

COVID-19 Lockdown Exit Analysis

18th Dec 2020

News Highlights

Covid-19 surge overwhelms hospitals in England

NHS hospitals in England are running out of beds amidst a surge in Covid-19 cases. Hospitals in Leicester, London and Northampton are especially hard-hit. [Patients are being diverted to other hospitals in the highest numbers for four years](#). 'It already feels like we're in the grip of a really bad winter, and there's a very long way to go,' said NHS Providers chief executive, Chris Hopson.

Initiative to provide a vaccine to LMICs runs 'very high risk' of failing

COVAX - a global initiative to ensure equitable access to a Covid-19 vaccine for lower-income nations - faces a 'very high risk of failure, according to a GAVI report. [A number of financial, logistical and regulatory issues pose major barriers to the success of the programme](#). To be able to vaccinate twenty percent of people in poorer countries next year, the COVAX scheme needs an extra U.S.\$4.9 billion. As a result of this challenge, some may not receive a Covid-19 vaccine until 2024.

Good immune response in Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine trials

The Oxford University/AstraZeneca vaccine provoked a good immune response when participants were given two full vaccine doses, according to early trial data, [however, more investigation needs to be carried out](#). The recent phase III trial showed 62% efficacy when participants were given two full doses. This contrasted with 90% efficacy when participants were given a full dose followed by a half dose.

Five times deadlier than the flu

Many anti-vaxxers have compared Covid-19 to the seasonal flu and researchers have carried out a study to ascertain whether there was any basis for this claim. The conclusion was that Covid-19 is up to five times deadlier in patients requiring hospitalisation than the flu. [Based on an analysis of U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs data, Covid-19 patients are at heightened risk of death](#); more likely to require mechanical ventilation and intensive care; more likely to endure a longer stay in hospital; and more susceptible to damage to other organs than the lungs.

Lockdown Exit

States report confusion as feds reduce vaccine shipments, even as Pfizer says it has 'millions' of unclaimed doses

The changes prompted concern in health departments across the country about whether Operation Warp Speed, the Trump administration's vaccine accelerator, was capable of distributing doses quickly enough to meet the target of delivering first shots to 20 million people by year's end. A senior administration official, speaking on the condition of anonymity to discuss internal plans, said the revised estimates for next week were the result of states requesting an expedited timeline for locking in future shipments — from Friday to Tuesday — leaving less time for federal authorities to inspect and clear available supply.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2020/12/17/pfizer-vaccine-supply-states/>

Covid: Sir Ian McKellen praises NHS after first dose of Pfizer vaccine

Sir Ian McKellen has praised the NHS saying he wants to "give them all a big hug" after having his first dose of the Pfizer Covid-19 vaccine. The 81-year old also urged others to get the Covid-19 jab if they could. "I would encourage everybody to do the sensible thing, not just for themselves but for everybody else because if you're virus-free that helps everybody else, doesn't it?"

<https://www.itv.com/news/2020-12-16/covid-sir-ian-mckellen-praises-nhs-after-first-dose-of-pfizer-vaccine>

New Zealand's 'go hard and early' Covid policy reaps economic rewards

New Zealand's economy has accelerated out of a coronavirus induced recession to grow by a record 14 per cent in the third quarter, reflecting authorities' adept handling of the pandemic. Figures published on Thursday showed a resurgence in household spending drove the country's recovery. The easing of some of the world's toughest social distancing restrictions prompted 11.1 per cent growth in service industries and 26 per cent growth in the goods producing sector. New Zealand's statistics agency also revised the decline in gross domestic product in the June quarter to 11 per cent, from previous estimates of a 12.2 per cent contraction. However, the damage wrought by a nationwide lockdown remained evident in the annual growth figure, which shows economic activity fell 2.2 per cent in the year to the end of September.

<https://www.ft.com/content/b8c4ab58-99db-4af2-9449-5fd70a9235ce>

Ardern unveils New Zealand Covid vaccine deals as economy rebounds

New Zealand has ordered 15m courses of Covid-19 vaccine from four providers as the country approaches the end of 2020 on a promising note, with a recovering economy and plans to open numerous travel corridors in the new year. On Thursday, the prime minister, Jacinda Ardern, confirmed the treatment would be free for everyone, with health workers and border officials prioritised. The vaccine will be made available in the second quarter of next year. Ardern said readiness for New Zealand's "largest-ever immunisation programme" was progressing well, and the country had now pre-ordered vaccines from four providers: 750,000 courses from Pfizer, 5m from Janssen, 3.8m from Oxford/AstraZeneca and 5.36m from Novavax. One course refers to all the doses needed for one person.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/dec/17/ardern-unveils-new-zealand-covid-vaccine-deals-as-economy-rebounds>

New Zealand economy bounces back with record growth as pandemic contained

New Zealand's economy grew a record 14% in the third quarter, bouncing back from a COVID-19 lockdown earlier in the year that shut businesses and brought activity to a standstill, official data showed on Thursday. Annual gross domestic product (GDP) rose 0.4%, Statistics New Zealand said, with both figures beating expectations in a Reuters poll for quarterly growth of 13.5% and an annual contraction of 1.3%. The GDP numbers also topped the Reserve Bank of New Zealand's November forecast of quarterly and annual growth of 13.4% and minus 1.3% respectively.

<https://uk.reuters.com/article/newzealand-economy-gdp/update-1-new-zealand-economy-bounces-back-with-record-growth-as-pandemic-contained-idUSL1N2IW3CR>

NHS hospitals running out of beds as Covid cases continue to surge

Growing numbers of hospitals in England are running short of beds and having to divert patients elsewhere and cancel operations as the NHS struggles to cope with the resurgence of coronavirus, a Guardian analysis shows. According to the NHS figures, hospitals had to tell ambulance crews to divert patients elsewhere 44 times last week – the highest number for four years. With hospitals in London, Leicester and Northampton particularly hard hit, Chris Hopson, chief executive of NHS Providers, warned: "It already feels like we're in the grips of a really bad winter, and there's a very long way to go."

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/dec/17/nhs-hospitals-running-out-of-beds-as-covid-cases-continue-to-surge>

One night in Wuhan: COVID-19's original epicenter re-learns how to party

"After experiencing the first wave of epidemic in Wuhan and then the liberation, I feel like I'm living a second life," says Zhang, 29, who works in a textiles shop in the central Chinese city that was the original epicenter of COVID-19. Outside, maskless partygoers spill onto the streets, smoking and playing street games with toy machine guns and balloons. Nightlife in Wuhan is back in full swing almost seven months after the city lifted its stringent lockdown and the city's young partygoers are embracing the catharsis.

<https://uk.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-wuhan-nightlife-wi-idUKKBN28Q36G>

Exit Strategies

Pfizer/BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine set for roll-out in Germany this month

Germany is set to begin administering the Pfizer/BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine on 27 December, according to Reuters. The Berlin city government disclosed that priority for the vaccine will first be given to elderly individuals living in care homes.

http://www.pmlive.com/pharma_news/pfizerbiontech_covid-19_vaccine_set_for_roll-out_in_germany_this_month_1360175

Commission closing in on deal for up to 200M doses of Novavax coronavirus vaccine

The Commission completed exploratory talks for coronavirus vaccines with Novavax, the Commission announced Thursday. The deal would secure 100 million doses of the U.S.-made vaccine, with the option of purchasing an additional 100 million doses. It would be the seventh deal struck by the Commission with drugmakers. Commission President Ursula von der Leyen also announced Thursday that EU countries will begin vaccinating between December 27 and 29.

<https://www.politico.eu/article/commission-closing-in-on-deal-for-up-to-200m-doses-of-novavax-coronavirus-vaccine/>

Storm may help U.S. Northeast contain coronavirus but could disrupt vaccine delivery

A winter storm piled historic amounts of snow onto parts of the U.S. Northeast on Thursday and wreaked havoc throughout the region, hobbling if not paralyzing travel as it moved up the coast and bore down on New England. The first major snowstorm of the season, which was expected to move out to sea by the end of Thursday, prompted officials to urge the region's 50 million residents to stay home, a warning many had been routinely issuing anyway because of the pandemic. "Given the heavy (snow) and difficult travel conditions, drivers are encouraged to stay off the road if they can during the storm," Massachusetts Governor Charlie Baker said on Twitter.

<https://uk.reuters.com/article/usa-weather/historic-snowfalls-of-up-to-45-inches-blanket-u-s-northeast-idUKKBN28R1VL>

You can't sue Pfizer or Moderna if you have severe Covid vaccine side effects. The government likely won't compensate you for damages either

Under the PREP Act, companies like Pfizer and Moderna have total immunity from liability if something unintentionally goes wrong with their vaccines. A little-known government program provides benefits to people who can prove they suffered serious injury from a vaccine. That program rarely pays, covering just 29 claims over the last decade.

<https://www.cNBC.com/2020/12/16/covid-vaccine-side-effects-compensation-lawsuit.html>

COVID-19 vaccine rollout may be delayed - with IT system 'failing constantly'

The rollout of the COVID-19 vaccine could be delayed by technical issues, doctors and health officials have warned, after the first week of the vaccination programme was marred by difficulties with data collection. GP practices have been forced to collect data on the rollout of the Pfizer vaccine by hand, following problems with the software being used to keep track of who has been given the jab. A senior health official told Sky News that the IT system, known as Pinnacle, was "failing constantly" and that GPs were "having to record on paper and then transfer". NHS England strongly

disputed the claims.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-vaccine-rollout-may-be-delayed-with-it-system-failing-constantly-12164829>

Biden to get COVID-19 vaccine publicly next week

President-elect Joe Biden will get the coronavirus vaccine as soon as next week, transition officials said on Wednesday (16 December), as US authorities try to build public confidence in a measure that promises to stanch the deadly pandemic. Vice President Mike Pence will get the vaccine on Friday, the White House said. Both men will receive the shot publicly in an effort to boost confidence in the safety of the vaccine, which will become widely available to the public next year. "I don't want to get ahead of the line but I want to make sure that we demonstrate to the American people that it is safe to take," Biden said at an event earlier on Wednesday. Biden, 78, is in a high-risk category for the coronavirus because of his age.

<https://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/news/biden-to-get-covid-19-vaccine-publicly-next-week/>

Covid Risks a Lost Generation in India as Digital Divide Widens

Dhiru, an Indian teenager who entered 10th grade this year, hasn't attended even one day of class since the academic year began in April. The school was closed for months amid the pandemic, but even since it reopened Dhiru's mother Rekha Devi is afraid to send her son to class. Unlike some schools, Dhiru's doesn't offer online instruction -- and even if it did, the family doesn't own a computer or a smartphone to access the internet. "The school is now saying, 'Come and attend class,' but we don't want to take the risk," said Rekha Devi, a domestic helper near New Delhi. "Unlike rich people, we don't have the option of online classes. So we've started private tuition for him, but I'm not sure he'll be able to pass the exams without any schooling this year."

<https://www.bnnbloomberg.ca/covid-risks-a-lost-generation-in-india-as-digital-divide-widens-1.1537656>

Germany to roll out BioNTech/Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine on Dec. 27

Germany will roll out the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine against COVID-19 on Dec. 27, with priority given to the elderly in care homes, Berlin city government said on Wednesday. The announcement came as Germany registered its highest daily death toll from COVID-19 and as it entered a strict lockdown in an attempt to bring down soaring infections. As a member of the European Union Germany must wait for the European Medicines Agency (EMA) to approve the vaccine. It is expected to make an announcement on Dec. 21. A senior EU official said on Wednesday the bloc could give its final approval for the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine on Dec. 23

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-germany-vaccine/germany-to-roll-out-biontech-pfizer-covid-vaccine-on-december-27-berlin-city-government-idUSKBN28Q2UG>

Scheme to get Covid vaccine to poorer countries at 'high risk' of failure

The global scheme to deliver Covid-19 vaccines to poorer countries faces a "very high" risk of failure, potentially leaving billions of people with no access to vaccines until as late as 2024, internal documents say. The Covax scheme has been beset by a number of issues, including a shortage of doses of approved vaccines, and a decision by India's Serum Institute, which was initially earmarked to supply Covax, saying it would prioritise supplying India first. The cheaper and easier to transport vaccines that the scheme has banked on, including the Oxford University-AstraZeneca vaccine, have been slower in testing and getting regulatory approval.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/dec/16/scheme-to-get-covid-vaccine-to-poorer-countries-at-high-risk-of-failure>

Labeling confusion led to wasted doses of Pfizer Covid-19 vaccine in first days of rollout

With the Covid-19 vaccine in short supply, hospital pharmacists found themselves in the unexpected position of throwing away one in every six doses of the first Pfizer-BioNTech vaccines distributed this week in the United States. The confusion came over labeling: The vaccine comes in vials labeled as containing enough for five doses. But pharmacists discovered that, after thawing and mixing the

contents with a diluent, each vial contained enough vaccine for six doses. Without explicit approval from the manufacturer, that final dose had to be discarded. "It was overtly clear early on there's some extra volume," said Russell Findlay, pharmacy manager at University of Utah Health. His colleagues called Pfizer on Tuesday to ask if they could use the extra dose, said Findlay, but the company wouldn't give a definitive answer.

<https://www.statnews.com/2020/12/16/labeling-confusion-led-to-wasted-doses-of-pfizer-covid-19-vaccine-in-first-days-of-rollout/>

Partisan Exits

Debunked COVID-19 myths survive online, despite facts

From speculation that the coronavirus was created in a lab to hoax cures, an overwhelming amount of false information clung to COVID-19 as it circled the globe in 2020. Public health officials, fact checkers and doctors tried to quash hundreds of rumors in myriad ways. But misinformation around the pandemic has endured as vexingly as the virus itself. And with the U.S., U.K. and Canada rolling out vaccinations this month, many falsehoods are seeing a resurgence online. A look at five stubborn myths around COVID-19 that were shared this year and continue to travel:

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/debunked-covid19-myths-survive-online-despite-facts-masks-myth-covid19-virus-myths-b1775721.html>

How France is confronting its big anti-vaxx problem

As it emerges from its second Covid lockdown, France is preparing to roll out one of the biggest vaccination campaigns in its history. The country has been badly battered by the pandemic, tallying 59,000 Covid deaths and 2.39 million cases so far, and the vaccine would finally offer a way out of the ordeal. Yet, Paris will now have to grapple with another alarming reality: France has become one of the most vaccine-sceptical countries in the world.

<https://www.wired.co.uk/article/france-covid-antivaxx-coronavirus>

'Nightmare' Australia Housing Lockdown Called Breach of Human Rights

An ombudsman's report condemned a rushed lockdown of nine public housing towers in Melbourne that left thousands of residents without adequate food and medication and access to fresh air.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/17/world/australia/melbourne-lockdown-covid-human-rights.html>

Melbourne tower lockdown 'breached human rights'

The Victorian Ombudsman said while the decision was warranted, the residents affected were entitled to an apology. State political reporter Bridget Rollason and producer Erwin Rinaldi have the story.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-12-17/melbourne-tower-lock-down-breached-human-rights/12995576>

Australian state violated human rights in COVID lockdown-report

An Australian state's decision to lockdown more than 3,000 people in public housing towers to contain a second COVID-19 outbreak was not based on direct health advice and violated human rights, Victoria's state Ombudsman said in a report. Australia's second-most populous state, Victoria, locked down nine public housing towers for several days in July due to a surge in coronavirus cases. Victoria's acting chief health officer had only 15 minutes to consider and approve the lockdown, including the potential human rights impacts, Ombudsman Deborah Glass said in her report released on Thursday.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-australia-towers/australian-state-violated-human-rights-in-covid-lockdown-report-idUSKBN28R0EC>

Palestinians left waiting as Israel is set to deploy vaccine

Israel will begin rolling out a major coronavirus vaccination campaign next week after the prime minister reached out personally to the head of a major drug company. Millions of Palestinians living

under Israeli control will have to wait much longer. Worldwide, rich nations are snatching up scarce supplies of new vaccines as poor countries largely rely on a World Health Organization program that has yet to get off the ground. There are few places where the competition is playing out in closer proximity than in Israel and the territories it has occupied for more than half a century.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/palestinians-left-waiting-as-israel-is-set-to-deploy-vaccine/2020/12/17/f8cbb832-402d-11eb-b58b-1623f6267960_story.html

Continued Lockdown

Germany facing lockdown to Easter with hospitals 'on brink of overload'

Germany's Covid-19 death toll has risen by nearly 1,000 in a single day, leading to speculation that its lockdown could last until Easter. One of the country's regional chief ministers has warned that for the first time the hospital system is "on the brink of overload" as the infection rate continues to rise and spare intensive care capacity dwindles. The World Health Organisation has advised Europeans to wear masks when meeting family and friends at Christmas. People should also meet outdoors whenever possible, it said. Yesterday, the Robert Koch Institute (RKI), which compiles the German government's coronavirus statistics, reported 952 deaths within the past 24 hours, well above the previous daily record of 590 on Friday. It said that there were 27,728 new cases.

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/germany-facing-coronavirus-lockdown-to-easter-with-hospitals-on-brink-of-overload-h0jvdm73x>

Scientific Viewpoint

Early data show two doses of Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine provoked good immune response

Oxford University's COVID-19 vaccine candidate has a better immune response when a two full-dose regime is used rather than a full-dose followed by a half-dose booster, the university said on Thursday, citing data from early trials. The developers of the vaccine candidate, which has been licensed to pharmaceuticals company AstraZeneca, have already published later stage trial results showing higher efficacy when a half dose is followed by a full dose, compared to a two full-dose regime. However, more work needs to be done to affirm that result. The latest details from the Phase I and 2 clinical trials released on Thursday made no reference to the half-dose/full-dose regime, which Oxford has said had been "unplanned" but approved by regulators.

<https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-health-coronavirus-astrazeneca-oxford-idUKKBN28R2J8>

Iceland's Herd Immunity Plan Likely Impacted by Vaccine Delay

Iceland's plan to achieve herd immunity already by the end of March will likely be impacted by production delays at Covid-19 vaccine supplier Pfizer, the country's chief epidemiologist warned Thursday. Earlier this month, the Health Ministry said it wanted to vaccinate 75% of Icelanders born in 2005 or earlier by the end of the first quarter. But according to Thorolfur Gudnason, that target won't be achieved until the end of next year. "We finally have a clear picture of the vaccine shipment from Pfizer," Gudnason said. "Because of the producers' shortage of raw materials, the production will be delayed, so it is clear we will get less than we anticipated," he said during a briefing in Reykjavik.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-12-17/iceland-s-herd-immunity-plan-likely-impacted-by-vaccine-delay>

Pfizer Says No Vaccine Shipments Have Been Delayed

Pfizer Inc. pushed back on claims it is experiencing problems producing its Covid-19 vaccine, as the company and the federal government continued to try to reach a deal that would eventually double the number of doses available for the U.S.'s vast immunization effort. Moncef Slaoui, the chief scientific adviser to Operation Warp Speed, said in an interview on Thursday that the U.S. is close to a deal for another 100 million doses of the vaccine Pfizer developed in partnership with BioNTech SE. Through the agreement, Pfizer would deliver the additional supply in the second quarter of 2021,

Slaoui said.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-12-17/pfizer-says-no-vaccine-shipments-have-been-delayed>

Pfizer says not facing production issues with COVID-19 vaccine

Pfizer Inc said on Thursday it was not facing any production issues with its COVID-19 vaccine, a day after U.S. officials pointed to challenges with the company's manufacturing. The company said it was confident in its ability to deliver up to 50 million doses globally this year and up to 1.3 billion next year. "No shipments containing the vaccine are on hold or delayed. This week, we successfully shipped all 2.9 million doses that we were asked to ship by the U.S. Government to the locations specified by them," Pfizer said in a statement.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-pfizer-production-idUSKBN28R2PW>

Oxford Covid-19 vaccine stimulates broad antibody and T cell functions - study

The University of Oxford's coronavirus vaccine stimulates broad antibody and T cell responses, published trial results show. Researchers published further data from phase one/two clinical trials of the ChAdOx1 nCoV-19 Covid-19 vaccine, showing the evidence for the decision to move to a two-dose regimen in ongoing phase three trials. The data also shows how the vaccine, developed with AstraZeneca, induces broad antibody and T cell functions. Previous studies have shown that in order to develop any vaccine against SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus, two key elements of the immune system need to be activated. These are neutralising antibodies against the coronavirus spike protein which is likely to be critically important in protecting against the disease, as well as robust T cell responses.

<https://www.irishnews.com/magazine/science/2020/12/17/news/oxford-covid-19-vaccine-stimulates-broad-antibody-and-t-cell-functions-study-2164033/>

HHS Secretary Azar says Pfizer keeps government at 'arm's length' on Covid vaccine manufacturing

Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar said Thursday he'd like "more visibility" into Pfizer's Covid vaccine manufacturing, adding Pfizer has kept the federal government at "arm's length." Unlike other drugmakers, Pfizer did not accept federal funding to help develop or manufacture its vaccine. But Azar said he would like to see that relationship change. "We're working with Pfizer. We're very optimistic that we'll secure additional quantities in the second quarter, but they're going to need help from us on their manufacturing."

<https://www.cnn.com/2020/12/17/covid-vaccine-hhs-secretary-azar-says-pfizer-keeps-us-at-arms-length-on-manufacturing.html>

Moderna's Covid vaccine data weighed by US regulator

A panel of scientific experts has endorsed Moderna's Covid-19 vaccine, paving the way for it to become the second jab to receive emergency authorisation for use in the US by the end of the week. All but one of the 21-member panel voted that the available evidence indicated the vaccine's benefits outweighed its risks for people aged 18 and older, with one member abstaining. The Food and Drug Administration could announce an emergency use authorisation by the end of the week. The FDA granted the first EUA for a coronavirus vaccine to Pfizer and BioNTech last week.

<https://www.ft.com/content/33206fc3-6ccb-40ce-ad93-ed33f67d890e>

COVID-19 is THE leading cause of death in the U.S., study finds

Researchers looked at daily coronavirus death rates and compared them with mortality rates of the leading causes of death from March to October 2018. Between November 1 and December 13, the seven-day rolling average for daily COVID-19 deaths tripled from 826 to 2,430. Seven-day rolling average mortality rates for heart disease and cancer are 1,700 deaths per day and 1,600 deaths per day, respectively. This means coronavirus claims 1.4 times as many lives as heart disease and 1.5 times as many as lives as cancer.

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-9064111/COVID-19-leading-cause-death-U-S-study-finds.html>

NICE: Not enough evidence to recommend vitamin D solely to prevent Covid-19

There is not enough evidence to support taking vitamin D solely to treat or prevent Covid-19, a rapid review of clinical evidence has concluded. The review, carried out by NICE, Public Health England and the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition, was ordered by health secretary Matt Hancock following reports of links between vitamin D deficiency and severe Covid-19. Anticipating the results, Mr Hancock already announced that millions of vulnerable people in England would receive free supplies of Vitamin D for the winter. But the guidance, published today, advises healthcare professionals 'not to offer vitamin D supplements to people solely to [prevent or treat] Covid-19, except as part of a clinical trial'.

<https://www.pulsetoday.co.uk/news/clinical-areas/respiratory/nice-not-enough-evidence-to-recommend-vitamin-d-solely-to-prevent-covid-19/>

Devices Used In COVID-19 Treatment Can Give Errors For Patients With Dark Skin

The common fingertip devices that measures oxygen in the blood can sometimes give misleading readings in people with dark skin, according to a report Wednesday in The New England Journal of Medicine. These devices, called pulse oximeters, are increasingly finding their way into people's homes, because of the COVID-19 pandemic. So, this is not just a concern for medical personnel using professional-grade devices. Dr. Michael Sjoding and colleagues at the University of Michigan hospital in Ann Arbor came across this issue this year when they received an influx of COVID-19 patients from Detroit's overflowing hospitals. Many of these patients are Black. Sjoding noticed something odd about results from the fingertip device used throughout hospitals.

<https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2020/12/16/947226068/dark-skin-can-lead-to-errors-with-pulse-oximeters-used-in-covid-19-treatment>

Chinese scientist behind Wuhan lockdown gets Nature magazine top 10 accolade

Zhang Yongzhen, publisher of the genome sequence for the pathogen, also recognised as one of the people who 'helped shape science' in 2020. WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, New Zealand's Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern and America's top infectious disease expert Anthony Fauci also honoured.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/science/article/3114233/coronavirus-two-chinese-scientists-named-among-nature-magazines>

FDA says Pfizer coronavirus vaccine contains extra doses, expanding nation's supply

The Food and Drug Administration said Wednesday that pharmacists can draw additional doses from vials of the Pfizer coronavirus vaccine, potentially expanding the country's supply by millions of doses as the Trump administration negotiates with Pfizer to speed up the next round of vaccine deliveries. The government's existing supply of the first authorized vaccine can be stretched further after pharmacists began to notice that vials contain more than the expected five doses. The FDA is in touch with Pfizer about how to handle this issue, the agency said. In the meantime, regulators say those extra doses from a single vial can be used.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/pfizer-vaccine-doses-us/2020/12/16/9d63848c-3fc1-11eb-8bc0-ae155bee4aff_story.html

India's indigenous coronavirus vaccine 'Covaxin' shows the robust immune response in its 1st phase clinical trials

India's indigenous coronavirus vaccine, Covaxin, has shown to generate a robust immune response in its first phase clinical trials. A detailed immunogenicity response of the first phase trials of the vaccine has been declared by the manufacturers. Covaxin, jointly developed by Hyderabad based Bharat Biotech and ICMR has been found to be safe generating no serious adverse effects in people of all dose groups as per the results of the first phase clinical trials. ICMR has informed that the

vaccine can be stored at 2-degree and 8-degree centigrade temperatures which also make it compatible with the National Immunization plan. Covaxin is one among the three coronavirus vaccine candidates being considered for emergency use authorisation in India by the Drug regulator. It is currently in its third and last phase of clinical trials with nearly 26 thousand volunteers in the age group of 18 and 55.

<https://www.thehansindia.com/life-style/health/indias-indigenous-coronavirus-vaccine-covaxin-shows-the-robust-immune-response-in-its-1st-phase-clinical-trials-662342>

Is COVID-19 really improving pharma's reputation? Takeda survey says not so much

Thinking pharma might earn a halo with its COVID-19 work? Not so fast, Takeda says. Its recent U.K. study finds only an incremental boost in positive consumer sentiment. Only 17% of adults surveyed in October agreed that their perception of the pharma industry has improved during the pandemic, while the majority (54%) said their opinion hasn't changed. Ipsos MORI fielded the study with adults in the U.K. and also with healthcare professionals. "Whilst there might be this perception it's improved, there's actually a lot of work to do to get down to the general public to change their perceptions," Jon Neal, Takeda managing director in the U.K. and Ireland, said.

<https://www.fiercepharma.com/marketing/takeda-u-k-survey-finds-only-minor-pharma-reputation-gains-during-pandemic>

Did the FDA understaff its review of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine?

In what is arguably the most important decision the Food and Drug Administration has made this year — its emergency use authorization of the Pfizer/BioNTech Covid-19 vaccine — the agency apparently assigned only a single reviewer in each of two key scientific disciplines (clinical and statistics) to do the work in three weeks that usually takes months to do. The FDA's authorization last week followed similar authorizations in the United Kingdom and Canada. But the FDA's decision is particularly important because of its reputation for being the international "gold standard" in regulatory rigor.

<https://www.statnews.com/2020/12/17/did-the-fda-understaff-its-review-of-the-pfizer-biontech-vaccine/>

Feds rebuff Pfizer's pleas to speed up supplies of COVID-19 vaccine raw materials: reports

Ever since Pfizer was pegged to participate in the U.S. government's Warp Speed effort to get COVID-19 vaccines to market, the company has made it quite clear it did not need to take any federal money to develop the vaccine. But did that refusal of R&D funding contribute to Pfizer's inability to manufacture more doses of its mRNA vaccine for the U.S. market? Pfizer could provide more than the 100 million doses it promised in its original contract with the U.S. government in the first half of next year—but only if Trump administration officials demand that suppliers of raw materials quickly fulfill the company's orders. And CEO Albert Bourla, Ph.D., is calling on the government to use the Defense Production Act to do just that.

<https://www.fiercepharma.com/pharma/feds-rebuff-pfizer-s-requests-for-speedier-supplies-covid-vaccine-raw-materials-reports>

BioNTech, through Fosun deal, pledges 100M coronavirus vaccine doses for China

Pfizer and its German mRNA partner BioNTech have started racking up authorizations for their COVID-19 vaccine, with shots already going into patients' arms in countries like the U.K. and the U.S. Now, BioNTech has struck a deal to supply initial doses in China, where the vaccine is currently in mid-stage testing. BioNTech, through its arrangement with local drugmaker Shanghai Fosun, will supply Mainland China with an initial 100 million doses of its mRNA vaccine, BNT162, in 2021—should the shot pass muster with domestic regulators. BioNTech will source the doses from its production facilities in Germany, the company said in a release.

<https://www.fiercepharma.com/pharma/biontech-and-fosun-lock-down-100m-covid-19-vaccine-doses-for-china>

COVID 5 times deadlier than flu for hospital patients, study finds

Compared with patients with seasonal flu, hospitalized COVID-19 patients face an increased need for ventilation and intensive care, longer hospital stays, more complications, and nearly five times the risk of death, according to a US study published yesterday in BMJ. The study, led by researchers from the VA Saint Louis Health Care System, mined the US Department of Veterans Affairs medical records database to compare the outcomes of 3,641 COVID-19 patients hospitalized from Feb 1 to Jun 17 with those of 12,676 hospitalized with the flu from 2017 to 2019.

<https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2020/12/covid-5-times-deadlier-flu-hospital-patients-study-finds>

Pfizer decision to turn off temperature sensors forced scramble to ensure Covid-19 vaccines kept ultra-cold

A last-minute snafu this fall threatened to disrupt the smooth rollout of the first Covid-19 vaccine approved in the United States, according to industry officials. At issue was how to monitor the temperature of the ultra-cold storage containers being used to distribute vials of the vaccine developed by Pfizer and its partner BioNTech. Pfizer, the officials told STAT, planned to disconnect temperature-monitoring sensors on the containers once they were delivered to health care providers — though many of the providers needed to use the boxes to store the vials for up to 30 days. Without the monitoring systems, providers would have no way of knowing if the vials had thawed prematurely, rendering the vaccine unusable.

<https://www.statnews.com/2020/12/17/pfizer-decision-to-turn-off-temperature-sensors-forced-scramble-to-ensure-covid19-vaccines-kept-cold/>

Coronavirus Resurgence

US surpasses 17 million official Covid-19 cases as FDA panel considers Moderna's vaccine candidate

As the United States on Thursday surpassed 17 million official Covid-19 cases, a US Food and Drug Administration advisory panel recommended a second coronavirus vaccine for the country. The developments come as the US, after starting distribution of its first authorized vaccine this week, is dealing with record rates of daily cases, daily deaths and numbers of Covid-19 patients in hospitals. The FDA is widely expected to grant emergency use authorization for Moderna's vaccine candidate -- as it did for Pfizer's vaccine last week -- after its vaccine advisory panel voted to recommend it.

<https://www.cnn.com/2020/12/17/health/us-coronavirus-thursday/index.html>

Covid-19: 'Nightmare six weeks' ahead for NI health service

Paramedics from the Republic of Ireland's National Ambulance Service (NAS) will be working in Northern Ireland this weekend. It comes amid severe Covid-19 related pressures on the health service in NI. Hospitals have faced severe pressures over the past few days, with ambulances queuing outside hospitals. It is not the first time NAS ambulances have helped out in NI, they assisted during the first wave of the pandemic and also in 2019. Irish Health Minister Stephen Donnelly said ambulance crews from the Republic of Ireland will "provide support" to the Northern Ireland Ambulance service (NIAS) over the weekend "due to the pressures being experienced".

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-55345151>

Swinney refuses to rule out post-Christmas lockdown

Tougher restrictions - including a potential lockdown - after the festive period cannot be ruled out, the deputy first minister has warned. John Swinney said the Scottish government would review Covid levels next Tuesday as part of an unplanned "decision-making moment". He said the move reflected the "deteriorating situation" across Scotland and the UK. Ministers have however ruled out a law change around the five-day festivities. The current Covid rules will be relaxed between 23 and 27 December to allow people to travel within the UK and spend Christmas together.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-scotland-politics-55346113>

Downing Street refuses to rule out third lockdown in England as London covid cases soar

Downing Street today declined to rule out a third national lockdown in England as Covid-19 cases soar in London and other parts of the country. With 25,161 confirmed new cases in the UK announced yesterday and 18,038 coronavirus patients in hospitals, No10 said the latest trends would be kept “under review”. Health Secretary Matt Hancock today put a swathe of the South East into Tier 3, with more than 38 million people, or 68 per cent, in England now in the strictest of restrictions. However, the virus is continuing to spread in some areas already in Tier 3 and cases were growing in London even before lockdown ended on December 2.

<https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/will-there-be-third-lockdown-coronavirus-downing-street-b355716.html>

Germany’s Winning Covid Strategy Has Stopped Working

When Covid-19 swept across Europe this spring, Germany gained plaudits for its handling of the pandemic. Now authorities fear they are losing control of the virus. Germany registered one of the lowest death rates from the disease in the world in the first half of the year. It had fewer infections than most of its large neighbors and its hospitals never ran out of emergency care beds, factors that led to the government enacting one of the mildest lockdowns in Europe.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/germanys-winning-covid-strategy-has-stopped-working-11608206996>

Madrid rules out stricter Christmas restrictions despite coronavirus fears

The premier of Madrid, Isabel Díaz Ayuso, announced on Thursday that the region is not considering stricter restrictions for the Christmas period, despite concerns about the rising number of coronavirus cases there. The news comes after Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez called on Wednesday for tougher rules to be introduced in regions where the coronavirus incidence rate is on an upward trend, which includes Madrid. But Díaz Ayuso has ruled out such a move, indicating that the Madrid government will only follow the current restrictions set by the Spanish Health Ministry two weeks ago. Under the Health Ministry’s national Christmas plan, which was approved by a council made up of central and regional health officials, all regions in mainland Spain must seal their borders between December 23 and January 6

https://english.elpais.com/spanish_news/2020-12-17/madrid-rules-out-stricter-christmas-restrictions-despite-coronavirus-fears.html

Spain ready to implement tougher measures as 'Christmas clock' is ticking

With the virus not going away ahead of the Christmas season, the Spanish government is ready to implement tougher measures, Spain’s socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez told parliament on Wednesday, EFE reports. The epidemiologic situation in Spain was kept relatively under control for a few weeks, but the latest reports are no bearers of good news: the incidence rate of the COVID-19 pandemic has risen for the fourth day in a row. There is a “worrying increase in infections,” Sánchez said in a speech before parliament (Congreso de los Diputados), where he informed MPs about the current health situation. “We cannot relax. We cannot lower our guard... We have fought hard this year, united, and we are facing the last effort”, Sánchez stressed.

<https://www.euractiv.com/section/coronavirus/news/spain-ready-to-implement-tougher-measures-as-christmas-clock-is-ticking/>

French President Macron Tests Positive for Covid-19

French President Emmanuel Macron tested positive for the coronavirus, his office said Thursday, delivering a blow to a country that has been among Europe’s hardest hit by the pandemic. The 42-year-old was tested after showing symptoms of Covid-19, the Élysée Palace said, adding that he would isolate for seven days while continuing to work. Mr. Macron has a fever, a cough and is tired, a spokesman for the Elysée Palace said. Mr. Macron’s test result immediately rippled across Europe, affecting the activities of a number of leaders who have recently been in contact with him. The Élysée Palace said he received his test results on Thursday, but didn’t specify when the test was

administered

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/frances-macron-tests-positive-for-covid-19-11608198351>

How coronavirus has rocked India's economy

As well as having the second highest number of cases and third highest number of deaths, India has suffered a huge economic hit from Covid-19. The FT's Mumbai correspondent Benjamin Parkin explains why India's economy has been hit especially hard by the virus.

<https://www.ft.com/video/cd987555-c22c-4c25-9fed-88037bb0f585>

Sweden and Japan are paying the price for COVID exceptionalism

One of the most striking things about the COVID-19 pandemic is just how dramatically different the responses have been from country to country. In early 2020, when little was known about the virus, this difference was unsurprising. Today, with tens of thousands of research articles and cases of best practice to learn from, one would expect to see more convergence. And yet some countries continue to resist popular strategies, such as lockdowns, and insist on going their own way - with varying degrees of success. Two such countries are Sweden and Japan, which in 2020 have forged a different path to their neighbours on coronavirus and attributed their early successes to the assumed advantages of an inherent national character. But today, both seem to be paying the price.

<https://theconversation.com/sweden-and-japan-are-paying-the-price-for-covid-exceptionalism-151974>

Japanese leader appears to flout virus guidelines as country grapples with record cases

Japan's Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga has expressed "remorse" for attending a group dinner with celebrity friends in apparent breach of his own government's coronavirus guidelines, as infection rates in the country continue to surge. For weeks, Japanese health officials have urged citizens to reduce their daily activities, remain vigilant and only dine out in small numbers to curb a resurgent winter Covid-19 wave that has seen daily case numbers climb to their highest levels since the beginning of the pandemic. But on Monday, Suga appeared to disregard those guidelines by attending a gathering with seven guests, who were all over the age of 70, at a high-end steak restaurant in Tokyo's Ginza district.

<https://www.cnn.com/2020/12/17/asia/japan-suga-coronavirus-dinner-intl-hnk/index.html>

More than HALF of schools in England had coronavirus cases in November, report finds

Infection rates were highest among secondary school pupils, the survey found. They were lowest in primary school staff, with primary pupils also lower. Teenagers have high rates of coronavirus but officials refuse to close schools. ONS survey is the first of its kind to look at asymptomatic cases in education.

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-9063045/More-HALF-schools-England-coronavirus-cases-November-report-finds.html>

Coronavirus: Swedish King Carl XVI Gustaf says coronavirus approach 'has failed'

Sweden's king has said his country "failed" to save lives with its relatively relaxed approach to the coronavirus pandemic. King Carl XVI Gustaf made the remarks as part of an annual TV review of the year with the royal family. Sweden, which has never imposed a full lockdown, has seen nearly 350,000 cases and more than 7,800 deaths - a lot more than its Scandinavian neighbours. Prime Minister Stefan Lofven said he agreed with the king's remarks. "Of course the fact that so many have died can't be considered as anything other than a failure," Mr Lofven told reporters.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-55347021>

Why Sweden's anti-lockdown strategy hasn't worked as Covid-19 cases spike

Sweden's anti-lockdown strategy had been heralded as a victory for common sense by sceptics, with bars and restaurants open for business and people going about their normal lives, social distancing permitting.

<https://inews.co.uk/news/analysis/why-swedens-anti-lockdown-strategy-hasnt-worked-as-covid-19-cases-spike-797039?ITO=msn>

Macron tests positive for COVID-19, forcing leaders to self isolate

President Emmanuel Macron tested positive for the coronavirus on Thursday, prompting a track-and-trace effort across Europe following numerous meetings between the French leader and EU heads of government in recent days. Macron, who will turn 43 on Monday, is running France remotely and has gone into quarantine at the presidential retreat of La Lanterne close to the Palace of Versailles, the presidency said. A presidential official described Macron as tired and having a cough. His wife Brigitte tested negative but was also self-isolating, staying at the Elysee palace in central Paris.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-macron/frances-macron-tests-positive-for-covid-19-self-isolates-idUSKBN28R146>

Sweden's king says 'we have failed' over COVID-19, as deaths mount

Sweden's king said his country had failed in its handling of COVID-19, in a sharp criticism of a pandemic policy partly blamed for a high death toll among the elderly. Carl XVI Gustaf, whose son and daughter-in-law tested positive last month, used an annual royal Christmas TV special to highlight the growing impact of the virus, in a rare intervention from a monarch whose duties are largely ceremonial. Sweden has stood out from most countries by shunning lockdowns and face masks, leaving schools, restaurants and businesses largely open and relying mainly on voluntary social distancing and hygiene recommendations to slow the spread. An official commission said on Tuesday systemic shortcomings in elderly care coupled with inadequate measures from the government and agencies contributed to Sweden's particularly high death toll in nursing homes.

<https://uk.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-sweden-king/swedens-king-says-we-have-failed-over-covid-19-as-deaths-mount-idUKKBN28R1IP>

Netherlands hits new daily COVID-19 infection record as lockdown imposed

The number of coronavirus infections in the Netherlands jumped by more than 11,000 in 24 hours, hitting a new record, data released by the National Institute for Public Health (RIVM) on Wednesday showed. The steep increase came just a day after a tough, 5-week lockdown was imposed in the Netherlands, where more than 10,000 people have died during the COVID-19 pandemic.

<https://uk.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-netherlands-tally-idUKKBN28Q1Z5>

S.Korea reports record coronavirus deaths as lockdown fears spark panic buying

South Korea reported a record number of coronavirus deaths on Thursday as the country's biggest wave of infections since the start of the pandemic strained hospital resources and sparked panic buying in anticipation of a harsh new lockdown. The novel coronavirus had claimed another 22 lives as of midnight on Wednesday, sharply up from a previous high of 13 deaths in a single day earlier in the week, the Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency (KDCA) reported. Deaths were expected to rise after infections had spiked in Seoul and surrounding areas, with another 1,014 cases reported on Thursday including a daily record of 423 in the densely populated capital city.

<https://uk.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-southkorea/skorea-reports-record-coronavirus-deaths-as-lockdown-fears-spark-panic-buying-idUKKBN28R08Y>

COVID-19 surges stretch health systems in US, elsewhere

COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations, and deaths in the United States continue to climb, with some declines seen in some Upper Midwest states, but surging activity in states such as California. In Europe, some countries are struggling with slowing their activity in the final days leading up to Christmas, and several Americas countries are experiencing steady rises.

<https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2020/12/covid-19-surges-stretch-health-systems-us-elsewhere>

New Lockdown

Two-thirds of England to be under toughest COVID-19 measures

Large areas of England will be added to the 'very high alert' COVID-19 category this weekend, placing residents under the most stringent set of restrictions to tackle a rising number of infections. Britain, like other countries, is struggling to tame a second wave of novel coronavirus cases and deaths, and the government is having to defend a plan to relax contact restrictions for five days over Christmas. In a sign of mounting anxiety over the potential consequences of Christmas socialising, the government said most secondary school pupils would have a week of remote learning before returning to classrooms in January

<https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-health-coronavirus-britain-england/two-thirds-of-england-to-be-under-toughest-covid-19-measures-idUKKBN28R1MW>

Uruguay to close its borders over holidays due to COVID-19

Uruguay will temporarily close its borders next week to non-commercial traffic, and urged citizens to limit holiday gatherings due to a surge in COVID-19 cases. Borders will be closed from Dec. 21 to Jan. 10, except for cargo transportation, the government said late on Wednesday. Uruguay's lockdown measures largely held the virus at bay during the first months of the pandemic. "The second wave to hit the world is our first wave," President Luis Lacalle Pou said in an evening televised event. "We cannot compromise what has been achieved so far," said Rafael Radi, coordinator of the government's COVID-19 advisory group. He said the hardest hit areas are the capital Montevideo and surrounding areas.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-uruguay/uruguay-to-close-its-borders-over-holidays-due-to-covid-19-idUSL1N2IX00F>

Greece tightens COVID-19 curbs in west Athens boroughs

Lockdown restrictions will tighten in parts of western Athens from Friday to contain a resurgence in COVID-19 cases, authorities said. Greece has seen a rapid rise in infections since October, forcing it to impose a second nationwide lockdown. But, despite those curbs, infections have shown no sign of abating in three western boroughs of Athens, Deputy Civil Protection Minister Nikos Hardalias said in a televised briefing. In those areas, a curfew will be extended by four hours and run from 6 p.m. to 5 a.m. local time from Friday, Hardalias said. Bookstores, hair salons and some of the few retailers that Greece allowed to re-open on Monday will also close for a week.

<https://www.msn.com/en-au/lifestyle/wellbeing/greece-tightens-covid-19-curbs-in-west-athens-boroughs/ar-BB1c10XI>

Covid-19: Millions move into tier 3 of virus rules in England

Health Secretary Matt Hancock announces results of review into England's tier rules. A number of areas move into tier three: all of Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Berkshire, Peterborough, Portsmouth, Gosport, Havant, Hastings and Rother, and Surrey, except Waverley. Just two areas move down a tier: Bristol and North Somerset into tier two, while Herefordshire moves to tier one. The new rules kick in at 00:01 on Saturday 19 December.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/live/world-55345020>

Northern Ireland could be heading for a six week lockdown

The Executive has agreed to go into a six week lockdown that will begin on Boxing Day. Ministers met on Thursday amid growing concern about the rise of coronavirus cases in Northern Ireland. The Health minister said the restrictions will come into effect from midnight on Christmas Day, taking effect on the 26th. Robin Swann said: "The Executive has probably taken its hardest decision, its most deep decision, in regards to how we have had to combat Covid-19 collectively. "We will be looking to a six week lock down where the message will be work from home, stay at home."

<https://www.itv.com/news/utv/2020-12-17/northern-ireland-could-be-heading-for-a-six-week-lockdown>

Italy Weighs Holiday Lockdown That Would Dash Hopes for Christmas Respite

Italy's government is debating a lockdown over the holiday period, something it promised Italians it

would do its best to avoid. Some ministers are pushing for the closure of stores, restaurants and bars for a few days around Christmas and again over New Year, as well as tight restrictions on nonessential movement. Some in the government want to preserve freedom of movement for people who want to visit their close relatives. A decision could come as early as today. Italy has struggled to suppress its recent surge of coronavirus cases, despite imposing an array of social-distancing measures last month. Infections and deaths have peaked but are declining only slowly. Italy recorded around 17,500 new infections on Wednesday and 680 deaths.

<https://www.wsj.com/livecoverage/covid-2020-12-17/card/4Q4V0W0dHlg5q35HxwI2>

Denmark will shut down completely during Christmas, New Year - PM

Denmark will impose a hard lockdown over Christmas and the New Year to limit the spread of COVID-19, Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen said on Wednesday. Shopping malls will close starting Thursday, and other stores, with the exception of supermarkets and food shops, will close from Dec. 25. Students still in school will be sent home as of Monday.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-denmark/denmark-will-shut-down-completely-during-christmas-new-year-pm-idUSKBN28Q29V>