

# COVID-19 Lockdown Exit Analysis

## 14th Feb 2022

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### Lockdown Exit

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#### **Omicron's Threat to Global Economy Increasingly Runs Through China**

it has also become clear that Omicron causes milder symptoms in vaccinated people than its predecessors, and an increasing number of European countries have lifted restrictions put in place when the variant emerged. U.S. job growth accelerated in January, even though the number of people not working because of illness more than doubled from December. So while business surveys and other data indicate economic growth slowed in Europe and the U.S. as 2022 began, many economists expect the Omicron variant to do less damage than previous surges.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/omicrons-threat-to-global-economy-increasingly-runs-through-china-11644764401>

#### **Hong Kong in 'Crisis' Leans on Beijing to Contain Covid Surge**

Hong Kong's health officials warned that the city is facing a "crisis" as a record 2,000 preliminary positive cases threatened to overwhelm hospitals and upend its Covid Zero strategy. Authorities on Sunday reported 1,347 infections and said more than 3,400 confirmed patients were receiving treatment. Cases have exceeded capacity at Hong Kong's hospitals, health officials said, adding they will now shift to prioritizing care for the elderly and children who test positive.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-02-13/hong-kong-in-crisis-leans-on-beijing-to-contain-covid-surge>

#### **French COVID protest convoy defies Paris stay-away order**

A convoy protesting COVID-19 restrictions breached police defences and drove into central Paris on Saturday, snarling traffic around the Arc de Triomphe and on the Champs Elysees, as police fired tear gas at demonstrators. Protesters in cars, campervans, tractors and other vehicles had converged on Paris from Lille, Perpignan, Nice and other cities late on Friday, despite warnings from Paris authorities that they would be barred from entering the capital. Inspired by horn-blasting "Freedom Convoy" demonstrations in Canada, dozens of vehicles slipped through the police cordon, impeding traffic around the 19th century arch and the top of the boutique-lined Champs Elysees, a magnet for tourists.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/police-stop-50-vehicles-heading-paris-protest-convoy-2022-02-12/>

#### **Germans pin hopes on Novavax moving the needle among anti-vaxxers**

Benedikt Richter, a 40-year-old teacher in the southwest German city of Kaiserslautern, long held out against getting vaccinated against COVID-19. He felt uneasy about the novelty of the mRNA technology used in two of the most commonly administered shots. It did not help that his sister-in-law was hospitalised with heart muscle inflammation a day after receiving her second shot, which doctors officially linked to her vaccine, Richter said. Regulators have acknowledged such conditions as a rare and mostly mild side-effect. But when the European Union in December approved the use of the Novavax vaccine Nuvaxovid, which deploys a long-established protein-based technology, he became interested.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/germans-pin-hopes-novavax-moving-needle-among-anti-vaxxers-2022-02-13/>

#### **Hong Kong reports 1347 COVID cases as healthcare system overwhelmed**

Hong Kong reported 1,347 new daily COVID-19 infections on Sunday, down from the previous day's record, but the spread, with 2,000 more suspected cases, threatens the city's overstretched healthcare system, authorities said. The surge in coronavirus cases, the biggest test yet for Hong Kong's "dynamic zero-COVID" strategy, comes a day after the government said China would help the

city with testing, treatment and quarantine capacity.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/china/hong-kong-food-supplies-may-be-disrupted-covid-hits-goods-drivers-2022-02-13/>

### **When Will Covid End? What New Covid Variants, Post-Pandemic Life Mean for 2022**

As a virus-weary world limps through the third year of the outbreak, experts are sending out a warning signal: Don't expect omicron to be the last variant we have to contend with — and don't let your guard down yet. In the midst of a vast wave of milder infections, countries around the world are dialing back restrictions and softening their messaging. Many people are starting to assume they've had their run-in with Covid-19 and that the pandemic is tailing off. That's not necessarily the case. The crisis isn't over until it's over everywhere. The effects will continue to reverberate through wealthier nations — disrupting supply chains, travel plans and health care — as the coronavirus largely dogs under-vaccinated developing countries over the coming months.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2022-02-13/when-will-covid-end-what-new-covid-variants-post-pandemic-life-mean-for-2022>

### **UK Treasury pushes to end most free Covid testing despite experts' warnings**

The Treasury is pushing for most free Covid testing to end as soon as next month to save billions despite warnings from public health experts and scientists. Several sources told the Guardian that Rishi Sunak's department wants to end most PCR testing for people with Covid symptoms, possibly by the end of March. The exception would be those in hospitals, high-risk settings and for the 1.3m extremely vulnerable people who are eligible for antivirals if they contract Covid. Under the plans, everyone else with symptoms would be either given some free lateral flow tests or no testing at all. A third option would be restricting the offer of lateral flows to symptomatic people over 50 and the clinically vulnerable. The advice for people without symptoms to take routine lateral flow tests is expected to be scrapped entirely.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/11/uk-treasury-pushes-to-end-most-free-covid-testing-despite-experts-warnings>

### **COVID pandemic's 'acute phase' could end by midyear: WHO**

The head of the World Health Organization has said the acute phase of the pandemic could end this year, if about 70 percent of the world gets vaccinated. "Our expectation is that the acute phase of this pandemic will end this year, of course with one condition, the 70 percent vaccination [target is achieved] by mid this year around June, July," Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, told reporters in South Africa on Friday. "If that is to be done, the acute phase can really end, and that is what we are expecting. It's in our hands. It's not a matter of chance. It's a matter of choice." He was speaking during a visit to Afrigen Biologics and Vaccines, which has produced the first mRNA COVID vaccine made in Africa using Moderna's sequence.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/2/11/pandemics-acute-phase-could-end-by-midyear-who-chief-says>

### **Beijing's ambitious Olympic COVID bubble: So far, so good**

For a country determined to keep out the virus that first emerged within its borders, bringing in more than 15,000 people from all corners of the world was a serious gamble. It appears to be working. One week into the 17-day event, China seems to be meeting its formidable COVID-19 Olympic challenge with a so-called "bubble" that allows Beijing Games participants to skip quarantine but tightly restricts their movement so they don't come in contact with the general population. There have been 490 confirmed cases — many of them positive tests on symptomless visitors — and no reports of any leaking out to date. Inside the bubble, Olympic organizers are employing a version of the government's zero-tolerance approach. Everyone is tested daily for the virus, and anyone who tests positive is rapidly isolated to prevent any spread. Athletes and others are required to wear N95 face masks when not competing.

<https://apnews.com/article/winter-olympics-covid-pandemic-bubble-effectiveness-acb24560ea13174b94590c428dac29d9>

### **COVID-19: Children over 12 can visit Spain without being fully vaccinated after rule scrapped**

Children over 12 from non-EU countries will no longer have to be fully vaccinated against coronavirus to enter Spain. The country is scrapping the rule from Monday to line up with UK half term. Children aged 12 to 17 will now be able to visit by showing a negative PCR test taken in the past three days. It will make holidays easier for many families, some of whom had to cancel plans because of the rule. Adults must still be fully vaccinated to go to Spain (the NHS COVID pass is acceptable) and travellers must also fill in a health control form before departure.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-children-over-12-can-visit-spain-without-being-fully-vaccinated-after-rule-scrapped-12539143>

### **US buys 600K doses of new COVID antibody awaiting clearance**

Addressing diminished treatment options in the omicron wave, the Biden administration has purchased enough of a yet-to-be approved antibody drug to treat 600,000 COVID-19 patients, officials said Thursday. The new monoclonal antibody from pharmaceutical giant Eli Lilly will be shipped out to states free of charge if the Food and Drug Administration approves the company's request for emergency use authorization, said Health and Human Services Secretary Xavier Becerra. "We are going to try to be there to meet the demand," he added. The government's move comes after the two leading monoclonal antibody treatments in the U.S. turned out to be ineffective against the omicron variant, which now accounts for nearly all COVID-19 cases in the country. Data indicate that the Lilly drug works against omicron, including the new BA.2 mutation. Lilly said the contract for its new drug — bebtelovimab — is worth at least \$720 million. That name is pronounced "beb-teh-LO-vi-mab."

<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-business-health-xavier-becerra-65a703b4b92c385128ecd856e4cb5aac>

### **German court rules coronavirus vaccine mandate for health workers can proceed**

The mandate requires all employees in nursing homes, hospitals, doctors' offices and outpatient clinics to prove they are vaccinated against COVID-19. An emergency motion had attempted to delay its enforcement. Germany's Constitutional Court on Friday ruled that a mandate requiring health care workers to present proof of full vaccination against COVID-19 or recovery from the disease should go into force as planned. Opponents of the mandate had petitioned the court to postpone its application. The mandate is due to begin on March 15. Friday's ruling was on whether the mandate could be enforced ahead of a final decision on whether the move is constitutional under German law.

<https://www.msn.com/en-xl/news/other/german-court-rules-coronavirus-vaccine-mandate-for-health-workers-can-proceed/ar-AATJ4nH>

### **CDC recommends people with weakened immune systems get booster doses after three months instead of five**

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention updated its guidance on Friday for some people with weakened immune systems, recommending they get a booster dose of the coronavirus vaccine three months after completing the initial series of the Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna shots, rather than the current interval of five months. The guidance also said immunocompromised people who received the one-shot Johnson & Johnson vaccine should get an additional dose. That means two doses, at least 28 days apart, followed by a booster dose of one of the mRNA vaccines. "Although COVID-19 vaccines continue to work well to prevent severe illness, hospitalization, and death, we have seen reduced protection against mild and moderate disease," the agency said in a statement.

“With the number of cases of COVID-19 still high across the United States and globally, this guidance helps to ensure that people have optimal protection against” the virus that causes the disease.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2022/02/11/booster-guidance-immunocompromised-people/>

### **EU investigates reports of menstrual disorders after mRNA COVID shots**

The European Medicines Agency's safety committee said on Friday it was reviewing reports of heavy menstrual bleeding and absence of menstruation from women who had received COVID vaccines from Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna. The assessment was in view of reports of menstrual disorders after receiving either of the two vaccines, both based on messenger RNA technology, and it was not yet clear whether there was a causal link, the agency said. It was not yet clear whether there was a causal link between the vaccines and the reports, the agency said.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/eu-regulator-reviewing-menstrual-disorder-cases-after-mrna-covid-shots-2022-02-11/>

### **Germany's Covid Boomtown Stumbles Over Its Newfound Riches**

While pandemic lockdowns continue to rock cities around the world, Germany's Marburg has emerged with a windfall that makes the quaint university town with cobbled streets and a hilltop castle look like a long-term winner of the crisis. A Covid-19 vaccine plant operated by BioNTech SE helped provide more jobs and more income for the city of roughly 80,000, located in verdant hill country about 55 miles north of Frankfurt. Tax receipts for 2021 ballooned to 480 million euros (\$550 million), the equivalent of about 6,000 euros per resident and quadruple the city council's initial projections. “We had an unbelievable amount of money all of a sudden,” Mayor Thomas Spies said in an interview. “We were extremely happy” that BioNTech expanded here. But then....

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2022-02-11/covid-blessed-germany-s-marburg-with-unexpected-riches-and-political-strife>

### **Belgium Eases Virus Curbs With Omicron Outbreak Past Peak**

Belgium agreed to loosen most of the virus restrictions it introduced late last year now that all but one of the indicators used to monitor the surge of the omicron variant show that the outbreak is past its peak. Starting on Feb. 18, the requirement to work from home four days a week will disappear and become a recommendation, Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Croo said on Friday. At that time, nightclubs will also reopen, pubs and restaurants won't face a mandatory closing hour or table limits, and a ban on events with moving crowds will subside, along with the obligation for children younger than 12 to wear masks. “This is an enormous step, but it would be wrong to say we have eradicated the virus,” De Croo said at a briefing in Brussels. “Let's not make that mistake again and mind ourselves that our behavior is what matters the most.”

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-02-11/belgium-eases-virus-curbs-saying-omicron-outbreak-likely-peaked>

## **Exit Strategies**

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### **While 99% of NYC Workers Comply With Covid-19 Vaccine Rules, 3,000 Face Cuts**

About 3,000 New York City workers are set to lose their jobs for not complying with Covid-19 vaccine requirements for city employees, representing about 0.8% of a roughly 370,000-person workforce. The vaccine requirement—which encompassed the city's teachers, police officers and firefighters—mandated that all new city workers as of Aug. 2, 2021, be fully vaccinated against Covid-19. The policy went into effect under then-Mayor Bill de Blasio's administration. City agencies were told Monday that new hires who joined after that date had until Friday to show proof they received a second vaccine dose. About 3,000 employees were on leave without pay as of the end of January due to being unvaccinated. They were told they would be let go on Friday unless they got vaccinated.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/while-99-of-nyc-workers-comply-with-covid-19-vaccine-rules-3-000-face-cuts-11644608816>

### **Venice's 'Carnival of hope' kicks off as COVID worries ease**

Thousands of people revelled in the start of the annual Carnival celebrations in Venice on Saturday, marking a slow return to normality after the COVID-19 pandemic hit the two previous editions. The 2020 Venice Carnival, which usually draws tourists from around the world, was curtailed when the pandemic broke out in Italy in February that year and then cancelled the following year as the government sought to contain infections. "This is the Carnival of hope," said Venice resident Cristian Scalise. "COVID is ending and we hope to return to our life as always."

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/venices-carnival-hope-kicks-off-covid-worries-ease-2022-02-12/>

### **Biden Should Put the CDC in Its Place**

When will the federal government see the light and let airline passengers and Amtrak riders take their masks off? Technically, this is a question for the Centers for Disease Control, which issued the the federal mask mandates. As a scientific agency, the CDC is supposed to base its decisions on scientific facts rather than political realities. But in the real world it's bizarre to imagine a scenario in which President Joe Biden's administration remains to the left of the governors of New York, Massachusetts and California on a high-salience issue on which there is partisan political conflict.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2022-02-13/mask-mandate-biden-should-put-the-cdc-in-its-place>

### **Africa 'on track' to control the Covid-19 pandemic, WHO says**

African countries are on course to control the coronavirus and its emerging variants this year, the World Health Organization's regional head for the continent has said. African countries have faced a number of challenges since the first outbreak of the Covid-19 virus in February 2020, including the impact of lockdowns on economies and livelihoods, and inequities in accessing vaccines. However, the continent also saw relatively modest infection and fatality rates, with a higher number of recoveries when compared to cases reported globally, according to data from the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC). "Over the past two years, the African continent has gotten smarter, faster, and better at responding to each new surge in cases of Covid-19," said WHO Regional Director for Africa, Dr. Matshidiso Moeti.

<https://edition.cnn.com/2022/02/11/africa/africa-control-pandemic-2022-intl/index.html>

### **Covid testing: 'Gold standard' ONS testing set to be scrapped making it more difficult to monitor**

The gold standard for measuring the level of coronavirus in the community is expected to be scrapped from this April, as part of the government's major shift in its response to the pandemic, it understands. The weekly Covid infection survey run by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), which measures both infection rates and antibodies in households, is due to lapse this spring and it will be either scaled back or phased out altogether if the Treasury does not sign off on funding for another year. As part of the transition to a new phase of "living with covid" in the UK, which was accelerated by Boris Johnson this week, mass testing - including free daily covid tests for anyone who wants them - is also likely to end within weeks, alongside the requirement for anyone with the virus to self-isolate, due to be removed by the end of this month.

<https://inews.co.uk/news/politics/covid-testing-gold-standard-ons-testing-set-to-be-scrapped-making-it-difficult-to-monitor-virus-spread-1454482>

### **Belgium to ease COVID-19 measures as infections decline**

Belgium will ease a slew of COVID-19 measures from next week, with restaurants and bars allowed to open for full hours and children under 12 no longer forced to use face masks, as authorities anticipate a further decline in infections. The government announced Friday that the nation of 11 million will go from code red, the toughest for virus measures, to code orange as of Feb. 19. "We can

start easing several measures. There will be no closing time in bars and restaurants anymore and no more limits on how many people can sit together at a table," said Prime Minister Alexander De Croo. <https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/belgium-ease-covid-19-measures-infections-decline-82827682>

### **Covid-19: Robin Swann 'has authority' to lift restrictions**

Northern Ireland Health Minister Robin Swann does have the authority to lift Covid-19 restrictions, the economy minister has said. Mr Swann told other ministers he had received legal advice indicating he cannot lift all of the regulations in the absence of the executive. The executive collapsed after the resignation of Paul Givan from the post of first minister. But Gordon Lyons said Mr Swann does not need to take it to the executive. The Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) MLA was responding to a letter from Mr Swann to ministers, which outlined the advice from Stormont lawyers about lifting restrictions. Mr Lyons told BBC News NI ministers were only "obligated to take issues to the executive if they are controversial, significant or cross cutting.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-60339540>

### **Amazon to allow work without face masks, require vaccination for paid COVID leave**

Amazon.com Inc on Thursday informed staff at its U.S. warehouses and logistics sites that they must report being fully vaccinated by March 18 if they wish to receive paid leave due to COVID-19. The company also said fully vaccinated operations staff could work without a face covering starting on Friday as local regulations allow, according to a message to workers that Amazon shared with Reuters. The online retailer attributed its policy updates to a recent decline in coronavirus cases across the United States, increasing rates of vaccination, and guidance from its medical experts and public health authorities.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/amazon-allow-work-without-face-masks-require-vaccination-paid-covid-leave-2022-02-10/>

### **Germany to lift some restrictions next week as COVID peak in sight**

Germany is approaching the peak of the coronavirus pandemic and will next week start easing some restrictions with a view to lifting more measures in spring, Chancellor Olaf Scholz said in a speech on Friday. "The scientific prognoses show us that the peak of the wave is in sight," Scholz said in a speech in the Bundesrat upper house. "This allows us at the meeting between the federal government and states next week to take the first reopening steps and consider more steps for spring."

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/germany-lift-some-restrictions-next-week-covid-peak-sight-2022-02-11/>

### **Hong Kong's zero-COVID quest pushes medical facilities to the brink**

Hong Kong's stubborn pursuit of zero COVID infections has stretched hospital and quarantine facilities nearly to their limit in the global financial hub, raising the near-term prospect of changes to admissions and isolation policies. Chinese-ruled Hong Kong is also grappling with the overload on doctors and nurses as it follows mainland authorities' strategy of curbing outbreaks as soon as possible, in contrast with many other places that aim to "live with COVID".

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/hong-kongs-zero-covid-quest-pushes-medical-facilities-brink-2022-02-11/>

### **Australians told to get COVID boosters to be considered fully vaccinated**

Australian residents will need to receive booster shots to be considered fully vaccinated against COVID-19, although authorities said foreign travellers will continue to need only two shots to enter the country. Australia's national cabinet late on Thursday endorsed the revised guidance from the country's vaccination advisory group to classify "up-to-date" inoculations as including boosters. A person's vaccination status will be considered "overdue" if they have not received a booster within six months of their second dose, Prime Minister Scott Morrison said.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/australians-told-get-covid-boosters-be-considered-fully-vaccinated-2022-02-11/>

## **COVID: South Africa gradually 'returns to normalcy'**

The world was shocked when the Omicron variant was discovered in South Africa last year. But life is almost back to normal there. The government has lifted most lockdown restrictions, and tourists are flocking back. The pandemic felt like a distant memory on the first Thursday of February in Cape Town. Once a month, galleries, restaurants, and shops in the city center open until late, turning the area into a massive pedestrian zone. "Friends told me that there would hardly be any restrictions," German tourist Dominik Irschik told DW. He had just arrived in Cape Town. "But I didn't expect this. Streets, bars, and clubs are full of people — everybody is relaxed and lives like normal again. It's great," Irschik said.

<https://www.dw.com/en/covid-south-africa-gradually-returns-to-normalcy/a-60701117>

## **EXCLUSIVE EU, Gates Foundation to support African medicines agency -source**

The European Union and the Gates Foundation are set to announce financial support for nascent efforts to set up an African medicines regulator to boost the continent's drugs and vaccine production, a person familiar with the matter told Reuters. The treaty establishing the African Medicines Agency (AMA) came into force in November but the agency currently exists only on paper. So far just over half of the 55 African Union (AU) member states have ratified the treaty setting up the AMA. Financial and technical support to the new agency is seen as crucial to help it to begin operations. This in turn would be a boost for the continent's vaccine and drugs industry, which needs a trusted regulator to flourish.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/exclusive-eu-gates-foundation-support-african-medicines-agency-source-2022-02-11/>

## **France's 'Freedom Convoys' Head to Paris to Protest Vaccine Rules**

President Emmanuel Macron called for order as protesters against France's Covid-19 vaccine passes headed toward Paris to attempt to blockade the capital, inspired by Canada's "freedom convoys." Police set up barricades and armored vehicles at some Paris intersections, including along the Champs-Élysées. Tractors and water cannon were also deployed. Macron called for "order" in an interview published Friday in Ouest-France, while saying he "understood and respected" fatigue and anger spurred by the pandemic.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-02-11/french-freedom-convoys-head-to-paris-to-protest-vaccine-rules>

## **Kids Who Get Sick From Covid Are Also Missing Out on School Lunches**

First Jill Carey and her children got sick. Then they got hungry. Then the family came down with Covid-19 in early December, Carey's son and daughter had to isolate at their home in Pennsylvania for two weeks. That meant missing school — and the reduced-price lunches the kids rely on. "I felt like I was rationing," said Carey, a 39-year-old single mother. "I have a loaf of bread. We've got to make the loaf of bread last all week." America's low-income families, already burdened with surging food inflation and the pandemic's lasting economic blow, are now facing a new set of challenges when it comes to feeding their kids. Intermittent, often unpredictable, interruptions to schooling can also mean losing access to the free and subsidized school meals that have long been a cornerstone of U.S. efforts to combat child hunger.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-02-11/kids-who-get-sick-from-covid-are-also-missing-out-on-school-lunches>

## **Partisan Exits**

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### **Australian police urge protesters to leave capital**

Australian police have given thousands of protesters until the end of Sunday to leave occupied areas of the country's capital, as days-long rallies continue against COVID-19 vaccine mandates. Several thousand protesters remained in place at Canberra's major showgrounds, while fewer than 100 demonstrators were gathered near the federal parliament building, an Australian Capital Territory

(ACT) police spokesperson told Reuters. No protesters in Canberra had been arrested so far on Sunday after three were detained on Saturday.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/australian-police-urge-protesters-leave-capital-2022-02-13/>

### **New Zealand, Australia vaccination mandates protests gain in numbers**

Days-long rallies against COVID-19 vaccination mandates picked up in numbers in New Zealand and Australia on Saturday, with protesters blocking roads and disrupting life in the countries' capitals. About 10,000 protesters gathered at Canberra's major showgrounds, forcing the cancellation of a popular charity book fair, bringing traffic to a standstill and blocking roads in the Australian capital. Police said three people were arrested, but overall the crowd was "well behaved". In New Zealand's Wellington, hundreds of demonstrators gathered near the distinctive "Beehive" parliament for a fifth day despite drenching rain.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/new-zealand-australia-vaccination-mandates-protests-gain-numbers-2022-02-12/>

### **Canada Border Blockades Leave Automakers Scrambling**

Blockades of the U.S.-Canada border stymied flows of critical supplies for the fourth day on Friday, leaving companies scrambling for materials and shutting down major auto factories from Ontario to Alabama. The partial closure of the Ambassador Bridge, the busiest land crossing between the countries and a vital conduit for the auto industry, sent ripples through North American supply chains. Business groups called on officials to forcefully remove protesters who were causing the blockades. Some companies tried to redistribute key parts among their factories and looked for other ways to move products. But others appeared resigned to shutdowns, saying that bypassing the Ambassador Bridge, which connects Detroit and Windsor, Ontario, was just too expensive or difficult.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/11/world/canada/canada-protests-autos.html>

### **US conservative figures cheer on Canadian trucker protest**

Several conservative media figures in the U.S. have taken up the cause of Canadian truckers who have occupied parts of Ottawa and blocked border crossings to protest COVID-19 restrictions and vaccine mandates. Fox News Channel's Sean Hannity cheered the truckers on while showing four live reports from Ottawa this week. Tucker Carlson's online store is selling "I (heart) Tucker" T-shirts edited to say "I (heart) Truckers." "Send our solidarity, love and support to all of the brave people who are there," Hannity told Fox reporter Sara Carter, who was with the protesters in Ottawa, on his show Thursday. "Don't give up."

<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-sean-hannity-business-health-ottawa-6ced8d978d2b2e36d4c1f40261bb0d6a>

### **Macron urges calm as French "Freedom Convoys" approach Paris**

France mobilised thousands of police, armoured personnel carriers and water cannon trucks in Paris on Friday to keep out convoys of motorists converging on the capital for a protest against COVID-19 restrictions. Checkpoints were set up at toll points on major entry roads while riot-control barriers were erected across the city centre ahead of rallies that the protesters aim to hold over the weekend. Inspired by horn-blaring "Freedom Convoy" demonstrations in Canada, the motorists - from numerous cities across France - were expected to gather outside Paris during Friday and seek to defy a police order not to enter the city.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/french-freedom-convoys-head-towards-paris-police-checkpoints-2022-02-11/>

### **'It's time to go home': Justin Trudeau tells truck protesters**

Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau issued a stern warning to protesters who have set up truck blockades to express their opposition to government mandates regarding COVID-19, saying, "We've heard you. It's time go home now." "You don't want to end up losing your license, end up with a

criminal record, which will impact your job, your livelihood, even your ability to travel internationally, including to the US,” Trudeau said Friday. “We’ve heard your frustration with COVID, with the measures that are there to keep people safe. We’ve heard you. It’s time to go home now.” Trudeau’s remarks came as Ontario’s premier declared a state of emergency in reaction to the border blockade, and a judge in the province issued an injunction ordering truckers to clear an international bridge by 7 pm local time (midnight GMT) on Friday. Trudeau and Ontario Premier Doug Ford threatened heavy penalties against those who interfere with the free flow of goods and people.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/2/11/canadian-authorities-look-to-the-courts-to-break-trucker-blockade>

### **Thousands of unvaccinated New York municipal workers could lose jobs Friday**

Thousands of unvaccinated New York City municipal workers are up against a deadline on Friday to get a COVID-19 shot or get fired, with Mayor Eric Adams apparently determined to carry out the terminations despite an outcry from union leaders. Fewer than 4,000 of the city's 370,000 workers were facing termination at the end of January as a result of the mandate, according to the mayor's office, which said it expected to have an updated number of affected city employees on Monday.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/thousands-unvaccinated-new-york-municipal-workers-could-lose-jobs-friday-2022-02-11/>

### **UK Covid Self Isolation Rules to Be Scrapped This Month, Boris Johnson Says**

U.K. Prime Minister Boris Johnson plans to scrap self-isolation rules for people in England who test positive for Covid-19, ending the last of the pandemic restrictions that have dominated daily life for the past two years. The dramatic step is due to take effect later this month and would move England beyond other major Western countries in relaxing virus curbs. While regulations forcing people to self-isolate at home for five days are only set to expire on March 24, Johnson said Wednesday he expects to lift them “a full month early.” With more people vaccinated and the highly-transmissible omicron variant proving almost unstoppable, a number of countries have been easing rules and trying to return life to normal as quickly as possible.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-02-09/johnson-suggests-u-k-covid-rules-to-be-lifted-later-this-month>

## **Scientific Viewpoint**

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### **China approves use of Pfizer's COVID drug Paxlovid**

China's medical products regulator said on Saturday it has given conditional approval for Pfizer's COVID-19 drug Paxlovid, making it the first oral pill specifically developed to treat the disease cleared in the country. The National Medical Products Administration said Paxlovid is approved to treat adults who have mild to moderate COVID-19 and high risk of progressing to a severe condition. Further study on the drug needed to be conducted and submitted to the authority, it said. It is not immediately clear if China is already in talks with Pfizer to procure the pill.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/china-gives-conditional-approval-pfizers-covid-drug-paxlovid-2022-02-12/>

### **US delays decision on COVID vaccine for children under 5**

A United States decision on Pfizer and BioNTech’s COVID-19 vaccine for children six months through four years of age has been postponed for at least two months after the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) said it needed more data. The FDA had planned to make a decision on the vaccine based on early trial data because of what it had called a great public health need due to the surge in infections caused by the Omicron variant of the coronavirus. The decision was slated for next week, with a rollout starting as soon as February 21.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/2/11/us-delays-decision-on-covid-vaccine-for-children-under-5>

### **Novartis seeks FDA EUA for Covid-19 antiviral candidate ensovibep**

Molecular Partners has reported that its partner Novartis sought emergency use authorization (EUA) for the antiviral candidate, ensovibep, from the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to treat Covid-19. A Designed Ankyrin Repeat Protein (DARPin) antiviral therapeutic candidate, ensovibep can specially hinder the SARS-CoV-2 virus' target cell entry. It comprises three covalently associated individual DARPins domains that can attach to the viral spike protein. With these domains combined into a single molecule, the antiviral candidate can inhibit the SARS-CoV-2 spike protein's receptor-binding domain (RBD), even when mutations occur in the spike protein. The latest submission to the FDA is based on the entirety of the results from clinical and preclinical studies.

<https://www.pharmaceutical-technology.com/news/novartis-fda-eua-ensovibep/>

### **Lilly to supply up to 600000 doses of COVID-19 drug candidate to U.S.**

Eli Lilly and Co said on Thursday it had entered an agreement with the U.S. government to supply up to 600,000 doses of its developmental COVID-19 antibody drug for at least \$720 million. Lilly said it has filed a request with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for authorization of the drug, bebtelovimab, to treat mild-to-moderate COVID-19 in some high-risk patients. The U.S. government will accept the doses if the drug receives clearance from the FDA, Lilly said.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/eli-lilly-supply-up-600000-doses-covid-19-drug-candidate-us-govt-2022-02-10/>

### **Gilead says COVID drug remdesivir shows antiviral activity against Omicron, other variants**

Gilead Sciences Inc's drug, remdesivir, showed antiviral activity against Omicron, Delta and other variants of the coronavirus in laboratory studies, the company said on Friday. The study results showed similar activity of remdesivir against the variants and an early ancestral strain of the virus detected in Seattle, Washington, Gilead said. Remdesivir, marketed as Veklury, was approved by the FDA in October 2020 to treat hospitalized COVID-19 patients. Last month, this was expanded to non-hospitalized patients who were at high risk of severe disease

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/gilead-says-covid-drug-remdesivir-shows-antiviral-activity-against-omicron-other-2022-02-11/>

### **WHO adds Roche's arthritis drug tocilizumab to COVID-19 medicines list**

The World Health Organization said on Friday it had added its first monoclonal antibody tocilizumab to its so-called pre-qualification list, an official list of medicines used as a benchmark for procurement by developing countries. The WHO recommended the drug, manufactured by Roche and typically used to treat arthritis, only for patients diagnosed with severe or critical COVID-19.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/who-adds-roche-arthritis-drug-tocilizumab-covid-19-medicines-list-2022-02-11/>

### **EU investigates reports of menstrual disorders after mRNA COVID shots**

The European Medicines Agency's safety committee said on Friday it was reviewing reports of heavy menstrual bleeding and absence of menstruation from women who had received COVID vaccines from Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna. The assessment was in view of reports of menstrual disorders after receiving either of the two vaccines, both based on messenger RNA technology, and it was not yet clear whether there was a causal link, the agency said. It was not yet clear whether there was a causal link between the vaccines and the reports, the agency said.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/eu-regulator-reviewing-menstrual-disorder-cases-after-mrna-covid-shots-2022-02-11/>

### **COVID-19: The pandemic is far from over**

Some countries are reporting more new coronavirus infections compared with the previous two weeks. Global data trends show that the pandemic isn't over yet. DW sums up the current situation in three charts.

<https://www.dw.com/en/coronavirus-global-pandemic-trend/a-53954594>

### **Boosters wane but showed protection against hospitalization during omicron, CDC study says**

Booster shots of the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines lose substantial effectiveness after about four months — but still provided significant protection in keeping people out of the hospital during the omicron surge, according to a study published Friday by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Researchers found the booster shots remained highly effective against moderate and severe covid-19 for about two months after a third dose. But their effectiveness declined substantially after four months, suggesting the need for additional boosters, the study said.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2022/02/11/covid-boosters-omicron-protection/>

### **F.D.A. Clears Monoclonal Antibody Drug From Eli Lilly**

With Covid treatments still in short supply in the United States, the Food and Drug Administration on Friday gave emergency authorization to a new monoclonal antibody drug that has been found in the laboratory to be potent against the Omicron variant of the coronavirus. The Biden administration said it would make the therapy immediately available to states free of charge. The authorization of the treatment, bebtelovimab, means that the United States now has four drugs available for high-risk Covid patients early in the course of their illness that have been found to neutralize the Omicron variant. While there is a greater menu of Covid pills and treatments now than at any other point in the pandemic, the drugs have been so scarce that doctors have been forced to make painful rationing decisions during the Omicron surge.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/11/us/politics/eli-lilly-antibody-treatment-covid.html>

### **Robust Covid-19 Booster Protection Wanes After Four Months, CDC Says**

Messenger RNA vaccines' protection against Covid-19 hospitalization remained strong overall after three doses but did wane over time, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said. In the month after the Omicron variant became dominant in the U.S. around Dec. 20, protection against hospitalization fell from 91% within two months of receiving a third shot to 78% after four months, the CDC said Friday, reporting results from a study. The CDC report said the findings underscored the importance of receiving a third mRNA vaccine dose to prevent hospitalization as well as emergency-care visits. Without a third booster shot, protection against hospitalization within two months of a second shot was 71%, and fell to 54% after five months.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/omicron-wave-continues-to-recede-in-u-s-europe-11644583684>

## **Coronavirus Resurgence**

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### **Cook Islands braces for first community COVID cases**

Cook Islands, a small South Pacific nation that has not experienced COVID-19 in its community, is readying for its first coronavirus infections after an infected traveller visited, Prime minister Mark Brown said on Sunday. The traveller from New Zealand spent eight days in the community and tested positive for Omicron upon returning home last week, Brown said in a video posted on the government's Facebook page. "It is likely that the person ... was infectious while here and further likely that the virus is in our community," he said.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/cook-islands-braces-first-community-covid-cases-2022-02-13/>

### **Omicron: mass screening as border city reports over half China's new coronavirus infections**

Baise in southwestern China ordered citywide mass coronavirus screening on Friday after reporting 33 more cases, bringing its total in this outbreak to 220 infections. The screenings began at noon and were set to cover all 12 counties and districts across Baise. The process was expected to be completed by the evening, according to the China News Service. Baise's new cases accounted for

more than half of the national tally of 56 reported on Friday, according to the National Health Commission.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/science/article/3166725/omicron-mass-screening-border-city-reports-over-half-chinas-new>

### **Hundreds of thousands of Covid-19 cases still being missed from official figures**

Hundreds of thousands of Covid-19 cases are continuing to be missed from the official figures each week, despite the recent decision to start including reinfections, new analysis shows. An average of 101,000 cases of coronavirus per day were recorded from January 16 to 22, according to the Government's Covid-19 dashboard. But the true number was likely to be nearer 280,500 a day, according to estimates by the Office for National Statistics (ONS). It means more than 1.2 million cases will not have been included in the official count during the week to January 22.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/ons-government-pcr-test-omicron-england-b2013225.html>

### **Russia's daily COVID-19 case tally tops 200000 for first time**

Russia's daily COVID-19 cases exceeded 200,000 for the first time since the pandemic began as the Omicron coronavirus variant continued to spread, authorities said on Friday. New cases jumped to 203,949, from 197,076 a day earlier. The government coronavirus task force also reported 722 deaths in the last 24 hours.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/russias-daily-covid-19-case-tally-tops-200000-first-time-2022-02-11/>

### **Record Hong Kong COVID infections strain hospitals, China pledges support**

Hong Kong reported a record number of new daily COVID-19 infections on Friday and China said it would fully support the city with its "dynamic zero" coronavirus strategy, as local authorities struggle to control a deepening outbreak. Hong Kong's chief secretary John Lee, Health Secretary Sophia Chan and Security Chief Chris Tang will meet Chinese officials in neighbouring Shenzhen on Saturday to discuss support measures, the government said in a statement.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/china/china-pledges-support-hong-kong-amid-covid-surge-2022-02-11/>

### **England's estimated COVID R number roughly steady**

The estimated range of England's COVID-19 reproduction "R" number is between 0.8 and 1.0, similar to its range the previous week, the UK Health Security Agency said on Friday, with the daily reduction in cases also around the same level. An R number between 0.8 and 1.0 means that for every 10 people infected, they will on average infect between 8 and 10 other people. Last week the range was 0.8 to 1.1. The daily growth of infections was estimated at between -3% to 0%, compared to -3% to +1% the previous week.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/englands-estimated-covid-r-number-roughly-steady-2022-02-11/>

### **UK reports 58899 new covid-19 cases, 193 additional deaths**

Britain reported 58,899 new COVID-19 cases and 193 deaths within 28 days of a positive test on Friday, according to government data. The number of cases in the last seven days has fallen 28.7% compared with the previous seven days, while deaths have fallen 22.5%.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uk-reports-58899-new-covid-19-cases-193-additional-deaths-2022-02-11/>