

# COVID-19 Lockdown Exit Analysis

## 16th Feb 2022

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### Lockdown Exit

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#### **Xi Says Hong Kong Should Tackle Covid by All Means, Report Says**

President Xi Jinping called for “all necessary measures” to get Hong Kong’s virus outbreak under control, an unusually direct intervention that leaves the city’s leaders even less room to deviate from China’s Covid Zero policy. The Chinese leader said Chief Executive Carrie Lam’s government should make stabilizing the Covid-19 situation its top priority, the state-run Wen Wei Po newspaper reported Wednesday, without saying where it got the information. The message came a day after Lam said she had no plans for a citywide lock down, while acknowledging the omicron outbreak had overwhelmed officials’ capacity to respond. “Hong Kong’s government must take up the main responsibility to stabilize and control the pandemic as soon as possible as a mission that overrides everything, mobilize all available forces and resource and take all necessary measures to ensure the safety and health of Hong Kong’s citizens and the stability of Hong Kong’s society,” Xi said, according to Wen Wei Po.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-02-16/xi-says-hong-kong-should-tackle-covid-by-all-means-report-says>

#### **Belgium permits four-day week to boost work flexibility post COVID**

Belgian employees will be able to work a four-day week after the government on Tuesday agreed a new labour accord aimed at bringing flexibility to an otherwise rigid labour market. Speaking after his seven-party coalition federal government reached a deal overnight, Prime Minister Alexander De Croo said the coronavirus pandemic had forced people to work more flexibly and combine their private and working lives. "This has led to new ways of working," he told a press conference. Employees who request it will be able to work up to 10 hours per day if trade unions agree, instead of the maximum 8 now, in order to work one day less per week for the same pay.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/belgium-permits-four-day-week-boost-work-flexibility-post-covid-2022-02-15/>

#### **DC to drop coronavirus vaccine requirement to enter businesses**

D.C. Mayor Muriel E. Bowser is dropping the city’s requirement that people show proof of coronavirus vaccination before entering many businesses in the city, as coronavirus transmission continues to trend downward throughout the region. The District’s requirement for residents to show proof of vaccination to enter most businesses — announced in December — will cease Tuesday, said Bowser (D). She also said she’s allowing the city’s mandate to wear masks in all indoor public spaces to be lifted starting March 1. Bowser had rescinded the indoor masking mandate in November before the surging omicron variant spurred her to bring it back.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2022/02/14/dc-covid-restrictions-lifted/>

#### **Covid-19: Relief mixed with concern as regulations removed in NI**

From mask wearing to Covid certificates, restrictions have been a part of life in Northern Ireland for nearly two years. But Health Minister Robin Swann advised people to be vigilant and warned that coronavirus remains a threat to public health. BBC News NI spoke to people in Belfast and Londonderry, who expressed a mixture of relief and concern.

[https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-60386305?at\\_medium=RSS&at\\_campaign=KARANGA](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-60386305?at_medium=RSS&at_campaign=KARANGA)

#### **D.C., Maryland join others in easing COVID restrictions**

Washington, D.C. will no longer require people show proof of COVID-19 vaccination to enter many

businesses beginning on Tuesday, its mayor said, joining a slew of local leaders who are dialing back pandemic restrictions as the Omicron wave ebbs. Mayor Muriel Bowser also announced on Monday that the city will no longer make masks mandatory in many indoor settings - including restaurants, bars, gyms and houses of worship - starting on March 1. Masks will still be required in schools, libraries, nursing homes, public transit and healthcare facilities, among other settings.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/dc-maryland-join-others-easing-covid-restrictions-2022-02-14/>

### **U.S. says it could spend \$22 mln a month testing unvaccinated federal employees**

The U.S. government said it faces "significant harm" if an appeals court fails to reverse an injunction barring enforcement of President Joe Biden's COVID-19 vaccine mandate for government workers, and that testing unvaccinated employees could cost up to \$22 million a month. White House Office of Management and Budget Deputy Director Jason Miller disclosed in a declaration cited late on Monday by the Justice Department that the government would be hurt on several fronts if it cannot enforce the vaccine requirements. "While most federal civilian employees are fully vaccinated, hundreds of thousands of them are not vaccinated," Miller said in the Jan. 28 declaration.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-says-it-could-spend-22-mln-month-testing-unvaccinated-federal-employees-2022-02-15/>

### **Canada to ease travel requirements as COVID cases decline**

Canada will ease entry for fully vaccinated international travelers starting on Feb. 28 as COVID-19 cases decline, allowing a rapid antigen test for travelers instead of a molecular one, officials said on Tuesday. Antigen tests are cheaper than a molecular test and can provide results within minutes. The new measures, which include random testing for vaccinated travelers entering Canada, were announced by federal government ministers at a briefing.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/exclusive-canada-ease-travel-requirements-covid-cases-decline-govt-source-2022-02-15/>

### **S. Korean COVID deaths rise, hope rests on high booster rate**

South Korea reported its highest number of COVID-19 deaths in a month Tuesday as U.S. health authorities advised Americans to avoid traveling to the country grappling with a fast-developing omicron surge. The 61 deaths reported by the Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency on Tuesday was the highest daily tally since the 74 reported on Jan. 19, when the country was emerging from an outbreak driven by the delta variant. While omicron so far seems less likely to cause serious illness or death, the greater scale of the outbreak is fueling concerns that hospitalizations and fatalities could spike in coming weeks. The 57,177 new cases reported by the KDCA was another one-day record and more than a 12-fold increase from the levels seen in mid-January, when omicron became the dominant strain.

<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-health-south-korea-18b8dc349cb751f21b19cde7067481d8>

### **WHO urges increased COVID vaccination efforts in Eastern Europe**

A new wave of COVID infections from the highly transmissible Omicron variant of the coronavirus is heading towards Eastern Europe, the World Health Organization (WHO) has warned. The WHO's European office on Monday called for authorities to boost vaccination efforts in the region, warning that a "tidal wave" of infections was approaching. WHO Europe director, Hans Kluge, said the number of new daily COVID-19 cases had more than doubled in six countries in the region in the past two weeks. Kluge said the 53-country region has tallied more than 165 million confirmed coronavirus cases and 1.8 million deaths linked to the pandemic - including 25,000 in the last week alone. "Today, our focus is towards the east of the WHO European region," Kluge said in Russian at a media briefing, pointing to a surge of Omicron cases. "Over the past two weeks, cases of COVID-19 have more than doubled in six countries in this part of the region [Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus,

Georgia, the Russian Federation, and Ukraine],” the director said.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/2/15/who-calls-for-increased-vaccination-efforts-in-eastern-europe>

## **Exit Strategies**

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### **Biden Administration Seeking Additional \$30 Billion for Covid-19 Response**

The Biden administration told Congress it needs an additional \$30 billion in coronavirus response aid, according to people familiar with the matter. Health and Human Services Department officials outlined the request for additional aid in a briefing with congressional staff on Tuesday, the people said. The request includes \$17.9 billion for medical countermeasures like antivirals, \$4.9 billion for testing capacity and \$2.7 billion to combat future variants, the people said. Some Republican lawmakers have expressed skepticism about approving additional money to combat the coronavirus, arguing that the administration should first spend all of the money included in the \$1.9 trillion pandemic response legislation signed into law last year.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/biden-administration-seeking-additional-30-billion-for-covid-19-response-11644963914>

### **‘Panicking’ Hong Kong parents rush to book Covid-19 shots for young children**

Covid-19 vaccinations for children have risen sharply amid Hong Kong’s worsening fifth wave of coronavirus cases, with bookings boosted by an earlier government decision to lower the eligibility age for Sinovac shots to three years from Tuesday. Family doctors and paediatric experts have reported a surge in vaccinations for children, with one medical professional suggesting the recent coronavirus-related death of a four-year-old boy could have been a contributing factor. Paediatrician Dr Alvin Chan Yee-shing, co-chairman of the Medical Association’s advisory committee on communicable diseases, said parents had gone into “panic” mode.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/health-environment/article/3167132/hong-kong-doctors-report-rapid-uptake-coronavirus>

### **Finland entry requirements: New travel rules scrap Covid tests for fully vaccinated and recently infected**

Finland is the latest country to scrap testing for fully vaccinated travellers from the UK. From Tuesday the requirement to present a PCR or antigen test upon arrival is to be dropped for those with either with proof of vaccination, proof of a recent infection or a combination of both.

<https://inews.co.uk/inews-lifestyle/travel/finland-entry-requirements-new-travel-rules-covid-tests-scrapped-fully-vaccinated-recent-infection-1461363>

### **Covid-19 booster shot uptake is at all-time low in the US, CNN analysis finds**

The pace of people getting Covid-19 vaccine booster shots in the United States has dropped to the lowest it has ever been, and many public health experts are concerned. As of Monday, about 64% of the US population is fully vaccinated against Covid-19 with at least their initial two-dose series, and 28% have received a booster shot. But the pace of booster doses going into arms is the lowest it has been in months -- since the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention first recommended boosters for seniors and other at-risk adults in September, according to a CNN analysis of CDC data.

<https://www.cnn.com/2022/02/15/health/covid-19-booster-dose-slow-uptake-us/index.html>

### **Cyprus to ease COVID-19 access restrictions on unvaccinated**

Cyprus is lifting COVID-19 restrictions on access for the unvaccinated to bars, restaurants and other venues following a leveling off of new coronavirus cases in recent days that has eased the pressure on the health care system. Health Minister Michalis Hadjipantela said Tuesday that unvaccinated people can enter nightclubs, soccer stadiums, theaters, hotels and cinemas starting Feb. 21 as long as they show a valid COVID-19 rapid test taken within the previous 24 hours.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/cyprus-covid-nicosia-b2015494.html>

### **COVID-19: Provision of free lateral flow tests under review as reports say they are due to**

**end**

The government has said it is keeping its provision of free lateral flow tests under review as reports say they are due to end. It comes as Prime Minister Boris Johnson is due to announce the end of all coronavirus restrictions in England. Ministers hope plans to wind down COVID testing and payments for isolation will save more than £10bn, according to reports in The Guardian and The Times.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-provision-of-free-lateral-flow-tests-under-review-as-reports-say-they-are-due-to-end-12542437>

### **Netherlands to drop most COVID measures starting Friday**

The Dutch government will lift most of its coronavirus restrictions as of Friday, as the record levels of infections triggered by the Omicron variant have not translated in a peak of hospitalisations, health minister Ernst Kuipers said on Tuesday. "The country will open up again ... happily we are in a different phase now," Kuipers said during a press conference. Bars and restaurants will be allowed to stay open until 1 a.m. (midnight GMT) as of Friday, instead of 10 p.m.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/netherlands-drop-most-covid-measures-starting-friday-2022-02-15/>

## **Partisan Exits**

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### **Djokovic prepared to miss Grand Slams if COVID jab made mandatory**

Novak Djokovic is prepared to miss the French Open and Wimbledon rather than have a COVID-19 vaccination but denies being an anti-vaxxer, the world number one said in his first interview since his failed attempt to play at the Australian Open. After an 11-day rollercoaster involving two visa cancellations, two court challenges and five nights in two stints at an immigration detention hotel, the unvaccinated Djokovic was deported.

<https://www.reuters.com/lifestyle/sports/not-anti-vax-wont-be-forced-take-covid-19-jab-says-djokovic-2022-02-15/>

### **Israelis mount their own COVID 'Freedom Convoy'**

Hundreds of vehicles drove along the main highway from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem on Monday and converged on parliament to protest against COVID-19 curbs in a convoy inspired by demonstrations in Canada. Other protesters stood on overpasses and at junctions as the so-called "Freedom Convoy" passed by, with banners and Israeli and Canadian flags flying from the vehicles. "Freedom doesn't look like this," read one sign, showing a picture of a girl in a mask. Outside parliament, protesters sounded horns and beat drums, and called for pandemic restrictions to be lifted.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/israelis-mount-their-own-covid-freedom-convoy-2022-02-14/>

### **More data on Canadian 'Freedom Convoy' donors leaked -website**

The leak website Distributed Denial of Secrets on Tuesday said it has posted more donor files from the fundraising platform GiveSendGo relating to the Canadian movement of people opposed to pandemic health measures, including COVID-19 vaccine mandates. On Sunday, the DDoS website, which is devoted to disseminating leaked data, said it was releasing donor information relating to the "Freedom Convoy 2022" campaign, which raised more than \$2 million in donations. It includes funds raised from several Canadian business owners. Tuesday's leak contains donor information about a similar "Adopt-a-Trucker" campaign, which says it is operating "in partnership with the Freedom Convoy." The Adopt-a-Trucker effort appeared to raise less money and involved fewer donors.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/more-data-canada-truck-convoy-donors-leaked-website-2022-02-15/>

### **Unvaccinated medical workers turn to religious exemptions**

In the US, religious exemptions are increasingly becoming a workaround for unvaccinated hospital and nursing home workers who want to keep their jobs in the face of federal mandates that are going into effect nationwide this week. In some institutions, religious exemptions are being invoked by staff and approved by managers in large numbers. It's a tricky issue for hospital administrators,

who are struggling to maintain adequate staff levels and are often reticent to question the legitimacy of the requests.

<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-business-health-religion-montana-7e16ed524ad17d42f8a7ccd19cca5f64>

## **Scientific Viewpoint**

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### **Scientists identify potential reasons for COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy in US among individuals with chronic health conditions**

A recent survey conducted on the adult population in the United States has identified the most common predictive reasons behind coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) vaccine hesitancy. The findings indicate that most of the individuals with chronic health conditions express hesitancy towards the vaccine because of safety and side-effect-related concerns. The study has been published in the journal Health Science Reports.

<https://www.news-medical.net/news/20220215/Scientists-identify-potential-reasons-for-COVID-19-vaccine-hesitancy-in-US-among-individuals-with-chronic-health-conditions.aspx>

### **Novavax receives interim authorisation in Singapore for Covid-19 vaccine**

Novavax has received interim authorisation from the Singapore Health Sciences Authority (HSA) for its recombinant, adjuvanted Covid-19 vaccine, Nuvaxovid (NVX-CoV2373). The vaccine is intended for active immunisation to prevent the disease in people aged 18 years and above. A protein-based vaccine, NVX-CoV2373 is made from the genetic sequence of the first SARS-CoV-2 viral strain. The vaccine is formulated with the company's Matrix-M, a saponin-based adjuvant to boost immune response and elicit greater neutralising antibody levels.

<https://www.pharmaceutical-technology.com/news/novavax-singapore-covid-vaccine/>

### **Exercise right after Covid or flu vaccination may give an antibody boost, study finds**

About 90 minutes of light- to moderate-intensity exercise directly after a flu or Covid shot could provide an extra immune boost, suggests a new study. Researchers at Iowa State University found participants who cycled on a stationary bike or took a brisk walk for an hour-and-a-half after getting a jab produced more antibodies in the following four weeks compared to those who sat or continued with their daily routine post-vaccination. The study, published last week in the journal Brain Behavior and Immunity, found similar results after an experiment with mice and treadmills. "Our preliminary results are the first to demonstrate a specific amount of time can enhance the body's antibody response to the Pfizer-BioNtech Covid-19 vaccine and two vaccines for influenza," Marian Kohut, lead author of the study, said in a statement.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/science/covid-flu-vaccine-exercise-immunity-b2015238.html>

### **Vaccine scientists have been chasing variants. Now, they're seeking a universal coronavirus vaccine.**

The disconnect highlights the exhausting scientific chase of the last year — and the one that lies ahead. And it underscores a more pressing, overarching conundrum: Is chasing the latest variant a viable strategy? Instead of testing and potentially deploying a new shot when a new variant pops up, what if a single vaccine could thwart all iterations of this coronavirus and the next ones, too?

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2022/02/14/universal-covid-vaccine/>

### **Coronavirus: Long COVID less common in fully vaccinated, UK health agency says**

People who have been fully vaccinated against coronavirus are less likely to have long COVID, the UK Health Security Agency has found. Its review looked at 15 national and international studies that were undertaken up until January 2022. The UKHSA found an estimated 2% of the UK population had reported symptoms of long COVID which can last for more than four weeks after their initial infection.

<https://news.sky.com/story/coronavirus-long-covid-less-common-in-fully-vaccinated-uk-health-agency-says-12542755>

### **Why Covid-19 vaccines are a freaking miracle**

Two years into the Covid-19 pandemic, it's easy to lament all that has come to pass. The devastating losses. The upending of what we regarded as normal ways of life. The sheer relentlessness of it all. But let's stop for a moment and consider something else that may have escaped you: You have witnessed — and you are a beneficiary of — a freaking miracle. That miracle is the development, testing, manufacturing, and global distribution of Covid vaccines.

<https://www.statnews.com/2022/02/14/why-covid-19-vaccines-are-a-freaking-miracle/>

### **Covid-19: Show us evidence for lifting restrictions, doctors tell Johnson**

Doctors and scientists have warned the prime minister that SARS-CoV-2, and not politics, should dictate the pace at which the UK lifts measures to contain the pandemic. They expressed their concern after Boris Johnson's announcement during prime minister's questions in parliament on 9 February that he intended to end all remaining restrictions four weeks early if "encouraging trends" continued. The move would see the restrictions, including the current legal requirement to self-isolate after a positive test result, ending as early as 24 February. The BMA responded by calling for the government to provide evidence for its position. Penelope Toff, chair of the association's public health medicine committee, said, "With case rates still incredibly high and hundreds of deaths each day, the suggestion that self-isolation may be removed this month runs contrary to good public health practice. We must question on what scientific basis this decision is being made, and the government needs to show the evidence behind its proposals."

<https://www.bmj.com/content/376/bmj.o383>

### **Israel to offer AstraZeneca's Evusheld to immunocompromised people**

Israel will start offering AstraZeneca's (AZN.L) antibody cocktail Evusheld, which is used to prevent COVID-19, to people with compromised immune systems who did not get a sufficient antibody boost from vaccines. Evusheld has been approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and has proven to be 83% effective in preventing serious illness and death from COVID-19, the Health Ministry said on Tuesday. It is not a treatment for those already sick or a prevention for those already exposed to the virus, it said. Evusheld will be made available for people 12 and older who weigh more than 40 kg (88 lb), according to a Health Ministry statement.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/israel-offer-astrazenecas-evusheld-immunocompromised-people-2022-02-15/>

### **Prior COVID offers less protection vs Omicron; mRNA booster shot efficacy declines within months**

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. Previous COVID-19 less protective against Omicron variant. The immune response to COVID-19 helps protect against reinfection, but that protection is weaker against Omicron than it was against earlier variants of the coronavirus, according to new data. A previous SARS-CoV-2 infection protects against Omicron reinfection only 56% of the time, researchers found in a review of national data in Qatar.

<https://www.reuters.com/lifestyle/science/prior-covid-offers-less-protection-vs-omicron-mrna-booster-shot-efficacy-2022-02-14/>

### **Oxford scientists to study effects of COVID variants, shots in pregnancy**

Oxford University scientists said on Tuesday they would evaluate the effects of new coronavirus variants on pregnant women and newborns, as well as COVID-19 vaccination effects on complications during pregnancy and after birth. The study comes less than a year after the university found that pregnant women with COVID-19 and their newborn children faced higher risks

of complications, such as premature birth and organ failure risk, than was previously known.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/uk-scientists-study-effects-covid-variants-pregnancy-2022-02-15/>

### **China's potential mRNA COVID vaccine weaker against Omicron-study**

A Chinese mRNA vaccine candidate showed a sharper drop in neutralizing antibody activity against Omicron than against the non-mutated coronavirus in a small study, but a booster readily induced antibody production in animal tests, a research paper said. The ARCoV vaccine, jointly developed by the Academy of Military Medical Sciences (AMMS), Suzhou Abogen Biosciences and Walvax Biotechnology is currently being tested in an international Phase III clinical trial.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/chinas-potential-mrna-covid-vaccine-weaker-against-omicron-study-2022-02-15/>

### **Scientists propose cause of symptoms, treatment for long COVID-19**

Two studies to be presented at upcoming professional society meetings suggest that some long COVID-19 symptoms may be related to the effect of SARS-CoV-2 on the vagus nerve and that the use of enhanced external counterpulsation (EECP)—which increases blood flow—can improve some of those symptoms, respectively. Long COVID may affect up to 15% of those who survive their infections, causing symptoms such as fatigue, muscle pain, and cognitive problems that linger for months. Neither study has been peer-reviewed, and the second one comes with the added caveat that it was conducted by an EECP provider.

<https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2022/02/scientists-propose-cause-symptoms-treatment-long-covid-19>

### **Controlled studies ease worries of widespread long Covid in kids**

Uncertainty about the effect of Covid-19 on children is gradually being replaced by reassuring news. First, severe complications from Covid-19 are extremely rare in those under age 18. In Connecticut and Massachusetts, the states where we practice medicine, far fewer than 1% of those under age 18 diagnosed Covid have needed to be hospitalized, and that number is declining. Vaccines have proven immensely effective against the virus, in children and teens as well as in adults. This is grounds for relief, and even celebration.

<https://www.statnews.com/2022/02/14/controlled-studies-ease-worries-widespread-long-covid-kids/>

## **Coronavirus Resurgence**

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### **Covid-19 deaths fall for second week in a row strengthening hopes Omicron peak has passed**

Article reports that Coronavirus deaths in England have fallen for the second week in a row, suggesting the peak in deaths may have passed. A total of 1,242 deaths registered in England and Wales in the week ending February 4 mentioned Covid-19 on the death certificate, according to the Office for National Statistics (ONS). This is down 10 per cent on the previous seven days and is the second consecutive week-on-week fall. Around one in 10 (10.5 per cent) deaths registered in England and Wales in the week to February 4 mentioned Covid-19 on the death certificate. Deaths involving coronavirus fell in all regions in England, except for the South West and North East, and they rose in Wales.

<https://inews.co.uk/news/health/covid-19-deaths-fall-for-second-week-in-a-row-strengthening-hopes-omicron-peak-has-passed-1461307>

### **Omicron threat remains high in east Europe - WHO**

A new wave of infections from the Omicron variant of the coronavirus is moving towards the east of Europe, the World Health Organization said on Tuesday, urging authorities to improve vaccination and other measures. Over the past two weeks, cases of COVID-19 have more than doubled in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Russia and Ukraine, WHO's Europe regional director Hans

Kluge said in a statement. The comments come at a time when several European countries including the Czech Republic and Poland have hinted at easing of COVID-19 restrictions next month if daily infection numbers kept falling.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/omicron-threat-remains-high-east-europe-who-2022-02-15/>

### **Hong Kong rules out citywide lockdown as cases continue to surge**

Daily infections have surged by about 20 times over the past two weeks. Health authorities reported 1,619 infections on Tuesday, a new daily record with around 5,400 preliminary positive cases. "There are no plans for a widespread city lockdown," Lam told a news conference. "We cannot surrender to the virus. This is not an option," she said, doubling down on her 'dynamic zero' coronavirus strategy, similar to mainland China which seeks to curb outbreaks as soon as they occur.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/hong-kong-leader-says-govt-covid-19-response-not-satisfactory-2022-02-15/>

### **S. Korean COVID deaths rise, hope rests on high booster rate**

South Korea reported its highest number of COVID-19 deaths in a month Tuesday as U.S. health authorities advised Americans to avoid traveling to the country grappling with a fast-developing omicron surge. The 61 deaths reported by the Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency on Tuesday was the highest daily tally since the 74 reported on Jan. 19, when the country was emerging from an outbreak driven by the delta variant. While omicron so far seems less likely to cause serious illness or death, the greater scale of the outbreak is fueling concerns that hospitalizations and fatalities could spike in coming weeks.

<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-health-south-korea-18b8dc349cb751f21b19cde7067481d8>

### **WHO Europe warns of COVID rise in east, like Russia, Ukraine**

The head of the World Health Organization's Europe office said Tuesday that health officials are turning their attention to growing rates of COVID-19 infection in Eastern Europe, where six countries — including Russia and Ukraine — have seen a doubling in case counts over the last two weeks. Dr. Hans Kluge said the 53-country region, which stretches to former Soviet republics into central Asia, has now tallied more than 165 million confirmed coronavirus cases and 1.8 million deaths linked to the pandemic — including 25,000 in the last week alone. "Today, our focus is towards the east of the WHO European region," Kluge said in Russian at a media briefing, pointing to a surge in the highly transmissible omicron variant. "Over the past two weeks, cases of COVID-19 have more than doubled in six countries in this part of the region (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Russian Federation, and Ukraine)."

<https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-coronavirus-pandemic-health-business-pandemics-454b6b5519ffaa2441ffe2de9bb2a201>

### **COVID-19 cases drop by 40% in US**

The COVID-19 surge caused by the Omicron variant continues to recede in the United States, with the nation reporting a 7-day average of 175,492 new daily cases, with 2,458 daily deaths, according to the Washington Post tracker. New daily cases fell 42% in the past week, deaths fell 6%, and hospitalizations fell 19%. The United States reported 32,531 new COVID-19 cases yesterday, and 441 deaths, according to the Johns Hopkins COVID-19 tracker. The drop in cases—almost 2 years into the pandemic—has caused lawmakers across both sides of the aisle to dismantle pandemic restrictions in states and cities.

<https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2022/02/covid-19-cases-drop-40-us>

### **New Lockdown**

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### **Major Chinese industrial city steps up COVID control; Bosch affected**

A major Chinese high-tech industry centre limited some highway access on Tuesday after detecting new COVID-19 cases, while epidemic control measures, including mass testing, affected the local operations of overseas firms such as Robert Bosch GmbH. The city of Suzhou - a trading, commercial and industrial hub in the eastern province of Jiangsu - reported eight domestically transmitted infections with confirmed symptoms for Monday, the National Health Commission (NHC) said on Tuesday. The highly transmissible Omicron variant was detected among the cases, a Suzhou official said on Monday, without specifying the number of Omicron cases.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/china/major-chinese-industrial-city-steps-up-covid-control-bosch-affected-2022-02-15/>