

COVID-19 Lockdown Exit Analysis

7th Apr 2022

Lockdown Exit

In China's Covid Fight, Respect for Seniors Backfires

China's strict Covid-zero policy is getting costlier by day. As the infectious omicron variant spreads, the government is resorting to widespread lockdowns. Shanghai, a city of 25 million people, is at a standstill, and cities accounting for a quarter of China's gross domestic product are under some form of restrictions on movement, estimates Goldman Sachs Group Inc. Politics is an often-cited reason to explain why China is sticking with Covid-zero. Looking for stability, Beijing is unlikely to relent before this fall's 20th Party Congress, when President Xi Jinping is expected to start his third term.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2022-04-05/in-china-s-covid-fight-respect-for-seniors-backfires>

U.K. Covid Cases at Highest Level as Immunity Wanes, Study Finds

Covid-19 infections in England reached their highest level in March since the pandemic began, driven by the omicron subvariant BA.2 and waning immunity among older adults, according to a new study. The overall Covid prevalence rate more than doubled last month from February when infection rates were falling from the omicron-led January peak, the React-1 study led by Imperial College London found. Since then the emergence of BA.2 -- a more-transmissible version of omicron -- has accelerated new infections and become the dominant strain in England, accounting for about 90% of the samples that tested positive. The higher infection rates may result in an increase in hospitalizations despite the higher levels of vaccination among the population, said Paul Elliott, director of the React program, and chair in Epidemiology and Public Health Medicine, Imperial College London.

<https://www.msn.com/en-us/finance/other/uk-covid-cases-at-highest-level-as-immunity-wanes-study-finds/ar-AAVUrHT>

China's Daily Covid Cases Top 20000 as Isolation Efforts Expand

China reported 20,472 new Covid-19 cases for Tuesday, driven by surging infections in Shanghai where local officials are building the world's largest makeshift isolation facility to help contain the outbreak there. The National Exhibition and Convention Center, a 1.2 million square-meter space known for hosting international auto shows and other massive events, will be converted to house more than 40,000 people, according to local media reports. The effort shows how far the financial hub will go to fight the virus, on top of the lockdown that has kept its 25 million residents confined to their homes.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-04-06/china-s-daily-covid-cases-surge-past-20-000-amid-lockdowns>

Shanghai says it will make some exceptions in COVID children separation policy

Guardians of children with special needs who are infected with COVID can apply to escort them, a Shanghai city official said on Wednesday, pointing to a relaxation of a child-separation policy that has triggered widespread public anger. The city has been separating COVID-positive children from their parents, citing epidemic prevention measures. China's elimination strategy against COVID sees it test, trace and centrally quarantine all cases. In the face of rising public criticism, the government said on Monday it would allow children to be accompanied by their parents if the parents were also infected, but that they would still separate them if they were not.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/shanghai-start-another-round-city-wide-covid-tests-2022-04-06/>

Biden launches U.S. plan to help Americans struggling with long COVID

President Joe Biden has tasked the U.S. health department with developing a national action plan to tackle the looming health crisis of long COVID, a complex, multi-symptom condition that leaves many of its sufferers unable to work. Long COVID, which arises months after a COVID-19 infection, affects nearly 7% of all U.S. adults and 2.3% of the overall population and has cost an estimated \$386 billion in lost wages, savings and medical bills, according to an analysis by the Solve Long Covid Initiative, a non-profit research and advocacy group

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/white-house-launches-national-plan-address-long-covid-2022-04-05/>

Japan to lift COVID entry ban for 106 countries including U.S.

Japan plans to ease COVID 19-related border restrictions by lifting its entry ban for foreign nationals from 106 countries including the United States, Britain and France on Friday, the government said. Tokyo has been gradually relaxing pandemic-induced curbs but the loosened border regime does not mean a full reopening to tourists.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/japan-lift-covid-19-entry-ban-106-countries-including-us-2022-04-06/>

'COVID is not a cold' - Germany U-turns on ending mandatory isolation, article with image

Germany will not end mandatory isolation for most people who catch COVID-19, the health minister said on Wednesday, reversing course after concerns were raised that lifting quarantine restrictions would suggest the pandemic was over. "Coronavirus is not a cold. That is why there must continue to be isolation after an infection," Health Minister Karl Lauterbach said on Twitter, adding he had made a mistake by suggesting an end to mandatory quarantine. Under the existing rules, people with COVID must isolate for at least seven days. Lauterbach suggested last week a shift to a voluntary five-day period of self-isolation with the recommendation of a COVID test at the end of that time.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/germany-drops-plan-relax-covid-quarantine-rules-2022-04-06/>

Covid's Next Big Wave Worries FDA Advisers Mapping Vaccine Plans

Health officials should be developing a consistent standard for Covid-19 vaccines as they prepare for the rapid emergence of new variants, U.S. Food and Drug Administration advisers said. Chances are roughly 20% that there will be another "omicron-like" event in the next 12 months, according to research reviewed Wednesday by the FDA and its advisory panel on vaccines. A key portion of the spike protein that coronavirus uses to enter cells is changing at least twice as fast as one common influenza strain, which requires new types of shots every year because of mutations. Many of the FDA advisers agreed that the agency needs to come up with a single standard for updating Covid-19 shots to prevent a confusing situation where vaccine manufacturers come out with different updates. Several panel members also said that a multiple-strain vaccine makes the most sense for the next iteration of the Covid shot, given the great uncertainties about future viral evolution

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-04-06/fda-advisers-seek-vaccine-update-plan-before-next-big-wave?srnd=premium-europe>

Global groups propose strategy to tackle ongoing COVID risks

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and three global health partners today proposed a strategy to manage future risk from COVID, factoring in different scenarios on how the pandemic could evolve and setting ambitious price tags that would enable key policies to take shape.

<https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2022/04/global-groups-propose-strategy-tackle-ongoing-covid-risks>

Exit Strategies

Covid-19 Hits Broadway Once More, Leading to Cancellations, Changes

Covid is hitting Broadway again. Several highly anticipated shows have been affected by

breakthrough cases of Covid-19, as Broadway looks to make up for pandemic losses with big names and longtime favorites lighting up the Great White Way. "Macbeth," starring Daniel Craig and Ruth Negga and directed by Sam Gold, said Tuesday it was canceling shows through Saturday at 8 p.m. ET because of "a limited number of positive COVID test results within the company." Mr. Craig, who is returning to the stage for the first time in six years, tested positive for Covid-19 last week.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/covid-19-hits-broadway-once-more-leading-to-cancellations-changes-11649260998>

Sanctioned Oil Piling Up Off China as Virus Outbreak Worsens

Tankers carrying 22 million barrels of Russian, Iranian and Venezuelan oil are piling up off China, according to Kpler, as the country battles a virus outbreak that's sapping demand and causing logistics problems. China has been one of the only buyers of sanctioned Iranian and Venezuelan oil over the last few years. The world's largest crude importer is also still taking Russian supplies that are being largely shunned since the invasion of Ukraine. The trade in the discounted oil is now being disrupted by the country's worsening virus outbreak, with waiting times to unload ships increasing.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-04-06/sanctioned-oil-piling-up-off-china-as-virus-outbreak-worsens>

Irish people aged 65 and over to receive fourth dose of Covid-19 vaccine

Irish people aged 65 and over should receive a fourth dose of a Covid-19 vaccine, the Republic of Ireland's National Immunisation Advisory Committee has said. Health Minister Stephen Donnelly has accepted the recommendation. Those aged 12 and older, who are immunocompromised, will also receive another booster.

<https://www.irishnews.com/news/republicofirelandnews/2022/04/06/news/irish-people-aged-65-and-over-to-receive-fourth-dose-of-covid-19-vaccine-2635445/>

Ontarians 60+ to be eligible for 4th COVID-19 vaccine doses starting Thursday

Ontario is opening up eligibility for fourth COVID-19 vaccine doses to those aged 60 and older as wastewater data suggests the number of infections are almost as high as in early January, when Omicron was at its peak. Ontarians 60 and up, as well as all Indigenous residents and their non-Indigenous household members aged 18 or older, will be able to book their second booster shot through the province's online portal starting Thursday at 8 a.m, the province said.

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/covid-ontario-april-6-2022-1.6409884>

Spain to mostly ditch indoor mask wearing from April 20

Spain will lift a requirement to wear face masks indoors except on public transport and in hospitals and retirement homes from April 20, Health Minister Carolina Darias said on Wednesday. Since the Omicron variant of the coronavirus drove up infections to record highs in January the caseload has receded sharply and COVID patients now account for just 3.5% of hospital occupation. She said advisers have recommended lifting the obligation after the Easter long weekend.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/spain-mostly-ditch-indoor-mask-wearing-april-20-2022-04-06/>

Canada panel makes initial recommendations on second COVID booster shot

An official Canadian panel has provided initial recommendations on the use of a second COVID-19 vaccine booster dose for some Canadians as infections rise in many parts of the country, Health Canada said on Tuesday. The National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) recommended Canadian jurisdictions to prepare for the deployment of a second vaccine booster dose program over the coming weeks prioritizing people 80 years old and over and residents of long-term care.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/canada-panel-makes-initial-recommendations-second-covid-booster-shot-2022-04-05/>

COVAX, African Union decline to buy more doses of Moderna's COVID shots

COVAX, the global project to share COVID-19 vaccines, and the African Union have declined options to buy additional doses of Moderna's shot, as developing nations struggle to allocate supplies. The

global alliance did not exercise the option for 166 million doses of the shot for the third quarter of 2022, as well for 166 million doses in the fourth quarter, which expired on April 1, a Moderna spokesperson said.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/covax-african-union-decline-buy-more-doses-modernas-covid-shots-2022-04-05/>

'COVID is not a cold' - Germany U-turns on ending mandatory isolation

Germany will not end mandatory isolation for most people who catch COVID-19, the health minister said on Wednesday, reversing course after concerns were raised that lifting quarantine restrictions would suggest the pandemic was over. "Coronavirus is not a cold. That is why there must continue to be isolation after an infection," Health Minister Karl Lauterbach said on Twitter, adding he had made a mistake by suggesting an end to mandatory quarantine.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/germany-drops-plan-relax-covid-quarantine-rules-2022-04-06/>

STAT-Harris Poll: Most Americans would get a Covid-19 booster shot if recommended

As a Food and Drug Administration panel meets to sort out the ongoing use of booster shots for Covid-19, a new survey by STAT and The Harris Poll finds six in 10 Americans have already decided they will get another booster if it's recommended for them. Just under one-quarter of U.S. adults indicated they will only receive a second booster shot if a new variant arises or there is a surge in Covid-19 cases in their area, and 18% have no plans to get a booster at all, according to the survey, which polled 2,028 U.S. adults between March 25 and 27.

<https://www.statnews.com/pharmalot/2022/04/06/covid19-vaccine-mask-booster-harris-poll/>

Partisan Exits

Viral Recordings Tap Into Anger at Shanghai's Covid Response

Until Saturday, Dr. Zhu Weiping was a little-known epidemiologist working for Shanghai's Pudong district. That was when two recordings in which she shared blunt criticism against the city's Covid-19 policies went viral and she became a beacon for many fed-up residents. Each recorded phone call, between the government scientist and a member of the public, has been shared hundreds of thousands of times on WeChat, spreading the contention that Beijing's strategy of mass testing, mandatory quarantine and sweeping lockdowns isn't working against the highly transmissible Omicron variant in the city of 25 million people. Dr. Zhu told one of the callers that Shanghai's medical resources had been exhausted because of what she said was an overreaction to Omicron.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/viral-recordings-tap-into-anger-at-shanghais-covid-response-11649243138>

China's widening COVID curbs exact mounting economic toll

China's top European business group warned on Wednesday that its "zero-COVID" strategy was harming the attractiveness of Shanghai as a financial hub, echoing analysts voicing caution over the mounting economic toll of the country's coronavirus curbs. China has for the past month been tackling multiple outbreaks with an elimination strategy that seeks to test, trace and centrally quarantine all positive COVID-19 cases. Nomura estimated on Tuesday that a total of 23 Chinese cities have implemented either full or partial lockdowns, which collectively are home to an estimated 193 million people and contribute to 22% of China's GDP. The European Union Chamber of Commerce in China said that the strategy was causing growing difficulties transporting goods across provinces and through ports, harming factory output.

<https://www.msn.com/en-ca/finance/other/chinas-widening-covid-curbs-exact-mounting-economic-toll/ar-AAVh7v>

U.S. Fed bars six former bankers over COVID grant fraud

The U.S. Federal Reserve on Tuesday said it had barred six former bank executives from Regions Bank and Bank of America Merrill Lynch from the industry for fraudulently obtaining COVID-19

pandemic relief grants. Under the CARES Act, some small businesses were eligible to receive funds to mitigate the effects of the pandemic. The six individuals obtained funds based on fraudulent representations and used the money for unauthorized personal expenses, the Fed said.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-fed-bars-six-former-bankers-over-covid-grant-fraud-2022-04-05/>

Continued Lockdown

In Shanghai, a long, fruitless wait for help amid COVID lockdown

Shanghai is trying to detect and centrally quarantine every COVID-positive person, plus their close contacts, among its 26 million residents. But many say local authorities are struggling to carry out that mission given the size of the city. Complaints include unclear guidance on what to do if a person tests positive, long waits to enter central quarantine centres, and crowded and unsanitary conditions for some once they get there.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/shanghai-long-fruitless-wait-help-amid-covid-lockdown-2022-04-06/>

Shanghai eases child separation policy but extends COVID lockdown

Shanghai on Wednesday made concessions on an unpopular COVID isolation policy that has separated children from their parents and sparked a public outcry, but extended a citywide lockdown that has left some residents struggling to buy food. The lockdown of China's most populous city, which started in parts of Shanghai 10 days ago and has now confined nearly all of its 26 million residents at home, has massively disrupted daily life and business.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/china/shanghai-scrambles-secure-food-supplies-covid-lockdown-hits-2022-04-06/>

Scientific Viewpoint

Rare vaccine-related blood clots tied to gene; concentrated antibodies may help the immunosuppressed

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. Vaccine-related blood clots tied to gene, antibody variants. New research may help shed light on a rare but serious blood-clotting problem associated with the COVID-19 vaccines from AstraZeneca and Johnson & Johnson . Five unrelated people with this clotting complication, known as vaccine-induced thrombotic thrombocytopenia, all had unusually-structured antibodies against a protein called PF4 that is involved in blood clotting, the researchers found.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/rare-vaccine-related-blood-clots-tied-gene-concentrated-antibodies-may-help-2022-04-06/>

U.S. FDA aims to decide on strain selection for COVID boosters by June

Top U.S. Food and Drug Administration officials on Wednesday said the agency is aiming to decide by June whether to change the design of COVID-19 vaccines in order to combat future variants, even if it does not have all the necessary information to measure their effectiveness. "We're going to have to think about this in a way that is less than optimal because we're not going to have all the data that we'd like to have," Peter Marks, director of FDA's Center for Biologics Evaluation and Research, said at a meeting of the agency's scientific advisers to discuss the issue. Marks also conceded that future COVID booster campaigns likely need to be less frequent.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-fda-says-current-covid-vaccines-not-well-matched-against-ba2-variant-2022-04-06/>

Study: Newly developed COVID vaccine from Aus

The SARS-CoV-2 subunit vaccine (PreS-RBD) developed at MedUni Vienna is based on a structurally folded fusion protein consisting of two receptor binding domains (RBD) of the SARS-CoV-2 virus and the PreS antigen from hepatitis B, which serve as immunological carriers for each other, thereby

strengthening the immune response. Currently available genetic SARS-CoV-2 vaccines induce mainly transient IgG1 antibody responses, whereas the PreS-RBD vaccine can additionally induce long-lived RBD-specific IgG4 antibodies. PreS-RBD-specific IgG antibodies detected in blood and mucosal secretions reacted with SARS-CoV-2 variants, including the omicron variant. Antibodies induced by vaccination with PreS-RBD more potently inhibited the binding of RBD with its human receptor ACE2, and their virus-neutralizing titers were higher than those in a random sample of individuals fully immunized with two vaccinations of currently registered vaccines or than those of COVID-19 convalescents (i.e., individuals who had previously had COVID-19).

<https://www.eurekalert.org/news-releases/948759>

Protection against infection offered by fourth Covid-19 vaccine dose wanes quickly, Israeli study finds

A fourth dose of the Pfizer/BioNTech Covid-19 vaccine seems to offer short-lived protection against infection overall, but protection against severe illness did not wane for at least several weeks, according to a new study. The study, published Tuesday in the New England Journal of Medicine, looked at the health records of more than 1.25 million vaccinated people in Israel who were 60 or older from January through March 2022, a time when the Omicron coronavirus variant was the dominant strain.

<https://www.cnn.com/2022/04/05/health/israel-fourth-dose-study/index.html>

FDA suspends use of GSK-Vir's sotrovimab for Covid-19 treatment in US

The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has updated the emergency use authorization (EUA) for GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) and Vir Biotechnology's sotrovimab and suspended its use to treat Covid-19. Sotrovimab is an investigational monoclonal antibody that binds to the epitope of the SARS-CoV-2 virus to neutralise it. The regulatory authority noted that the antibody is unlikely to be effective against the Omicron BA.2 sub-variant, which is causing a rise in the number of Covid-19 cases in the region. The proportion of the sub-variant-caused Covid-19 cases is more than 50% in all Health and Human Services (HHS) US regions, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Nowcast data showed.

<https://www.pharmaceutical-technology.com/news/fda-gsk-sotrovimab-covid/>

Covid-19: WHO suspends supplies of India's Covaxin through UN agencies

The World Health Organization has suspended the supply of Covaxin through UN procurement agencies because of manufacturing irregularities. Covaxin is India's indigenous covid-19 vaccine, produced by the Hyderabad based Bharat Biotech. A spokesperson for WHO told The BMJ that the suspension had come after a broader inspection of a few companies in India by the agency. "In the case of Bharat Biotech's Covaxin manufacturing site, problems were detected in some parts of the manufacturing process, and changes were made after the emergency use listing was granted," said the spokesperson. "But [these] were not submitted to the national drug regulator and WHO for evaluation and validation. However, the company is fully aware and cooperative." The move came a day after Bharat Biotech announced that it would be scaling down its production of Covaxin domestically, as demand was dropping and infections were reducing alongside wider immunisation coverage in India. Covaxin received emergency use authorisation from India's Central Drugs Standard Control Organization in January 2021 and was included in the nationwide immunisation drive.

<https://www.bmj.com/content/377/bmj.o902>

Long Covid-19 may remain a chronic condition for millions

Covid-19 has become a chronic condition for tens of millions of people -- and an expensive one, as well. Long Covid -- a condition marked by lingering symptoms that can involve multiple bodily systems -- has cost a cumulative \$386 billion in lost wages, savings and medical expenses in the US

alone as of January, according to one estimate. On Tuesday, the Biden administration announced that it was making long Covid a national priority. It unveiled a plan to accelerate efforts to prevent, treat and detect long Covid through a national interagency research action program. In February, the National Institutes of Health announced a \$1.15 billion initiative to support research into the condition over four years.

<https://www.cnn.com/2022/04/06/health/long-covid-19-what-it-is/index.html>

China's COVID outbreak will improve if existing policies implemented better - expert

"The duration of this epidemic depends on our prevention and control strategies, and how strong we implement our prevention and control measures," said Wu Zunyou, chief epidemiologist at the China Center for Disease Control and Prevention. China's "zero-COVID" stance, known as "dynamic clearance", has come under growing scrutiny in recent weeks after the lockdown of the country's most populous city of Shanghai amid an outbreak of the highly contagious Omicron variant.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/china/chinas-covid-outbreak-will-improve-if-existing-policies-implemented-better-2022-04-06/>

FDA pulls authorization for GSK-Vir's COVID therapy as BA.2 cases rise

The U.S. health regulator said on Tuesday GlaxoSmithKline and Vir Biotechnology's antibody therapy was no longer authorized as a COVID-19 treatment, with data suggesting it was unlikely to be effective against the dominant Omicron sub-variant in the country. The move by the agency, which had already pulled its authorization for the sotrovimab therapy in much of the U.S. northeast last month, sent shares in Vir Biotechnology 11.5% lower. The highly contagious BA.2 coronavirus sub-variant is estimated to make up about three of every four COVID-19 cases in the United States, according to the latest government data

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/fda-says-gsk-virs-sotrovimab-no-longer-authorized-treat-covid-us-2022-04-05/>

Current COVID vaccines not 'well-matched' against BA.2 -FDA

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration said it is aiming to come up with a decision on coronavirus strain selection for the composition of future COVID-19 boosters by June, as a panel of its advisers met on Wednesday to discuss the issue. "We should be thinking of a May to June time frame here," said Peter Marks, director of FDA's Center for Biologics Evaluation and Research, during the meeting, adding that there is some wiggle room. The panel of outside experts was convened to discuss how and whether to use additional vaccine boosters after data from Israel showed a fourth dose lowered rates of severe COVID among older people.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-fda-says-current-covid-vaccines-not-well-matched-against-ba2-variant-2022-04-06/>

China Kintor's COVID drug candidate cuts hospital, death risk in trial

China's Kintor Pharmaceutical said its potential COVID-19 treatment proxalutamide effectively reduced the risk of hospitalization and death in a clinical trial involving outpatients with mild to moderate symptoms. The results came from a multi-national clinical trial with over 700 subjects across the world, mostly from the United States, recruited during April-December, 2021, who were given either proxalutamide or a placebo, the company said in a filing. It remains unclear how many patients contracted the Omicron variant.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/china-kintors-covid-drug-candidate-cuts-hospital-death-risk-trial-2022-04-06/>

Second booster shields elderly from COVID but protection wanes quickly - study

A fourth dose of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine lowered rates of COVID-19 among the elderly but the protection against infection appeared short-lived, a large study in Israel has found. The second booster's protection against infection dwindled after four weeks, Israeli researchers showed in their

study published on Tuesday in the New England Journal of Medicine. Protection against severe illness did not wane during the six weeks after the dose but more follow-up study was needed to evaluate its longer-term protection, the researchers said.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/second-booster-shields-elderly-covid-protection-wanes-quickly-study-2022-04-06/>

US Owes Pfizer \$5 Billion for Covid Pills, Half of Proposed Aid Package

The Biden administration is on the hook to pay Pfizer Inc. nearly \$5 billion for pills it's already ordered to treat Covid-19, meaning as much as half of a scaled-back pandemic funding bill the Senate is debating is already spoken for, according to officials familiar with the matter. Senators announced a deal Monday to provide \$10 billion in new Covid funding, far less than the White House has requested. The true purchasing power of the package will be even less because of commitments the government's already made, the officials said. They asked not to be identified to discuss internal deliberations.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-04-05/pfizer-s-5-billion-bill-for-u-s-takes-big-bite-from-covid-aid>

China Drugmaker Kintor Up 229% After Reporting Covid Pill Effect

Chinese drug maker Kintor Pharmaceutical Ltd. soared in Hong Kong after saying its pill was highly effective in reducing the risk of hospitalization or deaths related to Covid-19, raising the prospect of a first homegrown antiviral treatment. Shares were up 141% as of 11:06 a.m. local time after earlier surging as much as 229%, the biggest jump since the company's Hong Kong listing in mid-2020. The stock was also the best performer on the the Hang Seng Composite Index, which slid 1.6%.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-04-06/kintor-surges-229-after-saying-its-drug-reduces-covid-deaths>

COVID vaccine in early pregnancy not tied to birth defects

Maternal COVID-19 vaccination in early pregnancy is not associated with fetal abnormalities detectable on ultrasound, finds a study yesterday in JAMA Pediatrics. The retrospective study, conducted by Northwestern University and Penn State College of Medicine researchers, used electronic medical records to identify any link between COVID-19 vaccination in early pregnancy and the risk of major fetal structural abnormalities on ultrasound. Major structural fetal abnormalities were defined as those identifiable on ultrasound in the second semester (18 to 24 weeks' gestation) that may affect the newborn's life expectancy, health, or functioning. Examples included malformation of the heart or spine. Functional defects were excluded from the study because they can't be assessed using ultrasound, the researchers said. "If the baby's heart isn't forming correctly, that could lead to the baby needing major cardiac surgery or long-term medication," senior author Emily Miller, MD, MPH, said in a Northwestern University news release.

<https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2022/04/covid-vaccine-early-pregnancy-not-tied-birth-defects>

Coronavirus Resurgence

Deaths at Shanghai Elderly Facility Spark a Dispute Over Cremation

Families of patients who died recently at Shanghai's biggest elderly-care facility are demanding to know whether a Covid-19 outbreak that hit in the past few weeks led to their deaths, with some refusing a request by the hospital to cremate the bodies. At least 20 patients died in recent weeks at the Donghai Elderly Care Hospital, according to members of several families, who said they are still trying to understand why. The facility asked for the families' agreement in the past few days to cremate the bodies that were being kept in the hospital morgue, the relatives said. Several relatives said while some families had agreed, fearing the bodies would start to decompose, they had refused, demanding to protect evidence that might show how the deaths happened. One of the families said they had demanded an autopsy.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/deaths-at-shanghai-elderly-facility-spark-a-dispute-over-cremation-11649262740>

Washington's unwelcome party guest: COVID crashes capital's reopening

As Washington emerges from its COVID cocoon, with tourists returning to the U.S. Capitol and officials attending a white-tie party that had been scotched for the past two years, the coronavirus is again stalking the halls of power. At least a half-dozen senior officials, including members of President Joe Biden's Cabinet and lawmakers, have tested positive for COVID-19 in recent days, even as caseloads drop across the country. Days after the Gridiron dinner, usually a highlight of the Washington social calendar, Attorney General Merrick Garland, Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo and Democratic Representatives Adam Schiff and Joaquin Castro tested positive.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/washingtons-unwelcome-party-guest-covid-crashes-capitals-reopening-2022-04-06/>

More Australians are reporting catching COVID-19 twice, but there's limited data on reinfections

A growing number of Australians are catching COVID-19 for a second time as the country grapples with another surge in infections, but a lack of official data makes it hard to pinpoint exactly who is getting it twice. Raelene Roede is a 50-year-old kindergarten teacher from Geelong, south-west of Melbourne, who caught COVID-19 for the first time after New Year's Eve in January. After an extended bout of isolation - made longer due to January's infamous testing delays - and a week spent feeling pretty sick, Ms Roede made a full recovery and returned to her daily gym routine.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-04-06/covid-19-reinfections-increasing-in-australia/100967706>

Worries of more school disruptions are rising alongside COVID-19 cases

As the spring weather improves, Montrealer Doug Bentley understands people feeling a pent-up desire to return to pre-pandemic normalcy. Still, as a parent with two kids attending elementary school, he remains "ill at ease" about classrooms amid COVID-19. "I don't feel particularly comfortable about the situation in the schools," he said. "There's a lot of denial going on about the sixth wave that has started." With capacity limits, mask mandates and other restrictions lingering in some areas but gone in others, Canadian regions remain in varying stages of easing pandemic mitigation measures. Yet as health experts warn again of rising new COVID-19 infection and hospitalization rates in parts of the country, parents and school officials are bracing for what a sixth wave may bring to classrooms.

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/covid-sixth-wave-school-concerns-1.6408695>

India reports first case of COVID variant XE - report

India's first case of coronavirus variant XE was detected in Mumbai, NDTV reported on Wednesday.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/india-reports-first-case-covid-variant-xe-report-2022-04-06/>

China reports 1415 new confirmed coronavirus cases on April 5 vs 1235 a day earlier

Mainland China reported 1,415 new confirmed coronavirus cases on April 5, the country's national health authority said on Wednesday, compared with 1,235 a day earlier. Of the new cases, 1,383 were locally transmitted, the National Health Commission said, compared with 1,173 a day earlier. The number of new asymptomatic cases, which China counts separately, stood at 19,199 compared with 15,355 a day earlier. There were no new deaths, leaving the death toll unchanged at 4,638.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/china/china-reports-1415-new-confirmed-coronavirus-cases-april-5-vs-1235-day-earlier-2022-04-06/>

Quebec extends mask mandate as new COVID wave spreads in Canada

Quebec will require masks to be worn in indoor public spaces for all of April, delaying a plan to relax the measure by the middle of the month as it and other Canadian provinces face a new COVID-19 wave, a top public health official said on Tuesday. The province, the second most populous in Canada, will become one of the last parts of North America to continue a mask mandate in public indoor places like stores, with health officials projecting a rise in cases and hospitalizations. "We do

not expect the mask will be needed after the month of April," Dr. Luc Boileau, the province's interim public health director, told reporters.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/quebec-extends-mask-mandate-end-april-covid-hospitalizations-rise-2022-04-05/>

Taiwan aims for zero serious COVID cases as infections edge up

Taiwan is aiming for zero serious COVID-19 infections and an "effective" control of the virus, President Tsai Ing-wen said on Wednesday, responding to a gradual increase in the number of domestic cases as it pledges to keep its reopening on track. Unlike large parts of the rest of the world, Taiwan has kept the pandemic well under control with strict and early control measures, including an efficient contact tracing system and largely closing its borders. Since the beginning of this year, Taiwan has reported 2,061 domestic cases, with only five people classified as being seriously ill and just one death.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/taiwan-aims-zero-serious-covid-cases-infections-edge-up-2022-04-06/>

Record COVID rates in England still rising in over-55s - study

England recorded its highest ever COVID-19 infection prevalence in March and cases were still increasing in the over-55s at the end of the month, an Imperial College London survey said on Wednesday, adding that Omicron subvariant BA.2 was now dominant. Prime Minister Boris Johnson has lifted all COVID-19 restrictions in England, citing the experience with a wave of Omicron infections over new year which saw record cases, but did not produce an equivalent wave of deaths in Britain's highly vaccinated population. Imperial's study showed that the peak in infections in March surpassed the highs of the BA.1 Omicron wave in January, reinforcing findings by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) that cases have hit an all time high.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/record-covid-rates-england-still-rising-over-55s-study-2022-04-05/>

China relies on traditional medicine to fight COVID surge in Shanghai

Shanghai is distributing to residents millions of boxes of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), such as herbal products and flu capsules, which it says can treat COVID-19 in the battle to control its largest virus outbreak. China's commercial capital, now under an extended lockdown, reported more than 17,000 new COVID-19 infections on April 5, including 311 symptomatic cases, among a population of more than 26 million. "Facing the extremely transmissible Omicron variant, we should use TCM treatment as soon as possible," said Fang Min, president of the city's Shuguang Hospital.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/china/china-relies-traditional-medicine-fight-covid-surge-shanghai-2022-04-06/>

China's services sector activity hit hard by Omicron surge - Caixin PMI

Activity in China's services sector contracted at the sharpest pace in two years in March as a surge in coronavirus cases restricted mobility and weighed on demand, a private sector survey showed on Wednesday. The Caixin services Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) dived to 42.0 in March from 50.2 in February, dropping below the 50-point mark that separates growth from contraction on a monthly basis. The reading indicates the sharpest activity decline since the initial onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in February 2020. The survey, which focuses more on small firms in coastal regions, tallied with an official survey, which also showed deterioration in the services sector

<https://www.reuters.com/world/china/chinas-services-sector-activity-squeezed-by-omicron-surge-caixin-pmi-2022-04-06/>

'So many bodies piled up': Hong Kong funeral services overwhelmed by COVID

Traditional wooden coffins are running short in Hong Kong as authorities scramble to add mortuary space in the global financial hub's battle on COVID-19, which is swamping funeral parlours. "I have never seen so many bodies piled up together," said funeral director Lok Chung, 37, who has been working round the clock, with about 40 funerals organised in March, up from roughly 15 in an average month. "I have never seen family members so upset, so disappointed, so helpless," Chung,

wearing a sober grey suit with a black polo T-shirt, told Reuters.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/china/so-many-bodies-piled-up-hong-kong-funeral-services-overwhelmed-by-covid-2022-04-06/>

UK Covid Cases Hit Peak on BA.2 Omicron, Waning Immunity: Study

Covid-19 infections in England reached their highest level in March since the pandemic began, driven by the omicron subvariant BA.2 and waning immunity among older adults, according to a new study. The overall Covid prevalence rate more than doubled last month from February when infection rates were falling from the omicron-led January peak, the React-1 study led by Imperial College London found. Since then the emergence of BA.2 -- a more-transmissible version of omicron-- has accelerated new infections and become the dominant strain in England, accounting for about 90% of the samples that tested positive. The higher infection rates may result in an increase in hospitalizations despite the higher levels of vaccination among the population, said Paul Elliott, director of the React program, and chair in Epidemiology and Public Health Medicine, Imperial College London.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-04-05/u-k-covid-cases-at-highest-level-as-immunity-wanes-study-finds>

New Lockdown

Whole of Shanghai enters COVID lockdown despite lower symptomatic cases

Chinese authorities on Tuesday extended a lockdown in Shanghai to cover all of the financial centre's 26 million people, despite growing anger over quarantine rules in the city, where latest results show only 268 symptomatic daily COVID-19 cases. In a major test of China's zero-tolerance strategy to eliminate the novel coronavirus, the government widened the lockdown to eastern parts of the city and extended until further notice restrictions in western districts, which had been due to expire on Tuesday. The broader lockdown came after testing saw asymptomatic COVID-19 cases surge to more than 13,000. Symptomatic cases fell on Monday to 268, from 425 the previous day

<https://www.reuters.com/world/china/shanghai-lockdown-deepens-after-new-surge-asymptomatic-cases-2022-04-05/>