

COVID-19 Lockdown Exit Analysis

4th Jan 2022

Lockdown Exit

COVID-19: New variant, B.1.640.2, detected in France - study

A new coronavirus variant has been discovered in southern France, spreading in a small outbreak, according to a new study. The variant, tentatively identified B.1.640.2 according to a recent study backed by the French government that has yet to be peer-reviewed, is believed to be Cameroonian in origin and have so far spread to 12 patients in southern France. This new variant seems to have 46 new mutations as well as 37 deletions.

<https://www.jpost.com/health-and-wellness/coronavirus/article-691458>

South Africa lifts curfew as it says COVID-19 fourth wave peaks

South Africa has lifted a midnight to 4 a.m. curfew on people's movement with immediate effect, believing the country has passed the peak of its fourth COVID-19 wave driven by the Omicron variant, a government statement said on Thursday. The country made the changes based on the trajectory of the pandemic, levels of vaccination in the country and available capacity in the health sector, according to a press release issued by Mondli Gungubele, a minister in the presidency. South Africa is currently at the lowest of its five-stage COVID-19 alert levels.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/safrica-lifts-curfew-it-says-covid-19-fourth-wave-peaks-2021-12-30/>

Omicron dampens worldwide New Year celebrations, but London throws party on TV

The Omicron coronavirus variant dampened New Year festivities around much of the world, with Paris cancelling its fireworks show, London relegating its to television, and New York City scaling down its famous ball drop celebration in Times Square. The illuminated ball made of Waterford crystal panels slid down its pole at the midnight hour in Times Square, but only 15,000 spectators were allowed into the official viewing area instead of the usual 58,000.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/gloomy-new-year-many-covid-19-crashes-party-again-2021-12-31/>

New Year celebrations muted by Omicron, but South Africa ...

The Australian city of Sydney was one place where the New Year charged in with something like full swagger, as spectacular fireworks glittered in the harbour above the Opera House. But many other landmark cities were forgoing pyrotechnics as midnight rolled across the globe, with displays called off at Paris's Arc de Triomphe, London's riverside and the Petronas Towers in Kuala Lumpur. The glittering ball is still due to drop at New York's Times Square, but the crowd shouting out the countdown of the year's exit is set to be a quarter the usual size - masked up, socially distanced, and with vaccine proof in hand. Still, South Africa, which first raised the alarm about the new fast-spreading coronavirus variant, gave the world one of the last big good surprises of the year, becoming the first country to declare its Omicron wave had crested - and with no huge surge in deaths. The abrupt lifting

<https://news.trust.org/item/20211231205706-unmwk/>

UK honours COVID scientists and medics, Bond actor Daniel Craig

Britain recognised the scientists and medical chiefs at the forefront of the battle against COVID-19 in Queen Elizabeth's annual New Year's honours list, while James Bond actor Daniel Craig was given the same award as his famous onscreen character.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uk-honours-covid-scientists-medics-bond-actor-daniel-craig-2021-12-31/>

Australia starts 2022 with record COVID cases

Australia started 2022 with a record number of new COVID-19 cases as an outbreak centred in the eastern states grew, and New South Wales eased its isolation rules for healthcare workers as the number of people hospitalised with the virus rose. New South Wales, the most populous state, and Victoria both posted daily record case numbers of 22,577 and 7,442 respectively on Saturday, health department figures showed.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/australia-starts-2022-with-record-covid-cases-2022-01-01/>

China ends 2021 with highest weekly COVID cases since taming original epidemic

China ended its final week of 2021 with its biggest tally of local coronavirus cases for any seven-day period since subduing the country's first epidemic nearly two years ago, despite an arsenal of some of the world's toughest COVID-19 measures. The National Health Commission reported on Saturday 175 new community infections with confirmed clinical symptoms for Dec. 31, bringing the total number of local symptomatic cases in mainland China in the past week to 1,151. The surge has been driven mostly by an outbreak in the northwestern industrial and tech hub of Xian, a city of 13 million.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/chinas-xian-enters-10th-day-covid-lockdown-cases-per-sist-2022-01-01/>

Paris attacks trial to be paused after main suspect catches COVID -source

The trial of Salah Abdeslam, the main suspect in the November 2015 Islamist attack that killed 130 people in Paris, and others will be paused briefly in January as Abdeslam has caught the coronavirus, a judicial source told Reuters on Friday. The criminal trial will resume as scheduled on Jan. 4 but then be officially suspended until Jan. 13., the source said. French news agency AFP earlier reported on the planned suspension, citing an e-mail sent to the parties by the court's president.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/paris-attacks-trial-be-paused-after-main-suspect-catches-covid-source-2021-12-31/>

U.K. Tinkers With Covid Measures as Omicron Cases Spike

The U.K. is trying various strategies to limit the impact of record high Covid-19 cases on health care and other sectors, while attempting to stay true to a vow to avoid new lockdowns. Among the latest moves, Boris Johnson's government is developing contingency plans to help companies and supply chains avoid disruptions caused by rising staff absences, the Financial Times reported. It's asked private businesses to test the plans against a worst-case scenario of as much as 25% in workforce absences, according to the newspaper. Covid-related absences among hospital staff jumped nearly two-thirds between Dec. 26 and Dec. 31, the Times reported on Sunday, citing National Health Service figures.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-02/u-k-tinkers-with-covid-measures-as-omicron-drives-record-cases>

Fauci warns of danger of hospitalization surge due to large number of COVID cases

Top U.S. infectious disease expert Anthony Fauci said there was still a danger of a surge in hospitalization due to a large number of coronavirus cases even as early data suggests the Omicron COVID-19 variant is less severe. "The only difficulty is that if you have so many cases, even if the rate of hospitalization is lower with Omicron than it is with Delta, there is still the danger that you will have a surging of hospitalizations that might stress the healthcare system," Fauci said in an interview on Sunday with CNN. The Omicron variant was estimated to be 58.6% of the coronavirus variants circulating in the United States as of Dec. 25, according to data from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/fauci-warns-danger-hospitalization-surge-due-large-number-covid-cases-2022-01-02/>

Israel reports first case of 'flurona': Doctors say they have found rare double infection of influenza and Covid in young pregnant woman

A young pregnant woman has become the first person in the world to be infected with both Covid and the flu. The woman tested positive for both viruses in Beilinson Hospital in Petach Tikva city, Israel, on Thursday. She is suffering mild symptoms and Israeli health officials are studying her case to determine whether the combination causes any greater severity of illness. Her case is first documented in the world but doctors believe there could be more 'flurona' infections in the country.

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10360879/Doctors-say-rare-double-infection-influenza-Covid-young-pregnant-woman.html>

English school children to wear masks to tackle Omicron surge

Children in secondary schools in England will be told to wear face coverings when they return after the Christmas holiday next week to tackle a surge in cases of the Omicron variant of COVID-19, Education Secretary Nadhim Zahawi said on Sunday. "We want to maximise the number of children in school and college for the maximum amount of time," he said in an article in the Sunday Telegraph. "One of the additional, temporary measures that will help achieve this in light of the omicron surge is recommending face coverings are worn in secondary school classrooms and teaching spaces for the coming weeks – although not for longer than they are needed."

<https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/english-school-children-wear-masks-tackle-omicron-surge-2022-01-02/>

U.S., Europe Weigh Isolation Requirements as Omicron Disrupts Daily Life

European governments are relaxing some quarantine requirements to help keep daily life open with new Covid-19 infections surging, while the top U.S. infectious-disease expert suggested health authorities might tighten isolation measures. Countries have been grappling with isolation requirements, trying to balance health concerns as the Omicron variant takes hold, with the risk that those quarantine periods sideline medical staff, teachers and other workers for so long that hospitals, schools and other workplaces are unable to function effectively. Throughout the pandemic, Europeans have typically been required to self-isolate for 10 days if they or a close contact have tested positive for the virus. Some governments are responding to the threat of breakdown by shortening or otherwise easing their quarantine rules.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-europe-weigh-isolation-requirements-as-omicron-disrupts-daily-life-11641137748>

Exit Strategies

Israel extends second COVID-19 booster to elderly in care facilities

Israel is extending its offer of a fourth COVID-19 vaccine dose to elderly people in care facilities, Health Minister Nitzan Horowitz said on Friday, citing their high exposure and vulnerability to infections. On Thursday, the Health Ministry's director-general, Nachman Ash, approved fourth doses for people with weakened immune systems and the administering of those shots began on Friday. An Israeli hospital administered fourth shots to a test group of health workers on Monday, in what it called the first major study into whether a second round of boosters will help contend with the Omicron coronavirus variant.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/israel-extends-4th-covid-vaccine-elderly-care-facilities-2021-12-31/>

Ireland relaxes COVID-19 testing rules, cuts isolation period

Ireland on Thursday became the latest country to cut the isolation period for some people who contract COVID-19 and relax requirements for tests as a record number of cases for the fourth time in a week overwhelmed testing facilities. With the fast-spreading Omicron variant of the coronavirus accounting for 92% of all infections, the health department reported 20,554 new cases, more than double the record in any previous wave to bring the 14-day infection rate to 2,300 per 100,000 people.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ireland-relaxes-covid-19-testing-rules-cuts-isolation-period-2021-12-30/>

Morocco's tough COVID restrictions hammer tourism sector

Businesses working in Morocco's key tourism sector say the country's tough COVID-19 restrictions, including a full flight ban, are undermining its competitiveness compared to rival destinations. Morocco shut its borders in late November and will only reopen them at the end of January. It has also banned new year celebrations and is enforcing its vaccine pass requirements more strictly in response to the Omicron variant of the coronavirus.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/moroccos-tough-covid-restrictions-hammer-tourism-sector-2021-12-31/>

Air New Zealand Changes In-Flight Snack and Mask Policy in Covid Fear

After upending global travel, Covid-19 is doing the same to in-flight dining. Passengers at Air New Zealand Ltd. will now only get fed after they've disembarked. The airline wants to make sure passengers keep their masks on for the entire flight, it said in a statement Friday. It will now hand out snacks like cookies and popcorn when people get off their plane to enjoy at their destination, the airline said. "It's anticipated that we will soon see the omicron variant within the New Zealand community," Chief Customer and Sales Officer Leanne Geraghty said in the statement. "Masks are one of the key ways to limit transmission."

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-12-31/covid-sends-in-flight-meals-out-of-the-plane-at-air-new-zealand>

South Africa Says Its Omicron Wave Has Passed With No Big Spike in Deaths

The South African government said Thursday that data from its health department suggested that the country had passed its Omicron peak without a major spike in deaths, offering cautious hope to other countries grappling with the variant. "The speed with which the Omicron-driven fourth wave rose, peaked and then declined has been staggering," said Fareed Abdullah of the South African Medical Research Council. "Peak in four weeks and precipitous decline in another two. This Omicron wave is over in the city of Tshwane. It was a flash flood more than a wave." The rise in deaths over the period was small, and in the last week, officials said, "marginal."

<https://www.nytimes.com/live/2021/12/30/world/omicron-covid-vaccine-tests>

Royal Caribbean bookings take a hit as Omicron fears worsen

Royal Caribbean Group said on Thursday it was grappling with a drop in bookings and a rise in cancellations as COVID-19 cases surge in the United States, driven by the fast-spreading Omicron variant. U.S. cruise ships have been gradually returning to the seas since late June, but an increase in Omicron cases has sparked calls for a temporary ban on cruising, including from Senator Richard Blumenthal, a Connecticut Democrat. Since the Celebrity Cruises parent resumed operations from U.S. ports in June, the company's cruise ships have ferried 1.1 million passengers, with 1,745 people testing positive for COVID-19 and 41 being hospitalized.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/royal-caribbean-bookings-take-hit-omicron-fears-worsen-2021-12-30/>

Key workers and vulnerable people to be prioritised for Covid-19 tests if necessary, health chiefs say

Key workers and vulnerable people will be able to jump the queue for Covid-19 tests if necessary, health authorities have said. Amid shortages of instant Lateral Flow Devices (LFD) and delays processing PCR lab tests, health chiefs said they were prepared to prioritise supplies for "critical workforces". Ministers previously faced calls to ring-fence tests for NHS workers to ensure patient safety and prevent staff shortages due to unnecessary isolation.

<https://inews.co.uk/news/politics/key-workers-and-vulnerable-people-to-be-prioritised-for-covid-19-tests-if-necessary-health-chiefs-say-1377698>

Covid-19 positive cases can be released from isolation without a test

On Thursday states agreed to seven-day isolation with negative test on day 6 But now leaders have agreed that no test is necessary for asymptomatic people Close contacts and Covid patients can simply leave isolation after seven days This is because people are rarely infectious after having Covid for a whole week

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10357527/Covid-19-positive-cases-released-isolation-without-test.html>

WHO chief says the pandemic could be defeated this year if countries work together to contain its spread and vaccines are equally distributed across the globe

WHO Director-General Tedros Ghebreyesus says 2022 could spell end for Covid The health chief encouraged wealthy nations to share vaccines with other countries He says he is 'confident' the pandemic will end this year if global leaders do so

https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10360601/WHO-chief-says-pandemic-defeated-year-countries-work-together.html?ito=social-twitter_mailonline

How This Pandemic Has Left Us Less Prepared for the Next One

Tiny vials of bat saliva in a laboratory in Wuhan, China, collected with help from U.S. government funding, potentially hold clues to the origin of Covid-19 or the next pandemic. They are now mostly out of reach of U.S. scientists, part of a bitter international controversy that has effectively stalled a high-stakes hunt for the source of the coronavirus that causes Covid-19 and also made the world less prepared for future health crises. One fallout from the conflict over the origin of the pandemic is less scientific collaboration and more mistrust between two global powers that must work together with other nations to head off or mitigate the next disaster. "We are very vulnerable," said Dr. Jeremy Farrar, director of Wellcome, a London-based charitable foundation that funds health-related research. "I don't think there is nearly as much cooperation and partnership going on as there was in December 2019."

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/how-this-pandemic-has-left-us-less-prepared-for-the-next-one-11640982760>

Wastewater samples reveal record levels of coronavirus across U.S.

With at-home Covid-19 tests in high demand and their efficacy in question, health departments from California to Massachusetts are turning to sewage samples to get a better idea of how much the coronavirus is spreading through communities and what might be in store for health care systems. Experts say wastewater holds the key to better understanding the public health of cities and neighborhoods, especially in underserved areas that do not have equal access to care. "Every time an infected person uses the toilet, they're flushing this information down the toilet, where it's collecting and aggregating and mixing with poop from thousands of other people," said Newsha Ghaeli, a co-founder and the president of Biobot Analytics, a wastewater epidemiology company based in Massachusetts.

<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/wastewater-samples-reveal-record-levels-covid-19-us-rcna10451>

Omicron-related disruptions cause over 4000 flight cancellations to kick off 2022

Over 4,000 flights were cancelled around the world on Sunday, more than half of them U.S. flights, adding to the toll of holiday week travel disruptions due to adverse weather and the surge in coronavirus cases caused by the Omicron variant. The flights cancelled by 8 pm GMT on Sunday included over 2,400 entering, departing from or within the United States, according to tracking website FlightAware.com. Globally, more than 11,200 flights were delayed. Among the airlines with most cancellations were SkyWest and SouthWest, with 510 and 419 cancellations respectively, FlightAware showed.

<https://www.reuters.com/markets/commodities/airlines-grapple-with-omicron-related-disruptions-start-off-2022-2022-01-02/>

"We will not yield," French lawmaker says after death threats over vaccine pass

Lawmakers from France's ruling party said on Monday they would not be cowed by death threats

that dozens of politicians have received over a bill that will require people to show proof of vaccination to go to a restaurant or cinema or take the train. The new law, which would remove the option of showing a negative test result instead of having the jabs, has the backing of several parties and is almost certain to be passed by the lower house in a vote late on Monday or early Tuesday. But a tense debate in parliament on Monday highlighted what the government and the opposition described as widespread fatigue with the pandemic and measures to tackle it.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/french-lawmakers-vote-covid-vaccine-pass-amid-death-threats-2022-01-03/>

France Bolsters Aid for Tourism Firms to Mitigate Omicron Hit

The French government said it will ease access to crisis funds and could delay loan repayments for businesses struggling with a drop in activity as the surge in omicron cases hits tourism and leisure activities. "We are standing by firms and workers in difficulty," Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire said after meeting with representatives of business groups. "This method has allowed to relaunch economic activity very quickly and very strongly."

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-03/france-bolsters-aid-for-tourism-firms-to-mitigate-omicron-hit>

Partisan Exits

Brazil health agency warns against boarding cruise ships amid COVID-19 outbreaks

Brazilian health agency Anvisa on Sunday warned passengers against boarding cruise ships operating along the Brazilian coast after outbreaks of COVID-19 affecting crew and customers, according to a statement on its website. The move follows a call for the "immediate temporary interruption of the cruise ship season in Brazil" as they pose a risk to public health. "In view of recent events, Anvisa does not recommend the embarkation of passengers who have trips scheduled on cruise ships for the next few days," the statement said.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/brazil-health-agency-warns-against-boarding-cruise-ships-amid-covid-19-outbreaks-2022-01-03/>

Dutch police disperse thousands protesting against lockdown measures

Riot police with batons and shields broke up a crowd of several thousand who had gathered in Amsterdam on Sunday to protest against COVID-19 lockdown measures and vaccinations. Public gatherings of more than two people are prohibited under restrictions imposed by the Netherlands in an effort to prevent the Omicron variant of the coronavirus overwhelming an already strained healthcare system. At least 30 people were detained after scuffles, during which four officers were injured, police said in a statement. Amsterdam mayor Femke Halsema had issued an emergency ordinance, empowering police to clear the central Museum Square, after the protesters defied a ban on public gatherings.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/media-telecom/dutch-police-disperse-thousands-protesting-against-lockdown-measures-2022-01-02/>

Kuwait encourages citizens to leave UK on Omicron fears

The Kuwaiti embassy in the United Kingdom has encouraged its citizens to leave the country due to a "significant and unprecedented" increase in Omicron cases there, the Gulf country's state news agency reported on Sunday. The daily number of new COVID-19 infections across Britain rose to a record 189,846 on Friday, far higher than during previous peaks.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/kuwait-encourages-citizens-leave-uk-omicron-fears-2022-01-02/>

Anti-vax community blasts Trump after pro-shot comments

Former Republican President Donald Trump's recent comments touting COVID-19 vaccines as safe and a major achievement of his presidency have roiled extreme anti-vaxers, which include many of his ardent supporters. After months of a relatively low profile on vaccines and no photos of him getting inoculated, Trump on Dec. 19 told former Fox News host Bill O'Reilly during an event in

Dallas that he'd received the booster - eliciting some boos from the audience. In an interview with right-wing pundit Candace Owens released two days later, Trump pushed back when Owens suggested the shots were not safe

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/anti-vax-community-blasts-trump-after-pro-shot-comments-2021-12-30/>

COVID-19: Police appeal for information after dozens of anti-vaxxers protest at testing site

Police have appealed for information after an anti-vaccine demonstration took place at a COVID testing centre in Milton Keynes. Footage from the protest showed a woman appearing to pick up medical equipment and papers from the site and then dumping them in a nearby bin. Another demonstrator allegedly knocked down a sign, and another man apparently threw a couple of traffic cones. Dozens of people were seen in the video, including some who were holding anti-vaccine placards and shouting anti-vaccine slogans. Police said that "where criminal offences have been disclosed, we will take swift action and bring offenders to justice".

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-police-appeal-for-information-after-dozens-of-anti-vaxxers-protest-at-testing-site-12505943>

Scientific Viewpoint

Omicron Surge Stymies Public-Transit Systems

Public-transit services in New York and other cities are being interrupted, as the Omicron variant of Covid-19 continues to drive staffing shortages. Service on several New York City subway and bus lines was partially suspended Monday. An MTA spokesman said hundreds of employees have been out sick in recent days. He declined to give an exact number or say how many workers have tested positive for Covid-19, adding that the agency doesn't track specific illnesses. MTA ridership is down about 50% compared with pre-pandemic levels, New York City Transit Interim President Craig Cipriano said. The MTA is currently running over 90% of the buses and trains it typically operates, he said. Mr. Cipriano said that the MTA has contingency plans that outline service tweaks in case of staff shortages on any given day.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/omicron-surge-stymies-public-transit-systems-11641247808>

Omicron evades immunity better than Delta, Danish study finds

The Omicron coronavirus variant is better at circumventing vaccinated peoples' immunity than the Delta variant, according to a Danish study published last week, helping explain why Omicron is spreading more rapidly. Since the discovery of the heavily mutated Omicron variant in November, scientists have been racing to find out whether it causes less serious disease and why it appears more contagious than the previously dominating Delta variant.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/omicron-evades-immunity-better-than-delta-danish-study-finds-2022-01-03/>

U.S. Covid-Test Positives Suggest Case Numbers Are Undercounted

The U.S. is reporting record Covid-19 infections, but the true tally may be significantly higher. Average daily cases reached about 405,000 in the past week, about 60% higher than the previous U.S. peak in January 2021, according to Johns Hopkins University data. But the numbers of tests reported by states are still running below their 2021 highs. Meanwhile, the rate of positives among the polymerase chain reaction (PCR) tests is at 17%, the highest since April 2020. In New York City, one in three tests are coming back positive, according to data as of Dec. 31.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-03/u-s-covid-test-positives-suggest-sky-high-cases-are-undercount>

Omicron Cases Are Hitting Highs, But New Data Puts End in Sight

A string of new studies has confirmed the silver lining of the omicron variant: Even as case numbers

soar to records, the numbers of severe cases and hospitalizations have not. The data, some scientists say, signal a new, less worrying chapter of the pandemic. "We're now in a totally different phase," said Monica Gandhi, an immunologist at the University of California, San Francisco. "The virus is always going to be with us, but my hope is this variant causes so much immunity that it will quell the pandemic."

<https://www.msn.com/en-us/finance/other/omicron-cases-are-hitting-highs-but-new-data-puts-end-in-sight/ar-AAsojua>

U.S. FDA authorizes Pfizer's COVID-19 booster for 12- to 15-year-olds

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration on Monday authorized the use of a third dose of the Pfizer (PFE.N) and BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine for children ages 12 to 15, and narrowed the interval for booster shot eligibility to five months from six. The agency also authorized a third shot for children aged 5 through 11 years who are immunocompromised. The regulatory decisions come with COVID-19 cases surging due to the Omicron variant of the virus and just as many workers and school children return from holiday vacations, raising the prospect of overwhelming health systems. Some businesses and schools closed Monday as staff called in sick.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/us-fda-clears-pfizers-covid-19-booster-shot-12-15-year-olds-2022-01-03/>

Virus leaves antibodies that may attack healthy tissues; B cell antibodies weakened, not defeated by Omicron

The following is 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. Coronavirus leaves survivors with self-attacking antibodies. Months after recovering from SARS-CoV-2 infection, survivors have elevated levels of antibodies that can mistakenly attack their own organs and tissues, even if they had not been severely ill, according to new findings.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/virus-leaves-antibodies-that-may-attack-healthy-tissue-s-b-cell-antibodies-2022-01-03/>

Israel Gives Fourth 4th Shot of Covid Vaccine

Israel will start offering a fourth dose of the coronavirus vaccine to people aged 60 and over, becoming the first country in the world to widely disseminate the extra jab to fight off the omicron strain. The fourth dose will also be made available to medical staff who had their last jab at least four months ago, Prime Minister Naftali Bennett said in a press conference on Sunday. Last week, Israel approved the extra shot for people who are immunocompromised, as well as residents of nursing homes and patients in geriatric wards. New daily cases, which topped 5,000 last week in the country of 9.5 million, are expected to quadruple by the end of the week, Bennett said. The caseload could reach as many as 50,000 cases a day, he said, or nearly five times the previous peak. Critical cases remain well below previous records but have started to creep up over the past week.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-02/israel-to-start-giving-4th-vaccine-dose-to-people-older-than-60>

New Zealand to Reduce Booster Interval to 4 Months from Jan. 5

New Zealand will reduce the interval between the second Covid-19 vaccine dose and a booster shot to four months from six as part of its response to the omicron variant. People aged 18 or older who have had second shots of the vaccine at least four months ago will be eligible for a booster from Jan. 5, the Ministry of Health said in a statement. The shorter interval means that more than 82% of vaccinated people in the country will be eligible for a booster by the end of February, Dr. Ashley Bloomfield, director general of health, said in the statement. Over 70% of people who were eligible for a booster in 2021 have already had the shot, according to the statement.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-01/new-zealand-to-reduce-booster-interval-to-4-months-from-jan-5>

Omicron hospitalisation risk around one third of Delta, UK analysis shows

The risk of hospitalisation with the Omicron variant of coronavirus is about one-third that of the Delta variant, according to British analysis of more than a million cases of both types in recent weeks. Britain is experiencing a surge in COVID-19 cases driven by the highly-transmissible Omicron variant, with record daily infections of 189,846 reported on Friday. While hospital admissions have started to rise, the government has said it believes the new variant is milder than the Delta variant.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/hospitalisation-risk-omicron-around-one-third-delta-uk-analysis-shows-2021-12-31/>

J&J booster slashes Omicron hospitalisations -S.African study

A booster dose of Johnson & Johnson Inc's (JNJ.N) single-dose COVID-19 vaccine was 84% effective at preventing hospitalisation in South African healthcare workers who became infected as the Omicron variant spread, researchers said on Thursday. The real-world study, which has not been peer-reviewed, was based on a second dose of the J&J vaccine administered to 69,092 workers between Nov. 15 and Dec. 20.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/jj-booster-84-effective-against-hospitalization-safrican-omicron-era-study-2021-12-30/>

Turkey rolls out its own COVID-19 vaccine as infections surge

Turkey began administering its domestically developed COVID-19 vaccine, Turkovac, at hospitals across the country on Thursday, amid a rapid surge in infections due to the Omicron variant. Turkey has already administered more than 130 million doses of vaccines using shots developed by China's Sinovac and by Pfizer/BioNTech. It also began administering booster shots. Turkovac received emergency use authorisation from Turkish authorities last week, after its launch was beset by delays for months.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/turkey-rolls-out-its-own-covid-19-vaccine-infections-surge-2021-12-30/>

Pfizer's COVID-19 shot causes mostly mild side effects in young kids - U.S. CDC

Pfizer Inc and BioNTech SE's COVID-19 vaccine caused mostly mild side effects in children aged 5 to 11 years, according to data published by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on Thursday. The data showed that after the second dose of the vaccine some children reported injection-site pain and other systemic reactions such as fatigue and headache. The CDC said it also received reports of 11 cases of myocarditis, a type of heart inflammation, in children aged 5-11 years who had received the vaccine. Of them, seven had recovered, and four were recovering at the time of the report.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/pfizers-covid-19-shot-causes-mostly-mild-side-effects-young-kids-us-cdc-2021-12-30/>

Scientists to test high dexamethasone doses in severely ill COVID-19 patients

British scientists will be studying whether higher doses of a cheap and widely used steroid called dexamethasone could work better for patients with severe COVID-19 compared to the standard low doses, they said on Thursday. Last year, the same scientists conducting the large trial, dubbed RECOVERY, showed that dexamethasone was able to save the lives of COVID-19 patients in what was called a "major breakthrough" in the coronavirus pandemic.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/benefits-higher-doses-dexamethasone-be-tested-severe-covid-19-2021-12-30/>

Sinovac COVID-19 shot with Pfizer booster less effective against Omicron - study

Sinovac's two-dose COVID-19 vaccine followed by a booster Pfizer-BioNTech shot showed a lower immune response against the Omicron variant compared with other strains, according to a study by researchers. The study, which has not been peer-reviewed yet, was conducted by researchers from Yale University, the Dominican Republic's Ministry of Health and other institutions.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/sinovac-covid-19-shot-with-pfizer-booster-less-effectiv>

[e-against-omicron-study-2021-12-31/](#)

Britain approves Pfizer's antiviral COVID-19 pill

Britain has approved Pfizer's Paxlovid COVID-19 pill for adults who have mild to moderate infection and are at high risk of their illness worsening, its second easily administered antiviral against the coronavirus. Britain is scrambling to build its defences amid a record surge in COVID-19 cases in the winter season as the Omicron variant of the virus spreads quickly.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/britain-approves-pfizer-covid-19-pill-2021-12-31/>

Novavax Files Final Data on Covid Vaccine to U.S. Regulators

Novavax Inc. submitted the final data package for its Covid-19 vaccine candidate to U.S. regulators, bringing it one step closer to clearance. The submission to the Food and Drug Administration included details on chemistry, manufacturing and controls for the shot known as NVX-CoV2373, Novavax said in a statement. The company expects to file a request for emergency use authorization in one month, in line with the FDA's guidance around such filings. If authorized, the shot would become the fourth Covid vaccine cleared in the U.S. and the first of its kind. European regulators and the World Health Organization cleared the product this month after months of delays. Novavax has grappled with manufacturing problems despite securing some of the largest funding from the Trump administration in the early stages of the pandemic.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-12-31/novavax-files-final-data-on-covid-19-vaccine-to-u-s-regulators>

Coronavirus Resurgence

U.S. schools delay openings as Omicron pushes pandemic to record highs

Thousands of U.S. schools delayed this week's scheduled return to classrooms following the holiday break or switched to remote learning as the Omicron variant of the coronavirus pushed COVID-19 cases to record levels. In other school districts, officials pressed on with plans to reopen, including in hard-hit New York City, where one of every three COVID-19 tests over the last week was positive for the virus, according to city data released on Monday. Nationwide, the country is averaging 18% of tests coming back positive, according to the Mayo Clinic.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/omicron-teaches-hard-lessons-us-schools-revamp-return-holidays-2022-01-03/>

Daily COVID cases in Saudi Arabia above 1000, continue to climb in UAE

Daily coronavirus cases in Saudi Arabia have climbed above 1,000 for the first time since August, while daily infections in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) haven't crossed the 2,500-level. Authorities in the two Gulf Arab states did not break down the cases by COVID-19 variant. Both countries confirmed their first known case of the Omicron variant in early December. Saudi Arabia, the largest Gulf state with a population of around 30 million, on Sunday registered 1,024 new coronavirus infections and one death. Daily cases had fallen below 100 in September.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/daily-covid-cases-saudi-arabia-above-1000-continue-climb-uae-2022-01-02/>

Kids' Covid Hospitalizations Hit Record in U.S. Omicron Surge

Pediatric Covid-19 hospitalizations have risen to record levels as omicron races across the U.S., amplifying the urgency to get boosters and vaccines cleared for children. While the variant so far doesn't appear more severe than other versions in youngsters, the growing number of cases means more children are susceptible to serious illness. New hospital admissions of kids with Covid-19 have increased 66% to 378 a day on average for the week ending Tuesday, according to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The last peak occurred in early September at a daily count of 342. The Northeast and parts of the Midwest are seeing higher-than-ever numbers, though a doubling of hospitalizations in some Southern states still haven't yet hit records reached over the summer.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-12-31/kids-covid-hospitalizations-reach-record-level-in-omicron-surge>

Travelers infected one another across hallway in Covid-19 quarantine facility, New Zealand research shows

A traveler isolated for Covid-19 at a quarantine facility in New Zealand managed to infect three others across a hallway, researchers reported Thursday. Closed-circuit camera footage, genetic testing and careful contact tracing show that the only conceivable way the virus could have passed from one room to another was in air that leaked out when both doors were briefly opened, the researchers said. It's a demonstration of how the virus can spread -- and of how well vaccines can work. The one person who escaped infection was fully vaccinated and never tested positive, despite having stayed in the same room as four other infected people for weeks on end.

<https://www.cnn.com/2021/12/30/health/new-zealand-covid-facility-transmission/index.html>

The US shattered its average daily Covid-19 case record again. Experts say numbers will keep climbing in the coming weeks

A day after reporting its highest average daily Covid-19 case number, the US shattered the record Thursday, with an average of 355,990 infections reported every day in the past week, according to Johns Hopkins University. As the latest surge sweeps across the US, pushing cases and hospitalizations to unprecedented levels and altering daily life again, experts warn a turning point could be weeks away. Given the size of our country -- and the diversity of vaccination versus not vaccination -- that it likely will be more than a couple of weeks (until Covid-19 cases peak) ... probably by the end of January," Dr. Anthony Fauci, the nation's leading infectious disease expert, told CNBC. Roughly 62% of the country is fully vaccinated, according to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Only about 33% of fully vaccinated adults have gotten boosters, which experts say are critical to protect against severe illness from the variants.

<https://www.cnn.com/2021/12/31/health/us-coronavirus-friday/index.html>

S.Korea to extend curbs amid Omicron surge, serious COVID-19 cases

South Korea said on Friday it will extend stricter social distancing rules for two weeks amid a persistent surge in serious coronavirus infections and concerns over the spread of the highly contagious Omicron variant. The government reinstated the curbs on Dec. 18, six weeks after easing them under a "living with COVID-19" scheme, as record-breaking numbers of new infections and serious cases put a huge strain on the country's medical system.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/skorea-extend-curbs-amid-omicron-surge-serious-covid-19-cases-2021-12-31/>

Russia's COVID-19 death toll climbs to world's second highest

Russia has overtaken Brazil to have the world's second-highest death toll from the COVID-19 pandemic, behind the United States, data from Russia's state statistics service and Reuters calculations showed on Thursday. The statistics service, Rosstat, said 87,527 people had died from coronavirus-related causes in November, making it the deadliest month in Russia since the start of the pandemic. Russia's overall pandemic death toll reached 658,634, according to Reuters calculations based on Rosstat figures up to the end of November and data from the coronavirus task force for December, overtaking Brazil which has recorded 618,800 deaths.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russias-covid-19-death-toll-climbs-worlds-second-highest-2021-12-30/>

Hong Kong says Omicron has breached its strict COVID-19 restrictions

Hong Kong's health officials said on Friday the Omicron variant of the coronavirus has made its way past some of the world's toughest COVID 19 restrictions, with the city reporting its first cases outside its strict quarantine system. The findings raise risks that the global financial hub might keep its borders shut well into 2022. It has largely isolated itself from the world hoping in turn to open the border with mainland China for a limited number of business travellers.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/hong-kong-says-omicron-variant-has-spread-despite-covid-restrictions-2021-12-31/>

COVID-19 deaths in Eastern Europe surpass 1 million

Coronavirus deaths in Eastern Europe topped 1 million on Thursday, according to a Reuters tally, as the Omicron variant threatened to batter the region. Three out of the five countries reporting the highest number of daily deaths in Europe are from the East, including Russia, Poland and Ukraine, Reuters data through Thursday showed. "I am scared because it is a huge number of daily deaths – huge, unimaginable," said Bozena Adamowicz, a pensioner from Warsaw.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/covid-19-deaths-eastern-europe-surpass-1-million-2021-12-30/>

Greece reports new COVID-19 daily record, 76 deaths

Greece reported 40,560 COVID-19 cases on Friday, setting a new record high for the fourth successive day following a surge of cases of the Omicron coronavirus variant. Health authorities said 76 deaths had been reported on Friday. Greece introduced new restrictions this week, ordering bars, restaurants and nightclubs to close at midnight, with no standing customers and no music. An exception is New Year's Eve, when establishments can close at 2 a.m.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/greece-reports-new-covid-19-daily-record-76-deaths-2021-12-31/>

Portugal's COVID-19 cases hit record, Omicron dominates at 83%

Portugal reported on Friday a new daily record of 30,829 coronavirus cases, up from 28,659 the previous day, with the rapidly spreading Omicron variant accounting for an estimated 83% of all new cases, official data showed. Health authority DGS registered 18 fatalities from COVID-19, up from Thursday's 16, but that was only a fraction of the more than 300 daily deaths suffered in late January, when Portugal had just begun its vaccination campaign. The number of patients in intensive care was steady at 145, also well below more than 900 in early 2021.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/portugals-covid-19-cases-hit-record-omicron-dominates-83-2021-12-31/>

UK had over 2 million COVID-19 cases in week to Dec. 23 - official estimate

More than 2 million people in Britain tested positive for COVID-19 in the week before Christmas, Office for National Statistics (ONS) estimates published on Friday showed, with the highest ratio of around one in 25 people seen in England. Britain is experiencing a surge in cases of the virus driven by the highly-transmissible Omicron variant, but the government is hoping its comprehensive vaccine programme and potentially milder disease caused by Omicron will allow it to keep the economy largely open.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uk-had-over-2-million-covid-19-cases-week-dec-23-official-estimate-2021-12-31/>

Covid Latest: US Daily Cases Hit Records as Omicron Sweeps Across the Country

In Boston, coronavirus levels measured in wastewater are spiking to more than quadruple last winter's surge. In Miami, more than a quarter of people are testing positive for Covid. And a San Francisco medical leader estimates that, based on his hospital's tests, one of every 12 people in the city with no Covid symptoms actually has the virus. As the omicron variant sweeps the country, daily cases are reaching unheard-of levels, crossing the half-million mark, and are only expected to go much higher. Some projections are for a peak of more than one million cases a day by as early as mid-January. "That seems totally plausible to me, given that we're already at almost 600,000," said Sam Scarpino, managing director of pathogen surveillance at the Rockefeller Foundation's Pandemic Prevention Institute

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-12-31/cases-rise-through-the-roof-as-omicron-sweeps-across-u-s>

Covid-19 Australia: Doherty Institute director says Omicron cases to surge but strain less severe

Doherty Institute director warned Omicron cases will surge to 'very high' level. Sharon Lewin said

less severe strain meant restrictions could begin to ease. Changes were recently made to isolation rules and close contact definition. Remarks came after 2GB's Ray Hadley slammed NSW government over Covid NSW reported pandemic record 21,151 cases and Victoria 5,919 infections

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10357171/Covid-19-Doherty.html>