

COVID-19 Lockdown Exit Analysis

14th 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.

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Lockdown Exit

China's Covid Absolutism Is Making It a No-Go Zone for Airlines

Entering the third year of the pandemic, China's unbending approach to Covid-19 has left the world's second-largest economy all but shut off from international travel, with fewer than 500 inbound flights scheduled this week, compared with about 10,000 this time two years ago. Capacity cuts are intensifying as China tries to snuff out virus flareups with aggressive lockdowns. Since mid-December, airlines have eliminated almost 1,000 flights that would have arrived in the country between now and Feb. 1, the start of the Lunar New Year -- typically the busiest time for travel anywhere on the planet.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-13/china-s-covid-absolutism-is-making-it-a-no-go-zone-for-airlines>

Norway Eases Measures as It Prepares to Live With Omicron Wave

Norway is scaling back some of its infection restrictions as it moves into a new phase of the pandemic. The omicron variant has pushed infection rates to records, and the country now needs to ready itself to tolerate living with the virus, Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Store told reporters on Thursday. It isn't possible to stop an omicron-driven wave, but the likelihood of hospitalization is lower and vaccination provides good protection against serious sickness, he said.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-13/norway-eases-measures-as-it-prepares-to-live-with-omicron-wave>

Hundreds of Millions of Covid Vaccine Doses Risk Going to Waste

Hundreds of millions of Covid-19 vaccine doses purchased by wealthy countries are at risk of going to waste, a new analysis shows, while large parts of the world remain unprotected amid the spread of the omicron variant. About 240 million doses purchased by the U.S., U.K., Japan, Canada and the

European Union are expected to go unused and expire by March, London-based analytics firm Airfinity Ltd. said Thursday in a report. The number of potentially wasted doses could climb to 500 million by that point if other countries receiving donated doses don't have enough time to administer them, it said. "Even after successful booster rollouts, there are surplus doses available that risk going to waste if not shared very soon," Rasmus Bech Hansen,

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-13/hundreds-of-millions-of-covid-vaccine-doses-risk-going-to-waste>

Analysis: India's new COVID-19 rules aim to free up resources but carry risks

India has eased its COVID-19 rules on testing, quarantine and hospital admissions in a bid to free up resources for its neediest people, a strategy hailed by experts even though it carries the risk of a heavy undercount of infections and deaths. The moves will offer a breathing space for healthcare facilities, often overstretched in a far-flung nation of 1.4 billion, as they battle a 33-fold surge in infections over the past month from the highly contagious Omicron variant.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/india/indias-new-covid-19-rules-aim-free-up-resources-carry-risks-2022-01-13/>

Australian Open crowds capped at 50% capacity due to COVID

Crowds at the main Australian Open tennis stadiums will be capped at 50% capacity under updated COVID-19 restrictions, organisers said on Thursday, as authorities battle a surge of cases in Melbourne. Face masks will also be mandatory for all patrons, except when eating or drinking, and there will be density limits of one person per two square metres at indoor hospitality venues. Tennis Australia (TA) said the 50% cap only applied for ticket sales at the Rod Laver Arena centre court and the second show court Margaret Court Arena.

<https://www.reuters.com/lifestyle/sports/australian-open-crowds-capped-50-capacity-due-covid-2022-01-13/>

CES unable to confirm COVID-19 cases after 70 S.Korean nationals test positive

The organizer of CES, the world's largest technology show, said on Thursday it was unable to confirm the number of COVID-19 cases from its in-person event in Las Vegas last week after South Korean authorities said about 70 attendees from the country tested positive for the virus. The 70 South Korean nationals included representatives from Samsung Electronics and chipmaker SK Hynix sources told Reuters on Tuesday. Of the 40,000 that attended CES, 30% traveled from outside the United States.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/ces-unable-confirm-covid-19-cases-after-70-skorean-nationals-test-positive-2022-01-13/>

Volkswagen China shuts two plants in Tianjin due to COVID-19 outbreaks

Volkswagen Group's China unit said on Thursday it has shut a plant it jointly runs with FAW Group in the city of Tianjin, as well as a component factory, due to recent COVID-19 outbreaks there. "Due to the recent COVID-19 outbreaks both the FAW-VW vehicle plant and VW Automatic Transmission Tianjin component factory have been shut down since Monday," a spokesperson told Reuters. "Both plants have conducted COVID -19 testing twice for all employees this week and are waiting for the results

<https://www.reuters.com/business/autos-transportation/volkswagen-china-shuts-two-plants-tianjin-due-covid-19-outbreaks-2022-01-13/>

Exit Strategies

So long Toronto: COVID-19 pandemic hastens Canada's urban exodus

Canada's urban exodus picked up steam into the second year of the COVID-19 pandemic, with tens of thousands of people leaving Toronto and Montreal for smaller cities or rural areas, official data showed on Thursday. More than 64,000 people left Toronto for other parts of Ontario from mid-2020 to mid-2021, up 14% from the previous 12-month period, according to Statistics Canada population

estimates, with another 6,600 moving out of province.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/so-long-toronto-covid-19-pandemic-hastens-canadas-urban-exodus-2022-01-13/>

French teachers walk out of classrooms in strike over Covid strategy

French teachers have held one of the biggest education strikes in recent years, forcing the closure of hundreds of primary schools in protest at the government's handling of Covid-19 measures in the education sector. Tens of thousands of teachers took part in the one-day strike. Trade unions said 75% of primary teachers walked out alongside 62% of secondary teachers. The education ministry gave much lower figures on Thursday morning, saying there was an average of 38.5% of teachers on strike in primary schools, and just under 24% in high schools. Teachers and education support staff joined a protest march through the centre of Paris to the education ministry, and others demonstrated in towns across France.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/13/half-of-french-primary-schools-expected-to-close-teachers-strike-protest-covid-education>

Palestinians married to Israeli citizens excluded from COVID vaccine pass program

Palestinians who are married to Israeli citizens and are legal residents of Israel are unable to download the Health Ministry's Green Pass, which certifies that they are vaccinated against the coronavirus or recovered from the virus. Many Palestinians reported difficulties in acquiring the Green Pass, even if they were vaccinated in Israel. The Health Ministry said in response that the matter is being dealt with, but affected Palestinians say the issue is persisting.

<https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/palestinians-married-to-israeli-citizens-excluded-from-covid-vaccine-pass-program-1.10535762>

Why Cuba's extraordinary Covid vaccine success could provide the best hope for low-income countries

Cuba's prestigious biotech sector has developed five different Covid vaccines to date, including Abdala, Soberana 02 and Soberana Plus — all of which Cuba has said provide upwards of 90% protection against symptomatic Covid when administered in three doses. The country of roughly 11 million remains the only country in Latin America and the Caribbean to have produced a homegrown shot for Covid. The WHO's potential approval of Cuba's nationally produced Covid vaccines would carry "enormous significance" for low-income nations, John Kirk, professor emeritus at the Latin America program of Dalhousie University in Nova Scotia, Canada, said

<https://www.cnn.com/2022/01/13/why-cubas-extraordinary-covid-vaccine-success-could-provide-the-best-hope-for-the-global-south.html>

NHS leaders call for delay to mandatory Covid vaccine law

The most senior nurses and midwives in England have called for the government to delay its deadline for all NHS staff to be vaccinated against Covid, over fears it could "backfire". From 1 April 2022 all NHS staff will be required by law to be fully vaccinated against Covid-19, meaning all those who have yet to have a first dose will need to have it by February. The government has previously predicted the NHS could lose up to 73,000 staff following the jab deadline and, in an assessment published in December, warned patient care could be impacted.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/health/covid-vaccine-mandatory-nhs-delay-b1991855.html>

South Korea gets first supply of Pfizer's COVID-19 pills

South Korea on Thursday received its first supply of Pfizer's antiviral COVID-19 pills to treat patients with mild or moderate symptoms. Health officials have described the Paxlovid pills as a potentially important tool to suppress hospitalizations and deaths, as the country braces for another possible surge in infections driven by the contagious omicron variant. South Korea's initial supply is enough to support the required five-day treatment courses for 21,000 people. Officials say another batch of

pills, enough to provide the required five-day courses for 10,000 people, will come by the end of January.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/south-korea-pfizer-seoul-covid-experts-b1992112.html>

First new COVID-19 tests to arrive in schools week of Jan. 24 - White House

U.S. schools should receive the first additional COVID-19 rapid tests being made available by the federal government in about two weeks, a White House official said, as Washington races to keep classes open amid a record-setting Omicron surge. The new tests must be ordered through state governments, but the White House is also making available lab capacity to support five million monthly PCR tests that schools can order themselves if their states are not being helpful, the official said. Those should arrive in seven to 10 days.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/first-new-covid-19-tests-arrive-schools-week-jan-24-white-house-2022-01-13/>

Netherlands to ease COVID-19 restrictions - report

Coronavirus restrictions in the Netherlands will be eased from Saturday despite a wave of new infections due to the Omicron variant, Dutch media reported on Thursday. Non-essential stores, hairdressers and gyms will be allowed to reopen for a limited number of customers, broadcasters NOS and RTL said, citing government sources. Students will be welcomed back to their colleges and universities. Bars, restaurants, theatres, museums and other public places will remain closed. The government will decide formally on the changes on Friday.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/netherlands-ease-covid-19-restrictions-report-2022-01-13/>

Africa joins race to acquire Pfizer's COVID-19 Paxlovid pills

Africa's top public health body said it was in talks with Pfizer about securing supplies of its antiviral COVID-19 pills for the continent, the latest to join the race for a drug seen as a potential game changer in fighting the virus. The Paxlovid medication was nearly 90% effective in preventing hospitalisations and deaths, and data suggested it retains its effectiveness against the Omicron variant, Pfizer has said

<https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/africa-cdc-talking-pfizer-about-importing-its-covid-treatment-pill-2022-01-13/>

Sweden cuts recommended gap between second and third COVID shot

Sweden will cut the recommended time interval between the second and third COVID vaccine shot to five months from six, the health agency said on Wednesday. The decision will affect people between the age of 18 and 64. People above 65 were already eligible to get their booster shot five months after the second. Children aged 12 to 17 will still have to wait six months.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/sweden-cuts-recommended-gap-between-second-third-covid-shot-2022-01-12/>

England to cut minimum COVID self-isolation to five days

The minimum COVID-19 self-isolation period in England will be cut to five days from seven if someone tests negative twice, Health Secretary Sajid Javid said on Thursday, a move that could reduce staffing disruption in businesses and infrastructure. The rapid spread of the Omicron variant has fuelled a spike in COVID-19 cases to record highs in Britain, and the surge has caused major disruption to the staffing of hospitals, schools and transport as staff have to self-isolate.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uk-health-minister-address-lawmakers-amid-debate-over-covid-19-isolation-period-2022-01-13/>

Senegal authorizes COVID-19 booster shots, vaccines for children

Senegal has authorized COVID-19 vaccines for children over 12 and booster shots for adults, the health ministry said on Thursday, as vaccine hesitancy complicates its fight against rising infections from the Omicron variant. The booster dose will initially be aimed at people identified as vulnerable to severe illness, the health ministry said in a Twitter post on Thursday that included a ministry letter dated Jan. 11.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/senegal-authorizes-covid-19-booster-shots-vaccines-children-2022-01-13/>

Poorer nations dump millions of close-to-expiry COVID-19 vaccines - UNICEF

Poorer nations last month rejected more than 100 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines distributed by the global programme COVAX, mainly due to their rapid expiry date, a UNICEF official said on Thursday. The big figure shows the difficulties of vaccinating the world despite growing supplies of shots, with COVAX getting closer to delivering 1 billion doses to a total of nearly 150 countries. "More than a 100 million have been rejected just in December alone," Etleva Kadilli, director of Supply Division at U.N. agency UNICEF told lawmakers at the European Parliament. The main reason for rejection was the delivery of doses with a short shelf-life, she said.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/more-than-100-million-covid-19-vaccines-rejected-by-poorer-nations-dec-unicef-2022-01-13/>

French Senate approves latest COVID measures and vaccine pass

The French Senate approved on Thursday the government's latest measures to tackle the COVID-19 virus, including a vaccine pass, which has encountered some opposition among the public after President Emmanuel Macron's harsh criticism of the unvaccinated. The Senate backed the COVID measures and legislation for a COVID vaccine pass by 249 in favour, versus 63 against. The legislation had already been approved earlier this month by France's lower house of parliament.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/french-senate-approves-latest-covid-measures-vaccine-pass-2022-01-13/>

Hungary to offer fourth COVID shot as Omicron cases spike

Hungary is to make a fourth COVID-19 shot available to people who ask for it, after a consultation with a doctor, Prime Minister Viktor Orban's chief of staff, Gergely Gulyas, told a news conference on Thursday. Gulyas made the announcement just as the Central European country of 10 million expects a substantial further increase in COVID-19 cases over the coming weeks due to the rapid spread of the Omicron variant.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/hungary-govt-expects-covid-19-cases-surge-shortens-quarantine-period-2022-01-13/>

Partisan Exits

French teachers strike over chaotic COVID-19 strategy for schools

Tens of thousands of French teachers angry with the government's COVID-19 rules walked off the job on Thursday and took to the streets to demand better protection for pupils and staff against infection. "Stop your contempt," and "We're fed up with tests" teachers proclaimed on banners in rallies across France, calling for the government to provide them with FFP2 face-masks and to stop changing the rules so often. Teachers, parents and school directors have struggled to cope with the many twists and turns in COVID rules on schools. New testing requirements announced a day before schools restarted after the Christmas holidays and changed twice since increased the anger.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/french-teachers-strike-over-chaotic-covid-19-strategy-schools-2022-01-13/>

Britain's Next cuts sick pay for unvaccinated staff forced to self-isolate

British fashion retailer Next has cut sick pay for unvaccinated staff who must self-isolate due to exposure to COVID-19, it said on Thursday. "It's highly emotive but we have to balance the needs of the business with those of workers and shareholders," said a spokesperson for the group. He said unvaccinated workers who test positive will still receive Next's full rate of sick pay. Next's move follows a similar one by furniture retailer Ikea.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/retail-consumer/britains-next-cuts-sick-pay-unvaccinated-staff-forced-self-isolate-2022-01-13/>

U.S. Supreme Court blocks Biden vaccine-or-test policy for large businesses

The U.S. Supreme Court on Thursday blocked President Joe Biden's COVID-19 vaccination-or-testing

mandate for large businesses - a policy the conservative justices deemed an improper imposition on the lives and health of many Americans - while endorsing a separate federal vaccine requirement for healthcare facilities. Biden voiced disappointment with the conservative-majority court's decision to halt his administration's rule requiring vaccines or weekly COVID-19 tests for employees at businesses with at least 100 employees. Biden said it now is up to states and employers to decide whether to require workers "to take the simple and effective step of getting vaccinated."

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-supreme-court-blocks-biden-vaccine-or-test-policy-large-businesses-2022-01-13/>

Scientific Viewpoint

Covid in Pregnancy Linked to Stillbirths and Newborn Deaths, Study Suggests

Women who have Covid-19 towards the end of their pregnancy are more vulnerable to stillbirths, newborn deaths and birth related complications, a new study suggests. The research also found that most complications occurred in women who were not vaccinated, with the majority (98%) of pregnant women with Covid-19 who were admitted to critical care being unvaccinated. The study, which included more than 87,000 women in Scotland, found that preterm births, stillbirths and newborn deaths were more common among women who had the virus 28 days or less before their delivery date, compared to background rates. All the women whose babies died had not been vaccinated against Covid-19 at the time of infection, though experts stressed that it is not possible to say if Covid-19 contributed directly to the deaths or preterm births as they did not have access to detailed clinical records for individual women.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-13/covid-in-pregnancy-linked-to-stillbirths-and-newborn-deaths-study-suggests>

How Does Covid Spread? Virus' Infection Capacity Weakens After 20 Minutes in Air

Coronavirus loses most of its ability to infect shortly after being exhaled and is less likely to be contagious at longer distances, a study from the University of Bristol's Aerosol Research Centre showed. Researchers found that the virus loses 90% of its contagion capacity 20 minutes after becoming airborne and that most of that loss happens in the first five minutes of it reaching the air, according to the study, that simulates how the virus behaves after exhaling. With some countries opening the debate in Europe about an endemic phase to the virus, insights into the way the virus travels across the air will help guide containment measures.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-13/covid-loses-most-of-infection-capacity-after-20-minutes-in-air>

New data finds AstraZeneca booster generates higher antibodies against Omicron

AstraZeneca said on Thursday preliminary data from a trial it conducted on its COVID-19 shot, Vaxzevria, showed it generated a higher antibody response against the Omicron variant and others, including Beta, Delta, Alpha and Gamma, when given as a third booster dose. The increased response was seen in people who were previously vaccinated with either Vaxzevria or an mRNA vaccine, the drugmaker said, adding that it would submit this data to regulators worldwide given the urgent need for boosters. AstraZeneca has developed the vaccine with researchers from the University of Oxford, and lab studies last month found a three-dose course of Vaxzevria was effective against the rapidly spreading new variant.

<https://uk.finance.yahoo.com/news/astrazeneca-says-higher-antibody-response-075212288.html>

AstraZeneca says early trial data indicates third dose helps against Omicron

AstraZeneca said that preliminary data from a trial showed that its COVID-19 shot, Vaxzevria, generated an increase in antibodies against the Omicron and other variants when given as a third booster dose. The increased response, also against the Delta variant, was seen in a blood analysis of people who were previously vaccinated with either Vaxzevria or an mRNA vaccine, the drugmaker said, adding that it would submit this data to regulators worldwide given the urgent need for

boosters. read more

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/astrazeneca-says-higher-antibody-response-against-omicron-with-booster-dose-2022-01-13/>

Swissmedic temporarily approves Regkirona COVID-19 treatment

Swiss drugs regulator Swissmedic said on Thursday it had granted temporary approval to Regkirona, antibody medicine that can be used for the treatment of COVID-19 in adults. Swissmedic said the applicant did not submit any information on its efficacy against the highly contagious Omicron variant of the coronavirus. Regkirona, which contains the active substance regdanvimab, can be used to treat adult COVID patients if oxygen therapy or hospitalisation is not required, and there is a high risk of developing a severe form of COVID-19.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/swissmedic-temporarily-approves-regkirona-covid-19-treatment-2022-01-13/>

Moderna expects COVID-19 vaccine trial data for children aged 2-5 in March

Moderna Inc said on Wednesday it expects to report data from its COVID-19 vaccine trial in children aged between 2 to 5 years in March. "If the data is supportive and subject to regulatory consultation, Moderna may proceed with regulatory filings for children 2-5 years of age thereafter," the company said. Moderna's vaccine, based on the messenger RNA platform, already has authorizations in Europe, UK, Australia, and Canada for adolescents aged 12-17 years, and has submitted applications for children in 6 to 11 years.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/moderna-expects-covid-19-vaccine-trial-data-children-aged-2-5-march-2022-01-12/>

Long COVID brain fog found similar to 'chemo brain'; clip-on device shows promise in virus detection

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. Long COVID "brain fog" shares features with "chemo brain" The "brain fog" reported by some people after COVID-19 shows striking similarities to the condition known as "chemo brain" - the mental cloudiness some people experience during and after cancer treatment, according to new research.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/long-covid-brain-fog-found-similar-chemo-brain-clip-on-device-shows-promise-2022-01-12/>

COVID-19 pill rollout stymied by shortages as omicron rages

Two brand-new COVID-19 pills that were supposed to be an important weapon against the pandemic in the U.S. are in short supply and have played little role in the fight against the omicron wave of infections. The problem, in part, is that production is still being ramped up and the medicines can take anywhere from five to eight months to manufacture. While the supply is expected to improve dramatically in the coming months, doctors are clamoring for the pills now, not just because omicron is causing an explosion of cases but because two antibody drugs that were once the go-to treatments don't work as well against the variant.

<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-science-business-health-pandemics-b2d1051842df779dfa6122f824bd0377>

UK virus hunting labs seek to bolster global variant network

The air conditioners hum constantly in the lab at the Wellcome Sanger Institute, countering the heat thrown off by rows of high-tech sequencing machines that work seven days a week analyzing the genetic material of COVID-19 cases from throughout the U.K. The laboratory is one example of how British scientists have industrialized the process of genomic sequencing during the pandemic, cutting the time and cost needed to generate a unique genetic fingerprint for each coronavirus case analyzed. That made the U.K. a world leader in COVID-19 sequencing, helping public health

authorities track the spread of new variants, develop vaccines and decide when to impose lockdowns. But now researchers at the Sanger Institute in Cambridge and labs around the U.K. have a new mission: sharing what they've learned with other scientists because COVID-19 has no regard for national borders.

<https://apnews.com/article/genomic-sequencing-UK-COVID-Omicron-42ebdfcab1821f0b099ae59a9c2fea4>

Unvaccinated pregnant people are at higher risk for Covid complications and newborn deaths

Unvaccinated pregnant people who get Covid-19 are at much higher risk for complications from the disease and death of their babies than their vaccinated counterparts, according to a new study from Scotland. Authors of the population-level study, published Thursday in Nature Medicine, examined data from all pregnant people across Scotland between December 2020 and October 2021 that included information on Covid-19 vaccination status and infection. Almost all of the pregnant people who needed critical care for Covid-19 — 102 out of 104 overall — were unvaccinated. There were over 450 total fetal and newborn deaths that coincided with Covid-19 — all among unvaccinated mothers. "Vaccination in pregnancy is the safest and most effective way for pregnant women to protect themselves and their babies," said Sarah Stock, an author of the study who is an obstetrician and maternal and fetal medicine specialist at the University of Edinburgh. "This advice needs to go out to partners and parents and grandparents and friends."

<https://www.statnews.com/2022/01/13/unvaccinated-pregnant-people-higher-risk-covid-complications-newborn-deaths/>

Polish scientists find gene that doubles risk of serious COVID

Polish scientists have found a gene that they say more than doubles the risk of becoming severely ill with COVID-19, a discovery they hope could help doctors identify people who are most at risk from the disease. With vaccine hesitancy a major factor behind high coronavirus death rates in central and eastern Europe, researchers hope that identifying those at greatest risk will encourage them to get a shot and give them access to more intensive treatment options in case of an infection. "After more than a year and a half of work it was possible to identify a gene responsible for a predisposition to becoming seriously ill (with coronavirus)," said Health Minister Adam Niedzielski.

reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/polish-scientists-find-gene-that-doubles-risk-serious-covid-2022-01-13/

Pfizer's Covid-19 antiviral pill was hailed as a game-changer, but supplies are scarce

The Omicron variant of the coronavirus is causing Covid-19 cases to spike, with an average of more than 747,000 new cases a day, according to the latest numbers from Johns Hopkins University. That's almost three times the average daily cases from a year ago, when the country was going through its previous peak, and it's putting an incredible strain on hospitals and emergency rooms. The good news since the last peak is that the US Food and Drug Administration authorized new antiviral pills. Both Paxlovid and molnupiravir were given emergency use authorization in late December to treat mild to moderate Covid-19. They interfere (through different pathways) with the virus' ability to replicate -- and they can be taken at home, before someone becomes seriously ill.

<https://edition.cnn.com/2022/01/12/health/paxlovid-pfizer-antiviral-scarce/index.html>

Global study notes risk factors for uncommon severe COVID-19 in kids

A 10-country study of more than 3,000 children who tested positive for COVID-19 in emergency departments (EDs) finds that 3% went on to develop severe disease within 2 weeks, with risk factors being older age, having chronic conditions, and experiencing symptoms longer. The study was published yesterday in JAMA Network Open. An international group of scientists report that, among 3,221 children 17 years and younger studied in Argentina, Australia, Canada, Costa Rica, Italy, New Zealand, Paraguay, Singapore, Spain, and the United States, 107 (3.3%) experienced severe

outcomes within 2 weeks, and 4 (0.12%) died. Among children discharged home from the ED, the risk was much lower.

<https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2022/01/global-study-notes-risk-factors-uncommon-severe-covid-19-kids>

AstraZeneca sells another half-million doses of its COVID-19 antibody combo to the US

Order up. Shortly after topping off supplies of COVID-19 drugs from Pfizer and GlaxoSmithKline, the U.S. has asked for a second helping of AstraZeneca's antibody combo. The government has purchased an additional 500,000 doses of AZ's long-acting antibody cocktail Evusheld, or tixagevimab plus cilgavimab. That comes on top of 700,000 doses the U.S. already ordered, for a total supply of 1.2 million, the British drugmaker said Wednesday. AstraZeneca plans to complete the entire delivery within the first quarter of 2022. Unlike the COVID-19 antibody drugs from Eli Lilly, Regeneron and GlaxoSmithKline-Vir Biotechnology, AstraZeneca's therapeutic is authorized for prevention before exposure to the virus. Specifically, the FDA in December authorized Evusheld in people with moderately to severely compromised immune systems, either from a medical condition or the use of immunosuppressive medications. People with a history of severe reactions to COVID-19 vaccines are also eligible to receive the therapeutic.

<https://www.fiercepharma.com/pharma/astrazeneca-sells-half-a-million-more-doses-its-covid-19-antibody-combo-u-s>

Coronavirus Resurgence

Omicron may reach millions before vaccines do - but that doesn't mean race to vaccinate the world is over

It's estimated that there could be 3 billion new infections globally over the next three months thanks to the highly infectious omicron variant. Large outbreaks are ongoing across Europe and North America and cases are also rising in many other countries.

<https://theconversation.com/omicron-may-reach-millions-before-vaccines-do-but-that-doesnt-mean-race-to-vaccinate-the-world-is-over-174492>

COVID Hospitalizations Rising in Kids Too Young for Vaccine

While COVID-19 has taken the lives of many children and caused serious illness for many more, it is generally agreed that the virus is much less likely to inflict severe damage in the young. But new data from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has revealed a concerning trend: The rate of COVID-19-linked hospitalizations among children younger than 5 grew substantially last week, while the same rate for children between the ages of 5 and 17 remained relatively stable. The latest numbers have sparked concerns that the youngest members of society may be more vulnerable to the Omicron variant than their older peers. The affected children, ages 4 and under, are in the age group not yet eligible for a coronavirus vaccine.

<https://consumer.healthday.com/covid-in-young-children-2656256077.html>

Hungary govt expects COVID-19 cases to surge, shortens quarantine period

Hungary is to make a fourth COVID-19 shot available to people who ask for it, after a consultation with a doctor, Prime Minister Viktor Orban's chief of staff, Gergely Gulyas, told a news conference on Thursday. Gulyas made the announcement just as the Central European country of 10 million expects a substantial further increase in COVID-19 cases over the coming weeks due to the rapid spread of the Omicron variant. "Anyone can get a fourth COVID-19 shot based on a consultation with a doctor, the (government) decree about this will be published this week," Gulyas said.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/hungary-govt-expects-covid-19-cases-surge-shortens-quarantine-period-2022-01-13/>

U.S. COVID deaths rising but likely due to Delta, not Omicron, says CDC chief

COVID-19 hospitalizations in the United States have increased by about 33% and deaths are up by

about 40% from a week earlier, the head of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said on Wednesday. CDC Director Rochelle Walensky, speaking on a media call, said U.S. COVID-19 cases, driven by the fast spreading Omicron variant, are expected to peak in the coming weeks. "The magnitude of this increase is largely related to the Omicron variant, which now represents about 90% of the COVID-19 cases in the country," she told reporters.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-covid-hospitalizations-up-about-33-deaths-up-about-40-over-past-week-cdc-2022-01-12/>

India's big cities could see COVID-19 cases peak next week

New COVID-19 infections in Indian cities such as capital New Delhi and Mumbai could peak next week after rising rapidly, experts said on Thursday, as the country reported the highest number of daily cases since late May. The 247,417 new infections were more than 30 times higher daily cases from a month ago, rising as the more transmissible Omicron variant replaced Delta across the country. Total infections reached 36.32 million, behind only the United States. "Our modelling, and those of others, suggests that the big Indian cities should see their peaks in cases close to Jan. 20, while the overall peak in India may be shifted a bit later, to early February," said Gautam Menon, professor of physics and biology at Ashoka University near the capital.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/india/indias-daily-covid-19-cases-rise-by-247417-highest-since-may-2022-01-13/>

Australia COVID-19 infections hit record amid runaway Omicron outbreak

Australia on Thursday reported its biggest pandemic caseload with a runaway Omicron outbreak driving up hospitalisation rates as the surge put severe strain on supply chains forcing authorities to ease quarantine rules for more workers. After successfully containing the virus earlier in the pandemic, Australia has reported nearly a million cases over the last two weeks as people slowly get adjusted to living with the coronavirus amid fewer restrictions. Total infections detected since the pandemic began neared 1.4 million.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/australia-covid-19-infections-hit-record-amid-runaway-omicron-outbreak-2022-01-13/>

China faces omicron test weeks ahead of Beijing Olympics

Most access to a major city adjacent to Beijing was suspended Thursday as China tried to contain an outbreak of the highly contagious omicron variant, which poses a test to its "zero-tolerance" COVID-19 policy and its ability to successfully host the Winter Olympics. Tianjin, a port and manufacturing center with 14 million people, is one of a half-dozen cities where the government is imposing lockdowns and other restrictions as part of a policy that aims to track down every virus case. But the outbreak in a city so close to the Olympic host is particularly worrying. Throughout the pandemic, authorities have been especially protective of Beijing since it is the seat of government and home to senior politicians. With the Games opening there in just over three weeks and China's national pride on the line, the stakes are even higher now.

<https://apnews.com/article/beijing-olympic-games-omicron-china-0e87de42d0d62fc3541d0732a6acd194>

New Lockdown

Chinese woman stuck in blind date's home by abrupt COVID lockdown

When authorities in Zhengzhou suddenly placed the central Chinese city under a COVID-19 lockdown last week, a woman known only by her surname, Wang, was having dinner – at the house of her blind date. "Just after I arrived in Zhengzhou, there was an outbreak and his community was put under lockdown and I could not leave," Wang told Shanghai-based outlet The Paper on Tuesday, adding that she went there for a week-long trip to meet potential suitors.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/1/13/woman-in-china-stuck-in-blind-dates-home-after-covid-lockdown>