

COVID-19 Lockdown Exit Analysis

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Lockdown Exit

Omicron hits Beijing: City records first local case of the highly transmissible variant

An Omicron case has been detected in Beijing, officials in the Chinese capital said Saturday, as the country battles multiple outbreaks of the highly transmissible coronavirus variant ahead of the Winter Olympics. Lab testing found 'mutations specific to the Omicron variant' in the person, Pang Xinghuo, an official at the city's disease control authority, told a news briefing. Officials have sealed up the infected person's residential compound and workplace, and collected 2,430 samples for testing from people linked to the two locations, a Haidian district official said.

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10405941/Omicron-hits-Beijing-City-records-local-case-highly-transmissible-variant.html>

U.S. CDC recommends Americans wear 'most protective mask you can'

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) late on Friday revised its guidance for Americans on wearing masks, recommending wearing "the most protective mask you can," although the agency stopped short of calling for nationwide N95 usage.

<https://www.reuters.com/reuters.com/world/us/us-cdc-recommends-americans-wear-most-protective-mask-you-can-2022-01-14/>

Burned by COVID supply crunch, hospitals invest in U.S. mask-making

Two days before Christmas, a cargo ship left Mumbai with a mask-making machine bound for Illinois-based OSF HealthCare, which will use the equipment to make its own N95 masks. It isn't the hospital group's first foray into manufacturing. After COVID-19 border closures in early 2020 choked shipments from Asia, producer of about 80% of the world's medical masks and protective gear, OSF and some other hospital groups started investing in U.S. production of key supplies including masks, gowns and critical pharmaceuticals.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/burned-by-covid-supply-crunch-hospitals-invest-us-mask-making-2022-01-14/>

Gene Linked to Severe Covid to Provide Clues for Those at Risk

Polish scientists have discovered a gene that they say more than doubles the risk of falling severely ill with, or even dying from Covid-19. The Health Ministry in Warsaw expects the discovery to help identify people who are most at risk from the disease, which has already killed more than 100,000 people in Poland alone. It also plans to include genetic tests when it screens patients for potential Covid-19 infections as soon as the end of June. The research from the Medical University of Bialystok estimates that the gene could be present in about 14% of the Polish population, compared with around 9% in Europe and 27% in India. It's the fourth most important factor determining the severity of the illness after age, weight and gender, it said.

https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-14/gene-linked-to-severe-covid-to-provide-clues-for-those-at-risk?utm_source=google&utm_medium=bd&cmpId=google

Biden Forms New Group to Plan for Future Coronavirus Variants

The Biden administration has assembled a group that will prepare new countermeasures for the emergence of future Covid-19 variants and other pandemic threats, after the arrival of the omicron strain led to tumult in the U.S. economy and health-care system. The Pandemic Innovation Task Force, formed by the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, or OSTP, will focus on developing vaccines, treatments, diagnostic tests and other tools, said officials familiar with the

matter, who asked for anonymity as the details aren't yet public. That will help prepare the country in case new versions of the virus surface, and for future biological threats beyond Covid-19, they said.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-14/biden-forms-new-group-to-plan-for-future-coronavirus-variants>

Exit Strategies

Exhausted parents navigate a patchwork of U.S. school COVID-19 policies

Jennifer Pierre speaks for millions of American parents when she sums up how it feels to navigate a patchwork of school COVID-19 policies as the pandemic enters a third year. "It's so exhausting," the Sacramento, California, mother said this week. She is happy to see her 13-year-old daughter and 10-year-old son back in their classrooms after the long months of remote learning that hindered their social development. But even with her school district's strict safety protocols, she worries about whether the surging Omicron variant will lead to further closures and on what grounds those will be decided.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/exhausted-parents-navigate-patchwork-us-school-covid-19-policies-2022-01-14/>

Mexico approves emergency use of Pfizer's COVID-19 pills

Mexican health regulator COFEPRIS said on Friday it had approved U.S. pharmaceutical company Pfizer's antiviral oral treatment against COVID-19 for emergency use in adults with light or moderate risk of complications. Paxlovid, which combines nirmatrelvir and ritonavir in a tablet, will require a prescription, it said in a statement. The treatment was nearly 90% effective in preventing hospitalizations and deaths, and data suggested it retains its effectiveness against the Omicron variant, Pfizer has said.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/mexico-approves-emergency-use-pfizers-covid-19-pills-2022-01-14/>

In rare move, Uruguay opens borders for residents infected with COVID-19

Uruguay has opened its borders to citizens and residents even if they are infected with COVID-19, a rare move amid surging cases worldwide, though passengers would need to travel in private vehicles across the border and be in a family "bubble". The South American country's government said the move was in "solidarity" with Uruguayans and residents who were infected with the virus abroad. "All Uruguayan travelers and resident foreigners who have got Covid abroad may return to our country at any time," Uruguayan Health Minister Daniel Salinas said on his Twitter account on Friday.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/rare-move-uruguay-opens-borders-residents-infected-with-covid-19-2022-01-14/>

Apple to require employee proof of COVID-19 booster

Apple Inc will require retail and corporate employees to provide proof of a COVID-19 booster shot, The Verge reported on Saturday, citing an internal email. Starting Jan. 24, unvaccinated employees or those who haven't submitted proof of vaccination will need negative COVID-19 tests to enter Apple workplaces, the report said. The Verge said it was not immediately clear if the testing requirement applies to both corporate and retail employees. "Due to waning efficacy of the primary series of COVID-19 vaccines and the emergence of highly transmissible variants such as Omicron, a booster shot is now part of staying up to date with your COVID-19 vaccination to protect against severe disease," the memo read, according to The Verge.

<https://www.reuters.com/technology/apple-require-employee-proof-covid-19-booster-the-verge-2022-01-15/>

Dutch announce COVID lockdown easing amid record infections

Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte on Friday announced the reopening of stores, hairdressers and gyms, partially lifting a lockdown despite record numbers of new COVID-19 cases. "We are taking a big step and that also means we're taking a big risk," Rutte told a televised press conference. Non-

essential stores, hairdressers, beauty salons and other service providers will be allowed to reopen under strict conditions until 5 p.m. local time (1600 GMT) for the first time since mid-December. Rutte added that the uncertainties meant that bars, restaurants and cultural venues would have to remain closed until at least Jan. 25.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/new-dutch-government-expected-ease-month-long-covid-19-lockdown-2022-01-14/>

Vaccine Makers Pursue Omicron-Targeted Shots That Health Officials Say Might Not Be Needed

As Covid-19 vaccine makers prepare Omicron-specific shots, federal health authorities say there are signs they might not be necessary. Research is continuing, however, and industry and global-health officials say doses targeting the highly transmissible new variant might be needed longer-term, especially if it winds up crowding out earlier strains globally. Differing opinions on the need for Omicron-targeted shots highlights the persisting uncertainty around current vaccines' relative efficacy against the variant weeks after it began sweeping the U.S. Researchers designed the existing Covid-19 shots to fight the original coronavirus strain that predominated in 2020. Since then, the vaccines have remained effective against newer variants like Delta that have emerged and overtaken the initial strain.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/vaccine-makers-pursue-omicron-targeted-shots-that-health-officials-say-might-not-be-needed-11642161601>

Omicron Slows in Early U.S. Hot Spots, Offering First Hopes of a Peak

The steep rise in new daily Covid-19 cases fueled by the Omicron variant is starting to slow in some early U.S. hot spots, including New York and Chicago, sparking some optimism that a record-breaking spike in cases may be plateauing. Public officials are viewing the data cautiously and aren't yet declaring victory. Still, some are noting that the trend is appearing to follow similar trajectories that have played out in South Africa and the U.K., where Omicron hit earlier. "There seems to be a slowing down in the major cities that were most initially impacted by the Omicron variant," said Enbal Shacham, an epidemiologist and associate director of the Geospatial Institute at St. Louis University. "This pattern is similar to what we saw in South Africa and what we were all kind of hoping to see."

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/omicron-slows-in-early-u-s-hot-spots-offering-first-hopes-of-a-peak-11642166670>

Stretched Hospitals, Nursing Homes Fear Losing More Staff Over Vaccine Mandate

Strained hospitals and nursing homes said they fear losing workers but would require Covid-19 vaccinations for employees after the Supreme Court allowed federal officials to mandate the shots in healthcare. As the highly transmissible Omicron variant spreads across the U.S., sickening patients and workers alike, hospitals and nursing homes have struggled to maintain the staffing levels they need. The vaccination mandate could complicate those efforts if facilities are forced to let go of workers who don't comply, said healthcare industry officials, who asked for some enforcement leniency to prevent staffing losses during the crunch. Hospitals will now work to balance the vaccine mandate with their staffing needs, said Rick Pollack, chief executive of the American Hospital Association, which is urging regulators to use enforcement discretion.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/stretched-hospitals-nursing-homes-fear-losing-more-staff-over-vaccine-mandate-11642183926>

U.K. Reports Fewest New Covid Cases in More Than Three Weeks

The U.K. reported fewer than 100,000 new coronavirus cases for the first time since late December, raising hopes that the country is past the worst of its omicron wave. The 99,652 infections recorded on Friday compare with almost 200,000 a day at the peak of the outbreak. Hospitalizations in London, the early center of the U.K. omicron onslaught, are below the recent high reached on Jan. 5.,

and show signs of decline elsewhere in the country as well. While the average number of fatalities is creeping upward, deaths have stayed relatively low compared with earlier waves.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-14/u-k-reports-fewest-new-covid-cases-in-more-than-three-weeks>

Citigroup reaches 99% compliance on U.S. staff vaccine mandate

About 99% of Citigroup Inc's staff in the United States have complied with the company's COVID-19 vaccine requirements, the bank's Head of Human Resources Sara Wechter said in a LinkedIn post on Thursday. Citi staff in the U.S. who have not been vaccinated against COVID-19 by Jan. 14 will be placed on unpaid leave and fired at the end of the month unless they are granted an exemption, Reuters reported last week, citing a memo.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/finance/citigroup-reaches-99-compliance-us-staff-vaccine-mandate-2022-01-14/>

Google mandates weekly COVID-19 tests for people entering U.S. offices

Alphabet Inc's Google is temporarily mandating weekly COVID-19 tests for any person entering Google offices or facilities in the United States, the tech giant said on Friday. Anyone who comes into Google's U.S. work sites will require a negative test and be required to wear surgical-grade masks while at the office, the company said. "To help prevent the further spread of COVID-19 during this period of heightened risk, we're implementing new temporary health and safety measures for anyone accessing our sites in the U.S.," a Google spokesperson said.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/google-mandates-weekly-covid-19-tests-people-entering-us-offices-cnbc-2022-01-14/>

Frustration over COVID-19 restrictions in increasingly isolated Hong Kong

Hong Kong is following mainland China's zero-tolerance approach to control COVID-19, ranking many residents of the international financial hub as much of the world shifts towards living with the coronavirus. Hong Kong effectively closed its borders and imposed social restrictions this month to deal with a spurt in COVID-19 infections due to the spread of the Omicron variant. Although the moves are less strict than those in parts of the mainland, they come after months of relative normalcy and are battering a city dependent on business travellers and accustomed to frequent dining out.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/frustration-over-covid-19-restrictions-increasingly-isolated-hong-kong-2022-01-14/>

Citi Says 99% of U.S. Staffers Complied With Vaccine Mandate

Citigroup Inc. said 99% of its U.S. employees have complied with its vaccine mandate, one of the strictest on Wall Street. The firm expects more employees will comply with the order before the deadline on Friday, Sara Wechter, head of human resources, said Thursday in a LinkedIn post. As part of the mandate, staffers were able to receive exemptions. "A huge thank you to everyone at Citi who took action to meet this requirement: those who were already vaccinated, those who made the decision to get vaccinated, and those who requested and received approved religious and medical accommodations or state-permitted exemptions," Wechter said.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-14/citi-says-99-of-u-s-staffers-complied-with-vaccine-mandate>

Covid-19 Home Tests Pose Accessibility Problems for People With Disabilities

"We need to look at the Covid testing process, break it down into component parts of the process and figure out how to make those more inclusively designed," Ms. Fleet said in an interview. That can range from examining test prices to gauging the legibility of their instructions, she added. At-home Covid-19 tests have been in high demand since December, as infections rose and people sought them ahead of holiday gatherings. Home test kits are particularly important for people who cannot stand in long lines for public testing sites or cannot reach them, accessibility advocates say.

[wsj.com/articles/covid-19-home-tests-pose-accessibility-problems-for-people-with-disabilities-11642096771?mod=hp_minor_pos3](https://www.wsj.com/articles/covid-19-home-tests-pose-accessibility-problems-for-people-with-disabilities-11642096771?mod=hp_minor_pos3)

Polish COVID advisers quit over lack of science influence on policy

Thirteen of the 17 members of Poland's Medical Council advising the prime minister on COVID-19 resigned on Friday, condemning what they said was a lack of scientific influence on policy. Even with one of the world's highest per capita death rates, Poland has introduced much more limited measures than many European countries to curb the spread of the coronavirus during the latest wave of infections. "The discrepancy between scientific and medical rationale and practice has become especially glaring in the context of the very limited efforts in the face of the autumn wave and then the threat of the Omicron variant, despite the enormous number of deaths expected," the 13 council members said in a statement to Reuters, confirming a report by the PAP state news agency.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/polish-covid-19-advisers-quit-protest-govt-limited-efforts-2022-01-14/>

Thousands protest in Vienna against mandatory vaccination

Thousands of people took to the streets of Austria's capital on Saturday to protest against government plans to introduce mandatory COVID-19 vaccinations for all next month. "The government must go!" crowds chanted at one rally in central Vienna in what has become a routine Saturday event. Parliament is scheduled to vote next week on the issue, which has polarised the country as coronavirus cases surge.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/thousands-protest-vienna-against-mandatory-vaccination-2022-01-15/>

Australia Feared Letting Novak Djokovic Stay Would Fuel Antivaccine Sentiment

Australia's decision to cancel tennis star Novak Djokovic's visa for a second time was driven by fear that letting him stay could foster antivaccine sentiment during a surge in Covid-19 cases, court documents show.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/australia-feared-letting-novak-djokovic-stay-would-fuel-antivaccine-sentiment-11642223036>

Singapore Workers Who Refuse Vaccination Risk Losing Their Jobs

Workers in Singapore who refuse to be inoculated against Covid-19 may risk losing their jobs as new restrictions on office access take effect. From Saturday, a prior concession that allowed unvaccinated employees who test negative to go to workplaces will be removed, according to a government advisory. Employers can redeploy those with no jobs to suitable jobs that can be done from home, place them on no-pay leave, or as a last resort, fire them if they can't perform their contracted work outside the office.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-14/singapore-workers-who-refuse-vaccination-risk-losing-their-jobs>

Spotify Pressured by 270 Scientists, Medical Professionals Over Joe Rogan Episode

A coalition of 270 scientists and medical professionals this week issued an open letter to Spotify Technology SA, urging the streaming platform to establish a misinformation policy after an episode of the Joe Rogan Experience, among its most listened-to podcasts, promoted what they said were "baseless conspiracy theories" about the pandemic. The Dec. 31 program featured Robert Malone, a doctor who has called himself the "inventor" of mRNA vaccines, the type that serves as the basis for the Covid-19 vaccine. Malone was banned from Twitter for circulating anti-vaccine misinformation. YouTube deleted a recording of the Rogan podcast shortly after it was uploaded to the website by a third-party.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-14/spotify-pressured-by-270-scientists-medical-professionals-over-joe-rogan-episode>

Australia Says Djokovic's Vaccination Stance Poses a Public Risk

Immigration Minister Alex Hawke barred the world men's No. 1 tennis player despite saying Djokovic had entered Australia with a valid medical exemption from being vaccinated and presents a negligible health risk himself, according to court documents released Saturday. His ongoing presence, however, "may lead to an increase in anti-vaccination sentiment generated in the Australian community, potentially leading to an increase in civil unrest of the kind previously experienced in Australia with rallies and protests which may themselves be a source of community transmission," Hawke said in the filing.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-14/djokovic-to-be-detained-in-fight-to-stop-australia-deportation?rnd=premium-europe>

Lockdown party allegations facing UK PM Johnson

Prime Minister Boris Johnson has apologised for attending a "bring your own booze" gathering at his official residence during Britain's first coronavirus lockdown, and an internal inquiry is being carried out to establish the facts. British media have reported that at least 11 gatherings took place at Johnson's 10 Downing Street residence or in other government departments between May 2020 and April 2021, when COVID-19 rules limited how many people could meet socially. Sue Gray, a senior civil servant, is leading an inquiry. She has not said when her findings will be published.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/lockdown-party-allegations-facing-uk-pm-johnson-2022-01-14/>

Scientific Viewpoint

Thailand and Indonesia unveil plans to develop molnupiravir COVID-19 pill

Thailand's health minister said on Friday the country planned to develop the anti-viral pill molnupiravir to combat COVID-19 infections amid rising infections driven by the Omicron variant. The molnupiravir COVID-19 treatment pill for adult patients at risk of developing severe illness was jointly developed by U.S.-based Merck & Co Inc and Ridgeback Biotherapeutics. The Southeast Asian nation intends to join other countries in the region also planning to make versions of the drug including Bangladesh and India.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/thailand-indonesia-unveil-plans-develop-molnupiravir-covid-19-pill-2022-01-14/>

South African study suggests Omicron less severe even for unvaccinated

Unvaccinated people infected with the Omicron variant of coronavirus may be less prone to severe illness and requiring hospital care or dying than was the case with previous variants, a South African study showed on Friday. The study, by the National Institute of Communicable Diseases (NICD) in the Western Cape region, which has not yet been peer-reviewed, concluded. Compared about 11,600 patients from the first three COVID-19 waves with about 5,100 from the Omicron-driven wave that began in November. Omicron globally has tended to cause less severe disease, and proportionally fewer hospital admissions and deaths, than previous variants.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/safrican-study-suggests-omicron-less-severe-even-unvaccinated-2022-01-14/>

Italy's sewers will give early alert for future COVID spikes

Italy will use the nation's sewage to predict future coronavirus spreads and to alert authorities to rising cases and new variants before they appear in testing and hospitals, a senior official said, announcing a project to be launched in coming months. The new tool will be rolled out as governments look for new ways to track the virus to inform public health policy and to decide whether they have to take unpopular measures like restrictions that disrupt people's lives and economies. It could also be useful amid concerns about shortages of testing kits and labs being overwhelmed as the more infectious Omicron variant sweeps the world. Like many other countries, Italy is seeing surging cases.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/italys-sewers-will-give-early-alert-future-covid-spikes-2022-01-14/>

EMA lists rare spinal condition as side effect of AstraZeneca's COVID-19 shot

A safety panel of the European drug regulator on Friday recommended adding a rare spinal inflammation called transverse myelitis as a side effect of AstraZeneca's COVID-19 vaccine. The European Medicines Agency's (EMA) safety committee also recommended a similar warning be included for Johnson & Johnson's (JNJ.N) one-shot vaccine in October, and reiterated the decision on Friday. Transverse myelitis is an inflammation of one or both sides of the spinal cord and can cause weakness in the arms or legs, sensory symptoms or problems with bladder or bowel function.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/ema-lists-rare-spinal-condition-side-effect-astrazeneca-s-covid-19-shot-2022-01-14/>

UK study finds more Omicron hospitalisations in youngest children, but cases mild

Young children and babies are proportionally more likely to be hospitalised with Omicron compared to older children than with previous variants but the cases are still mild, British researchers said, adding the overall picture was reassuring. Omicron has spread rapidly in Britain and fuelled a spike in cases to record highs, though the variant is less severe than previous ones, and high vaccination levels among adults have also helped to limit the rise in hospitalisations. Children are less vulnerable than older adults to COVID-19.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uk-study-finds-more-omicron-hospitalisations-youngest-children-cases-mild-2022-01-14/>

Study finds COVID-19 may increase risk of diabetes in kids: What parents should know

Kids who have recovered from COVID-19 may have an increased risk of developing diabetes, according to a new study from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The study, which looked at databases with information for over 2.5 million patients under 18, found that children diagnosed with COVID-19 were about 2.5 times more likely to receive a new diabetes diagnosis a month or more after infection.

<https://abcnews.go.com/GMA/Wellness/study-finds-covid-19-increase-risk-diabetes-kids/story?id=82212416>

New study says air knocks down COVID-19 infection rate by 90 percent

New research found that after COVID-19 becomes airborne, the virus loses infectivity by 50 to 60 percent within seconds. By the first two minutes, the infectivity rate of COVID-19 dropped further by 90 percent. The new research was published out of the U.K. and has yet to be peer-reviewed.

<https://thehill.com/changing-america/well-being/prevention-cures/589262-new-study-says-air-knocks-down-covid-19>

Coronavirus Resurgence

City of Beijing reports first local Omicron case -state media

The Chinese capital Beijing on Saturday reported its first locally transmitted infection of the highly transmissible Omicron coronavirus variant, according to state media, just weeks ahead of its staging of the Olympic Winter Games. State television reported on Saturday that the new infection had been identified as the Omicron strain. Lab testing found "mutations specific to the Omicron variant" in the person, Pang Xinghuo, an official at the city's disease control authority, told a news briefing.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/china/china-reports-165-new-coronavirus-cases-jan-14-vs-201-day-earlier-2022-01-15/>

Brazil reels as COVID-19 cases soar; hospitals, economy under pressure

Brazil is suffering a sharp rise in COVID-19 cases as the Omicron variant spreads through the country, putting pressure on health services and weighing on an already sputtering economy. Insufficient testing and a data blackout caused by hackers have made it harder for experts to track the spread of the highly contagious variant in Brazil, but there are increasingly clear signs it is hitting Latin America's largest nation hard. Confirmed cases have almost doubled since last week, with the rolling average for the past seven days surging to 52,500, from 27,267 last Wednesday.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/brazil-reels-omicron-spreads-weighing-hospitals-economy-2022-01-14/>

India extends ban on public events in election states as COVID cases rise

India's election commission extended its ban on political rallies and roadshows in five states on Saturday due to rising COVID-19 cases in the country. The ban, which runs to Jan. 22, excludes indoor political party events of less than 300 people, or at 50% of a venue's capacity, the watchdog said in a statement. India reported 268,833 new coronavirus cases in the last 24 hours, taking its total tally to 36.84 million, according to data from the federal health ministry. Deaths from COVID-19 rose by 402 to 485,752.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/india/india-reports-268833-new-covid-19-infections-402-deaths-past-24-hours-2022-01-15/>

Swedish PM tests positive for COVID as fourth wave surges

Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson tested positive for COVID-19, her spokesperson said on Friday, the latest of several high-profile Swedes to catch the virus as a fourth wave of Omicron-driven infections sweeps across the country. Social Democrat Andersson, 54, attended a debate in parliament on Wednesday, after which two other party leaders - Annie Loof of the Centre Party and Per Bolund of the Greens - also tested positive. Sweden's king, queen and crown princess were all hit with coronavirus infections in early January

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/swedish-pm-andersson-tests-positive-covid-19-2022-01-14/>

Number of French COVID-19 ICU patients falls, despite record infections

The number of COVID-19 patients in intensive care units in France has fallen for the second day in a row, despite a record infection rate, health ministry data showed on Friday. France reported 3,895 COVID-19 patients were in intensive care units on Friday, 44 fewer than Thursday, and the second consecutive fall, despite the seven-day moving average of new infections reaching a new high of nearly 294,000 on Thursday. The number of people in hospital with COVID-19 rose by 357 to 24,511, but the week-on-week increase of 13.5% was the lowest since the start of the year.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/number-french-covid-19-icu-patients-falls-second-day-despite-record-infections-2022-01-14/>

Australia's worst-hit state says COVID-19 hospitalisations may plateau next week

COVID-19 hospitalisation rates in Australia's most populous state of New South Wales could plateau next week, a top health official said on Friday, as the state suffered record deaths from the virus for a third day. Pressure on hospitals will likely remain for "the next few weeks", the state's health deputy secretary, Susan Pearce, said, though hospitalisation numbers were tracking better than the best-case scenario in an official modelling a week ago. "That is pleasing, but that plateauing is obviously still at a relatively high level of COVID patients in our hospitals and in our (intensive care)," Pearce told a media briefing in Sydney, the state capital.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/australias-worst-hit-state-says-covid-19-hospitalisations-may-plateau-next-week-2022-01-14/>

UK seven-day COVID-19 infections down 33% on week before

The United Kingdom reported 81,713 new cases of COVID-19 on Saturday, leaving the seven-day tally down by nearly 33% on the previous week. It reported 287 deaths of people who had tested positive for the disease within the previous 28 days. The seven-day total for deaths was up 45% on the week before, following a record spike in infections in recent weeks.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uk-seven-day-covid-19-infections-down-33-week-before-2022-01-15/>

Nearly 90% of big US meat plants had COVID-19 cases in pandemic's first year - data

Nearly 90% of processing plants owned by five big U.S. meat companies had COVID-19 cases in 2020 and early 2021, a Reuters analysis of public data found, as a congressional committee investigates how meatpackers handled the pandemic. The U.S. House Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis began its probe last year amid evidence the plants were major spreaders of

COVID-19 and that workers suffered unusually severe outbreaks. It is unclear what the consequences of the investigation could be.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/nearly-90-big-us-meat-plants-had-covid-19-cases-pandemics-first-year-data-2022-01-14/>

Zhuhai in coronavirus mass testing mode after Zhongshan reports case

The southern Chinese city of Zhuhai reported seven cases of the Omicron variant of Covid-19 on Friday, as citywide mass screening of its 2.4 million people got under way. One of the cases was a 53-year-old woman living in the township of Nanping and she was transferred to a designated hospital for treatment, Zhuhai health authorities said. Authorities announced on Friday that all residents would be tested within the day at designated areas, advising the public to not leave Zhuhai unless absolutely necessary. Those who travel will need to show a negative nucleic test result taken within the previous 24 hours.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/science/article/3163374/chinese-city-zhuhai-coronavirus-mass-testing-mode-after>