COVID-19 Lockdown Exit Analysis
21st Jan 2022

Lockdown Exit

'Some people may not make it': athletes risk failing Beijing COVID-19 tests - IOC expert
Strict COVID-19 testing requirements for the Beijing Winter Olympics could see more athletes from high-risk Omicron regions banned from participating, but the system in place will be as flexible as possible, an Olympic medical adviser told Reuters. Experts have warned that China's strict "zero-COVID" strategy, as well as its more sensitive testing protocols, could see more athletes excluded from the Games scheduled to take place between Feb. 4 and Feb. 20 - especially from regions that have seen a spike in the highly infectious Omicron variant.
https://www.reuters.com/lifestyle/sports/some-people-may-not-make-it-athletes-risk-failing-beijing-covid-19-tests-ioc-2022-01-20/

U.S. to require COVID vaccines for essential workers crossing borders
The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is announcing Thursday it is requiring that non-U.S. essential workers such as truck drivers and nurses who are crossing land borders be fully vaccinated against COVID-19, effective Saturday. The Biden administration first announced in October that effective Nov. 8 it would again allow non-essential foreign visitors to travel from Canada and Mexico into the U.S. across land borders if they were vaccinated. The U.S. land borders with Canada and Mexico had been closed to non-essential travel for 20 months because of COVID-19 concerns.
https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-require-covid-vaccines-essential-workers-crossing-borders-2022-01-20/

Austria set to make COVID shots compulsory after bill clears parliament
Austria's lower house of parliament passed a bill on Thursday making COVID-19 vaccinations compulsory for adults as of Feb. 1, bringing Austria closer to introducing the first such sweeping coronavirus vaccine mandate in the European Union. Faced with a stubbornly high number of vaccine holdouts and a surge in infections, the government said in November it was planning the mandate. Since then it has raised the age as of which the mandate will apply, to 18 from 14.
https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/austria-introduces-lottery-covid-vaccine-incentive-2022-01-20/

U.S. preparing for possible future COVID variants -White House
The Biden administration is preparing for future variants of COVID-19, White House chief of Staff Ron Klain told MSNBC in an interview that aired on Thursday as the Omicron-related wave of cases appeared to be easing in parts of the country. "We're prepared. We're increasing the production of tests. We're increasing the production of masks," Klain said. "We have to be prepared for whatever comes next... there's a lot of steps left in fighting this pandemic. We are taking those steps."
https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/us-preparing-possible-future-covid-variants-white-house-2022-01-20/

Britain must learn to live with COVID-19, it could be with us forever - Javid
Britain must learn to live with COVID-19 as it may be with us forever, health minister Sajid Javid said on Thursday, adding that Britain was moving ahead of other countries as the government lifted coronavirus measures. "We need to learn to live with it. Sadly people die of flu as well: in a bad flu year you can sadly lose about 20,000 lives, but we don't shut down our entire country," Javid told Sky News.
https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/britain-must-learn-live-with-covid-19-it-could-be-with-us-forever-javid-2022-01-20/

Indonesia to Propose New Global Health Agency at G20 Summit

Indonesia will propose the creation of a new global health agency when leaders meet at the Group of 20 Summit. The agency would set up standard operating procedures for international travel and health protocols, as well as procure vaccines and ensure access and investment in medical equipment and medicines for developing countries, President Joko Widodo said in a statement at the World Economic Forum event

https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-20/indonesia-to-propose-new-global-health-agency-at-g20-summit

New Zealand Won't Resort to Lockdowns When Omicron Arrives

New Zealand will tighten Covid-19 restrictions when the omicron variant hits but won't resort to lockdowns, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said. When omicron starts to spread in the community, the country will move to "red" from "orange" in its Covid protection framework, which will see gathering limits of 100 imposed on events, social distancing in hospitality venues and greater use of face masks, Ardern told reporters. However, "we won't use lockdowns," she said.

https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-20/new-zealand-won-t-resort-to-lockdowns-when-omicron-arrives

Western Australia state to stay shut as Omicron stalks the east

Australia will remain a divided nation with the vast mining state of Western Australia cancelling plans to reopen its borders on Feb. 5 citing health risks from a surge in the Omicron COVID-19 variant in eastern states. Australia's most populous state New South Wales (NSW) on Friday reported its deadliest day of the pandemic. NSW reported 46 deaths of patients with COVID-19 including one infant, while Victoria state saw 20 lives lost. Yet, a drop in hospitalisations in both states did offer hope the latest outbreak might have peaked.

https://www.reuters.com/world/western-australia-state-stay-shut-omicron-stalks-east-2022-01-20/

Canadian vaccine mandate to lead to inflation, empty shelves, trucking executives say

The premier of Canada's Alberta province on Thursday called on the federal government to pause a COVID-19 vaccine mandate for cross-border truckers that companies say will disrupt the supply chain and fuel inflation. The mandate, imposed by Ottawa to help curb the spread of the coronavirus, has cost Canadian trucking companies about 10% of their international drivers, six top executives said this week. They said they are hiking wages to lure new operators during the worst labor shortage they have experienced.

https://www.reuters.com/business/canadian-vaccine-mandate-lead-inflation-empty-shelves-trucking-executives-say-2022-01-20/

The pandemic is birthing billionaires and killing the poor

We enter 2022 witnessing the biggest increase in billionaire wealth since records began. A billionaire was created every 26 hours during this pandemic. The wealth of the world's 10 richest men alone has doubled, rising at a rate of $15,000 per second. But COVID-19 has left 99 percent of humanity worse off. Our malaise is inequality. Inequality of income is now a stronger indicator of whether you will die from COVID-19 than age. In 2021, millions of people died in poorer countries with scant access to vaccines as pharmaceutical monopolies, protected by rich countries, throttled their supply. We minted new vaccine billionaires on the backs of denying billions of people access to vaccines.

aljazeera.com/opinions/2022/1/19/the-pandemic-is-birthing-billionaires-and-killing-the-poor

Biden's Team Says It's on Alert for Omicron Disruptions in China

The Biden administration is monitoring real-time data obtained from businesses operating in China to determine whether outbreaks of the omicron variant of coronavirus pose a risk to U.S. supply chains, an administration official said. It's too early to tell whether there will be any impact on the American economy from the variant's spread in China or from aggressive efforts by officials there to stamp it out, the official said. The official asked not to be identified discussing the administration's

efforts because the data is not public.
https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-20/biden-team-says-it-s-on-alert-for-omicron-disruptions-in-china

Wearing a mask on planes DOES cut risk of COVID spreading, study finds
Study used simulation to test how far virus-laden droplets could travel and infect They then compared it to real world flights where passengers had caught Covid Their model was 80 per cent right in predicting who did and didn't get the virus In one flight, the team found masks would have cut Covid infections from 12 to 1
https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10419559/Wearing-masks-planes-DOES-cut-risk-Covid-spreading-study-confirms.html?ito=social-twitter_mailonline

Exit Strategies

France to unveil timetable for easing COVID restrictions
France will unveil a timetable for easing COVID-19 restrictions later on Thursday, government spokesman Gabriel Attal said, though he cautioned the wave of Omicron infections tearing through the country had not reached its peak. Attal said France's new vaccine pass rules would help allow a softening of rules even as the incidence rate of infections continues to increase.
https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/france-unveil-timetable-easing-covid-restrictions-2022-01-20/

Ontario schools reopening amid calls for more COVID measures
Schoolchildren in Canada's most populous province are going back to their classrooms this week, after many parents said they were left scrambling to respond to the Ontario government's decision earlier this month to delay in-person learning. Ontario Premier Doug Ford announced on January 3 that the province would push back the planned return to in-person classes from January 5 to January 17 due to rising COVID-19 infections and hospitalisations linked to the Omicron variant.
https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2022/1/19/ontario-schools-reopening-amid-calls-more-covid-measures

Omicron prompts calls for Japan to treat COVID like the flu
Calls are growing in Japan to treat Covid-19 as endemic, adding to a global chorus pushing for a return to normal life as people tire of pandemic restrictions, vaccines become more accessible and virus deaths remain low. Drawing on data that shows omicron posing a less severe risk than previous variants, public figures from Tokyo's governor to former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe have signaled their support for downgrading the legal status of the virus in Japan. The change would widen health care access for patients, effectively casting the virus as no different than the flu.
https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2022/1/20/omicron-fuels-calls-for-japan-to-treat-covid-like-the-flu

US begins offering 1B free COVID tests, but many more needed
For the first time, people across the U.S. can log on to a government website and order free, at-home COVID-19 tests. But the White House push may do little to ease the omicron surge, and experts say Washington will have to do a lot more to fix the country's long-troubled testing system. The website, COVIDTests.gov, allows people to order four at-home tests per household, regardless of citizenship status, and have them delivered by mail. But the tests won't arrive for seven to 12 days, after omicron cases are expected to peak in many parts of the country. The White House also announced Wednesday that it will begin making 400 million N95 masks available for free at pharmacies and community health centers.
https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-science-business-health-bda6ac442be3d753407cfa0d52cd81d3

Europe considers new COVID-19 strategy: accepting the virus
With one of Europe's highest vaccination rates and its most pandemic-battered economies, the Spanish government is laying the groundwork to treat the next infection surge not as an emergency but an illness that is here to stay. Similar steps are under consideration in neighboring Portugal and in Britain. The idea is to move from crisis mode to control mode, approaching the virus in much the

same way countries deal with flu or measles. That means accepting that infections will occur and providing extra care for at-risk people and patients with complications.
https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-boris-johnson-health-europe-spain-1ab95ea43fa30bcb36f068c9a8664d12

Austria Starts Lottery to Boost Support for Obligatory Vaccine
Austrian lawmakers were set to pass the European Union's first law making coronavirus vaccinations mandatory as other member states ease restrictions in the latest wave of the pandemic. The parliament's lower house was set to approve the policy on Thursday with additional support from most deputies in two opposition groups. Only the far-right Freedom Party rejects the plan.
https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-20/austria-adds-incentives-to-first-vaccine-mandate-rule-in-eu

The Power of Free Covid Tests by Mail
On Jan. 18, the Biden administration quietly opened a portal that allows U.S. residents to order free coronavirus tests, a full day before the site's planned formal launch. Americans swiftly took notice: Covidtests.gov and special.usps.com/testkits rocketed to the top of the federal government's website portfolio on Tuesday, according to the U.S. analytics site. As of Wednesday morning, almost 300,000 users were engaging with these sites, accounting for 40% of the federal government's online traffic.
https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-20/the-power-of-free-covid-tests-by-mail

Thailand to resume quarantine waiver for arrivals from February
Thailand will resume its 'Test & Go' quarantine waiver for vaccinated arrivals from Feb. 1, its coronavirus task force said, in response to slowing COVID-19 infections. The scheme was suspended a month ago after only seven weeks due to the rapid global spread of the Omicron variant and uncertainty about vaccine effectiveness against it. The policy requires visitors to test on arrival and again five days later, while agreeing to have their whereabouts tracked, spokesperson Taweesin Wisanuyothin told a briefing.
https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/thailand-resume-quarantine-waiver-vaccinated-arrivals-feb-2022-01-20/

Taiwan to mandate COVID vaccination proof for entertainment venues
Taiwan will mandate the use of passes that provide proof of COVID-19 vaccination for entry into entertainment venues, the government said on Thursday, as it seeks to reduce infection risks while tackling a small rise in domestic Omicron cases. The Central Epidemic Command Centre said that from Friday entry into venues including bars and night clubs would require proof of full vaccination, either by showing a physical vaccine card or a new digital card.
https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/taiwan-mandate-covid-vaccination-proof-entertainment-venues-2022-01-20/

A Million Vaccine Shots Tossed in Indonesia on Short Expiry Date
More than a million Covid-19 vaccine shots expired in Indonesia before they could be given out, as most of them were donated with a short shelf life. Of the 1.1 million doses that were thrown out, about 98% were donated just one to three months away from expiry, Health Minister Budi Gunadi Sadikin said in parliament.
https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-20/a-million-vaccine-shots-tossed-in-indonesia-on-short-expiry-date

Vaccine group Gavi says additional $5.2 bln needed to ensure supply
The chairman of the Gavi vaccine alliance, Jose Manuel Barroso, said that an additional $5.2 billion is needed to continue to deliver vaccines at scale. Speaking at a news briefing, Barroso said it was critical to continue to keep up the pace of vaccine supply through the COVAX global vaccine-sharing programme, as more than 3 billion people in the world have yet to receive their first dose. Gavi Chief

Executive Seth Berkley said there was a need to raise the additional funds in the next three months to establish a pandemic pool of a minimum 600 million additional doses, strengthen countries' delivery systems, and finance ancillary costs for syringes and transport.
https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/vaccine-group-gavi-says-additional-52-bln-needed-ensure-supply-2022-01-19/

Some U.S. Hospitals See Covid-19 Patient Counts Decline as Omicron Retreats
Hospitals in early Omicron hot spots like New York and Washington, D.C., say the pressure is starting to ease, with many reporting fewer Covid-19 patients filling beds and smaller numbers of staff sidelined by infections. While these improvements follow declines in new Covid-19 case counts in parts of the U.S., health authorities have warned Omicron has yet to peak nationally, and hospitals around the country remain under significant strain from Covid-19 patient counts still at record levels. But there is also growing evidence Omicron's surges, while explosive, can be short lived. "We're really on that downturn," said Terry Fairbanks, chief quality and safety officer at MedStar Health, a Washington, D.C.-area hospital system that had about 700 Covid-19 patients by Wednesday. The peak was 980 on Jan. 10.
https://www.wsj.com/articles/some-u-s-hospitals-see-covid-19-patient-counts-decline-as-omicron-retreats-11642697531?mod=hp_lead_pos7

Partisan Exits

Czech anti-coronavirus vaccine folk singer dies after deliberately getting infected with Covid-19, son says
A Czech folk singer who was opposed to having a coronavirus vaccine has died after deliberately contracting the virus, according to her son. Hana Horká, of the folk band Asonance, died Sunday at the age of 57 after intentionally exposing herself to the virus at home while her son and husband were sick, according to CNN Prima News. Horká wanted to infect herself so she could be "done with Covid," her son, Jan Rek, said.
https://www.cnn.com/2022/01/20/europe/czech-singer-death-deliberate-covid-infection-intl/index.html

ITV says: UK investigation finds email warning lockdown party should not go ahead
An investigation into Downing Street parties has found an email from a senior official to Prime Minister Boris Johnson's private secretary warning that a May 20, 2020 party should not go ahead, ITV's political editor said. "I understand Sue Gray has found the email from a senior official to PM's principle private secretary Martin Reynolds warning him the 20 May party should not go ahead," Robert Peston said on Twitter. Johnson denied on Tuesday an accusation by his former adviser that he had lied to parliament about a lockdown party, saying nobody had warned him the "bring your own booze" gathering might contravene COVID-19 rules.
https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/itv-says-uk-investigation-finds-email-warning-lockdown-party-should-not-go-ahead-2022-01-20/

Novak Djokovic's Australian Visa Challenge Failed Due to Antivaccine Stance
Novak Djokovic's last-ditch effort to defend his Australian Open title by having his visa reinstated failed because a court accepted that people, especially youngsters, could emulate the tennis icon's opposition to being vaccinated. On Thursday, a panel of three judges at Australia's federal court said they upheld a decision by immigration minister Alex Hawke to cancel the visa of the men's tournament's top seed partly because Djokovic's presence in Australia had already created unrest, including a Jan. 11 protest involving the player's supporters. Djokovic was deported from Australia on Sunday after the court decided earlier in the day that Hawke acted lawfully when he canceled Djokovic's visa two days earlier, citing public interest.
https://www.wsj.com/articles/novak-djokovics-australian-visa-challenge-failed-due-to-antivaccine-stance-11642663221

Florida suspends health official who urged staff to get vaccinated

A top Florida public health official has been put on administrative leave as officials investigate whether he violated a state ban by emailing employees about their low vaccination rate against COVID-19 and urging them to get shots. Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, a Republican widely believed to be planning a run for the U.S. presidency, in November signed a law banning schools, businesses and government entities from requiring vaccination against COVID-19, drawing condemnation from health experts and Democratic leaders.

https://www.reuters.com/world/us/florida-suspends-health-official-who-urged-staff-get-vaccinated-2022-01-19/

Scientific Viewpoint

COVID-19: New 'game-changing' X-ray technology developed which can detect coronavirus in minutes

Experts in Scotland have developed groundbreaking Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology which is capable of accurately diagnosing COVID-19 in just a few minutes, much quicker than a PCR test. The research, by the University of the West of Scotland (UWS), uses X-ray technology, comparing scans to a database of around 3,000 images, belonging to patients with COVID- 19, healthy individuals and people with viral pneumonia. It then uses an AI process, an algorithm typically used to analyse visual imagery, to make a diagnosis.

https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-new-game-changing-x-ray-technology-developed-which-can-detect-coronavirus-in-minutes-12520697

Swiss researchers launch trial for COVID "patch" vaccine

Swiss medical researchers said on Wednesday they have launched an early-stage study to test a next-generation COVID-19 vaccine candidate which would be administered via an arm patch, the latest to look at alternative methods of giving injections. Unlike conventional vaccines that stimulate antibody production, the new PepGNP-Covid19 vaccine candidate focuses on T-cells, which are responsible for cellular immunity, to eliminate cells infected by the virus and prevent it from replicating.

https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/swiss-researchers-launch-trial-covid-patch-vaccine-2022-01-19/

Valneva says early studies show COVID-19 vaccine effective against Omicron

French biotech firm Valneva said that preliminary studies showed that three doses of its inactivated COVID-19 vaccine candidate neutralised the Omicron variant of the disease. All of the serum samples tested presented neutralizing antibodies against the ancestral virus and Delta variant, it said, while 87% of samples did so against the Omicron variant. "We are extremely pleased with these results," said Chief Medical Officer Juan Carlos Jaramillo in a statement, noting that these added to an earlier Phase III trial that showed improved immune response with two doses of the VLA2001 candidate.

https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/valneva-says-early-studies-show-covid-19-vaccine-effective-against-omicron-2022-01-19/

Analysis: How Omicron highlights fading hope of herd immunity from COVID

The Omicron variant, which is spreading far faster than previous versions of the coronavirus, is not likely to help countries achieve so-called herd immunity against COVID-19, in which enough people become immune to the virus that it can no longer spread, leading disease experts say. From the earliest days of the pandemic, public health officials have expressed hope that it was possible to achieve herd immunity against COVID-19, as long as a high enough percentage of the population was vaccinated or infected with the virus.

https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/how-omicron-highlights-fading-hope-herd-immunity-covid-2022-01-20/

Pfizer CEO awarded $1M Genesis Prize for developing COVID vaccine

Albert Bourla, chairman and CEO of Pfizer, has been awarded the 2022 Genesis Prize for his "leadership, determination and especially for his willingness to assume great risks" in developing a coronavirus vaccine in record time. The Genesis Foundation recognises individuals for their contribution to humanity and commitment to Jewish values.

https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2022/1/19/pfizer-ceo-awarded-1m-genesis-prize-for-developing-covid-vaccine

Novavax becomes Australia's 5th approved COVID-19 vaccine

Novavax's COVID-19 vaccine on Thursday became the fifth coronavirus vaccine approved for use in Australia. The country has ordered 51 million doses of the U.S.-manufactured vaccine, supplied under the brand Nuvaxovid, for its population of 26 million. Pfizer, AstraZeneca and Moderna vaccines are already in use in Australia. Johnson and Johnson's Janssen vaccine is also approved but the government has not bought any. The Novavax vaccine will be available to unvaccinated Australians aged 18 years and older but will not be used as a booster for the 95% of the population aged 16 and older who have already received a vaccine. "There are some individuals, notwithstanding a massive take up of vaccination in this country, who have been waiting for Novavax, and it's great that it's finally been approved," said chief regulator John Skerritt, head of the Therapeutic Goods Administration.

https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-health-australia-coronavirus-vaccine-8b13860c4c6422182349fb1381323e31

Prior Covid-19 Infection Offered Better Protection Than Vaccination During Delta Wave

Surviving a previous infection provided better protection than vaccination against Covid-19 during the Delta wave, federal health authorities said, citing research showing that both the shots and recovery from the virus provided significant defense. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said Wednesday that data from 1.1 million Covid-19 cases in California and New York last year showed people who were unvaccinated and hadn't previously contracted Covid-19 faced a far greater risk than both people who had gotten the shots and people who had been infected. The data on testing, cases and immunization was collected between May and November, as the Delta variant emerged and became dominant in the U.S., before the more-infectious Omicron variant began to spread widely. The hospitalization data came from more than 50,000 people in just California.

https://www.wsj.com/articles/prior-covid-19-infection-offered-better-protection-than-vaccination-during-delta-wave-11642619009

Drugmakers Sign Pacts to Widen Access to Merck's Covid Pill

More than two dozen generic-drug manufacturers have agreed to produce low-cost versions of Merck & Co.'s Covid-19 pill, a key step in bringing virus-fighting tools to lower-income countries that have struggled to get vaccines. Companies in Bangladesh, China, India, Kenya, South Africa, Vietnam and other countries signed pacts to supply more than 100 low- and middle-income nations, the United Nations-backed Medicines Patent Pool said Thursday.

https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-20/drugmakers-sign-pacts-to-widen-access-to-merck-s-covid-pill

Cheap version of Merck COVID pill to be made for poorer nations

Nearly 30 generic drugmakers in Asia, Africa and the Middle East will make cheap versions of Merck & Co's COVID-19 pill, under a landmark U.N.-backed deal to give poorer nations wider access to a drug seen as a weapon in fighting the pandemic. Merck's early greenlight to production of its anti-viral pill molnupiravir by other companies during the pandemic is a rare example in the pharmaceutical sector, which usually protects its patented treatments for longer periods.

https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/merck-covid-pill-molnupiravir-be-produced-by-27-drug makers-2022-01-20/

Waiting for Novavax? The company hopes to vaccinate 1 million unjabbed Australians

Hundreds of thousands of vaccine-hesitant Australians can now choose another jab with Novavax chief commercial officer John Trizzino hoping the newly approved protein-based vaccine could persuade the 5 per cent of the nation yet to be vaccinated. Australia has one of the highest vaccination rates in the world but a persistent group has been "waiting for Novavax" rather than taking the Pfizer or Moderna mRNA vaccines, or the AstraZeneca doses.
https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/waiting-for-novavax-the-company-hopes-to-vaccinate-1-million-unjabbed-australians-20220120-p59psx.html

Game recognizes game—Lilly, Novartis execs commend Pfizer on Paxlovid, but where does that leave them in the COVID market?
It's not often that high profile pharmaceutical executives publicly laud a direct competitor's medicine, but that's what's happening these days for Pfizer's COVID-19 antiviral Paxlovid. "The Pfizer compound was developed kind of from whole cloth during the course of the pandemic," said Eli Lilly CEO David Ricks, during an interview for Fierce JPM Week. "Small molecule drug development is a tricky business, and it involves as much art as science sometimes, so hats off to them." That sentiment was echoed by Jay Bradner, M.D., president of the Novartis Institutes for BioMedical Research, the Swiss pharma's R&D engine. "The Pfizer medicine is a remarkable contribution," Bradner said. "I mean, to take an inhibitor designed for a completely different virus, and then boost what is a peptide-like inhibitor … with a second drug to prevent its disposal, I think it's a pretty heroic act of repurposing, and the activity of the molecule is quite breathtaking."
https://www.fiercepharma.com/pharma/fierce-jpm-week-game-recognizes-game-lilly-novartis-execs-commend-pfizer-paxlovid-but-where

Coronavirus Resurgence

Five new local COVID-19 cases recorded in WA as contact tracers probe mystery infection
Western Australia has recorded five new local COVID-19 cases, including one that has yet to be linked to any known cases and was infectious in the community. Four of the new cases are contacts of previously reported infections, with two of them having been in quarantine. WA Health said the other two infections linked to known cases had potentially been infectious in the community. A further five travel-related cases have also been reported.
https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-01-20/five-new-local-covid-19-cases-in-wa-including-mystery-infection/100769100

Moscow's COVID-19 cases surge to pandemic high
The Russian capital on Thursday reported a record pandemic high of 11,557 new COVID-19 cases in the last 24 hours and the daily nationwide number of new infections also rose sharply to 38,850, authorities said. Moscow city mayor Sergei Sobyanin met President Vladimir Putin on Thursday in footage aired on state television and presented a report on the rapid spread of the Omicron variant.
https://www.reuters.com/world/moscows-covid-19-cases-surge-pandemic-high-2022-01-20/

Ukraine reports sharp increase in COVID-19 cases
The number of new coronavirus infections in Ukraine has more than doubled over the past three days and reached 18,479 cases as of Jan. 20, the country's health ministry said on Thursday. The ministry reported 12,815 cases on Jan. 19 and 8,558 cases on Jan. 18. Ukrainian health authorities said they expected a new wave due to the Omicron coronavirus variant in late January and in February.
https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ukraine-reports-sharp-increase-covid-19-cases-2022-01-20/

Spain's COVID infection rate drops for second straight day
Spain's COVID-19 infection rate fell for the second day in a row on Wednesday after 11 weeks of surges to record highs, raising hope among health authorities that the frenetic spread of the Omicron variant may be slowing. The rate as measured over the preceding 14 days fell to 3,286

cases per 100,000 people from Tuesday's 3,306 and Wednesday's record 3,397 cases, Health Minister Carolina Darias told a news conference.
https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/spains-covid-infection-rate-drops-second-straight-day-2022-01-19/

Mexico reports record number of COVID-19 cases as testing increases
Mexico registered a record daily increase of more than 60,000 new confirmed COVID-19 cases, health ministry data showed on Wednesday, as the country steps up testing for the virus. In the past 24 hours, more than 150,000 test results were logged, the ministry's data showed, far more than Mexico was registering at the start of the month. With 60,552 new infections, the number of overall cases since the pandemic began increased to 4,495,310 while 323 more deaths brought the overall death toll to 302,112.
https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/mexico-reports-record-number-covid-19-cases-testing-increases-2022-01-19/

Pakistan places new restrictions amid rise in COVID cases
Pakistani authorities have placed new restrictions on gatherings and in some schools in major cities in a bid to control the rapidly rising cases of the country's fifth wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. The restrictions, which include a ban on indoor gatherings and any indoor dining at restaurants, came into effect on Thursday, the National Command and Operation Centre (NCOC), which is coordinating the government's coronavirus response, said in a statement.
https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/pakistan-places-new-restrictions-amid-rise-in-covid-cases/ar-AASY0C3

Germany expects COVID-19 cases to peak in mid-February
Germany's health minister expects the number of coronavirus infections in the country to keep rising for several weeks before peaking next month. Karl Lauterbach told German public broadcaster ZDF late Wednesday that "the wave will reach its peak roughly in mid-February." Lauterbach warned that while hospitalization rates are currently low, clinics could see a severe strain in the coming weeks, noting that the share of people over age 50 who aren't vaccinated is significantly higher in Germany than in other European countries, such as Italy and Britain.
https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/germany-expects-covid-19-cases-to-peak-in-mid-february/ar-AASXQEw

France Records More Than 430000 New Covid Cases For Second Day
France's daily Covid infections topped 430,000 for the second day in a row, leading the government to extend a remote work mandate to contain the spread of the virus in the country. The country recorded 436,167 new coronavirus cases on Wednesday, according to data from the country's public health office. That's just shy of the record of 464,769 seen on Tuesday. The number of deaths rose by 231 to 127,869 since the beginning of the pandemic.
https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-19/france-records-more-than-430-000-new-covid-cases-for-second-day

New Mexico asks National Guard to teach as COVID shuts schools
New Mexico asked National Guard members and state employees to volunteer as substitute teachers to keep schools and daycare centers open during a surge in COVID-19 infections. State employees and Guard members who take up the call to teach will get their usual pay and be considered on administrative leave or active duty, respectively, according to Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham.
https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/new-mexico-asks-national-guard-teach-covid-shuts-schools-2022-01-20/

Beijing city raises vigilance as local COVID cases tick higher before Olympics
China's capital Beijing ramped up efforts to curb COVID-19 infections, ordering checks among cold-

chain firms and urging residents to cut unnecessary gatherings, as the city reported an uptick in local cases weeks before the Winter Olympics. Beijing had three domestically transmitted infections with confirmed symptoms on Wednesday, including one previously reported as a local asymptomatic carrier for Jan. 18, according to local health authority data on Thursday. That compared with one local confirmed infection for Jan. 18.
https://www.reuters.com/world/china/beijing-city-raises-vigilance-local-covid-cases-tick-higher-before-olympics-2022-01-20/

New Lockdown

Hong Kong to shut secondary schools from Monday over COVID fears
Hong Kong will suspend face-to-face teaching in secondary schools from Monday until after the approaching Lunar New Year, authorities said, because of a rising number of coronavirus infections in several schools in the Chinese-ruled territory. The government halted classes in primary schools and kindergartens early this month, and imposed curbs, such as a ban on restaurant dining after 6 p.m. and the closure of venues such as gyms, cinemas and beauty salons.
https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/hong-kong-shuts-secondary-schools-over-covid-fears-2022-01-20/