

# COVID-19 Lockdown Exit Analysis

## 11th Jan 2022

---

### What we want to achieve

- A reliable news source -- We search for stories that come from reliable sources. We're trying to create a disinformation bulwark, a wall built from a range of stories and perspectives that can help users see what is being written about Covid-19 around the world each day.
- A trustworthy source -- By hand-picking stories a range of stories from reliable sources we aim to support COVID health literacy and decision making and not dictate what organizations or individuals should think or do in any fashion.
- A logical presentation -- Our search tool scoops up news via APIs, expert analysts read the text and editors organise the stories in accessible and logical categories each day.
- A useful compendium of stories -- We aim to maintain independence, integrity and accuracy - in the hope of creating a database of stories and information journalists and decision makers on all levels can use to help themselves better understand action options, advocate for smarter policies and communicate useful information.
- A crowd- resourced platform -- after two years and more than 560 newsletters we are looking for contributors, donors and/or amplifiers to 'freshen-up' this platform and expand its reach and impact.

If you want to get behind this newsletter in some fashion please get in touch at [admin@nfind.uk](mailto:admin@nfind.uk)

### **Lockdown Exit**

---

#### **Chile, a vaccine front-runner, launches fourth COVID dose**

Chile, one of the world's fastest movers on COVID-19 vaccines, started its campaign to give fourth doses on Monday to immunocompromised people, a regional first, as infections rise driven by the fast spread of the Omicron variant. The South American country has seen daily infections rise to over 4,000, doubling over the last week, government data show, a reflection of soaring infections globally, despite hopes over data suggesting Omicron may be less fatal, if more contagious. "This vaccine, this fourth dose or second booster dose, will be available to everyone

<https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/chile-vaccine-front-runner-launches-fourth-covid-dose-2022-01-10/>

#### **U.S. Covid-19 Cases Set to Triple Pre-Omicron Record**

The seven-day average of newly reported Covid-19 infections in the U.S. is on track to triple the pre-Omicron record set a year ago, when America saw a quarter million daily cases, as concerns grow over access to and reliability of testing both in the U.S. and Europe, where the highly transmissible Omicron variant has also taken root. Growing demand for tests has led some laboratories to ration access, giving priority to people exhibiting symptoms or who have other underlying health concerns. The University of North Carolina's microbiology lab, for instance, is restricting tests to those showing Covid-19 symptoms, employees and patients who need a test before undergoing surgery. The University of Washington temporarily closed some of its testing sites last week and is giving appointment priority to people with Covid-19 symptoms or a known exposure, amid growing demand, though health experts worry that asymptomatic people might continue to spread the virus if they are unable to access testing.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-cases-set-to-triple-pre-omicron-record-11641816922>

### **Italy's COVID woes mainly caused by unvaccinated, Draghi says**

The small number of Italians who refuse to be vaccinated against COVID-19 are largely responsible for the continued health crisis, Prime Minister Mario Draghi said on Monday. The government last week made vaccinations mandatory for everyone aged over 50, one of very few European countries to take such a step, in an attempt to ease pressure on its hospitals as new cases surge. "We must never lose sight of the fact that most of the problems we have today are because there are non-vaccinated people," Draghi told a news conference. "For the umpteenth time, I invite all those Italians who are not yet vaccinated to do so, and to get the third shot."

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/italys-covid-woes-mainly-caused-by-unvaccinated-draghi-says-2022-01-10/>

### **Omicron takes over as Czech Republic's dominant coronavirus variant**

The Omicron variant of the COVID-19 coronavirus has become the dominant strain in the Czech Republic, the country's National Institute of Public Health (SZU) said on Monday. The central European country of 10.7 million expects the Omicron wave to culminate in late January, with about 50,000 daily cases detected, but that may not be a complete picture because of the expected strain on testing capacity, the government and independent experts have said. The SZU said that Omicron had accounted for more than 50% of positive tests as of Jan. 8, with samples from mainly big cities on Jan. 9 showing 79% of COVID-19 cases were the Omicron variant

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/omicron-takes-over-czech-republics-dominant-coronavirus-variant-2022-01-10/>

/

### **U.S. breaks COVID-19 hospitalization record at over 132000 as Omicron surges**

COVID-19 hospitalizations in the United States reached a record high on Monday, according to a Reuters tally, as a surge in infections caused by the highly contagious Omicron variant strains health systems in several states. There were 132,646 people hospitalized with COVID, surpassing the record of 132,051 set in January last year. Hospitalizations have increased steadily since late December, doubling in the last three weeks, as Omicron quickly overtook Delta as the dominant version of the virus in the United States.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-breaks-covid-19-hospitalization-record-omicron-surges-2022-01-10/>

### **Pfizer CEO predicts omicron vaccine will be ready in March**

Pfizer CEO Albert Bourla on Monday said that his company is aiming to have a vaccine that targets the omicron variant as well as other COVID-19 variants ready in March. "This vaccine will be ready in March," Bourla said in an appearance on CNBC's "Squawk Box." "We [are] already starting manufacturing some of these quantities at risk," he added. Pfizer will produce the doses to be ready in case countries want the shots, but Bourla noted that it was unclear if a vaccine targeting variants was necessary or how exactly it would be used. "The hope is that we will achieve something that will have way, way better protection particularly against infections, because the protection against the hospitalizations and the severe disease — it is reasonable right now with the current vaccines as long as you are having let's say the third dose," Bourla said.

<https://thehill.com/policy/healthcare/588988-pfizer-ceo-predicts-omicron-vaccine-will-be-ready-in-march>

### **Spanish PM calls for debate on treating COVID-19 as endemic**

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez says that amid falling lethality rates for COVID-19, Spain wants European officials to consider whether to move away from the detailed tracking that the pandemic has required until now to a flu-like monitoring system. The change would mean treating COVID-19 as an "endemic illness" rather than a pandemic, Sánchez said Monday, adding that deaths as a proportion of recorded cases have fallen dramatically since the initial onset of the pandemic. "I believe that we have the conditions for, with precaution, slowly, opening the debate at the technical level and at the level of health professionals, but also at the European level, to start evaluating the evolution of this disease with different parameters than we have until now," Sánchez told Cadena

SER radio.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/pedro-sanchez-madrid-spanish-pfizer-el-pais-b1989897.html>

### **COVID-19: 'End in sight' but there will be more 'bumps' for next three months - WHO envoy**

COVID-19 could continue to pose a "difficult" situation for the next three months but "we can see the end in sight", the World Health Organisation's special envoy on the virus has said. Disease experts are looking at when coronavirus will become endemic and how governments will need to change the way it is managed in the future. The WHO's Dr David Nabarro told Sky News: "I'm afraid we are moving through the marathon but there's no actual way to say that we're at the end - we can see the end in sight, but we're not there. And there's going to be some bumps before we get there."

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-end-in-sight-but-there-will-be-more-bumps-for-next-three-months-who-envoy-12512938>

### **Covid-19 news: Ministers plan for UK to 'live with covid'**

UK government ministers are hinting at plans for the nation to "live with covid". "I hope we will be one of the first major economies to demonstrate to the world how you transition from pandemic to endemic," Nadhim Zahawi, former minister for covid vaccine deployment, told Sky News on Sunday. Prime Minister Boris Johnson is expected to announce details of such a plan within the coming weeks. "We are moving to a situation where it is possible to say that we can live with covid and that the pressure on the NHS and on vital public services is abating," senior minister Michael Gove told Sky News. "But it's absolutely vital to recognise that we are not there yet." To be considered endemic, a disease outbreak would be consistently present in a region, with predictable spread and infection rates. The spread and rates of the disease would be predictable. This is currently far from the case in the UK, where over 150,000 deaths have been reported so far, and 141,472 new cases were reported on Sunday. Scientists have expressed concern. Devi Sridhar at the University of Edinburgh points out that no country has learned to live with covid without "crashing health services, social life, the economy or having widespread disruption" in one way or another.

<https://www.newscientist.com/article/2237475-covid-19-news-ministers-plan-for-uk-to-live-with-covid/>

### **Schools return amid Omicron havoc, but hopes flicker**

European governments are relaxing COVID-19 rules to keep hospitals, schools and emergency services going as the much more contagious but less lethal Omicron variant changes their approach to the pandemic. Even though a record surge in infections has yet to peak in Europe, Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said the time was right to start evaluating the disease's evolution "with different parameters". The mass return of children to school after the Christmas holidays is evidence that few wish to see a return to the online-only learning that marked some of the early waves of infection. Even as France registered a record seven-day average of almost 270,000 cases a day, it eased testing protocols for schoolchildren, saying too many classes were closed

<https://www.reuters.com/world/schools-return-amid-omicron-havoc-hopes-flicker-2022-01-10/>

### **Europe loosens COVID policies as Omicron takes out key workers**

The Czech Republic said on Monday it would allow critical workers such as doctors and teachers to go to work after a positive COVID-19 test, the latest European country to ease restrictions to keep services running as cases surge. As the much more contagious Omicron variant becomes dominant and forces hundreds of thousands to isolate, the pressure is growing on health workers, police and firefighters, with teachers set to follow as schools resume after Christmas holidays.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/europe-loosens-covid-policies-omicron-takes-out-key-workers-2022-01-10/>

## **Exit Strategies**

---

### **Draghi Says Keeping Schools Open Is Italy's Pandemic Priority**

Prime Minister Mario Draghi said the Italian government's priority is to avoid closing schools and blamed those yet to get vaccinated against Covid-19 for the nation's pandemic woes. "Most of the problems we have today stem from the fact that there are people who are not vaccinated," Draghi said at a press conference in Rome on Monday. "It doesn't make sense to close schools before everything else." The government successfully challenged in court a decision by the southern Campania region to keep schools closed after the Christmas vacation amid rising infections. Italy recorded more than 100,000 new cases and over 700 new hospitalizations on Monday.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-10/draghi-says-keeping-schools-open-is-italy-s-pandemic-priority>

### **UK government urges all pregnant women to get immediate Covid jab**

The UK government is warning that almost all pregnant women admitted to hospital with Covid symptoms were unvaccinated in one analysis over several months last year, as it kicks off an advertising campaign encouraging expectant mothers to get boosted. The campaign is calling on pregnant women not to wait to get either their first, second or booster jab. It will highlight the risks of Covid-19 to mothers and babies, with testimonies of pregnant women who have had the vaccine to be broadcast on radio and social media.

<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/jan/10/uk-government-urges-all-pregnant-women-to-get-immediate-covid-jab>

### **Chile starts fourth vaccine dose as coronavirus cases rise**

Chile is implementing a fourth vaccination dose for some citizens as the number of daily coronavirus infections rises. President Sebastián Piñera was present on Monday when two adults with immunosuppression problems received a fourth vaccination for COVID-19 at a Santiago hospital. Chile is applying a fourth dose early because the current daily infection rate of 4,000 coronavirus cases could rise to 10,000 or more, Piñera said. Vaccination with a fourth dose for the immunosuppressed will end on Feb. 7. Then the program will turn to people over 55 years old who had a third dose at least six months ago.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/chile-santiago-sebastian-pinera-vaccination-peru-b1990046.html>

### **Britain puts private health firms on high alert as Omicron threatens NHS**

Britain on Monday put the biggest private health companies on high alert to deliver crucial treatments such as cancer surgery should Omicron overwhelm National Health Service hospitals in England. The United Kingdom's death toll from the COVID-19 pandemic stands at 150,154, the world's seventh worst official COVID toll after the United States, Brazil, India, Russia, Mexico and Peru. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson has bet on refraining from lockdowns to deal with the Omicron variant which in recent weeks has swept across the United Kingdom, albeit with death rates significantly lower than previous waves.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/englands-nhs-tells-private-health-providers-prepare-help-us-2022-01-10/>

### **Pope backs COVID immunisation campaigns, warns of ideological misinformation**

Pope Francis on Monday condemned "baseless" ideological misinformation about COVID-19 vaccines, backing national immunisation campaigns and calling health care a moral obligation. Francis spoke in his yearly address to the diplomatic corps accredited to the Vatican, sometimes called his "State of the World" address because it is a broad survey of the global situation. His words to diplomats from nearly 200 countries marked the closest he has ever come to a de facto backing of vaccine mandates, which have become controversial in Italy and other European countries.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/pope-backs-covid-immunisation-campaigns-warns-ideological-misinformation-2022-01-10/>

### **Spain set to limit retail price of COVID-19 antigen tests**

Spain's government is working on rules to limit the retail price of antigen tests for COVID-19, Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said on Monday, after shortages were reported in many pharmacies across

the country last month. Price rises during the surge in Omicron cases and the scarcity of tests in pharmacies have raised protests from opposition politicians and consumer groups, many of whom are calling for tests to be sold in supermarkets.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/spains-government-limit-retail-price-covid-antigen-tests-2022-01-10/>

### **Million Indians get COVID vaccine boosters, hospitalisation low**

More than 1 million Indians received their third COVID-19 vaccine dose on Monday as the country rolled out boosters for frontline workers and vulnerable elderly, with the Omicron variant fuelling an eight-fold rise in infections in 10 days. The health ministry said only 5% to 10% of the infected have sought hospitalisation, compared with 20% to 23% during the Delta-driven last wave that peaked in May. Authorities say most people have shown no or only minor symptoms and have recovered quickly at home. "The situation is dynamic and evolving, therefore, the need for hospitalisation may also change rapidly," Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan wrote in a letter to state authorities asking them to regularly review staffing levels

<https://www.reuters.com/world/india/indias-covid-19-cases-multiply-vulnerable-groups-given-vaccine-boosters-2022-01-10/>

### **UK PM Johnson 'looking at' cutting COVID-19 isolation period**

Britain is making progress against Omicron and is looking at reducing the isolation period to five days, Prime Minister Boris Johnson said on Monday, though he cautioned the number of hospitalised COVID-19 cases was rising. Asked about cutting the isolation period from seven days to five days, he said: "We're looking at that." But he added that the government would follow the science.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uk-pm-johnson-looking-at-cutting-covid-19-isolation-period-2022-01-10/>

### **Labs Limit Covid-19 Test Access as Demand Soars**

Escalating demand for Covid-19 tests is prompting some laboratories to ration access, giving priority to people with symptoms or other health concerns as the Omicron variant quickly spreads. Triaging who is eligible for Covid-19 tests can help ensure that patients who need a test the most get results fast enough to isolate or get treatment, pathologists and public-health experts say. The strategy, however, risks perpetuating the virus's spread if some people get turned away from testing altogether. "What we don't want is for people to not be able to get tested in the community and then show up at the ER to get testing," said Melissa Miller, director of the University of North Carolina's microbiology lab. "But there is a maximum amount that you can collect in a day."

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/labs-limit-covid-19-test-access-as-demand-soars-11641724202>

### **Hong Kong's Covid Zero Strategy Has Failed. It's Time For a Policy Rethink**

Hong Kong's veneer of normalcy has been shattered — and it's exposed just how misguided and unrealistic the territory's Covid-19 containment strategy has become two years into the pandemic. After months of no local Covid infections, Hong Kong reported a string of positive cases over the past week. The territory's so-called fifth wave was set off by an aircrew employee who didn't fully comply with his medical surveillance rules — a special concession for airlines. He went to a restaurant for lunch and it quickly spread from there. Several senior government officials, including the territory's police chief, immigration head and financial services secretary, were ordered into quarantine after attending a birthday party that flouted warnings to avoid large gatherings.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2022-01-09/hong-kong-s-covid-zero-strategy-has-failed-it-s-time-for-a-policy-rethink>

### **Canada resists pressure to drop vaccine mandate for cross-border truckers**

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau is pushing ahead with a vaccine mandate for international truckers despite increasing pressure from critics who say it will exacerbate driver shortages and drive up the price of goods imported from the United States. Canada will require all truckers entering from the United States to show proof of vaccination starting on Saturday as part of its fight

against COVID-19. That could force some 16,000, or 10%, of cross-border drivers off the roads, the Canadian Trucking Alliance (CTA) estimates. The government estimates 5% of drivers will be impacted, according to a government source.

<https://www.reuters.com/markets/commodities/canada-resists-pressure-drop-vaccine-mandate-cross-border-truckers-2022-01-09/>

### **UK minister backs reduced COVID isolation period to ease workforce pressures**

Reducing the self-isolation period for people who test positive for COVID-19 from seven days to five would help British employers that have been hard hit by absences, education minister Nadhim Zahawi said on Sunday. The Omicron variant is still spreading in Britain and many businesses, schools and hospitals are struggling with staff shortages, fuelling calls for the rules on isolation after a positive test to be reduced further. Last month, health authorities in the United States shortened the recommended isolation time for asymptomatic cases of COVID-19 to five days from the previous guidance of 10 days

<https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uk-minister-says-reduced-covid-isolation-period-would-help-workers-2022-01-09/>

### **Relying on more home COVID tests, Israel looks to lower costs**

Israel sought on Sunday to ease access to home COVID-19 tests after a decision to allow most vaccinated people to use the kits to decide whether or not to quarantine led to shortages in shops and complaints about high prices. "We are mindful of the public's distress," Prime Minister Naftali Bennett said at the weekly cabinet meeting, announcing that every child in kindergarten or elementary school in Israel would be issued will three free kits in the coming days. The government was also negotiating price reductions with major pharmacy chains, Bennett said, adding: "In any event, costs will come down in the near future because the market will be flooded with millions of kits that will arrive in Israel."

<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/israel-issue-young-children-with-free-covid-home-tests-bennett-says-2022-01-09/>

### **Covid in Scotland: Wrongheaded to stop free lateral flow tests, says Nicola Sturgeon**

Nicola Sturgeon has insisted it would be "utterly wrongheaded" to halt the free availability of lateral flow tests as her health secretary dismissed the idea of following England and reducing quarantine to five days. Under plans reportedly being considered by UK officials, the tests could soon be made available only in "high-risk" settings such as care homes, hospitals and schools. A Whitehall source told The Sunday Times: "I don't think we are in a world where we can continue to hand out free lateral flow tests to everybody forevermore. It's likely we will move to a scenario where there is less testing but where we have a capacity to ramp it up if necessary, such as in the winter."

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/1f7cafe2-71a4-11ec-aacf-0736e08b15cd?shareToken=d0f09e21b2e5db123f9329e0ef08ae5e>

### **Europe loosens COVID policies as Omicron takes out key workers**

The Czech Republic said on Monday it would allow critical workers such as doctors and teachers to go to work after a positive COVID-19 test, the latest European country to ease restrictions to keep services running as cases surge. As the much more contagious Omicron variant becomes dominant and forces hundreds of thousands to isolate, the pressure is growing on health workers, police and firefighters, with teachers set to follow as schools resume after Christmas holidays

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/europe-loosens-covid-policies-omicron-takes-out-key-workers-2022-01-10/>

## **Partisan Exits**

---

### **Ikea Cuts Sick Pay for Unvaccinated Staff Ordered to Isolate**

Ikea imposed a financial penalty on unvaccinated U.K. employees who miss work if they are ordered to self-isolate after coming into contact with someone with Covid-19. If these workers become ill

with the virus themselves, however, they will still receive sick pay as normal, Ikea said in a statement to Bloomberg. The changes, which came into effect in September, mean that unvaccinated staff only receive statutory sick pay of 96.35 pounds (\$131) a week during the 10-day isolation period -- which is much lower than average weekly wages before taxes.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-10/ikea-reduces-covid-sick-pay-for-unvaccinated-british-workers>

### **London hospital boss says he may lose 1000 staff over Covid vaccine mandate**

A London hospital leader has said he may lose 1,000 staff to the Covid vaccination mandate, but hopes admissions from the Omicron wave have peaked in in the capital. The chief executive of King's College hospital NHS trust, Prof Clive Kay, told the BBC's Sunday Morning programme that his organisation was working urgently to encourage staff to come forward for vaccination to avoid redeploying or losing them.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/09/london-hospital-boss-says-he-may-lose-1000-staff-over-covid-vaccine-mandate>

### **French politician attacked by anti-COVID vaccine pass demonstrators**

French politician Stephane Claireaux, who is a member of President Emmanuel Macron's ruling La Republique En Marche party, said on Monday that he had been attacked over the weekend by protesters demonstrating against France's COVID health pass. The attack on Claireaux, which occurred on Sunday, comes amid public anger in France after Macron said he wanted to "piss off" unvaccinated people by making their lives so complicated they would end up getting the COVID vaccine.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/french-politician-attacked-by-anti-covid-vaccine-pass-demonstrators-2022-01-10/>

### **Djokovic back in practice after winning appeal to stay in Australia**

Novak Djokovic was back in training hours after winning a court challenge to remain in Australia on Monday, thanking the judge who released him from immigration detention and saying he remained focused on trying to win a record 21st tennis major. The fight over the world number one's medical exemption from COVID-19 vaccination in order to enter Australia and play may not be over, however, as the government said it was still considering another way to deport him. "I am pleased and grateful that the judge overturned my visa cancellation," Djokovic wrote on Twitter, where he posted a photograph of himself on court at Melbourne Park after a chaotic few days.

<https://www.reuters.com/lifestyle/sports/novak-djokovics-bid-stay-australia-goes-before-courts-2022-01-09/>

### **Brazil health regulator asks Bolsonaro to retract criticism over vaccines**

The head of Brazil's health regulator Anvisa has asked the country's vaccine-skeptic President Jair Bolsonaro to retract statements he made criticizing the agency for authorizing the vaccination of children against COVID-19. In a letter to Bolsonaro made public late Saturday, retired rear admiral Antonio Barra Torres asked the president to back up his statement that there were undisclosed "interests" behind the vaccine decision or else retract his words.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/brazil-health-regulator-asks-bolsonaro-retract-criticism-over-vaccines-2022-01-09/>

## **Scientific Viewpoint**

---

### **T Cells Triggered by Common Cold Fend Off Covid in Study**

High levels of protective immune cells that fight some common colds also made people less likely to contract Covid-19 in a study. Researchers found higher levels of T cells against certain colds in people who didn't develop Covid while living with someone who had the disease, according to a study released Monday by the U.K.'s Imperial College London. The prior illnesses were caused by other coronaviruses related to SARS-CoV-2. The findings, published in the journal Nature

Communications, provide further evidence of the protective effects of T cells, an arm of the immune system that's gaining attention as the pandemic stretches into its third year and new variants like omicron erode vaccine protection.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-10/t-cells-triggered-by-common-cold-also-fend-off-covid-in-study>

### **T-cells from common colds can provide protection against COVID-19 - study**

High levels of T-cells from common cold coronaviruses can provide protection against COVID-19, an Imperial College London study published on Monday has found, which could inform approaches for second-generation vaccines.

<https://www.msn.com/en-us/health/medical/t-cells-from-common-colds-can-provide-protection-against-covid-19-study/ar-AASCau9>

### **Rapid testing for Omicron: is a nose swab enough?**

The fast-spreading Omicron variant has made us more reliant on rapid at-home antigen tests to tell us if we have COVID-19. But should we be swabbing our throats as well as our noses? For now, the guidance depends on where you live. Some scientists have said people can transmit Omicron when it has infected their throat and saliva but before the virus has reached their noses, so swabbing the nostrils early in the infection will not pick it up.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/rapid-testing-omicron-is-nose-swab-enough-2022-01-10/>

### **Will we ever reach herd immunity to Covid?**

In May 2020, we and other scientists predicted that many regions of the world might never reach the herd immunity threshold for Covid-19 – the point at which enough people are immune to infection that transmission begins to slow down. This remains true today, even as vaccines have become accessible in wealthy nations and many people have built up immunity through vaccinations, boosters and previous infections. The herd immunity threshold was commonly misunderstood as a universal target to hit early in the pandemic. But the threshold has always been changeable: it depends on how transmissible the pathogen is, and the behavioural and immunological characteristics of the population in which it is spreading – how much they mix and how easily they are infected.

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/jan/10/herd-immunity-threshold-covid-new-variants>

### **Swab throat too when using rapid COVID test, Israel's Health Ministry says**

Israel's Health Ministry on Monday instructed people self-testing for COVID-19 to swab their throat as well as their nose when using rapid antigen kits to increase the chances of detecting the Omicron variant. The recommendation goes against the advice of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, which has said manufacturers' instructions should still be followed and that incorrect use of throat swabs could pose a safety risk. On Israeli Army Radio, Sharon Alroy-Preis, Israel's public health chief, said antigen tests, used widely in the country, are less sensitive than PCR tests in detecting illness.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/swab-throat-too-when-using-rapid-covid-test-israeli-health-official-says-2022-01-10/>

### **EU regulator could issue decision on Pfizer COVID-19 pill 'within weeks'**

The European Union's drug regulator said on Monday it could issue "within weeks" a decision on whether to approve the use of Pfizer's COVID-19 pill, Paxlovid, after the U.S. drugmaker submitted an application seeking authorisation. The approval sought is for the treatment of mild-to-moderate COVID-19 in patients 12 years of age and older, weighing at least 40 kilograms and are at high risk of their illness worsening, the European Medicines Agency

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/eu-regulator-could-issue-decision-pfizer-covid-19-pill-within-weeks-2022-01-10/>

### **Pfizer CEO unsure on need for fourth dose of COVID-19 vaccine**

Pfizer Inc Chief Executive Albert Bourla on Monday said a redesigned COVID-19 vaccine that specifically targets the Omicron coronavirus variant is likely needed and his company could have one ready to launch by March. Bourla said Pfizer and partner BioNTech SE are working on both an Omicron-targeted vaccine version as well as a shot that would include both the previous vaccine as well as one targeted at the fast-spreading variant. "I think it is the most likely scenario," Bourla said, speaking at J.P. Morgan's annual healthcare conference, which is being held virtually this year. "We're working on higher doses. We're working different schedules. We're doing a lot of things right now, as we speak."

<https://www.reuters.com/markets/deals/pfizer-joins-beam-therapeutics-develop-rare-disease-therapies-2022-01-10/>

### **Avacta pauses sales of COVID-19 antigen test to improve Omicron sensitivity**

Britain's Avacta Group is halting sales of its COVID-19 rapid antigen lateral flow test to replace antibodies in the device and boost its ability to detect the Omicron variant, the biotech firm said on Monday, sending its shares plunging nearly 27%. The London-listed company's test, AffiDX, can detect the Omicron variant when the virus is present in high numbers in samples, but tests carried out by Avacta found AffiDX is less sensitive to Omicron at lower viral loads versus other variants.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/covid-19-test-maker-avacta-pauses-sales-antigen-flow-test-2022-01-10/>

### **Novartis in-licenses COVID-19 treatment ensovibep from Molecular Partners**

Novartis said it will license in a new drug it has been developing with Molecular Partners to treat COVID-19, the Swiss company said on Monday, after getting positive trial data. Novartis will pay 150 million Swiss francs (\$162.92 million) to in-license ensovibep from Molecular Partners to speed up its manufacturing ramp up and get approvals for the drug more quickly. The decision comes after the two companies said they had received positive topline data from a phase 2 study for ensovibep (mp0420), an antiviral therapeutic for COVID-19 that will from now on be developed and manufactured by Novartis.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/novartis-in-licenses-covid-19-treatment-ensovibep-molecular-partners-2022-01-10/>

### **T-cells from common colds can provide protection against COVID-19 - study**

High levels of T-cells from common cold coronaviruses can provide protection against COVID-19, an Imperial College London study published on Monday has found, which could inform approaches for second-generation vaccines. Immunity against COVID-19 is a complex picture, and while there is evidence of waning antibody levels six months after vaccination, T-cells are also believed to play a vital role in providing protection. The study, which began in September 2020, looked at levels of cross-reactive T-cells generated by previous common colds in 52 household contacts of positive COVID-19 cases shortly after exposure, to see if they went on to develop infection.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/t-cells-common-colds-can-provide-protection-against-covid-19-study-2022-01-10/>

### **Qatar Approves Pfizer Boosters for Children Aged 12 to 15 Years**

Qatar approved the Pfizer-BioNTech booster coronavirus vaccine for children aged 12 to 15 years as nations fight the spread of the omicron variant. Children who received their second dose more than six months ago are eligible for the booster shots, according to a statement. Recently, the Ministry of Public Health had approved booster doses to those aged 16 and 17 years. Qatar reported 3,056 new confirmed cases among the community and 633 among travelers on Sunday. That is one of the highest daily numbers in the recent past.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-09/qatar-approves-pfizer-boosters-for-children-aged-12-to-15-years>

## **Cyprus Finds Covid-19 Infections That Combine Delta and Omicron**

A strain of Covid-19 that combines delta and omicron was found in Cyprus, according to Leondios Kostrikis, professor of biological sciences at the University of Cyprus and head of the Laboratory of Biotechnology and Molecular Virology. "There are currently omicron and delta co-infections and we found this strain that is a combination of these two," Kostrikis said in an interview with Sigma TV Friday. The discovery was named "deltacron" due to the identification of omicron-like genetic signatures within the delta genomes, he said. Kostrikis and his team have identified 25 such cases and the statistical analysis shows that the relative frequency of the combined infection is higher among patients hospitalized due to Covid-19 as compared to non-hospitalized patients. The sequences of the 25 deltacron cases were sent to GISAID, the international database that tracks changes in the virus, on Jan. 7.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-08/cyprus-finds-covid-19-infections-that-combine-delta-and-omicron>

## **Covid-19 Variant Deltacron Is Real, Scientist Says**

A Cypriot scientist defended his assertion that a new strain of Covid-19 exists that combines characteristics of the delta and omicron variants. Other scientists have speculated that Leonidos Kostrikis's findings are a result of laboratory contamination. But he told Bloomberg in an emailed statement Sunday that the cases he has identified "indicate an evolutionary pressure to an ancestral strain to acquire these mutations and not a result of a single recombination event."

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-09/cypriot-scientist-says-covid-19-variant-deltacron-not-an-error>

## **Germany assessing reliability of antibody tests for Omicron - minister**

Germany will study how reliable rapid antigen tests are in detecting the fast-spreading Omicron variant of COVID-19, Health Minister Karl Lauterbach said on Sunday. "We do not know exactly how well these tests work for Omicron," Lauterbach said on public broadcasting channel ARD, adding the results of the assessment would become available within the next few weeks. It was clear, however, that "the alternative not to test at all ... would be far too dangerous," said Lauterbach, a scientist and physician.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/germany-assessing-reliability-antibody-tests-omicron-minister-2022-01-09/>

## **Pfizer CEO unsure on need for fourth dose of COVID-19 vaccine**

Pfizer Inc Chief Executive Officer Albert Bourla said on Monday he was unsure about the need for a fourth dose of COVID-19 vaccine and that a shot targeting the highly contagious Omicron variant would be ready in March. The comments contrasted with those made by Moderna Inc CEO Stephen Bancel, who said last week people could need another shot in the fall of 2022 as the efficacy of boosters was likely to decline over the next few months.

[reuters.com/markets/deals/pfizer-joins-beigunx-develop-rare-disease-therapies-2022-01-10/](https://www.reuters.com/markets/deals/pfizer-joins-beigunx-develop-rare-disease-therapies-2022-01-10/)

## **Coronavirus Resurgence**

---

### **Nepal closes schools as COVID-19 cases spike**

Schools across Nepal will close for nearly three weeks after a spike in coronavirus cases, a government spokesman said on Monday, forcing more than seven million students to stay at home. Nepal reported 841 new cases on Sunday, the biggest single-day jump since September last year, taking its total to 832,589 since the pandemic began. Its death toll from the coronavirus is 11,604. Education Ministry spokesman Deepak Sharma said schools would remain closed until Jan. 29 although a campaign to vaccinate children aged 12 to 17 at their schools would go ahead. "Schools must notify students about the time and date when they need to go to schools and receive the shots," Sharma told Reuters. Authorities hope the closure of schools will help break chains of infection amid fears about the rapid spread of the omicron variant of the virus.

<https://bdnews24.com/world/south-asia/2022/01/10/nepal-closes-schools-as-covid-19-cases-spike>

### **France averages new record of nearly 270000 new Covid cases per day**

The number of people in hospital with COVID-19 in France rose by 767 to 22,749 on Monday, the biggest increase since April 2021 as a runaway Omicron infection rate boosted hospitalisations. Net new hospital admissions still remained well below peaks set in Nov-Dec 2020, when they stood over 700 for nearly a month and COVID-19 hospitalisations peaked at 33,497 on Nov. 16, 2020. Health Minister Olivier Veran told lawmakers on Monday that the Omicron coronavirus variant leads to less serious complications than previous variants, but since it is highly infectious, it is pushing hospital numbers up quickly.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/france-averages-new-record-nearly-270000-new-covid-cases-per-day-2022-01-10/>

### **Hospitals Cut Beds as Nurses Call In Sick With Covid-19**

Rising numbers of nurses and other critical healthcare workers are calling in sick across the U.S. due to Covid-19, forcing hospitals to cut capacity just as the Omicron variant sends them more patients, industry officials say. The hospitals are leaving beds empty because the facilities don't have enough staffers to safely care for the patients, and a tight labor market has made finding replacements difficult. Staff shortages prompted the Mass General Brigham hospital system in Boston to keep 83 beds empty on Friday. The University Hospitals system in Ohio has closed as many as 16% of its intensive-care beds recently, while Parkland Health & Hospital System in Dallas has shut 30 of 900 beds. "It's definitely a brutal situation," said Dr. Joseph Chang, chief medical officer at Parkland, which had more than 500 out of 14,000 employees out sick one recent day.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/hospitals-cut-beds-as-nurses-call-in-sick-with-covid-19-11641810781>

### **Nepal bans big public gatherings, closes schools as COVID cases spike**

Nepal banned large public gatherings and closed schools across the Himalayan nation for nearly three weeks after a spike in coronavirus cases, officials said on Monday. Nepal reported 1,357 new cases on Monday, the biggest single-day jump since September last year, taking its total to 833,946 since the pandemic began. Its death toll from the coronavirus is 11,606. Home Ministry spokesman Pradip Kumar Koirala said public gatherings like political rallies and religious functions involving more than 25 people had been prohibited.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/nepal-closes-schools-covid-19-cases-spike-2022-01-10/>

### **Australia vows to 'push through' Omicron wave as infections cross 1 mln**

Australia must "push through" the fast-moving Omicron outbreak, Prime Minister Scott Morrison said on Monday, as infections surpassed 1 million, more than half in the past week alone, throwing a strain on hospitals and supply chains. Although aggressive lockdowns and tough border controls kept a lid on infections earlier in the pandemic, Australia is now battling record infections in its effort to live with the virus after higher vaccination rates.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/australia-covid-19-infections-hit-1-million-omicron-drives-record-surge-2022-01-09/>

### **Hungary's daily COVID-19 cases could hit new peak exceeding 13000 - minister**

Hungary's daily tally of new COVID-19 cases could hit a new peak of more than 13,000, with deaths reaching 200 a day, a government minister warned, as the highly transmissible Omicron variant fuelled a rising wave of infections. Miklos Kasler, minister for human resources who is also in charge of healthcare, told local Inforadio late on Sunday that the government was looking into the possibility of offering a fourth vaccine shot, but more assessments were needed to measure how long immunity lasts after the third shot. Infection figures for the weekend are expected to be released later on Monday. On Friday, Hungary reported 6,524 new infections, and 39,780 people have died of COVID-19 since the start of the pandemic.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/hungary-daily-covid-19-infections-could-exceed-13000>

[-new-wave-minister-2022-01-10/](#)

### **Sweden to implement more COVID measures as Omicron squeezes healthcare**

Sweden will introduce more measures to stem a rising number of COVID cases that have placed a greater burden on the healthcare system, Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson said on Monday. Sweden has seen the fastest spread of COVID cases in recent weeks as the Omicron variant has surged through the country. A record 60,000 cases were detected last week, despite limited testing capabilities. "The situation has deteriorated, without doubt. The level of infections in Sweden is at a historically high level," Andersson told a news conference.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/sweden-introduces-more-measures-covid-cases-rise-2022-01-10/>

### **With peak yet to come, Europe's healthcare groans under Omicron's swift spread**

Europe's healthcare systems are being strained once again by the rapid spread of the Omicron variant of the coronavirus over the holiday period, with large numbers of key staff ill or self-isolating and experts predicting the peak of infections is yet to come. Despite early studies showing a lower risk of severe disease or hospitalisation from Omicron compared to the previously-dominant Delta variant, healthcare networks across Spain, Britain, Italy and beyond have found themselves in increasingly desperate circumstances.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/with-peak-yet-come-europes-healthcare-creaks-under-omicrons-rapid-spread-2022-01-10/>

### **Spain reports more Covid reinfections in one fortnight than rest of pandemic**

The number of Covid reinfections reported in Spain in the past fortnight has exceeded the total number of repeat infections documented during the rest of the pandemic, according to the latest data from Spanish researchers. In the span of two weeks in late December and early January, 20,890 reinfections were reported in Spain, figures from the state-backed Carlos III Health Institute suggested. While the bulk of cases appeared to be mild, the number is higher than the 17,140 cases of reinfection documented from the start of the pandemic to 22 December. The Spanish data includes both confirmed and suspected reinfections.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/09/spain-reports-more-covid-reinfections-in-one-fortnight-than-rest-of-pandemic>

### **China Reports Nation's First Community Spread of Omicron**

China saw its first omicron cases in the community, igniting a mass testing blitz in the northern city of Tianjin as the country strives to maintain its zero-tolerance approach to Covid in the face of more transmissible variants. The two cases in the port city were confirmed as being omicron by the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention, after its local branch completed the genome sequencing, CCTV reported. The infections were from the same transmission chain but officials have yet to establish if the strain is the same as imported omicron cases reported earlier in Tianjin, according to the report. China's commitment to its Covid Zero policy has seen it restrict movements and implement mass testing and other measures in cities spread across the country. Further outbreaks raise the risk of new lockdown measures that could disrupt production and shipping in an economy already battling weak consumption and a property market slump.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-09/china-reports-nation-s-first-community-spread-of-omicron-variant>

### **U.S. Covid-19 Seven-Day Case Average Tops 700,000**

The seven-day average for newly reported cases in the U.S. topped 700,000 for the first time, data from Johns Hopkins University show, as the highly infectious Omicron variant spreads throughout the country. The average of known cases could soon triple the pre-Omicron record set a year ago, when the U.S. briefly saw about a quarter million daily cases. The numbers reported by state health departments and collected by Johns Hopkins also likely reflect a fraction of the true number, due in

part to Omicron's rapid spread and the difficulty many Americans have had getting tested. Some laboratories are limiting test-processing to certain people such as those with symptoms because of the surge in demand.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-covid-19-seven-day-case-average-tops-700-000-11641748209>

### **Hungary Sees 200 Daily Covid Deaths at Omicron Peak: Inforadio**

Hungary expects more than 13,000 daily infections and about 200 daily deaths during the omicron-variant-fueled latest wave of the coronavirus pandemic in the eastern European Union nation, the country's health chief told Inforadio. The number of Covid-related hospitalized patients may peak at between 8,000 to 9,000 during the fifth wave in Hungary, which is expected to last until May, Human Resources Minister Miklos Kasler, who's in charge of healthcare, said in an interview with Inforadio on Sunday. The estimates were made assuming no other variant emerges in the period and assumes no significant increase in the vaccination rate, he said. Hungary's new daily Covid infections almost doubled in a week to 6,524 on Friday, while daily Covid-related deaths rose to 101 from 82 a week earlier

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-09/hungary-sees-200-daily-covid-deaths-at-omicron-peak-inforadio>

### **Royal Caribbean pauses some cruise operations due to Omicron concerns**

Royal Caribbean Cruises Ltd has paused some of its cruise operations amid rising numbers of COVID-19 infections due to the Omicron variant. The sailings of three ships - Serenade of the Seas, Jewel of the Seas, Symphony of the Seas - have been paused while the return of its Vision of the Seas to cruising has been postponed to March 7, 2022, the cruise line said in a statement on Friday. "We regret having to cancel our guests' long-awaited vacations and appreciate their loyalty and understanding," the company adding that these measures have been implemented "in an abundance of caution."

<https://www.reuters.com/business/royal-caribbean-pauses-some-cruise-operations-due-omicron-concerns-2022-01-08/>

## **New Lockdown**

---

### **China's Tianjin tightens control over travel after Omicron cases**

The northern Chinese city of Tianjin tightened exit controls and is requiring residents to obtain approval from employers or community authorities before leaving town in an effort to block the spread of the highly transmissible Omicron variant. The port city to the southeast of Beijing reported 21 domestically transmitted cases with confirmed symptoms on Sunday, the National Health Commission said on Monday, up from three a day earlier. Tianjin, with around 14 million residents, said over the weekend it detected two local cases of infection with the Omicron.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/chinas-tianjin-tightens-control-over-travel-after-omicron-cases-2022-01-10/>