

# COVID-19 Lockdown Exit Analysis

## 14th Dec 2021

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### Lockdown Exit

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#### **Canada could see surge in COVID-19 cases as Omicron spreads - health official**

COVID-19 cases in Canada may rapidly rise in the coming days due to community spread of the Omicron variant, mirroring the situation in the country's most populous province of Ontario, Canada's top health official said on Monday. The surge of COVID-19 cases in Ontario, which accounts for almost 40% of Canada's population of 39 million people, has prompted the provincial government to suspend easing of restrictions that were planned to be lifted ahead of the holiday season

<https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/canada-could-soon-see-rapid-surge-covid-19-cases-omicron-spreads-locally-2021-12-13/>

#### **Norway in partial lockdown as Omicron 'changes the rules', PM says**

Norway will further tighten restrictions and speed up vaccination in a bid to limit an expected surge of the Omicron variant of the coronavirus, Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Stoere said on Monday. Presenting its fourth round of measures in two weeks, the government announced a ban on serving alcohol in bars and restaurants, a closing of gyms and swimming pools to most users and stricter rules in schools, among other things.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/norway-tighten-covid-restrictions-pm-says-2021-12-13/>

#### **Masks come off, rallies begin as India's COVID-19 patient load falls**

India reported its lowest tally of active COVID-19 cases in 18 months on Monday, but a sharp drop in the use of protective face masks is causing concern after a rise in the number of infections with the Omicron variant. Many people have been standing or sitting close to each other without masks, or covering only their chins, at big rallies held by political parties in several states before elections. Something similar happened before the Delta variant ravaged India from April.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/india/masks-come-off-rallies-begin-indias-covid-19-patient-load-falls-2021-12-13/>

#### **Chinese manufacturing hub fights its first 2021 COVID-19 outbreak**

Major Chinese manufacturing province Zhejiang is fighting its first COVID-19 cluster this year, with tens of thousands of citizens in quarantine and virus-hit areas suspending business operations, cutting flights and cancelling events. The province reported 74 locally transmitted cases with confirmed symptoms on Dec. 12, official data showed on Monday, almost double the previous day's 38 cases, lifting to 173 the total since the province started to report cases for the latest outbreak. The outbreak in three Zhejiang cities - Ningbo, Shaoxing and Hangzhou - was developing at a "relatively rapid" speed, while the situation nationwide was largely stable, National Health Commission official Wu Liangyou said on Saturday.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/chinese-manufacturing-hub-fights-its-first-2021-covid-19-outbreak-2021-12-13/>

#### **Exclusive: Senegal expects 400000 COVID-19 vaccines to expire by year-end**

At least 200,000 COVID-19 vaccines have expired in Senegal without being used in the past two months and another 200,000 are set to expire at the end of December because demand is too slow, the head of its immunisation programme said on Monday. African governments have been calling for more COVID-19 vaccines to help catch up with richer regions, where vaccine rollouts have been humming along for more than a year. Yet, as the pace of supply has picked up in recent weeks some countries have struggled to keep pace. Logistical problems, the short shelf life of vaccines that

arrive from donors, and vaccine hesitancy have all kept doses from reaching arms.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/exclusive-senegal-expects-waste-400000-covid-19-vaccines-by-year-end-2021-12-13/>

### **Virus Cases Surge in Australia's Most Populous State as Curbs Eased**

Australia's most-populous state has recorded its highest daily Covid-19 infection tally in more than two months as authorities battle the fast-spreading omicron variant, even as New South Wales readies to remove almost all restrictions. The state recorded 804 new virus infections in the 24 hours to 8 p.m. Monday, a 50% jump from the day before, officials said in statement Tuesday. It's the largest tally since Oct. 2, when its largest city Sydney was in the midst of a months-long lockdown to combat the delta variant.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-12-13/virus-cases-surge-in-australian-state-even-as-restrictions-ease>

### **Some Hospitals Drop Covid-19 Vaccine Mandates to Ease Labor Shortages**

Some of the largest U.S. hospital systems have dropped Covid-19 vaccine mandates for staff after a federal judge temporarily halted a Biden administration mandate that healthcare workers get the shots.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/some-hospitals-drop-covid-19-vaccine-mandates-to-ease-labor-shortages-11639396806>

### **Omicron Oil Demand Impact Will Be 'Mild and Short-Lived,' OPEC Says**

The new variant's impact on global oil markets won't be as seismic as initially feared, because governments and businesses are now better adapted to dealing with the coronavirus, the cartel said.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/omicron-oil-demand-impact-will-be-mild-and-short-lived-opec-says-11639398257>

### **How Covid Increased the Cybersecurity Threat to Healthcare Companies**

The healthcare industry has long been a prime target of cybercriminals looking to mine patients' personal information or disrupt facilities' operations in ransomware attacks. The Covid-19 pandemic has made matters much worse, as the adoption of new technologies to enhance remote care and increased remote work has created a multitude of new potential targets for hackers. Wall Street Journal news editor Sara Castellanos spoke with Kathy Hughes, chief information security officer at Northwell Health, and Joey Johnson, chief information security officer at Premise Health, at the WSJ Pro Cybersecurity Executive Forum, about the cybersecurity threat and how the industry can protect itself. Edited excerpts of the conversation follow.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/how-covid-increased-the-cybersecurity-threat-to-healthcare-companies-11638904616>

### **Austria ends Covid lockdown restrictions for vaccinated people**

Austria has ended lockdown restrictions for vaccinated people across most of the country, three weeks after reimposing strict rules to combat a rising wave of coronavirus infections. The rules, which vary by region within the country, largely allow for the reopening of theatres, museums and other cultural and entertainment venues on Sunday. Shops will follow on Monday. Some regions are reopening restaurants and hotels on Sunday, while others will wait until later in the month. In all cases, there will be an 11pm curfew for restaurants, and masks will still be required on public transport and inside stores and public spaces.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/dec/12/austria-ends-covid-lockdown-restrictions-for-vaccinated-people>

## **Exit Strategies**

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### **Nicaragua receives China vaccines after cutting ties with Taiwan**

Nicaragua has received one million Covid vaccines from China, days after it cut diplomatic ties with Taiwan in favour of Beijing. Government representatives returned to the Central American state on Sunday with news of the donation. Local media broadcast clips showing an Air China plane landing with the first 200,000 doses of the Sinopharm vaccine. Officials said they were "extremely grateful"

for restored relations with Beijing. "We have come back with this great news that we have brought this donation of one million vaccinates to the Nicaraguan people," said Laureano Ortega Murillo, the son of Nicaraguan president Daniel Ortega and one of his advisers.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-59633388>

### **São Paulo says it has fully vaccinated more than 100 percent of its adults. Will it be enough to stop omicron?**

In a world struggling to convince people to take the coronavirus vaccine, the news was striking. São Paulo, the largest city in the Western Hemisphere, announced late last month that it had succeeded where others had failed. One hundred percent of its adult population had been fully vaccinated against the coronavirus — a remarkable rate in an era characterized by an intransigent and growing global anti-vaccine movement that has hobbled vaccination efforts from Europe to the United States.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/12/13/coronavirus-brazil-sao-paulo-vaccination/>

### **Coronavirus: Army to help with booster vaccines for all UK adults.**

The army will help in an effort to give booster vaccinations to all UK adults by New Year's Day, Prime Minister Boris Johnson has announced. Speaking on TV in a recorded message on Sunday night after Strictly Come Dancing, the PM explained that the top-up vaccinations would help "in our battle with the new variant". The plan will be delivered across all four UK nations, he said. Scotland is also setting the same target to offer all adults a booster by the end of the year, and Northern Ireland said it is stepping up its rollout and hopes to get as many people as possible boosted by then too.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/59634901>

### **Large queues as Covid-19 booster roll-out extended to over-30s**

Large queues formed outside some walk-in vaccination centres as Northern Ireland's booster vaccine roll-out was extended to over-30s. Some people have been waiting more than two hours at the Ulster Hospital's vaccination hub, with other clinics reporting similar waits. People queuing for jabs at hubs faced similar lengthy waits over the weekend. Some people waited up to three hours to be vaccinated at a walk-in clinic at the Downshire Hospital in Downpatrick on Sunday.

<https://www.itv.com/news/utv/2021-12-13/large-queues-as-covid-19-booster-roll-out-extended-to-over-30s>

### **COVID-19: N Ireland's coronavirus passport set to become legally enforceable, as Wales and Scotland prepare for tougher restrictions**

Northern Ireland's COVID-19 passport scheme, which requires people to provide proof of vaccination, a negative lateral flow test result or evidence of a previous coronavirus infection to gain entry to licenced premises and entertainment venues, is set to become legally enforceable today. The scheme was introduced late last month with a two-week grace period to allow businesses to adjust to the new requirements. The rules will apply to the hospitality sector including pubs, restaurants and nightclubs, as well as entry to large indoor and outdoor events, such as cinemas, concerts, theatres, and sporting events.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-n-irelands-coronavirus-passport-set-to-become-legally-enforceable-as-wales-and-scotland-prepare-for-tougher-restrictions-12494620>

### **Indonesia to start vaccinating children aged 6-11 against COVID-19**

Indonesia will start administering COVID-19 vaccinations for children aged between 6-11 on Tuesday, a health ministry official said, as the Southeast Asian country becomes one of the first in the region to immunise the very young. Indonesia approved China's Sinovac Biotech vaccine for the age group last month and about 26.5 million children have been targeted for vaccination, Maxi Rein Rondonuwu, a senior health ministry official, told a briefing.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/indonesia-start-vaccinating-children-aged-6-11-against-covid-19-2021-12-13/>

### **S.Korea to test AI-powered facial recognition to track COVID-19 cases**

South Korea will soon roll out a pilot project to use artificial intelligence, facial recognition and thousands of CCTV cameras to track the movement of people infected with the coronavirus, despite concerns about the invasion of privacy. The nationally funded project in Bucheon, one of the country's most densely populated cities on the outskirts of Seoul, is due to become operational in January, a city official told Reuters. The system uses an AI algorithms and facial recognition technology to analyse footage gathered by more than 10,820 CCTV cameras and track an infected person's movements, anyone they had close contact with, and whether they were wearing a mask, according to a 110-page business plan from the city submitted to the Ministry of Science and ICT (Information and Communications Technology), and provided to Reuters by a parliamentary lawmaker critical of the project.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/skorea-test-ai-powered-facial-recognition-track-covid-19-cases-2021-12-13/>

### **Philippines secures \$250 mln loan from ADB for COVID-19 vaccines**

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has approved a \$250 million loan for the Philippines to purchase COVID-19 vaccines, it said in a statement on Monday. The ADB said the loan would allow the government to purchase 40 million additional COVID-19 vaccine doses for eligible children and booster shots for adults. The Philippines is aiming to fully vaccinate at least 54 million people, or nearly half of its 110 million population, before the year ends.

<https://www.reuters.com/markets/rates-bonds/philippines-secures-250-mln-loan-adb-covid-19-vaccines-2021-12-13/>

### **Thailand to expedite COVID-19 boosters in anticipation of Omicron**

Thailand will halve to three months the time between administering a second COVID-19 vaccine shot and a booster, a health official said on Monday, to try to strengthen immunity in anticipation of a local spread of the Omicron variant. Thailand has so far detected eight imported cases of the Omicron variant but has yet to see community transmission, according to its health ministry. Omicron has been reported in dozens of countries. "Because Omicron is now widespread, the booster third shot would help lessen the severity of symptoms and reduce the death rate," said Taweasin Wisanuyothin, spokesperson for the government's COVID-19 taskforce.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/thailand-expedite-covid-19-boosters-anticipation-omicron-2021-12-13/>

### **Moderna Plans Australia Vaccine-Manufacturing Facility**

Moderna Inc. reached an agreement in principle with the Australian government to build a messenger RNA vaccine-manufacturing facility in Victoria, Australia. Moderna expects to invest in the facility with the collaboration of the Commonwealth and Victorian governments, aiming to provide Australians with domestically manufactured vaccines, including the Covid-19 and flu vaccines. Moderna expects that up to 100 million vaccine doses could be produced in Australia each year. The company said it is in discussions with other governments about potential collaborations using a similar model.

[https://www.wsj.com/articles/moderna-plans-australia-vaccine-manufacturing-facility-151639437344?mod=Markets\\_creener\\_news](https://www.wsj.com/articles/moderna-plans-australia-vaccine-manufacturing-facility-151639437344?mod=Markets_creener_news)

### **Britons rush to get shots in booster blitz against omicron**

Long lines formed Monday at vaccination centers across England as people heeded the government's call for all adults to get booster shots to protect themselves against the omicron variant, and as the U.K. recorded its first death of a patient infected with omicron. In a televised announcement late Sunday, Prime Minister Boris Johnson said everyone 18 and up would be offered a third vaccine dose by Dec. 31 — less than three weeks away, and a month earlier than the previous target. Johnson said boosters would "reinforce our wall of vaccine protection" against an anticipated "tidal wave of omicron." U.K. health authorities say omicron cases are doubling every

two to three days in Britain, and that the variant will replace delta as the dominant coronavirus strain within days. Health Secretary Sajid Javid told lawmakers Monday that omicron will be dominant in London "within 48 hours."

<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-health-business-boris-johnson-london-f68c13a9f9be352cf70e1e1a5f32e72a>

### **Government 'not ruling out' Covid vaccines for children aged 5 and up**

The Government has not ruled out a move to vaccinate children as young as 5 years old with parental consent although said a decision was not imminent. Education Secretary Nadhim Zahawi said vaccination experts were still reviewing the evidence on what level of protection a coronavirus vaccine would give those aged under 12, and that a decision would await their verdict. Asked whether there were plans to vaccinate primary school children, Mr Zahawi told the BBC's The Andrew Marr Show: "There is no plan at the moment to vaccinate primary school children for the reason that the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation is still looking at the evidence as to what level of protection it would offer."

<https://inews.co.uk/news/health/government-not-ruling-out-covid-vaccine-children-young-5-years-old-1348873>

### **Spain receives first shipment of Covid-19 vaccines for children**

Spain on Monday received its first shipment of Covid-19 vaccines for children. The 1.3 million doses made by Pfizer-BioNTech will be shipped to the regions, which are in charge of their own vaccination campaigns, said the Health Ministry. The shots will be administered from December 15, when health authorities are expected to first call in kids from at-risk groups and those ages 10 and 11. But the logistics will vary depending on the region, with some like Catalonia choosing to immunize all children between the ages of five and 11 at the same time.

<https://english.elpais.com/society/2021-12-13/spain-receives-first-shipment-of-covid-19-vaccines-for-children.html>

## **Partisan Exits**

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### **U.S. Supreme Court rejects religious challenge to New York vaccine mandate**

The U.S. Supreme Court on Monday rejected challenges brought by a group of Christian doctors and nurses and an organization that promotes vaccine skepticism to New York's refusal to allow religious exemptions to the state's mandate that healthcare workers be vaccinated against COVID-19. Acting in two cases, the justices denied emergency requests for an injunction requiring the state to permit religious exemptions while litigation over the mandate's legality continues in lower courts. Conservative Justices Clarence Thomas, Samuel Alito and Neil Gorsuch said they would have granted the injunction.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-supreme-court-rejects-religious-challenge-new-york-vaccine-mandate-2021-12-13/>

### **California to re-institute statewide mask mandate amid rise in COVID cases**

California will impose a statewide mask mandate in all indoor public spaces as COVID-19 case rates soar, the state's senior government health official said on Monday as precautions ramp up against the Omicron variant. The mandate, which will take effect on Wednesday and last a month, is one of several measures the most-populous U.S. state is taking to slow a wave of infections that is already straining hospitals in areas where vaccination rates are low.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/california-re-institute-statewide-mask-mandate-amid-rise-covid-cases-2021-12-13/>

### **Israel's education minister fires top official after spat on COVID vaccines in schools**

Israel's Education Minister Yifat Shasha-Biton dismissed the ministry's director general on Sunday. According to sources in the ministry, the two had an ongoing friction over Yigal Slovik's support for administering the coronavirus vaccine in schools, something that the education minister had reservations about. Shasha-Biton wrote on Facebook that "the coronavirus and the dismissal are

unrelated", and her associates said she fired Slovik due to her more general dissatisfaction over his professional performance and not specifically over coronavirus policy.

<https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-israel-s-education-minister-fires-top-official-after-spat-over-vaccines-in-schools-1.10461049>

### **COVID-19: PM facing major revolt over coronavirus curbs, amid 'authoritarianism' warning**

The Conservative Party is drifting into authoritarianism, a senior Tory MP has warned, as he confirmed he would oppose new coronavirus restrictions. Former Brexit minister Steve Baker told Sky News he believed at least 60 of his party colleagues at Westminster would join him in voting against the imposition of further COVID-19 measures by Boris Johnson this week.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-pm-facing-major-revolt-over-coronavirus-curbs-amid-authoritarianism-warning-12493843>

### **Norway bans serving of alcohol in bid to halt Omicron outbreak**

Norway will ban the serving of alcohol in bars and restaurants, impose stricter rules in schools and speed up vaccination as part of new efforts to curb the outbreak of the Omicron variant of the coronavirus, the government said on Monday. "For many this will feel like a lockdown, if not of society then of their lives and of their livelihoods," Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Støre told a news conference.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/norway-bans-serving-alcohol-bid-halt-omicron-outbreak-2021-12-13/>

### **France: 400 investigations into fake COVID-19 health passes**

France has opened 400 investigations into networks providing fake COVID-19 health passes, the interior minister said Sunday, as virus-related hospitalizations rise sharply across the country. The case of a woman with the virus who died in a Paris regional hospital after showing a false vaccine certificate has drawn attention in French media in recent days. The hospital's intensive care chief said they would have given the woman immediate antibody treatment had they known that she wasn't vaccinated. Authorities have identified several thousand fake COVID-19 health passes in use around France, Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin said Sunday on RTL radio. He said some 400 investigations have been opened into peddling fake passes, including some "connected to health professionals."

<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-technology-business-health-france-b66d11ea17f6d1ab1f83d55b41585060>

### **Thousands protest in Prague against COVID vaccine mandate**

Several thousand people marched through the Czech capital on Sunday, protesting a COVID-19 vaccination mandate for certain groups including people age 60 and over. The participants didn't wear face coverings or follow social distancing rules despite a request by police to do so. One person was detained. The protesters, chanting "Freedom!" alleged their constitutional rights are being violated. They said they weren't against voluntary vaccination but opposed a vaccine mandate. The outgoing government released an order this week, making vaccination mandatory for the 60 and over age group, as well as medical personnel, police officers, firefighters and medical students.

<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-business-health-europe-andrej-babis-cce59b98d29c4978b118d6c7c50910c2>

## **Scientific Viewpoint**

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### **Two-Dose Covid Vaccine Less Effective Against Omicron Than Delta, Study Shows**

The omicron variant dented the protection afforded by two doses of Pfizer Inc.'s and AstraZeneca Plc's Covid vaccines as feared, researchers found, increasing the risk of infection. Blood samples collected from people vaccinated with the two different shots and tested against the new strain

showed a substantial drop in neutralizing antibodies, a proxy for protection, particularly compared with the delta variant, researchers from the University of Oxford said Monday in a paper.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-12-13/vaccines-induce-lower-antibody-levels-against-omicron-in-study>

### **Moderna amends Covid-19 vaccine supply deal with Gavi**

Moderna has amended an existing contract with Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, to expedite the supply of 20 million doses of its Covid-19 vaccine to COVAX by the end of this year. Under the deal, the company agreed to deliver a total of 54 million vaccine doses to COVAX this year. The supply of the vaccine doses to COVAX Advance Market Commitment (AMC) nations has already been initiated. They were initially agreed to be delivered in the first quarter of next year as part of the company's prior agreement with Gavi.

<https://www.pharmaceutical-technology.com/news/moderna-vaccine-supply-deal-gavi/>

### **Vaccine committee rules against fourth COVID shot**

Individuals double vaccinated against COVID-19 within the last six months can't receive a booster and still need to wait to get their third jab, the Pandemic Response Team and the Advisory Committee on Vaccines said late Sunday night. The committee met for several hours to discuss the issue, as 67 cases of Omicron were discovered in Israel and dozens more are under investigation.

<https://www.jpost.com/health-and-wellness/coronavirus/vaccine-committee-rules-against-fourth-covid-shot-688577>

### **China's Bii says its COVID-19 antibody cocktail retains activity against Omicron**

China's Bii Biosciences said on Sunday lab studies showed that its COVID-19 antibody cocktail retained activity against the Omicron variant, although one of the antibodies showed a substantial drop in activity when tested alone. Test details for the dual-antibody treatment, which last week became the first approved COVID-19 antibody cocktail in China, would not be available until publication in a scientific journal, but results from three independent labs showed similar pattern, Bii chief executive Hong Zhi said on Monday

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/chinas-bii-says-its-covid-19-antibody-cocktail-retains-activity-against-omicron-2021-12-13/>

### **Israeli study finds Pfizer COVID-19 booster protects against Omicron**

Israeli researchers said on Saturday they found that a three-shot course of the Pfizer/BioNTech, COVID-19 vaccine provided significant protection against the new Omicron variant. The findings were similar to those presented by BioNTech and Pfizer earlier in the week, which were an early signal that booster shots could be key to protect against infection from the newly identified variant. The study, carried out by Sheba Medical Center and the Health Ministry's Central Virology Laboratory, compared the blood of 20 people who had received two vaccine doses 5-6 months earlier to the same number of individuals who had received a booster a month before.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/israeli-study-finds-pfizer-covid-19-booster-protects-against-omicron-2021-12-11/>

### **Omicron poses 'very high' risk but data on severity limited**

The Omicron coronavirus variant, reported in more than 60 countries, poses a "very high" global risk, with some evidence that it evades vaccine protection but clinical data on its severity is limited, the World Health Organization says. Considerable uncertainties surround Omicron, first detected last month in southern Africa and Hong Kong, whose mutations may lead to higher transmissibility and more cases of COVID-19 disease, the WHO said in a technical brief issued on Sunday. "The overall risk related to the new variant of concern Omicron remains very high for a number of reasons," it said, reiterating its first assessment of Nov. 29.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/omicron-poses-very-high-global-risk-data-severity-limited-who-2021-12-13/>

### **Antibody response from China Zhifei's COVID shot weaker against Omicron**

China's Anhui Zhifei Longcom Biopharmaceutical said on Monday a small laboratory test showed its COVID-19 vaccine could trigger antibodies against the Omicron variant though the response was weaker than against an older variant of the virus. The unit of Chongqing Zhifei Biological Products is the first Chinese vaccine developer to announce early data on how its COVID-19 vaccine work against Omicron, which has triggered global alarm about another surge in infections.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/antibody-response-china-zhifeis-covid-shot-weaker-against-omicron-2021-12-13/>

### **Omicron spreads faster and weakens jabs: WHO**

The omicron coronavirus variant is more transmissible than the delta strain and reduces vaccine efficacy but causes less severe symptoms according to early data, the World Health Organization said Sunday. The delta variant, first identified in India earlier this year, is responsible for most of the world's coronavirus infections. But South Africa's discovery of omicron — which has a large number of mutations — last month prompted countries around the world to impose travel bans on southern African countries and reintroduce domestic restrictions to slow its spread.

<https://www.arabnews.com/node/1985921>

### **Coronavirus Resurgence**

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#### **Omicron cases may already be peaking in South Africa, less than a month after the COVID-19 variant first surfaced**

Nearly three weeks after the Omicron variant was first identified by South African scientists, the COVID-19 mutation has whipped across the world, with infections in at least 63 countries. But in South Africa itself, the cases seem to be nearing their peak, and could already be headed for decline. Cases of Omicron in Gauteng, South Africa's most populous province and home to its biggest city, Johannesburg, rose slightly from a seven-day daily average of 9,645 last Thursday, to 10,131 on Sunday. At the same time, the positivity rate of those being tested and the number of hospitalizations have both been falling. Data from the country's National Institute for Communicable Diseases shows positivity rates dropping from 30% to around 15% between Thursday and Saturday, while the number of new hospitalizations fell from 207 to 64 over the same period. "The positivity rate in South Africa has been flattening and now declined for the past two days," Scott Gottlieb, a senior fellow for the American Enterprise Institute and former FDA commissioner, tweeted on Sunday.

<https://fortune.com/2021/12/13/omicron-cases-may-already-be-peaking-in-south-africa-less-than-a-month-after-the-covid-19-variant-first-surfaced/>

#### **Hungary's media, health experts seek more COVID-19 data**

As coronavirus infections and deaths soar in Hungary, the country's journalists and public health professionals are demanding more detailed data on the outbreak from the government, with some experts saying that greater transparency might boost lagging vaccination rates. Information is often hard to find in the country of over 9 million people, where infection rates have broken records and daily deaths per capita are among the highest in the world. Although Hungary has secured vaccine doses from China and Russia in addition to those provided by the European Union, nearly a third of its adults still have not received a single shot. That hesitancy is something immunologist Andras Falus said can be partly attributed to official communications about the pandemic being "extremely poor, inconsistent and totally incapable of maintaining trust."

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/hungary-viktor-orban-covid-budapest-czech-republic-b1974813.html>

#### **COVID-19: UK 'again in race between vaccine and virus' - as Javid reveals 'about 10' people in hospital with Omicron**

Sajid Javid has urged the British public to "play your part" and get a COVID booster vaccine -

warning that the UK is "once again in a race between the vaccine and the virus". The health secretary told Sky's Kay Burley that cases of Omicron are growing at a "phenomenal rate", which is why the government is expanding the booster programme "to a level never seen before in this country".

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-javid-says-play-your-part-and-get-a-booster-jab-as-the-uk-is-again-in-a-race-between-the-vaccine-and-the-virus-12494666>

### **Mainland China detects first case of Omicron coronavirus variant -state media**

Health authorities in northern China's port city of Tianjin have detected the first case of the Omicron coronavirus variant in the country's mainland, the state-run Tianjin Daily reported on Monday. The infection was discovered in a traveller who arrived in the city from overseas on Dec. 9, the newspaper said, adding that the patient is currently being treated in isolation in hospital.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/china/mainland-china-detects-first-case-omicron-coronavirus-variant-state-media-2021-12-13/>

### **Sixth COVID wave, fuelled by Omicron, to hit France in January -Paris hospitals executive**

France will be hit by a sixth COVID-19 wave next month due to the emergence of the new, more contagious, Omicron variant of the disease while the country is still in the midst of the current, Delta-fuelled, fifth wave of the pandemic, according to a leading French hospital executive. "We haven't said a word on the sixth wave, which is Omicron, which will come later, in January", Martin Hirsch, head of Paris's AP-HP hospitals group, Europe's largest hospital system, told RTL radio.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/sixth-covid-wave-fuelled-by-omicron-hit-france-january-paris-hospitals-executive-2021-12-13/>

### **UK raises COVID alert level as Omicron advances**

Britain raised its COVID alert level on Sunday in response to the rapid spread of the Omicron variant of the virus, as medical authorities warned that hospitalisations are likely to rise sharply over the coming weeks. The chief medical officers of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland recommended an increase to alert level 4 from level 3 on its 5-point scale, which means they judge transmission of the virus to be high. "Early evidence shows that Omicron is spreading much faster than Delta and that vaccine protection against symptomatic disease from Omicron is reduced," the medical officers said in a joint statement.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uk-raises-covid-alert-level-omicron-advances-2021-12-12/>

### **Norway to tighten COVID-19 restrictions, PM says**

Omicron wave requires tougher measures, PM says. New restrictions hit bars, restaurants, gyms. Stricter COVID-19 quarantines imposed. Fears new cases could reach 300,000 per day in Jan. Currency weakens vs euro

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/norway-tighten-covid-restrictions-pm-says-2021-12-13/>

### **First person dies from Omicron variant in United Kingdom**

At least one person has died in the United Kingdom after contracting the Omicron coronavirus variant, Prime Minister Boris Johnson said on Monday, the first publicly confirmed death globally from the swiftly spreading strain. Since the first Omicron cases were detected on Nov. 27 in Britain, Johnson has imposed tougher restrictions and on Sunday cautioned that the variant could overcome the immune defences of those inoculated with two shots of vaccines.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/britain-says-omicron-spreading-phenomenal-rate-2021-12-13/>