

COVID-19 Lockdown Exit Analysis

24th Jan 2022

Lockdown Exit

France's Constitutional Council approves Macron's vaccine pass

France's Constitutional Council on Friday approved - with conditions - the country's new COVID-19 vaccine pass, which will require people aged 16 and above to show proof of vaccination to enter public places like bars, restaurants and cinemas. The new pass is part of President Emmanuel Macron's drive to make life difficult enough for the small minority of unvaccinated people that they are compelled to get COVID shots. The Council's ruling paves the way for the vaccine pass to take effect on Jan. 24, replacing a health pass that showed proof of vaccination, a recent negative test or past infection.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/frances-constitutional-council-clears-vaccine-pass-with-conditions-2022-01-21/>

A divided nation: Western Australia stays shut as COVID deaths mount in 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. The country reported 86 deaths from the virus on Friday, figures from the state and territory jurisdictions that have reported so far showed, its deadliest day since the start of the pandemic. Australia's most populous state, New South Wales (NSW), reported 46 deaths of patients with COVID-19, also its worst day, including one infant, while Victoria state saw 20 deaths. 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/>

WHO recommends reduced dose Pfizer COVID vaccine for under 12s

The World Health Organization on Friday recommended extending the use of a reduced dosage of Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine to children aged 5 to 11 years old. The recommendation comes after the Strategic Advisory Group of Experts (SAGE) on immunisation held a meeting on Wednesday to evaluate the vaccine. It is currently recommended for use in people aged 12 years and above. The recommended dosage for the younger population is 10 micrograms instead of 30 micrograms offered to those 12 years and older.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/who-advisory-panel-recommends-extending-use-pfizer-vaccine-5-11-year-olds-2022-01-21/>

Covid-19: 'We'll be second-class citizens if self-isolation rules go'

Work-from-home guidance has been scrapped, mandatory mask-wearing will soon go and Health Secretary Sajid Javid has said compulsory self-isolation could be next. But what happens to people who cannot live with the virus, because their immune conditions mean vaccines may not work? For nearly two years, Julie - not her real name - has worked from home and lived like "an absolute hermit", knowing that her condition means a coronavirus infection could be more deadly. That didn't change even after her third jab, because she has to take medication to suppress her immune system, meaning her body may not be able to respond to the vaccine.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-60072080>

Covid: New Zealand PM Ardern cancels wedding amid Omicron wave

New Zealand's Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern has cancelled her wedding after announcing new Covid restrictions. The entire country is set to be placed under the highest level of Covid restrictions after an outbreak of the Omicron variant. The restrictions include a cap of 100 vaccinated people at

events and mask wearing in shops and on public transport. New Zealand has recorded 15,104 Covid cases and 52 deaths. Ms Ardern confirmed to reporters on Sunday that her wedding to television host Clarke Gayford would not be going ahead.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-60100369>

Beijing introduces more COVID measures as cases mount before Olympics

Beijing's city government on Sunday introduced new measures to contain a recent outbreak of COVID-19, as China's capital continued to report new local cases of the virus less than two weeks before it hosts the Winter Olympic Games. Nine locally transmitted cases were found in Beijing on Jan. 22, the National Health Commission said on Sunday, of which six were in the city's Fengtai district. Fengtai will organise nucleic acid tests for COVID-19 for all of its residents on Sunday, district health authorities said.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/china/chinas-beijing-orders-more-covid-tests-cases-mount-before-olympics-2022-01-23/>

U.S. opposes plans to strengthen World Health Organization

The United States, the World Health Organization's top donor, is resisting proposals to make the agency more independent, four officials involved in the talks said, raising doubts about the Biden administration's long-term support for the U.N. agency. The proposal, made by the WHO's working group on sustainable financing, would increase each member state's standing annual contribution, according to a WHO document published online and dated Jan. 4. The plan is part of a wider reform process galvanised by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has highlighted the limitations of the WHO's power to intervene early in a crisis.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/exclusive-us-opposes-plans-strengthen-world-health-organization-2022-01-21/>

Two-thirds of passengers on first flight to Covid-free Kiribati diagnosed with virus

After remaining Covid-free for the entirety of the pandemic, Kiribati has reopened its borders - only for two thirds of the passengers on the first international flight to arrive in ten months to test positive for the virus. The island nation is now set to impose a four-day lockdown from Monday after the virus was found to have spread into the community. All 54 passengers, 36 of whom were diagnosed with Covid after arriving from Fiji last Friday, have now been quarantined and are recovering well, according to authorities.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/21/two-thirds-of-passengers-on-first-flight-to-covid-free-kiribati-diagnosed-with-virus>

Get back to the office, Britain's business minister says

People should get back to the office to benefit from in-person collaboration because the world must learn to live with the coronavirus after a pandemic that has wiped trillions of dollars off global output, Britain's business minister said on Friday. After the novel coronavirus emerged in China in late 2019, work-from-home instructions across the world emptied office towers from Manhattan to Canary Wharf leaving millions toiling from home. Juggling sometimes shaky home internet connections, frustrated lockdown children and unmuting - or not - on often meandering video calls with work colleagues became the norm for many office workers.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/get-back-work-office-britains-business-minister-says-2022-01-21/>

Two Australian states to test school students twice weekly for COVID

Australia reported 58 deaths from COVID-19 on Sunday, as the two most populous states, New South Wales (NSW) and Victoria, said students would be tested twice weekly for the Omicron variant when classes resume next week. NSW reported 34 deaths of patients with COVID-19, while Victoria state saw 14 deaths, and Queensland reported 10 deaths. Health officials said they believe an Omicron outbreak has peaked in NSW and Victoria, which reported 20,324 and 13,091 new cases respectively on Sunday

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/two-australian-states-test-school-students-twice-weekly-covid-2022-01-23/>

India's COVID-19 cases rise by 333533 in last 24 hours - govt

India reported over 300,000 new COVID-19 infections for the fourth straight day even though the caseload over the last 24 hours was slightly lower than a day before, data released by the government on Sunday showed. India reported 333,533 new COVID-19 infections over the past 24 hours with 525 dead, according to the figures released by the government. India's total death toll due to COVID-19 now stands at 489,409, the health ministry said. On Saturday, India had reported 337,704 new cases of COVID-19 and 488 dead.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/india/indias-covid-cases-rise-by-333533-last-24-hours-govt-2022-01-23/>

Exit Strategies

Foreign Executives in Isolated Hong Kong Head for Exit, Sick of Zero-Covid Curbs

Stringent rules to try to keep Hong Kong free of Covid-19 are driving away more foreign executives, chipping away at the city's decades-old status as one of the world's top business hubs. Flight bans, lengthy quarantine stays for arrivals and repeated school closures are pushing more people to a breaking point as the pandemic enters its third year and the city clings to a zero-Covid strategy abandoned by nearly all countries save for China. A growing outbreak at a public housing estate has prompted the government to lock down buildings and send more people into quarantine. Executives complain the travel restrictions have prevented them from keeping tabs on operations in other countries or visiting business partners and potential clients, even in mainland China. Meanwhile, there is the ever-present risk of being sent to quarantine if they happen to cross paths with a Covid-19 sufferer in Hong Kong just by visiting a pet store or eating lunch out.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/foreign-executives-in-isolated-hong-kong-head-for-exit-sick-of-zero-covid-curbs-11642950280>

In Hospital Strained by Omicron, Weary Nurses Treat Too Many Patients

The fast-moving Omicron variant is straining U.S. hospitals on a scale not seen before in the two-year-old pandemic. The facilities are confronting record or near-record levels of patients while staff struggle with burnout and call in sick in large numbers due to the virus. Even hospitals in regions where the Omicron wave has begun easing say they couldn't keep up, forcing them to make agonizing decisions about which desperate patients they can admit and which must wait, risking more severe illness. "With 1,100 new positive cases in our employees last week, you have no choice," Ms. Schwartz said early this month while Houston Methodist Hospital was closing about 140 beds a day on average, more than one-tenth of its capacity, largely because of staffing.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/in-hospital-strained-by-omicron-weary-nurses-treat-too-many-patients-11642933804>

China's Covid Victory Over America Turns Out to Be Pyrrhic

Authoritarian regimes tend to boast about themselves and denigrate their rivals. President Xi Jinping's China is no exception. "As the Covid-19 epidemic takes away hundreds of lives every day in the U.S.," wrote Hu Xijin, the former editor-in-chief of the Global Times, on Jan. 14, "that country's propaganda machinery is engaging in vicious smears against China's dynamic zero-case policy of epidemic prevention ... Think about it. More than 800,000 Americans died from Covid-19 in the U.S. Behind these numbers, how many sad and desperate stories are there?"

<https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2022-01-23/niall-ferguson-china-s-covid-victory-over-america-is-pyrrhic>

Australia to Allow Overseas Arrivals With Rapid Antigen Test

Australia will allow international air travelers to enter the country if they provide results from a rapid antigen test taken within 24 hours of departure. A RAT must be undertaken by or under the supervision of a medical practitioner that includes pharmacists or trained personnel at an authorized

airport testing station, the Ministry of Health said on its website Saturday in Sydney. The change is effective from 1 a.m. Sunday. Until now any incoming traveler needed to provide a negative PCR test within three days of departure, creating the risk a person may get infected after the test and before embarking. In addition, the global spread of omicron has dramatically increased demand for PCR testing which has impacted access for those wanting pre-departure certification.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-21/australia-to-allow-overseas-arrivals-with-rapid-antigen-test>

Omicron Reinfections Unlikely Over Several Months, Fauci Says

It's extremely unlikely that a person can be reinfected with omicron, at least in the short-term, President Joe Biden's top medical adviser said, as the U.S. begins to see sharp declines in cases in places hit earliest by the variant. "There are reinfections, but it is unlikely that -- if you mounted a good immune response -- at least over a period of several months, it is extremely unlikely that you will be reinfected with the same variant," Anthony Fauci, the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, said in a press briefing on Friday. Cases of reinfection have typically been in people who fell ill with one variant and then later contracted a different variant, Fauci said.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-21/omicron-reinfections-unlikely-over-several-months-fauci-says>

FDA expands use of remdesivir to patients with high risk of hospitalization

The U.S. health regulator on Friday expanded its approval for the use of Gilead Sciences' (GILD.O) antiviral drug remdesivir to treat non-hospitalized patients 12 years and older for the treatment of mild-to-moderate COVID-19 disease with high risk of hospitalization. Previously, the use of Veklury was limited to patients requiring hospitalization.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/fda-expands-use-remdesivir-patients-with-high-risk-hospitalization-2022-01-21/>

Experts say the world needs to be vaccinated to end pandemic

COVID-19 cases have sharply risen again across the US and around the world, with the new Omicron variant accounting for most new cases. The winter surge has prompted many experts and officials to reemphasize the importance of masking indoors and social distancing, in addition to getting vaccinated, including booster shots.

<https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/other/nbc-won-t-send-announcers-to-beijing-for-olympics-maskless-passenger-forces-plane-to-turn-around/ar-AAODtSq>

GSK, Vir ramping up U.S. output of COVID antibody drug

GlaxoSmithKline and U.S. partner Vir Biotechnology will boost production of their antibody-based COVID-19 treatment by adding a second manufacturing plant to help meet soaring demand in the United States. The U.S. government last week signed a deal with the drugmakers to buy 600,000 more doses of the therapy, sotrovimab, for an undisclosed sum. The GSK-Vir therapy has shown more promise against the Omicron variant in lab studies than treatments from major rivals Eli Lilly and Regeneron.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/gsk-vir-ramping-up-us-output-covid-antibody-drug-2022-01-21/>

As Japan infections surge, so does risk of pandemic fatigue

Japan on Friday acted to contain a record surge in COVID-19 cases with a return to curbs that have however shown diminishing results, while a laggard vaccine booster programme leaves many people vulnerable to breakthrough infections. The government empowered authorities in Tokyo and 12 other prefectures to implement curbs on mobility and business activity - measures that, with three prefectures already under such devolved restrictions, now cover half of Japan's population. The highly infectious Omicron variant has driven the current wave of cases, and nationwide infections hit an all-time high of around 46,000 on Thursday.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/japan-infections-surge-so-does-risk-pandemic-fatigue-2022-01-21/>

Is COVID retreating in the U.S.? Data paints encouraging scenario

New coronavirus cases are falling in parts of the United States hardest hit by the fast-spreading Omicron variant, according to a Reuters analysis of public health data, offering an early indication the virus might once again be on retreat. COVID-19 infections have decreased in 15 states plus Washington, D.C. and Puerto Rico, an analysis of the past week through Wednesday compared with the prior week showed. In the Northeast, which saw some of the highest case loads during the latest surge, infections are down 36% week-over-week. The drop was more modest at the national level with the seven-day average of new COVID-19 cases falling 1% as of Wednesday, according to the Reuters tally. COVID-19 data often lag a few days behind the actual state of affairs. "Certainly it bodes well for us in terms of the trajectory of Omicron," said Wafaa El-Sadr, a professor of epidemiology and medicine at Columbia University in New York City. While falling case numbers in parts of the country that were first and hard-hit by the variant offer tangible hope of turning a corner, infections are still on the rise across swathes of the United States. Cases are still climbing in the Midwest, which has the highest week-over-week increase at 14%, followed by the South at 8% and Western states at 7%, although the increase has slowed considerably in recent weeks.

<https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/us/is-covid-retreating-in-the-us-data-paints-encouraging-scenario/ar-AAT0BOX>

Covid: NHS in push to vaccinate the final four million

More than four million adults in the UK have not yet had a first Covid jab and 16 million have not had their booster. This winter, NHS vaccine teams have been out on the streets trying to win over those hard-to-reach groups who might have struggled to access health services in the past. Carole Phillips, an NHS clinical director in Portsmouth, is best described as a straight talker. A former army medic who served in Afghanistan, she is now running outreach programmes in the city - trying to get the Covid vaccine to the most vulnerable. "In Portsmouth, we have still got a large percentage of the population - 20% - who haven't had their first jab," she says. "We have to reach out to these people, regardless of their lifestyle, to protect all of us in the end."

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-60055436>

Coronavirus vaccine fines: Experts urge caution as Austria and other governments plan to fine the unvaccinated

More governments are offering people a stark choice: Get vaccinated or pay up. Austria's lower house of parliament on Thursday approved a coronavirus vaccine mandate for all adults starting Feb. 1, with violators facing as much as \$4,000 in fines. In Greece, starting this week, people older than 60 who decline the vaccine can be fined \$113 per month. Italians who are older than 50 must also get vaccinated or face fines and suspensions from work, beginning next month. In Canada, meanwhile, the hard-hit province of Quebec said last week that it was considering a plan to impose a "significant" financial penalty on adults without at least a first dose of coronavirus vaccine.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/01/21/global-fines-unvaccinated/>

Hong Kong warns people to stop trying to prevent COVID hamster cull

Hong Kong police will deal with pet lovers who try to stop people giving up their hamsters to be put down, or who offer to care for abandoned hamsters, authorities said, after they ordered a cull of the cuddly rodents to curb the coronavirus. On Tuesday, officials ordered the killing of about 2,000 hamsters from dozens of pet shops after tracing a coronavirus outbreak to a worker at a shop, where 11 hamsters later tested positive for COVID-19. Thousands of people have offered to adopt unwanted hamsters amid a public outcry against the government and its pandemic advisers, which the office of Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam called irrational.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/hong-kong-warns-people-stop-trying-prevent-covid-hamster-cull-2022-01-21/>

France to loosen COVID curbs in February, allowing popcorn in cinemas again

France will ease work-from-home rules from early February and allow nightclubs to reopen two weeks later as the general COVID-19 situation in the country is starting to improve, Prime Minister Jean Castex said on Thursday. Caps on the number of people allowed into sports and entertainment venues will also be lifted on Feb. 2, and masks will no longer be required outdoors from that date. People will also again, from Feb. 16, be allowed to eat popcorn - or other snacks - in cinemas.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/france-unveil-timetable-easing-covid-restrictions-2022-01-20/>

Switzerland recommends COVID booster for children aged 12-15

Swiss public health officials updated their recommendation for COVID-19 booster shots on Friday to include everyone aged 12 and older. Pfizer's mRNA vaccine should be used as the booster shot for this age group, said the Federal Office of Public Health and the Federal Commission for Vaccination. The authority recommended the booster shot to be offered to all eligible age groups at least four months after the second dose of a two-shot coronavirus vaccine regimen.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/switzerland-recommends-covid-booster-children-aged-12-15-2022-01-21/>

EU told to prepare for fourth COVID vaccine doses, if needed

Countries scramble to tame more infectious Omicron variant. Some EU countries deploying 4th doses already. Many want more data before deciding. EU health ministers met at short notice on Friday

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/eu-health-ministers-seek-common-line-over-fourth-covid-vaccine-dose-2022-01-21/>

Poland to shorten COVID-19 quarantine to 7 days, says PM

Poland will shorten the COVID-19 quarantine period to seven days and will introduce free tests in pharmacies from Jan. 27, Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki said on Friday, after the country reported a record number of infections.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/poland-shorten-covid-19-quarantine-7-days-says-pm-2022-01-21/>

Ireland set to rapidly drop almost all COVID-19 restrictions

Ireland is to scrap almost all its COVID-19 restrictions on Saturday after coming through the storm of the Omicron variant that led to a massive surge in infections, Prime Minister Micheal Martin said in a national address. Ireland had the second highest incidence rate of COVID-19 in Europe just last week but also one of the continent's highest uptake of booster vaccines, which has helped keep the number of seriously ill people well below the previous peak.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/ireland-set-rapidly-drop-almost-all-covid-19-restrictions-2022-01-21/>

Covid-19: 'We'll be second-class citizens if self-isolation rules go'

Work-from-home guidance has been scrapped, mandatory mask-wearing will soon go and Health Secretary Sajid Javid has said compulsory self-isolation could be next. But what happens to people who cannot live with the virus, because their immune conditions mean vaccines may not work? For nearly two years, Julie - not her real name - has worked from home and lived like "an absolute hermit", knowing that her condition means a coronavirus infection could be more deadly. That didn't change even after her third jab, because she has to take medication to suppress her immune system, meaning her body may not be able to respond to the vaccine.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-60072080>

Medical Glassmaker Schott to Increase Spending Amid Boost From Covid-19 Vaccines

Schott AG's finance chief plans to increase spending this year as the specialty glass and materials manufacturer sees growing demand for its products, including syringes and vials for Covid-19 vaccines. The Mainz, Germany-based company intends to invest €450 million, equivalent to about \$510 million, this fiscal year. That is up from the €340 million it spent during the year ended Sept.

30. Schott, which in 2021 produced vials for over five billion doses of Covid-19 vaccines, expects to expand its plants, including a facility for syringes and vials in Müllheim in Southern Germany, for which it recently added a production line for polymer syringes, Chief Financial Officer Jens Schulte said. The company supplies vaccine makers globally, including in the U.S. and China.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/medical-glassmaker-schott-to-increase-spending-amid-boost-from-covid-19-vaccines-11642713162>

Partisan Exits

Rioters fight Brussels police, smash headquarters of EU foreign service

Protests in Brussels against coronavirus restrictions spiralled into violence on Sunday as protesters clashed with police officers and vandalized the offices of the European External Action Service, the EU's diplomatic arm. In one of the largest demonstrations against COVID-19 measures in the city, an estimated 50,000 people poured onto the streets, including groups traveling from outside Belgium, according to a police spokesperson. The demonstration was organized by the EU-wide network Europeans United for Freedom and other groups that oppose health restrictions. Police used teargas and water cannons to clear the Cinquantenaire park near the EU institutions after groups of protesters threw objects at officers and charged at them. Live footage showed protesters at street level hurling metal fences and a burning dustbin at policemen below them in the entrance to a metro station. An escalator was later shown burning.

<https://www.politico.eu/article/protest-against-covid-restriction-police-violent-brussels/>

Companies Face Patchwork of Covid-19 Rules After Supreme Court Ruling

Companies will have to fend for themselves—and grapple with varied state and local requirements—following the high court's decision to overturn the Biden administration's mandate for large employers

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/companies-face-patchwork-of-covid-19-rules-after-supreme-court-ruling-11642794722>

Clashes erupt again over COVID curbs on French island of Guadeloupe

One police officer was injured and police faced gunfire during a night of civil unrest over COVID-19 restrictions in Guadeloupe, a French overseas territory in the Caribbean, the island's local authority said on Friday. Shops were vandalised and there were attempted robberies during the unrest, focused on Guadeloupe's largest urban centre, Pointe-a-Pitre, the authority said. Police moved in at dawn to clear blockades set up by protesters.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/guadeloupe-extends-nightly-curfew-amid-violent-protests-against-covid-19-rules-2021-12-02/>

U.S. judge blocks Biden federal employee COVID-19 vaccine mandate

A judge in Texas ruled on Friday that President Joe Biden could not require federal employees to be vaccinated against the coronavirus and blocked the U.S. government from disciplining employees who failed to comply. It was the latest setback to White House efforts to require various groups of American workers to get vaccinated. Biden had issued an order requiring about 3.5 million government workers to get vaccinated by Nov. 22 barring a religious or medical accommodation -- or else face discipline or firing.

<https://www.reuters.com/legal/government/us-judge-blocks-biden-federal-employee-covid-19-vaccine-mandate-2022-01-21/>

Anti-vaccine movement's DC rally comes amid covid successes

As anti-vaccine activists from across the country prepare to gather on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial on Sunday, they are hoping their rally will mark a once-fringe movement's arrival as a lasting force in American society. That hope, some public health experts fear, is justified. Almost two years into the coronavirus pandemic, the movement to challenge vaccines' safety — and reject

vaccine mandates — has never been stronger. An ideology whose most notable adherents were once religious fundamentalists and minor celebrities is now firmly entrenched among tens of millions of Americans.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2022/01/21/anti-vaccine-dc-rally-covid-mandates/>

Back in court - UK hospitality groups take on insurers over lockdown losses

Some of the world's biggest insurers are bracing as a second wave of multi-million pound lawsuits, brought by struggling British pubs, restaurants and bakery chains over lockdown losses, starts hitting London's courts next week. Zurich, MS Amlin, Liberty Mutual, Allianz and AXA are among those due in court one year after Britain's Supreme Court ruled that many insurers had been wrong to deny thousands of companies, battered by the COVID-19 pandemic, business interruption payouts. Insurers have since paid out 1.3 billion pounds (\$1.8 billion), according to the Financial Conduct Authority. But the ruling did not cover all policy wordings and, where it deemed claims valid, some companies are now disputing payout levels.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/back-court-uk-hospitality-groups-take-insurers-over-lockdown-losses-2022-01-21/>

Former Polish president, Solidarity leader Walesa has COVID

Lech Walesa, the former Polish president and Solidarity trade union leader who played a leading role in the fall of Communism, has the coronavirus, he said on Friday. Originally a shipyard electrician in the northern port city of Gdansk, Walesa became a symbol of the historic changes that ended the Cold War, leading the Solidarity trade union movement which brought about the switch to a free-market economy in 1989. "I can't believe it ... I am infected," the 78-year-old Nobel Peace Prize laureate wrote on Facebook.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/former-polish-president-solidarity-leader-walesa-has-covid-2022-01-21/>

US conservatives spreading anti-vax misinformation to unvaccinated Uganda

US Christian legal organisation Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF) and Texas-based libertarian think tank the Brownstone Institute are among the organisations backing Uganda's 'End Lockdown Now' campaign. The Brownstone Institute's founder told Ugandans at an online event: "There's no real case for getting a vaccine if you've had natural immunity. It doesn't make any sense." End Lockdown Now has platformed anti-vax, anti-mask, anti-lockdown and pandemic-denying arguments, with journalists and scientists from Europe and Australia among those spreading misinformation to Ugandans at the group's online events. One such event was hosted by ADF. Separately, ADF has also involved itself in three legal challenges opposing lockdown measures in Uganda.

<https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/us-conservatives-spread-anti-vaccine-covid-misinformation-uganda/>

Continued Lockdown

A divided nation: Western Australia stays shut as COVID deaths mount in 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. The country reported 86 deaths from the virus on Friday, figures from the state and territory jurisdictions that have reported so far showed, its deadliest day since the start of the pandemic. Australia's most populous state, New South Wales (NSW), reported 46 deaths of patients with COVID-19, also its worst day, including one infant, while Victoria state saw 20 deaths.

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

Scientific Viewpoint

UK health chiefs are now officially keeping tabs on 'stealth' version of Omicron

UK Health Security Agency has classed BA.2 as a 'variant under investigation' It means BA.2 is spreading in the UK and may be more infectious or jab resistant But scientists say it likely will not

have a 'substantial impact' on the current wave

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10427005/UK-health-chiefs-officially-keeping-tabs-stealth-version-Omicron.html>

As Covid-19 Pills Roll Out, Worry Mounts That Resistance Could Develop

Researchers and U.S. health regulators worry Covid-19 will figure out a way to evade important new pills, prompting efforts to look for signs of such resistance and find combinations to thwart it. The treatments—Paxlovid from Pfizer Inc. and molnupiravir from Merck & Co. and Ridgeback Biotherapeutics LP—are the first drugs authorized by federal health regulators that people early in the course of an infection can easily take at home to avoid severe disease. Yet viruses are notorious for mutating in ways that allow them to bypass antivirals, especially when the drugs are given alone as is the case with the new Covid-19 pills. That is why treatments for other viruses such as HIV and hepatitis C consist of multiple drugs. Combinations cut the risk of resistance resulting from mutations because a virus is forced to do more to survive.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/as-covid-19-pills-roll-out-worry-mounts-that-resistance-could-develop-11642847405>

GlaxoSmithKline Racing to Provide Only Effective Covid-19 Antibody Treatment

GlaxoSmithKline PLC and partner Vir Biotechnology Inc. are straining to meet soaring demand for their Covid-19 antibody treatment after the highly mutated Omicron variant knocked out the two competing products. Demand has jumped in recent weeks for the treatment, called sotrovimab, because it is the only antibody drug authorized in the U.S. for the newly infected that has been found to work against Omicron. Glaxo and Vir, which were using one manufacturing plant, say they have raced to add another and taken other steps to roughly double the number of doses they can deliver to the U.S. in the first quarter to 600,000.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/glaxosmithkline-racing-to-provide-only-effective-covid-19-antibody-treatment-11642770001>

Third Dose of Pfizer, Moderna Covid-19 Vaccines Offers Strong Protection Against Omicron

Vaccines and booster shots offer superior protection from the Delta and Omicron variants, according to three new studies released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The data back up earlier findings supporting booster shots and offer the first comprehensive insight into how vaccines fare against the Omicron variant. In one of the studies published Friday, a CDC analysis found that a third dose of either the vaccine from Pfizer Inc. and BioNTech SE or Moderna Inc. was at least 90% effective against preventing hospitalization from Covid-19 during both the Delta and Omicron periods.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/omicron-wave-eases-in-parts-of-u-s-france-sets-plan-to-relax-curbs-11642770561>

Mixing Sinovac With Different Boosters Increases Protection

People who had two doses of the Covid-19 vaccine made by China's Sinovac Biotech Ltd. should get boosted with a different shot to amp up their protection against omicron, according to a study by researchers from Brazil and the University of Oxford. The research, published Friday in The Lancet, tested booster combinations on 1,240 people from Brazil above 18 years old who had been immunized with Sinovac's shot, one of the most widely used globally, six months prior. While those who received a third Sinovac dose did experience a boost in antibodies 28 days later, the level of improvement was found to be much higher in people who were boosted with vaccines from Pfizer Inc., AstraZeneca Plc, or Johnson & Johnson.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-21/mixing-sinovac-with-different-boosters-increases-protection>

Omicron Reinfections Unlikely Over Several Months, Fauci Says

It's extremely unlikely that a person can be reinfected with omicron, at least in the short-term, President Joe Biden's top medical adviser said, as the U.S. begins to see sharp declines in cases in

places hit earliest by the variant. "There are reinfections, but it is unlikely that -- if you mounted a good immune response -- at least over a period of several months, it is extremely unlikely that you will be reinfected with the same variant," Anthony Fauci, the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, said in a press briefing on Friday. Cases of reinfection have typically been in people who fell ill with one variant and then later contracted a different variant, Fauci said.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-21/omicron-reinfections-unlikely-over-several-months-fauci-says>

U.S. studies highlight the need for COVID boosters to fight Omicron

Three U.S. studies show that a third dose of an mRNA vaccine is key to fighting the Omicron coronavirus variant, providing 90% protection against hospitalization due to COVID-19, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said on Friday. The studies, led by the CDC, are among the first in the United States to look at the impact of booster doses against the fast-spreading Omicron variant, which now accounts for 99% of all new COVID cases. Overall, they suggest that boosters helped protect against both infection and symptomatic disease

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-studies-highlight-need-covid-boosters-fight-omicron-2022-01-21/>

EU health ministers seek common line over fourth COVID vaccine dose

European Union health ministers were told on Friday to prepare to deploy a fourth dose of COVID-19 vaccines as soon as data showed it was needed, as the bloc faces a surge in cases of the Omicron variant of the coronavirus. The EU drugs regulator said this week it would be reasonable to give a fourth dose to people with severely weakened immune systems, but more evidence was needed. "If we see data which is conclusive on whether a fourth dose is needed, we need to be ready to act," EU Health Commissioner Stella Kyriakides told EU ministers in a video conference, her speaking points showed.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/eu-health-ministers-seek-common-line-over-fourth-covid-vaccine-dose-2022-01-21/>

Japan approves Pfizer COVID vaccine for children aged 5 to 11 -

Japan's health ministry has authorised the use of Pfizer and BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine in children aged between five and 11. The vaccine, Comirnaty, is claimed to be the first in Japan to be approved for use in this age group. Once the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare grants special approval, Japan will join the UK and US in efforts to reduce the impact of COVID-19 in children. Until now, the mRNA vaccine has only been available to individuals over the age of 12 in the country. However, with this approval, approximately seven million children will be eligible to receive a dose of the vaccine. According to ministry officials, inoculations could begin as early as March once specific details of the roll-out are finalised.

<https://pharmaphorum.com/news/japan-approves-pfizer-covid-vaccine-for-children-aged-5-to-11/>

No evidence coronavirus vaccines cause infertility, study finds

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis (R), a foe of vaccine mandates, appeared to suggest Thursday that getting a shot to protect against the coronavirus could cause infertility. "Think about how ridiculous it is what they're doing by trying to force the nurses" to get immunized, he said in a speech announcing funding for nursing certification programs. "A lot of these nurses have had covid. A lot of them are younger. Some of them are trying to have families." But there is no evidence that getting vaccinated against the coronavirus makes it harder to conceive, according to a study released Thursday of heterosexual couples trying for pregnancy. DeSantis could not be immediately reached for a comment on his remarks. By contrast, men infected with the coronavirus showed signs of a short-term decline in fertility, according to the research, which was led by an epidemiologist at Boston University and published in the peer-reviewed American Journal of Epidemiology. It was funded by the National Institutes of Health.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2022/01/21/covid-vaccine-infertility-pregnancy-desantis/>

Covid-19 vaccine mixing: could heterologous boosters improve immunity?

As the world grappled with vaccinating against Covid-19 last year, a mix-and-match approach to jabs emerged as a potential solution to roadblocks like vaccine hesitancy, safety concerns, and supply chain issues. In the months since, numerous studies have shown that administering different Covid-19 vaccines for the first and second doses induces a strong immune response against the novel coronavirus, and recent research has even suggested that mixing jabs is more effective than administering two doses of the same vaccine. Now, with vaccine booster programmes underway across the globe, the next question is whether this mix-and-match rule applies to booster doses. More than 36 million booster doses have been administered in the UK so far, while over 62 million people in the US have received a third shot

<https://www.pharmaceutical-technology.com/features/covid-19-vaccine-mixing-heterologous-boosters-immunity/>

GlaxoSmithKline Racing to Provide Only Effective Covid-19 Antibody Treatment

GlaxoSmithKline PLC and partner Vir Biotechnology Inc. are straining to meet soaring demand for their Covid-19 antibody treatment after the highly mutated Omicron variant knocked out the two competing products. Demand has jumped in recent weeks for the treatment, called sotrovimab, because it is the only antibody drug authorized in the U.S. for the newly infected that has been found to work against Omicron. Glaxo and Vir, which were using one manufacturing plant, say they have raced to add another and taken other steps to roughly double the number of doses they can deliver to the U.S. in the first quarter to 600,000.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/glaxosmithkline-racing-to-provide-only-effective-covid-19-antibody-treatment-11642770001>

Singapore approves COVID-19 vaccine boosters for age 12-17s

Singapore will extend its COVID-19 booster vaccination programme to adolescents aged 12 to 17 years from next month, its health ministry said on Friday. Singapore is among the first few countries to recommend boosters for that age group, following Germany, the United States, Israel and Hungary.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/singapore-approves-covid-19-vaccine-boosters-age-12-17s-2022-01-21/>

Pfizer says has approval in Japan for COVID vaccine for children aged 5-11

Pfizer Inc said it received special approval in Japan for its COVID-19 vaccine to be given to children aged 5-11. The mRNA-type vaccine developed by Pfizer and BioNTech SE has been the most commonly used in Japan for protection against the coronavirus so far.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/pfizer-says-has-approval-japan-covid-vaccine-children-aged-5-11-2022-01-21/>

WHO recommends reduced dose Pfizer COVID vaccine for under 12s

The World Health Organization on Friday recommended extending the use of a reduced dosage of Pfizer's (PFE.N) COVID-19 vaccine to children aged 5 to 11 years old. The recommendation comes after the Strategic Advisory Group of Experts (SAGE) on immunisation held a meeting on Wednesday to evaluate the vaccine. It is currently recommended for use in people aged 12 years and above. The recommended dosage for the younger population is 10 micrograms instead of 30 micrograms offered to those 12 years and older. "This age group (5-11) is in the lowest priority use group for vaccination except, for children who have co-morbidities," SAGE chairman Alejandro Cravioto said at a briefing.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/who-advisory-panel-recommends-extending-use-pfizer-vaccine-5-11-year-olds-2022-01-21/>

Omicron 'sub-lineage' BA.2 designated as COVID variant under investigation, says UKHSA

The BA.2 form of Omicron has taken hold in countries such as Denmark but so far there doesn't appear too much cause for concern, with experts believing vaccines are effective and hospitalisation

levels apparently unchanged. However, there is a possibility it might be more transmissible. The UK Health Security Agency has designated the Omicron variant sub-lineage, known as BA.2, as a variant under investigation - but current case rates are very low. Just 53 sequences had been identified in the UK by 10 January, according to the UKHSA, which said it was doing further analysis. Initial studies from Denmark - where it's quickly taken hold and now makes up around half of Omicron cases - show no difference in hospitalisations between 'original' Omicron and BA.2.

<https://news.sky.com/story/amp/omicron-sub-lineage-ba-2-designated-as-covid-variant-under-investigation-says-ukhsa-12521718>

UK designates Omicron sub-lineage a variant under investigation

The UK Health Security Agency on Friday designated a sub-lineage of the dominant and highly transmissible Omicron coronavirus variant as a variant under investigation, saying it could have a growth advantage. BA.2, which does not have the specific mutation seen with Omicron that can help to easily distinguish it from Delta, is being investigated but has not been designated a variant of concern. "It is the nature of viruses to evolve and mutate, so it's to be expected that we will continue to see new variants emerge," Dr Meera Chand, incident director at the UKHSA, said.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uk-designates-omicron-sub-lineage-variant-under-investigation-2022-01-21/>

Boosters Effectively Fend Off Delta, Omicron Variants in Studies

Booster doses of Covid-19 vaccines increased protection against both the delta and omicron variants in three studies that looked at infections, hospital admissions and deaths in thousands of U.S. patients. Third doses of messenger RNA vaccines made by Moderna Inc. and the partnership of Pfizer Inc. and BioNTech SE were at least 90% effective in preventing hospitalizations during both the delta and omicron periods, according to an analysis of hundreds of thousands of hospitalizations and clinic visits.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-21/boosters-effectively-fend-off-delta-omicron-variants-in-studies>

Coronavirus Resurgence

New Zealand Urges Business to Be Ready for Omicron Disruption

New Zealand's government is warning businesses to be prepared for labor shortages and supply disruptions as omicron takes hold in the community. Finance Minister Grant Robertson has urged companies to ensure business continuity plans are in place and pledged government support, but warned that the impact of the variant could be severe. Modeling showed that in a scenario of 25,000 daily cases there could be 350,000 workers a day self-isolating, he said. "What we see from overseas is the supply side of the economy is where the big impacts have been," Robertson told reporters Sunday in Wellington. "We're working very hard to make sure we don't see disruption but inevitably there will be some."

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-23/new-zealand-urges-business-to-be-ready-for-omicron-disruption>

S.Korea reports second-highest COVID count ahead of holiday

South Korea posted its second-highest daily number of coronavirus cases on Sunday, despite extended COVID-19 curbs and a high vaccination rate, raising concerns of further spread during the upcoming Lunar New Year holiday. The country recorded 7,630 new cases on Saturday, the Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency (KDCA) said, above the 7,009 cases reported a day earlier and near the mid-December record

<https://www.fxempire.com/news/article/s-korea-reports-second-highest-covid-count-ahead-of-holiday-874337>

Coronavirus cases go UP for the first time in more than two weeks: 74,799 catch virus

Department of Health bosses reported a total of 74,799 new coronavirus cases This marks the first time the number of Covid cases has gone up since January 4 The official figures also showed there

have been a further 75 new Covid deaths

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10432643/Coronavirus-cases-time-two-weeks-74-799-catch-virus.html>

Covid Scotland: Four more deaths and 6329 new cases ahead of restrictions easing

It means the death toll under this measurement, of people who tested positive for the virus in the previous 28 days, has risen to 10,199. There were 1,441 people in hospital on Sunday with recently confirmed Covid-19, down 17 on the day before, with 41 in intensive care, down one from the previous day. Figures for NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde – the biggest health board by population in the country – were not submitted in time for the Sunday update and figures published on Friday were used instead. So far, 4,405,821 people have received their first dose of a Covid-19 vaccination, 4,105,220 have received their second dose, and 3,252,819 have received a third dose or booster. The remaining restrictions brought in before Christmas in response to the Omicron wave are set to be lifted on Monday.

<https://www.scotsman.com/health/covid-scotland-four-more-deaths-and-6329-new-cases-ahead-of-restrictions-easing-3538401>

Hong Kong Finds 25 Local Covid Cases, Most Since March Last Year

Hong Kong reported 25 confirmed local Covid infections on Saturday, the most since at least March, and 100 preliminary positive cases as officials try to contain an outbreak at a public housing estate. Most of the preliminary positive cases were found at the public housing complex in the New Territories, where more than 2,500 residents have been locked down for five days and are tested every day. Two employees at a local public hospital and one worker at a care center also tested preliminary positive.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-22/hong-kong-finds-25-local-covid-cases-most-since-march-last-year>

Australia's Queensland state says peak of Omicron two weeks away

Australia reported 64 deaths from COVID-19 on Saturday, as the most populous state, New South Wales (NSW), said the Omicron COVID-19 variant would not delay the start of the school year. NSW reported 30 deaths of patients with COVID-19, while Victoria state saw 20 deaths, and Queensland reported 10 deaths. The national toll of 64 was down from its deadliest day since the start of the pandemic on Friday, when 86 people died.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/australias-queensland-state-says-peak-omicron-two-weeks-away-2022-01-22/>

German health min sees possible tripling of COVID infections by mid-Feb -sources

Germany reported a record 140,160 new coronavirus cases on Friday as the country's health minister warned the country could see at least 400,000 per day by mid-February. That figure would be reached under an optimistic scenario in which booster shots provide very good protection, Karl Lauterbach said in a discussion with state government leaders, sources involved in the talks told Reuters late on Thursday. The number could climb to more than 600,000 daily new cases if the booster shots were less protective, he said, according to the sources. Lauterbach also said he expected the numbers in intensive care in hospitals to increase significantly over coming weeks.

<https://www.msn.com/en-gb/news/world/german-health-minister-sees-possible-tripling-of-coronavirus-infections-by-mid-feb/ar-AASZN80>

Pakistan records most daily COVID cases since pandemic began

Pakistan reported on Friday over 7,000 COVID-19 cases in a single day, its highest daily number of infections since the pandemic began, as the south Asian nation imposes new restrictions to curb the fast-spreading Omicron variant. At least 7,678 cases in the past 24 hours pushed the positivity ratio to 12.93%, the highest ever in the last two years, 23 deaths were also reported in the last 24 hours, according to data from the National Command Operation Centre (NCOC), which is overseeing the

pandemic response.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/pakistan-records-most-daily-covid-cases-since-pandemic-began-2022-01-21/>

China's local COVID cases fall while infections grow in Beijing city

China reported on Friday the lowest daily tally of confirmed locally transmitted COVID-19 cases in nearly two months, while infections edged up in the capital Beijing amid high virus alert before its hosting of the Winter Olympics Games. China reported 23 domestically transmitted infections with confirmed symptoms for Thursday, official data showed on Friday, down from 43 a day earlier. This marks the fourth consecutive day of decline in local symptomatic cases, with the lowest daily case load since Nov. 29, after a national strategy to extinguish flare-ups as quickly as possible forced the worst-hit cities to lock down affected communities and cut non-essential business activity.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/china/china-daily-local-confirmed-covid-cases-fall-nearly-two-month-low-2022-01-21/>

Russia reports record daily COVID-19 cases

Russia on Friday reported a new record number of COVID-19 confirmed in the past 24 hours as the Omicron variant of the virus spread across the country, the government coronavirus task force said. Daily new cases jumped to 49,513, from 38,850 a day. The task force also reported 692 deaths.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-reports-record-daily-covid-19-cases-2022-01-21/>

Sweden sets new daily COVID-19 case record

Sweden set a new daily record for COVID-19 cases, registering 39,928 on Jan. 19, health agency data showed on Thursday as the more easily transmitted Omicron variant of the virus raged across the country. The daily infection figures are typically revised somewhat as any delayed records of additional cases are added to the national total for a given day. The previous record of 39,321 cases was set on Jan. 18. Sweden's government recently announced new restrictions as the more contagious omicron variant has spread rapidly and putting strain on the country's healthcare system.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/sweden-eases-quarantine-rules-key-workers-exempted-omicron-rages-2022-01-20/>

England's COVID R number and daily COVID growth rate drop

The estimated range of England's COVID-19 reproduction "R" number has fallen to between 0.8 and 1.1, the UK Health Security Agency said on Friday, adding that cases are likely shrinking as Prime Minister Boris Johnson reopens the economy. An R number between 0.8 and 1.1 means that for every 10 people infected, they will on average infect between 8 and 11 other people. Last week the range was 1.1 to 1.5. The daily growth of infections was estimated at between -6% to +1%, a big fall of the previous weeks range of +1% to +5%. The UKHSA said the figures represented the situation in England 2-3 weeks ago.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/englands-covid-r-number-daily-covid-growth-rate-drop-2022-01-21/>

'Explosion': Poland widens testing as COVID cases hit record

Poles will be able to get tested for COVID-19 in pharmacies free of charge, the government said on Friday, after the country reported a record 36,665 daily cases as the Omicron variant takes hold. Authorities have warned that the latest wave of the pandemic will drive case numbers to levels as yet unseen in the European Union's largest eastern member, with estimates of the peak ranging from 60,000 to as many as 140,000 daily cases. Health Minister Adam Niedzielski said that on Saturday the country could report over 40,000 daily cases. A week ago the figure was just over 16,000.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/poland-sees-new-daily-record-36665-covid-cases-2022-01-21/>

Is COVID retreating in the U.S.? Data paints encouraging scenario

New coronavirus cases are falling in parts of the United States hit hardest by the fast-spreading Omicron variant, according to a Reuters analysis of public health data, offering an early indication the virus might once again be in retreat. COVID-19 infections have decreased in 19 states plus Washington, D.C. and Puerto Rico, an analysis of the past week through Thursday compared with the prior week showed.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/the-great-reboot/is-covid-retreating-us-data-paints-encouraging-scenario-2022-01-21/>

Bangladesh shuts schools as coronavirus cases surge

Bangladesh on Friday closed all schools and colleges for two weeks to counter an "alarming" rise in COVID-19 infections, just four months after ending a 1-1/2 year school closure imposed due to coronavirus. The south Asian country reported 11,434 new cases on Friday, the biggest single-day jump since Aug. 9, pushing the positivity rate to 28.5%. "We are seeing an uptick in infections in schools and colleges. This is really alarming," Health Minister Zahid Maleque told reporters.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/bangladesh-shuts-schools-coronavirus-cases-surge-2022-01-21/>

New Lockdown

Kiribati goes into first lockdown after Covid flight cases

The remote island nation of Kiribati has gone into lockdown after passengers on the first international flight in 10 months tested positive for Covid. Under the new measures, people have been told to stay at home and social gatherings are banned. Some 36 people on the flight from Fiji have tested positive. Four people have caught the virus from community transmission. Until last week, Kiribati had recorded just two Covid cases. Kiribati is one of the most isolated islands in the world. It is some 4,800km (2,980 miles) from its nearest continent, Australia.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-60092463>