to have expired in Nigeria last month without being used, two sources told Reuters, one of the biggest single losses of doses that shows the

difficulty African nations have getting shots in arms. Governments on the continent of over one billion people have been pushing for more vaccine deliveries as inoculation rates lag richer regions, increasing the risk of new variants such as the Omicron coronavirus now spreading across South Africa. In Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation and home to more than 200 million people, fewer than 4% of adults have been fully vaccinated, according to the World Health Organization (WHO).

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/exclusive-up-1-million-covid-vaccines-wasted-nigeria-east-month-2021-12-08/>

Austria allows broad lifting of lockdown, but many provinces hold off

Austria will let a wide range of businesses, from non-essential shops to theatres, restaurants and hairdressers reopen when its COVID-19 lockdown ends on Sunday, the government said on Wednesday, but many regions will open up more cautiously. The move means switching from a single set of rules for the whole country to a patchwork varying between nine provinces. Adding to the confusion, those opening up the fastest included the western provinces of Vorarlberg and Tyrol, which have the highest and fourth-highest infection rates in the country.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/austria-allows-broad-lifting-lockdown-many-provinces-hold-off-2021-12-08/>

Britain could implement COVID-19 'plan B' as early as Thursday - reports

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson looked set to introduce tougher COVID-19 measures for England on Wednesday, including asking people to work from home, in a bid to slow the spread of the Omicron coronavirus variant. Johnson, facing fierce criticism after a video appeared to show that his staff had held a party in Downing Street last year when such festivities were banned, said Omicron was spreading much faster than any other variant. "The prime minister will hold a COVID press conference at 6pm (1800 GMT)," a spokesperson for Johnson's office said. Sterling fell and investors pared back their bets on a Bank of England interest rate hike next week ahead of an expected announcement that large venues could also require people to show COVID passports as part of a Plan B.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/britain-could-implement-covid-19-plan-b-early-thursday-times-radio-2021-12-08/>

Partisan Exits

Johnson imposes COVID-19 'Plan B' in England to contain Omicron

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson imposed tougher COVID-19 restrictions in England on Wednesday, ordering people to work from home, wear masks in public places and use vaccine passes to slow the spread of the Omicron coronavirus variant. Undermined by accusations that his staff partied at Downing Street during a Christmas lockdown last year, Johnson said Omicron was spreading rapidly and he had no choice but to move to "Plan B" while a vaccine booster programme rolls out.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/britain-could-implement-covid-19-plan-b-early-thursday-times-radio-2021-12-08/>

Under fire, UK PM apologises for staff joking about Christmas lockdown party

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson apologised on Wednesday after a video surfaced showing his staff laughing and joking about a party in Downing Street during a Christmas COVID-19 lockdown last year when such festivities were banned. Hours later the main aide featured in the video, Johnson's press secretary at the time, Allegra Stratton, resigned as an adviser to the prime minister. In a tearful statement, she said she would regret the remarks she made in the video for the rest of her days. For more than a week, Johnson and his team have repeated that no rules were broken in late 2020 after the Mirror newspaper reported there had been several parties including a wine-fuelled gathering of 40 to 50 people to mark Christmas.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uk-pm-johnson-under-fire-over-christmas-lockdown-party-2021-12-08/>

UK's Johnson orders probe of staff party during lockdown

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson on Wednesday ordered an inquiry and said he was “furious” after a leaked video showed senior members of his staff joking about holding a lockdown-breaching Christmas party. The video has poured fuel on allegations that government officials flouted coronavirus rules they imposed on everyone else. “I understand and share the anger up and down the country” at staff members seeming to make light of lockdown rules, Johnson said. “I was also furious to see that clip,” he told lawmakers in the House of Commons. “I apologize unreservedly for the offense that it has caused up and down the country, and I apologize for the impression it gives.”

<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-health-lifestyle-christmas-europe-32571c5c7a550c8b418acb9e28e9815b>

With vaccine resistance high, Poland faces surge of deaths

As 83-year-old Hanna Zientara endured subfreezing temperatures to get a COVID-19 vaccine booster shot in Warsaw, her 30-year-old grandson was starting a Canary Islands vacation while unvaccinated and stubbornly refusing his grandmother’s repeated pleas to protect himself. “I am worried about him, but I have no influence over him. None,” Zientara said. “He has many doctor friends who aren’t getting vaccinated, and he says if they aren’t getting vaccinated, then he doesn’t have to.” Poland and several other countries in Central and Eastern Europe are battling their latest surges of coronavirus cases and deaths while continuing to record much lower vaccinations rates than in Western Europe.

<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-health-ukraine-poland-warsaw-2f631e3b51446af1aef39c8bf96955e8>

Unvaccinated parents highly unlikely to OK COVID vaccine for their kids

A research letter yesterday in JAMA Pediatrics shows that 25.6% of a sample of US parents responding to an online survey said they were hesitant to vaccinate themselves against COVID-19, and these parents were highly unlikely to approve of COVID vaccination for their children—by a wide margin. In the ongoing CHASING COVID nationwide cohort study, City University of New York researchers analyzed responses from the June 2021 survey of 1,162 parents of 1,651 children 2 to 17 years old. Willingness to have their children vaccinated varied from 8.3% to 13.9% in vaccine-hesitant parents, depending on the age of the child, compared with 64.9% to 86.4% among parents who had already gotten the COVID vaccine or were willing to receive it.

<https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2021/12/unvaccinated-parents-highly-unlikely-ok-covid-vaccine-their-kids>

Scientific Viewpoint

Pfizer, BioNTech vaccine neutralises Omicron with three shots

Neutralising antibodies seen one month after third dose. Pfizer CEO says seeking booster shot is the best option. Vaccine may still protect against severe disease Any vaccine relaunch could be achieved in March 2022.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/biontech-pfizer-say-test-shows-3-doses-vaccine-neutralise-omicron-2021-12-08/>

Moderna COVID-19 vaccine approved for booster shots in Australia

The Moderna COVID-19 vaccine has been approved for use in booster shots for adults in Australia. Australia's medicines authority, the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA), has given the green light to the shot being used as a booster for people aged 18 and over. Until now, only the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine has been available for booster shots in Australia. As is advised with the Pfizer booster shot, the Moderna booster shot should be given six months after the second dose of any COVID-19 vaccine. The TGA has also said immunocompromised people aged 12 and over can have a third shot as soon as 28 days after their second vaccine. The TGA said its decision to allow the Moderna vaccine to be used for booster shots was guided by expert advice from the independent

Advisory Committee on Vaccines.

<https://www.9news.com.au/national/coronavirus-vaccine-tga-approves-moderna-spikevax-covid19-vaccine-for-boosters-shots-in-australia/99774685-4822-46c3-83e7-4b58f0f92b5e>

China approves Bii Biosciences' COVID-19 treatment

China's medical products regulator said on Wednesday it had approved the use of Bii Biosciences' neutralising antibody cocktail for COVID-19, the first treatment of its type against the virus given the go-ahead in the country. The combination of BR11-196/BR11-198 showed a 78% reduction of hospitalization and death in non-hospitalized COVID-19 patients at high risk of developing severe disease in a Phase III clinical trial, Bii said in October. The medicine from a Bii subsidiary was approved to treat mild COVID-19 and the disease of "normal type" with high risk of progressing to hospitalization or death in adults and minors aged 12-17, the National Medical Products Administration said.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/china-approves-bii-biosciences-covid-19-treatment-2021-12-08/>

EU expects Europe plants to produce 3.6 billion COVID shots in 2022

Vaccine plants in the European Union are expected to produce 3.6 billion COVID-19 shots next year, out of a global output of more than 20 billion, two senior EU officials said on Wednesday. EU countries are administering boosters after having completed the primary vaccination of nearly 70% of the EU population, whereas in Africa only 7% have been immunised against the coronavirus, EU data show.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/eu-expects-europe-plants-produce-36-billion-covid-shots-2022-2021-12-08/>

'I'm so happy': first person to get fully-tested COVID-19 shot says one year on

The first person in the world to be given a fully-tested COVID-19 vaccine, 91-year-old Briton Margaret Keenan, urged people on Wednesday to get vaccinated, one year on from her shot. Keenan described receiving the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine on Dec. 8 2020 as the "best thing that has ever happened". "It was wonderful. I cannot believe it now, what happened at the time... I'm so happy I got the jab," Keenan, known to friends as Maggie, said in a broadcast clip to mark the anniversary.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/britain-marks-one-year-since-giving-first-pfizer-covid-19-shot-2021-12-08/>

Pfizer says COVID booster offers protection against omicron

Pfizer said Wednesday that a booster of its COVID-19 vaccine may offer important protection against the new omicron variant even though the initial two doses appear significantly less effective. Pfizer and its partner BioNTech said that while two doses may not be strong enough to prevent infection, lab tests showed a booster increased by 25-fold people's levels of antibodies capable of fighting off omicron. For people who haven't yet had a booster, the companies said two doses still should prevent severe disease or death. Health authorities in the U.S. and other countries have urged eligible people to get a third dose even before these results.

<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-science-business-health-coronavirus-vaccine-46a0cedcefcc938ba84ea2868bf69db1>

Pfizer, BioNTech say omicron partially evades its COVID vaccine but booster can restore protection

The COVID-19 vaccine produced by Pfizer and BioNTech, Comirnaty, provides less protection against the omicron variant than it did against wild-type COVID and other variants, the companies said on Wednesday. They also reported that a third (booster) shot is needed to gain protection against omicron comparable to that provided by the two-dose series against wild-type COVID-19 and other variants. The announcement from the companies came hours after the release of a study by scientists in South Africa that showed the omicron variant could largely evade the antibodies

generated by the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine. The lab study also indicated that booster shots would help restore some level of protection and that the original two-dose series was still likely to prevent a severe form of the disease.

<https://www.fiercepharma.com/pharma/pfizer-biontech-say-vax-less-resistant-to-omicron-but-booster-can-restore-protection>

Pfizer, ex-employee reach a deal in COVID-19 vaccine trade secrets case

A now-former Pfizer employee is playing nice after the drugmaker sued her in November alleging the 15-year veteran uploaded more than 12,000 sensitive files—including documents on the company's wildly successful COVID-19 vaccine—to personal devices and a Google Drive account. The defendant, Chun Xiao Li, agreed to let Pfizer's lawyers search her personal emails, Google drive accounts and all other personal computing devices or accounts that could contain confidential information or trade secrets by Dec. 6, court documents filed Monday show. Pfizer aims to complete its search by Dec. 29, at which point it will return Li's devices and accounts. By that same day, Li must send Pfizer a sworn declaration that she's cooperated with the investigation to the best of her ability and that she no longer possesses any proprietary information or trade secrets.

<https://www.fiercepharma.com/pharma/pfizer-strikes-deal-ex-employee-covid-19-vaccine-trade-secrets-case>

Pfizer's vaccine chief on Omicron, mix-and-match boosters, and being prepared for the unknown

Pfizer and partner BioNTech announced Wednesday that new data show that antibodies generated by their Covid vaccine appear less effective against the Omicron variant than other variants, but that a third booster dose likely provides sufficient antibody protection. Those data are very preliminary. But STAT took the opportunity to catch up with Pfizer's head of vaccine research, Kathrin Jansen, who has been one of the main architects of the development program that has helped make the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine the most widely used of the Covid shots. Jansen emphasized that Pfizer is developing an Omicron-specific vaccine, but that she does not know exactly what strategy the world should or will take over the coming months. Instead, she is focused on being prepared for anything.

<https://www.statnews.com/2021/12/08/pfizers-vaccine-chief-on-omicron-mix-and-match-boosters-and-being-prepared-for-the-unknown/>

Pfizer-BioNTech Covid-19 shot loses power against Omicron variant, but booster restores protection

People who have received two doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech Covid-19 vaccine are likely susceptible to infection from the Omicron variant of the coronavirus, but a third shot restores antibody activity against the virus, the companies said Wednesday. Their findings are based on lab experiments using the blood of people who have received the vaccine. In a press release, the companies reported a 25-fold reduction on average in the levels of neutralizing antibody activity against the Omicron variant in people who had received two doses of their Covid-19 vaccine. But they also found that blood, or sera, from people who had received boosters "neutralized the Omicron variant to levels that are comparable to those observed" for the original form of the coronavirus that the vaccine was based on, with neutralizing antibody levels increased 25-fold by a third shot.

<https://www.statnews.com/2021/12/08/pfizer-biontech-covid-19-shot-loses-power-against-omicron-variant-but-boosters-restores-protection/>

Coronavirus Resurgence

UK reports 131 new cases of Omicron coronavirus variant

Britain has reported 131 new cases of the Omicron coronavirus variant, the UK Health Security Agency said on Wednesday, taking the total number of confirmed cases in the country to 568.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uk-reports-131-new-cases-omicron-coronavirus-variant-2021-12-08/>

Omicron reported in 57 countries, hospitalisations set to rise, WHO says

The Omicron variant has been reported in 57 nations and the number of patients needing hospitalisation is likely to rise as it spreads, the World Health Organization said on Wednesday. The WHO, in its weekly epidemiological report, said more data was needed to assess the severity of disease caused by the Omicron variant and whether its mutations might reduce protection from vaccine-derived immunity.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/omicron-reported-57-countries-hospitalizations-set-rise-who-2021-12-08/>

Mexico posts 289 more COVID-19 fatalities; death toll reaches 295601

Mexico's Health Ministry on Tuesday reported 289 more deaths from COVID-19, bringing the country's death toll since the pandemic began to 295,601.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/mexico-posts-289-more-covid-19-fatalities-death-toll-reaches-295601-2021-12-08/>

Sweden to reintroduce many COVID-19 measures as cases rise

Sweden will reintroduce a raft of measures to curb rising COVID-19 infections, urging renewed social distancing and the use of masks in public transportation, the government said on Tuesday. "We see an increased spread of infection, but still from low levels," Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson told a news conference. "We need to work together to that the situation doesn't get worse, so today we are presenting further precautionary measures."

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/sweden-reintroduce-many-covid-19-measures-cases-rise-2021-12-07/>

S.Korea considers expanded COVID-19 home care as new cases top 7000

South Korea will consider expanding home treatment of COVID-19 patients, a health official said on Wednesday, as both new daily infections and severe cases hit record highs, putting hospital capacity under strain. Infections in South Korea have skyrocketed this month after the government began to ease restrictions under a so-called "living with COVID-19" scheme in November. The Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency (KDCA) reported 7,175 new coronavirus cases and 63 deaths for Tuesday, the first time daily infections topped 7,000, while hospitals treated a record 840 critical and serious cases.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/skorea-reports-over-7000-new-daily-covid-19-cases-first-time-yonhap-2021-12-07/>

Germany records highest daily COVID deaths since February

Germany recorded the highest number of deaths from COVID-19 since February on Wednesday as it battles to stop a fourth wave of the pandemic. A total of 69,601 new infections were reported, 2,415 more than the same time a week ago, and another 527 people died - the highest number since Feb. 12 - to bring the total to 104,047, the German Robert Koch Institute for disease control said. However, the country's seven-day incidence rate of cases per 100,000 people continued to fall, declining to 427 from 432 on Tuesday.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/germany-records-highest-daily-covid-deaths-since-february-2021-12-08/>

France says fifth COVID-19 wave has not peaked yet

The fifth wave of COVID-19 hitting France has not yet reached its peak, government spokesman Gabriel Attal said on Wednesday, and the cabinet's top adviser on the coronavirus indicated a fourth vaccine shot to fight the disease was possible. "The peak is clearly not behind us, the pandemic continues to gain ground," Attal said during a press briefing following the weekly cabinet meeting, though adding the pace of increase in daily new cases seemed to be slowing somewhat.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/frances-fifth-covid-wave-has-not-peaked-yet-government-2021-12-08/>

Denmark sees society-wide infection with Omicron variant

The new Omicron coronavirus variant has spread across Denmark, health authorities said on

Tuesday after registering large outbreaks of the variant in the east and west of the country. "We now have society-wide infection with the Omicron variant," director of the Danish Patient Safety Authority, Anette Lykke Petri, told reporters. Denmark has registered a total of 398 cases of infection with the variant first identified in South Africa.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/denmark-sees-society-wide-infection-with-omicron-variant-2021-12-07/>

Record COVID cases in S Korea as 'immunity wanes among elderly'

South Korea's daily count of COVID-19 cases has surpassed 7,000 for the first time, with experts attributing the record jump to waning immunity among older people. The Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency (KCDA) reported 7,175 new cases on Wednesday, 2,221 more than the previous day. It said infections were rising particularly among older adults who had "suffered a drop in vaccine efficacy, and children who have yet to receive their first doses", according to the Yonhap news agency. The number of critically ill patients also reached an all-time high of 840, up from 66 the previous day. The increase in infections and severe cases comes after the government began easing COVID-19 restrictions under a so-called "Living with COVID-19" policy in November. Most of the cases are being reported in the greater Seoul region, home to half of the country's 51.7 million people.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/12/8/record-covid-cases-in-s-korea-as-immunity-wanes-among-elderly>

New Lockdown

Norway again hardens COVID-19 curbs to try to halt spread

The Norwegian government introduced stricter rules on Tuesday to limit the spread of COVID-19, including a cap on the number of visitors in private homes and shortening the hours bars and restaurants can serve alcohol. The Nordic country has seen a surge of COVID-19 infections in recent weeks, followed by a rise in the number of hospitalisations. "We really wished we were done with the pandemic. But the situation is now so serious that we must put in place new measures to keep control," Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Stoere told a news conference.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/norway-again-tightens-covid-19-restrictions-bid-halt-spread-2021-12-07/>

France's Martinique territory imposes new curfew as COVID infections surge

Authorities on the Caribbean island of Martinique ordered a new curfew on Tuesday, citing the worsening of the COVID-19 epidemic on the French territory. The curfew is set at 8 p.m. local time (0000 GMT) and will start from Wednesday, the local authorities said, adding all trips will have to be justified by health or professional reasons. This curfew follows another one ordered on Nov. 25 in Martinique after protesters looted shops and set up burning barricades amid demonstrations against COVID-19 protocol

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/frances-martinique-territory-imposes-new-curfew-covid-infections-surge-2021-12-07/>