

COVID-19 Lockdown Exit Analysis

4th Feb 2022

Lockdown Exit

Omicron sub-variant BA.2 harder to identify, found in 5 African nations -WHO

The BA.2 sub-variant of Omicron has been found in five African countries, a World Health Organization scientist said on Thursday, adding she was concerned about the development because samples of BA.2 may not be spotted as a form of Omicron. The BA.2 sub-variant has begun to replace Omicron's more common "original" BA.1 variant in countries such as Denmark. Data from there suggests no difference in disease severity, according to another WHO official

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/omicron-sub-variant-ba2-found-5-african-countries-who-scientist-2022-02-03/>

Bangladesh extends closure of schools over Omicron

The government of Bangladesh has decided to extend the closure of schools, as COVID-19 cases surge, mostly because of the highly transmissible Omicron coronavirus variant. The school closure initially was just for two weeks, until February 6. But on Wednesday, Minister of Education Dipu Moni said it would be extended by two more weeks. The announcement was met with disappointment by some teachers and experts. At a school in the Moghbazar area of the capital, Dhaka, teachers were frustrated over having to restart online classes for their 500 students. "Students just don't get the lessons the same way online as in the classroom. It's very important to use teaching materials to help them understand clearly," Mizanur Rahman, a teacher at Provati Bidya Niketon, told The Associated Press news agency.

<https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/bangladesh-extends-closure-of-schools-over-omicron/ar-AATqEDB>

Long after COVID lockdowns, India's youth struggle to find work

Ravi Bansod lost almost everything when India imposed a nationwide lockdown to halt the spread of the coronavirus in March 2020. After investing five years and one million Indian rupees (\$13,515) in his Mumbai curry shop, the 29-year-old small business owner was forced to shut up shop. Once outgoing, he became so depressed and withdrawn that his friends referred him to a psychotherapist. Two years later, Bansod is still trying to rebuild his life and lives in fear of the government taking away everything he has worked for again amid the spread of the Omicron variant. "I feel that lockdowns should be imposed so that only vulnerable people like the old and those with comorbidities are restricted from going outside," Bansod told Al Jazeera.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2022/2/3/after-lockdowns-indias-youth-still-struggling-to-find-work>

Olympic spotlight back on China for a COVID-tinged Games

Long before the global pandemic upended sports and the world in general, the 2022 Winter Olympics faced unsettling problems. It started with the fact that hardly anybody wanted to host them. Beijing ended up solving that problem, but only after four European cities thought about it and dropped out, mostly because of expense and lack of public support. In the end, it was a race between two authoritarian countries. The IOC narrowly chose China's capital and its mostly bone-dry surrounding mountains over a bid from Kazakhstan. "It really is a safe choice," IOC President Thomas Bach said after the balloting.

<https://apnews.com/article/winter-olympics-Beijing-china-opening-ceremony-f2335793918e4580952e172b2316d6b0>

A different COVID-19 vaccine debate: Do we need new ones?

COVID-19 vaccines are saving an untold number of lives, but they can't stop the chaos when a

hugely contagious new mutant bursts on the scene, leading people to wonder: Will we need boosters every few months? A new vaccine recipe? A new type of shot altogether? That's far from settled, but with the shots still doing their main job many experts are cautioning against setting too high a bar. "We need collectively to be rethinking what is the goal of vaccination," said Dr. Daniel Kuritzkes, infectious disease chief at Brigham & Women's Hospital. "It's unrealistic ... to believe that any kind of vaccination is going to protect people from infection, from mild symptomatic disease, forever."

<https://apnews.com/article/covid-vaccine-whats-next-0b8b3fa92a024726251996acbcd6ecf>

Succession scramble grips Italian family firms after COVID scare

"Italian entrepreneurs often tighten their grip on their firms as they get older, fearing there may not be a future without them at the helm," he said. Yet a year into the pandemic, Giacomo Carlo Archiutti sold 30% of the kitchen manufacturer he founded in 1967 in Italy's industrial north east to a private equity firm. Pre-pandemic the Archiuttis would have stood out as a rarity, an Italian family-owned business welcoming an external investor as a first step to addressing succession planning.

<https://www.msn.com/en-us/finance/companies/succession-scramble-grips-italian-family-firms-after-covid-scare/ar-AA Tqf3j>

Covid: Europe set for 'long period of tranquillity' in pandemic, says WHO

Europe could soon enter a "long period of tranquillity" that amounts to a "ceasefire" in the pandemic thanks to the less severe Omicron variant, high levels of immunity and the arrival of warmer spring weather, the World Health Organization has said. In an upbeat assessment, Hans Kluge, the WHO's Europe director, said the region was in a position of "higher protection" that could "bring us enduring peace", even if a new, more virulent variant than Omicron should emerge. Kluge said the 53-country region - which includes the UK - had recorded 12 million new coronavirus cases last week, the highest single weekly total of the pandemic, with about 22% of all tests returning a positive result.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/03/europe-set-for-long-period-of-tranquillity-in-pandemic-says-who>

Brown University Hopes to Drop Masks in Classrooms This Spring

Brown University may allow students to finally ditch their masks this spring, barring any new disruptive variants, said President Christina Paxson. "I would love to lose the masks," Paxson said in an interview with Bloomberg News. Going maskless allows people to see people's smiles and confused faces, expressions that matter in an educational environment, she said. Providence, Rhode Island-based Brown, like many other institutions, is preparing for the point when Covid becomes endemic. Two years into the pandemic, that day may be nearing, with vaccines required by many colleges and the contagious omicron variant starting to pass its crest in the U.S. Paxson said she consulted with Ashish Jha, dean of Brown's School of Public Health, and the institution could end indoor mask mandates in the coming months.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-02-02/brown-university-hopes-to-drop-masks-in-classrooms-this-spring>

COVID inequity: In Africa, at-home tests are scarce, costly

After learning that a friend tested positive for COVID-19, Thembi Ndlovu went to a health clinic in Zimbabwe's capital in search of a free coronavirus test. But there were none left that day, leaving the 34-year-old hairdresser unsure if she needed to take precautions to protect clients. "I wish we could just walk into a pharmacy and buy a cheap self-testing kit like we do with pregnancy or HIV," she said as she left the clinic in a working-class township of Harare. "It would be much easier." For millions of people in rich countries, COVID-19 self-tests are abundant and free, including in Britain, Canada, France and Germany. But most people across Africa have limited access to them.

<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-health-zimbabwe-united-nations-coronavirus-vaccine-81d0353ba1f5ddc4e7e52362b5cccd1b>

Fortress New Zealand delays full reopening until October

New Zealand on Thursday announced a phased reopening of its border that has been largely closed for two years due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but travel bodies said self-isolation rules need to be removed to revive the struggling tourism sector. Vaccinated New Zealanders in Australia can travel home from Feb. 27 without a requirement to stay at state-managed quarantine facilities, while New Zealand citizens in the rest of the world will be able to do so two weeks later, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said. Foreign vaccinated backpackers and some skilled workers can come to the country beginning March 13, while up to 5,000 international students will be allowed to enter from April 12.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/new-zealand-reopen-borders-phases-end-feb-2022-02-02/>

Exit Strategies

Saudi Arabia requires citizens to take COVID booster shot to travel abroad starting Feb. 9

Saudi Arabia said on Thursday that citizens will be required to take the COVID-19 booster shot to be able to travel abroad starting Feb. 9, state media reported. The kingdom is also requiring visitors to present a negative PCR result before entry.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/saudi-arabia-requires-citizens-take-covid-booster-shot-travel-abroad-starting-2022-02-03/>

Medicare opens up access to free at-home COVID-19 tests

The Biden administration, seeking to fill a frustrating gap in COVID-19 testing coverage, announced on Thursday that people with Medicare will be able to get free over-the-counter tests much more easily in the coming weeks. The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services said Medicare will cover up to eight free tests per month, starting in early spring. The tests will be handed out at participating pharmacies and other locations. They'll be available to people who have Medicare's "Part B" outpatient benefit, which about 9 in 10 enrollees sign up for. Last month, the administration directed private insurers to cover up to eight free tests a month for people on their plans. Officials said at the time they were still trying to figure out what to do about Medicare, which covers more than 60 million people, most of them age 65 or older and more vulnerable to severe illness from coronavirus infection.

<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-business-health-medicare-a7f307eb589067624163dfde3ac80bce>

Strained US hospitals seek foreign nurses amid visa windfall

With American hospitals facing a dire shortage of nurses amid a slogging pandemic, many are looking abroad for health care workers. And it could be just in time. There's an unusually high number of green cards available this year for foreign professionals, including nurses, who want to move to the United States — twice as many as just a few years ago. That's because U.S. consulates shut down during the coronavirus pandemic weren't issuing visas to relatives of American citizens, and, by law, these unused slots now get transferred to eligible workers. Amy L. Erlbacher-Anderson, an immigration attorney in Omaha, Nebraska, said she has seen more demand for foreign nurses in two years than the rest of her 18-year career. And this year, she said, it's more likely they'll get approved to come, so long as U.S. consular offices can process all the applications.

<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-immigration-travel-business-health-525b951967525e75ba40a0a03433c3bf>

Schools seek volunteer teachers amid COVID staffing crunch

The answer around the U.S. could be a local police officer, National Guard soldier, state budget analyst, parent or recent high school graduate — nearly anyone willing to help keep schools' doors open through the omicron-driven staffing crunch. States have been loosening teaching requirements to give schools more flexibility on hiring as coronavirus exposures, illness and quarantines add to strains on schools that also have been tapping librarians, custodians and support staff to help cover

classrooms during the pandemic. Brian McKinney, a parent with students in second and 10th grade in Hays County, Texas, spent part of this week as a substitute, helping sixth graders through a social studies assignment that had them writing essays about the Soviet Union. A former teacher, he decided he could help as he waited out a cold snap that has slowed business at the World War II-themed miniature golf course he and his wife now own.

<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-health-business-education-texas-81e294609570160758ac14dd1d5d5ba0>

S. Korea expands rapid testing amid record COVID infections

South Korea on Thursday began enforcing a new coronavirus testing policy centered on rapid testing as health officials reported a record number of new infections following the Lunar New Year holiday. The 22,907 new cases reported by the Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency marked a second straight day of over 20,000 new infections and about a five-fold increase from daily cases seen in mid-January, when the highly contagious omicron variant first became the country's dominant strain. Long lines snaked around testing stations in the capital Seoul and other major cities, where most people were provided rapid antigen test kits to use under the supervision of health workers, who then approved lab tests for anyone who tested positive.

<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-health-seoul-south-korea-35d2305e4079bc07eada37d1d77c123>

Hong Kong expands government work-from-home plans as Omicron bites

The Hong Kong government said on Thursday it would extend a work-from-home plan for civil servants as health officials warned tougher measures could follow amid a worsening COVID-19 outbreak. Aside from those involved with essential and urgent work, all other civil servants - who had been due to resume work on Friday - will remain working from home until Feb. 11. Health officials said on Thursday many untraceable transmission chains of the Omicron variant were spreading across the global financial hub - a warning that comes as many Hongkongers enjoy Lunar New Year gatherings. "There is quite severe community transmission at the moment," said

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/hong-kong-expands-government-work-from-home-plans-omicron-bites-2022-02-03/>

Guernsey to offer Covid booster jabs to 16 and 17 year olds

All 16 and 17 year olds in Guernsey will be offered a booster dose of the Pfizer coronavirus vaccine. The move brings the Bailiwick in line with the UK, following advice from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI). Third jabs will be offered three months after the second dose, the Committee for Health and Social Care (HSC) said.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-guernsey-60240991>

Covid vaccine: More than a million teenagers are still unvaccinated in England as school absences rise

More than one million children between the age of 12 and 15 in England remain completely unvaccinated against Covid despite the jab being available to that age group since the end of September. Uptake of the Covid vaccine is also significantly lower in England than in Scotland for that age group. Around 58 per cent of children between the age of 12 and 15 in England have had their first jab, which is around 1.5 million children. In comparison, 68 per cent of that age group has had their first vaccine in Scotland, which is around 160,000 kids.

<https://inews.co.uk/news/health/covid-vaccine-teenagers-england-unvaccinated-school-absences-rise-1429407>

Fortress New Zealand delays full reopening until October

New Zealand on Thursday announced a phased reopening of its border that has been largely closed for two years due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but travel bodies said self-isolation rules need to be removed to revive the struggling tourism sector. Vaccinated New Zealanders in Australia can travel home from Feb. 27 without a requirement to stay at state-managed quarantine facilities, while New

Zealand citizens in the rest of the world will be able to do so two weeks later, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/new-zealand-reopen-borders-phases-end-feb-2022-02-02/>

Ardern Starts to Reopen New Zealand Border as Frustration Mounts

New Zealand will finally begin reopening to the world at the end of this month as frustration mounts over a border that's been closed for almost two years to keep out Covid-19. The border will reopen to vaccinated New Zealanders from Australia at midnight on Feb. 27 and from the rest of the world at midnight on March 13, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said in a speech Thursday in Auckland. Some groups of critical and skilled workers will also be permitted to enter from those dates. Arrivals will no longer need to spend time in a government managed isolation facility, but will be required to self-isolate and return negative tests.

https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-02-02/ardern-starts-to-reopen-new-zealand-border-as-frustration-mounts?utm_source=google&utm_medium=bd&cmpld=google

German vaccine commission to recommend fourth COVID-19 shot

Germany's expert panel on vaccine use (STIKO) is preparing to recommend a fourth COVID-19 vaccine dose, the committee's head, Thomas Mertens, told media group Funke on Thursday. "We have data from Israel that shows a fourth dose significantly improves protection from a severe case of illness," Mertens told Funke. "The STIKO will make the recommendation soon," he added. The panel would recommend booster shots only with vaccines that are already available, Mertens added.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/german-vaccine-commission-recommend-fourth-covid-19-shot-2022-02-03/>

France's COVID vaccine pass to stay until ICUs are 'emptied', says health minister

France's vaccine pass will remain in place until hospitals are able to function normally without cancelling non-emergency procedures to make room for COVID patients in intensive care, Health Minister Olivier Veran said. The government says the vaccine pass helps curb the spread of the coronavirus and has spurred more people to get the COVID shot, alleviating pressure on hospitals. Critics say it impinges on civil liberties and some have taken to the streets in protest.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/frances-covid-vaccine-pass-stay-until-icus-are-emptied-says-health-minister-2022-02-02/>

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<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-health-seoul-south-korea-35d2305e4079bc07eada37d1d77c123>

Japan border policy keeps thousands of foreigners in limbo

Japan has become one of the world's most difficult countries to enter and some are comparing it to the locked country, or "sakoku," policy of xenophobic warlords who ruled Japan in the 17th to 19th centuries. The current border rules allow in only Japanese nationals and permanent foreign residents, and have raised the ire of foreign students and scholars who say the measures are unfair, unscientific and force talented visitors to go to other countries. Critics say the rules are also hurting Japan's international profile and national interest.

<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-business-health-japan-pandemics-3e5263ea2c7d146090edc84c438a8104>

Partisan Exits

Canada will not use troops to deal with truckers' protest, Trudeau says

The Canadian government has no plans to send in troops to deal with a vaccine mandate protest in Ottawa that is causing widespread disruption and refusing to disperse

<https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/canada-has-no-plans-use-troops-deal-with-ottawa-protest-pm-trudeau-2022-02-03/>

Airlines urge White House to end COVID international travel testing rules

Major airlines, business and travel groups urged the White House on Wednesday to end COVID-19 pre-departure testing requirements for vaccinated international passengers traveling to the United States. Airlines for America, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, International Air Transport Association, Aerospace Industries Association, the U.S. Travel Association and other groups called for change in a letter to White House coronavirus response coordinator Jeff Zients. "Surveys of air passengers indicate that pre-departure testing is a leading factor in the decision not to travel internationally. People simply are unwilling to take the chance that they will be unable to return to the U.S.," they wrote.

<https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/us/airlines-urge-white-house-to-end-covid-international-travel-testing-rules/ar-AATpFLH>

Indian health workers allege widespread vaccine certificate fraud

Health workers on the frontline of India's Covid vaccination programme say people are being officially registered as double vaccinated without receiving both doses because of pressure to meet government targets. Workers described how easy it was to falsely register second vaccine doses for people who did not attend appointments, by using personal records from their first dose and opting to bypass a code sent to their mobile phone.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/02/indian-health-workers-allege-widespread-vaccine-certificate>

Anti-vaccine mandate protesters say they will block Ottawa for as long as necessary

Truck drivers who have been blockading downtown Ottawa for six days on Wednesday said they had no intention of leaving the Canadian capital until the government scrapped COVID-19 vaccine mandates. Despite increasing complaints from residents about noise, pollution and aggressive behavior from some truckers, Ottawa police have declined to end the protest, citing the risk of aggravating tensions. The demonstration began as a move to force the Liberal government of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to drop a vaccine mandate for cross-border truckers

<https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/anti-vaccine-protesters-say-they-will-block-ottawa-long-necessary-2022-02-02/>

Scientific Viewpoint

S Africa's Afrigen makes mRNA COVID vaccine using Moderna data

South Africa's Afrigen Biologics has used the publicly available sequence of Moderna's COVID-19 mRNA vaccine to make its own version of the shot, which could be tested in humans before the end of this year, Afrigen's top executive said on Thursday. The vaccine candidate would be the first to be made based on a widely used vaccine without the assistance and approval of the developer. It is also the first mRNA vaccine designed, developed and produced at lab scale on the African continent. The White House declined to comment. Airlines for America, which represents American Airlines, Delta Air Lines Inc, United Airlines Holdings and others said as of last week international air travel was down 38% over 2019 levels. In December, the Biden administration imposed tougher new rules requiring international air travelers arriving in the United States to obtain a negative COVID-19 test within one day of travel.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/2/3/s-africas-afrigen-makes-mrna-covid-vaccine-using-moderna-data>

Study: One-third of students in each class will be infected with COVID-19

A group of researchers from the Technion and Rambam Hospital on Wednesday published a model of the new quarantine outline in the Israeli education system. According to a report on Kan 11 News, the researchers said that a third of the students in each class will be infected with COVID-19 under the current outline which includes two COVID-19 tests per day. The model was presented to researchers at a conference of the Israel National Institute for Health Policy Research. According to the model, in a format of two tests per week, cases will be missed and 30% of students in each class will be infected. The researchers said that if an additional test per week is added and three tests are carried out per week, the morbidity in each class will drop to 20%. They added that performing a test every day would lower the rate of infection in each class to 10%.

<https://www.israelnationalnews.com/news/321632>

New Covid-19 vaccine wins regulatory approval in UK

A new Covid-19 vaccine has been approved by the UK's medicines watchdog, making it the fifth jab to be authorised for use in the country. The Nuvaxovid vaccine, developed by US biotech firm Novavax, will add another string to the UK's vaccine bow, with 71 per cent of the population having received at least two doses so far, according to Our World in Data. While it has secured the approval of the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA), it is now up to the Joint Committee on Immunisation and Vaccination (JCIV) to consider it as part of the UK's vaccination programme, health secretary Sajid Javid explained. The new vaccine uses the same protein-based technology which has been used to develop vaccines for other illnesses such as Hepatitis B.

<https://www.cityam.com/new-covid-19-vaccine-wins-regulatory-approval-in-uk/>

New Covid vaccine Nuvaxovid approved after almost 50,000 people involved in UK clinical trials

A fifth Covid vaccination has been given regulatory approval in the UK. Nuvaxovid, developed by Novavax, has been authorised by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) after safety, quality and effectiveness tests. The next step will see it considered for use in the Covid-19 vaccination programme, health secretary Sajid Javid said today (Thursday, February 3). It follows approval given for Moderna, Oxford/AstraZeneca, Pfizer/BioNTech and the Janssen vaccine (although this is not currently available), the NHS says. Almost 50,000 people were involved in clinical trials for the new vaccine. Mr Javid said: "It is great to see our world renowned medicines regulator approve another COVID-19 vaccine.

<https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/uk-news/new-covid-vaccine-nuvaxovid-approved-22973156>

Can China's home-grown mRNA Covid-19 vaccine pass its final tests?

China has moved a step closer to developing a home-grown mRNA vaccine against Covid-19, with the publication of early trial results for its prime candidate ARCoV. No serious adverse events were recorded in the phase 1 clinical trial data, published last week by The Lancet Microbe, but scientists said it was too early to judge its success. Large-scale trials of the vaccine - jointly developed by the Academy of Military Science, Walvax Biotechnology and Suzhou Abogen Biosciences - have been delayed since last year. No reason was given by the company, though it has become generally more difficult to recruit unvaccinated volunteers for phase 3 trials.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/science/article/3165712/can-chinas-home-grown-mrna-covid-19-vaccine-pass-its-final-tests>

Can antiviral drugs turn the tide on COVID-19?

There have been claims that COVID-19 oral antivirals, such as molnupiravir and Paxlovid (nirmatrelvir + ritonavir; Pfizer), will "change the course of the pandemic". But with limited supply, a short treatment window and only a few patient groups eligible to receive them — can these drugs really turn things around? In this episode of The PJ Pod, Dawn Connelly, features editor, and Julia Robinson, clinical and science editor, look at how these novel drugs work and answer questions from

PJ readers on how they will be used in practice. To explain all this, our editors are joined by Penny Ward, visiting professor in pharmaceutical medicine at King's College London, and Fiona Marra, a consultant infectious disease pharmacist based in Scotland, who has a central role in deploying the COVID-19 antivirals.

<https://pharmaceutical-journal.com/article/feature/can-antiviral-drugs-turn-the-tide-on-covid-19>

Singapore approves Pfizer's oral COVID-19 medicine Paxlovid

Singapore has approved Pfizer's (PFE.N) oral COVID-19 medicine Paxlovid, its Health Sciences Authority (HSA) said on Thursday. Paxlovid is the first COVID-19 oral treatment authorised for use in the city-state for the treatment of mild to moderate cases among adults at high risk of severe disease, HSA said in a statement.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/singapore-approves-pfizers-oral-covid-19-medicine-paxlovid-2022-02-03/>

In world first, S.Africa's Afrigen makes mRNA COVID vaccine using Moderna data

South Africa's Afrigen Biologics has used the publicly available sequence of Moderna Inc's mRNA COVID-19 vaccine to make its own version of the shot, which could be tested in humans before the end of this year, Afrigen's top executive said on Thursday. The vaccine candidate would be the first to be made based on a widely used vaccine without the assistance and approval of the developer. It is also the first mRNA vaccine designed, developed and produced at lab scale on the African continent.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/world-first-safricas-afrigen-makes-mrna-covid-vaccine-using-moderna-data-2022-02-03/>

Placenta may have mechanism that protects fetus from COVID; vaccines safe with rheumatic diseases

The following is a summary of some recent studies on COVID-19. They include research that warrants further study to corroborate the findings and that has yet to be certified by peer review. Placenta may shed proteins to keep virus out. The placenta may have a way to protect itself and the fetus from infection with the coronavirus, a small study suggests. Researchers studied 24 women who gave birth between July 2020 and April 2021. Eight had symptomatic COVID-19 in the second trimester, eight were sick from the virus in the third trimester, and eight were not infected during pregnancy.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/placenta-may-have-mechanism-that-protects-fetus-covid-vaccines-safe-with-2022-02-02/>

Drug distributor McKesson seen getting likely boost from COVID vaccine demand

McKesson Corp is expected to report strong earnings on Wednesday as an Omicron-driven surge in demand for COVID-19 vaccines and tests is likely to insulate the drug distributor from tepid sales of other medical products. The unit which sells medical and surgical products contributes about 5% to McKesson's revenue, compared with rival Cardinal Health Inc's similar business accounting for 10%. A surge in COVID-19 cases due to the fast-spreading Omicron variant has overwhelmed hospitals, forcing them to turn away patients seeking less-urgent procedures.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/drug-distributor-mckesson-seen-getting-likely-boost-covid-vaccine-demand-2022-02-02/>

Coronavirus Resurgence

Nine more lives lost to COVID-19 in Queensland, random testing reveals COVID prevalence on Gold Coast

As authorities report a further nine people have died from COVID-19 in Queensland, with 8,643 new cases confirmed, it has been revealed a significant number of Gold Coasters probably don't know

they have COVID-19. That's according to the state's Chief Health Officer, John Gerrard, who said at today's news conference there were 749 people in Queensland hospitals with COVID-19 and 47 on ventilators. Dr Gerrard said the latest deaths again highlighted the fact that not enough people were getting booster shots. "Of these nine people, three are unvaccinated, one had received a single dose of vaccine, four had received two doses and only one of the nine had received a booster," he said.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-02-03/qld-coronavirus-covid19-cases-vaccine-deaths-gold-coast-testing/100799382>

Opinion | What if we're in the middle — not the end — of the pandemic?

We would like to think we are at the end of a two-year pandemic. But what if we're only halfway through? With the omicron variant starting to recede in parts of Europe and the United States, people have become tired and impatient. But if we have learned anything, it is that covid-19 is still evolving. Our experts cannot predict how, where or when it will strike again. It is imperative, therefore, to prepare for the possibility of further waves, even while we celebrate the ebbing of this one. Viruses mutate every time they are exposed to a host. Hundreds of millions of people have been infected by the coronavirus. Hundreds of millions more are likely to contract it over the course of this year. Tens of millions have active infections as you read this article. Increasing human immunity protects us but also favors the survival of new viral mutations that can overcome that immunity.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2022/01/31/what-if-were-middle-not-end-pandemic/>

Opinion | Clues to the Next Variant Are All Around Us

Scientists recognise the clues to the next variant surge may simply all around us - air sampling in buildings, at sewage treatment plants, online searches indicating general sickness in the searches, increase remedial purchases in pharmacies and we need to look out for them in our monitoring programmes.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/02/opinion/covid-variant-air-sewage.html>

Venezuela COVID patients, exhausted doctors get mental health help from medical charity

Doctors Without Borders (MSF) is providing mental health care for COVID-19 patients, their families and also medical staff in two public hospitals in Venezuela to support the country's run-down health system. They are organizing phone and video calls between the sick and their loved ones and even helping dying patients to say their goodbyes, Elizabeth Hernandez, who leads MSF's effort at Caracas' Lidice hospital, said. She said they are providing one-on-one mental health consultations for doctors and nurses.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/venezuela-covid-patients-exhausted-doctors-get-mental-health-help-medical-2022-02-02/>

New Lockdown

Streets of tsunami-hit Tonga empty on first day of COVID lockdown

"Normally this road would be queueing with vehicles and people, but as you can see all shops are closed, everything is closed - taxi stands, shops, supermarkets, it's closed," said local journalist Marian Kupu as she stood at a deserted crossroads in the capital, shuttered buildings behind her. "It's a ghost town here in Nuku'alofa." There had been fears an influx of international ships and planes delivering badly-needed water, shelter and food after last month's devastating volcanic eruption had increased the risk of a pandemic outbreak in the isolated Pacific nation.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/streets-tsunami-hit-tonga-empty-first-day-covid-lockdown-2022-02-03/>