

COVID-19 Lockdown Exit Analysis

7th Jan 2021

News Highlights

EU member states face multiple difficulties in vaccine rollout

Rollout of Covid-19 vaccines [has been hampered by many issues in EU member states](#). Countries variously face bureaucratic challenges, a shortage of syringes, and human resource problems such as a lack of trained nurses. As cases surge, [many countries are considering or have embraced delaying the second dose](#) to ensure as many people as possible receive at least partial protection - seen as a controversial move by some.

Delaying the second dose could heighten vulnerability to new variant: South African official

Professor Barry Schoub, chair of the South African government's vaccine advisory committee, [said that the UK's strategy of delaying a second vaccine dose amps up vulnerability to the new variant of Covid-19 already present in that country](#). 'It is more transmissible, and your immunity is only half what it should be, so that will increase the risk of transmission,' he said. Lab tests suggest antibodies to be ten times less effective at protecting against the new strain.

U.S. hospitalisations at record highs

The U.S. saw the most hospitalisations due to Covid-19 on Wednesday, more than at any time since the pandemic began, as cases of Covid-19 surpassed 21 million. [The death toll late Tuesday of 3,684 - one death every 24 seconds - marked the second-highest number of fatalities during the pandemic](#). Worryingly, the country's vaccination effort is falling behind. Pressure is mounting to scale up efforts.

Israel facing tighter restrictions from Friday

Tighter restrictions in Israel will come into force at the end of the week to curb the spread of cases. [A fortnight of enhanced measures comes in as the country continues a mass vaccination campaign that has already inoculated nearly fifteen percent of its nine million people](#). The lockdown is projected to be costly, to the tune of U.S.\$1.3 billion a week. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu blamed the 'British mutation' for the accelerated spread of Covid-19.

Lockdown Exit

David Oliver: 'I've seen five people die in 90 minutes - coronavirus isn't being exaggerated'

I've been an NHS doctor for 31 years and worked in some demanding jobs. But since last March I have looked after wards where all the patients have Covid-19 for months on end. I've never seen anything like it. Total UK Covid deaths hit 70,000 this week but many more infected people end up in hospital, get sick in care homes or have a rough few weeks at home. On call for emergency admissions, as I was this week, around half the patients I admit are sick due to Covid. Right now, a quarter of our beds are filled by Covid patients and our Intensive Care Units and High Dependency Units, have nearly doubled in size to cope with the surge in demand. The current peak is already as high as it was in April and the models suggest it will worsen through January

<https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/politics/david-oliver-walk-mile-shoes-23273264>

Covid-19: New details revealed in government's vaccine distribution plan

New details have emerged in the government's hunt for a Covid-19 vaccine distributor – including the requirement to be able to move doses through roadblocks during another lockdown. The exacting requirements for prospective distributors have emerged in a Ministry of Health procurement document obtained by Stuff. They include the ability to distribute dangerously large quantities of dry ice and transport items at ultra-cold temperatures, down to minus 70 Celsius. Interested companies are also asked about contingency plans for delivering a vaccine in another Covid-19 lockdown scenario, including whether they could handle disruptions to their networks such as roadblocks.

<https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/health/coronavirus/300199285/covid19-new-details-revealed-in-governments-vaccine-distribution-plan>

Covid-19 pre-departure tests and more lockdowns: Additional measures rolled out to battle new variant

Since the new Covid-19 variant began spreading rapidly around the world, new measures have been rolled out to slow it down. The B.1.1.7 strain, which was first identified in the UK on September 20, is more transmissible than other coronavirus variants. According to Director-General of Health Dr Ashley Bloomfield, it is roughly one-and-a-half times more infectious than earlier versions of the virus. The new variant has since been found in more than 30 countries, including New Zealand.

<https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/health/coronavirus/123870153/covid19-predeparture-tests-and-more-lockdowns-additional-measures-rolled-out-to-battle-new-variant>

Covid-19 scare: Hamilton District Court lockdown lifts, isolation worker tests negative

A worker at a managed isolation facility who sparked a lockdown at Hamilton District Court has tested negative for Covid-19. The lockdown was triggered shortly before 10am and was lifted around 11.20am, when members of the public were allowed out again. The court then closed for the rest of the day. People who were inside have been told they are only casual contacts so don't have to do any mandatory quarantine at home. A source has told the Herald that the lockdown was triggered because a woman who worked at a managed isolation facility had turned up at court and told a staff member she had a runny nose and was awaiting the result of a Covid-19 test.

<https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/covid-19-scare-hamilton-district-court-lockdown-lifts-isolation-worker-tests-negative/GF3JLARWVCYT6H4FNR2EKOWHC4/>

Life after lockdown: New Zealand creatives on navigating a post-Covid world

In a year that mostly felt devoid of hope, a light at the end of the tunnel emerged from a surprising source: the bottom of the world. Long-since illuminated for its history-making politics, 2020 saw New Zealand burn even brighter on the global stage for all but eliminating coronavirus (twice) with remarkable efficiency — announcing 95 percent probability of zero local transmissions — as other first-world nations confronted yet another surge. Perhaps it was the country's dispersed population, borderless isolation or high governmental trust index, but once again a small island nation just North of Antarctica (and often confused with Australia) had set an undeniable precedent.

https://i-d.vice.com/en_uk/article/g5bwyx/new-zealand-creatives-on-life-after-covid-19

Operation Warp Speed's Moncef Slaoui will stay on as a consultant for Biden

Moncef Slaoui, the controversial head of Operation Warp Speed, will serve as a consultant in the Biden administration, he confirmed Wednesday. He suggested it would be a less active role than his current position, as the initiative's chief adviser. "I will continue to support as needed, I think we are getting close to the point where my value add is more limited and therefore I'll expect my activity to decrease gradually after January 21," Slaoui told STAT Wednesday during a briefing with reporters.

<https://www.statnews.com/2021/01/06/moncef-slaoui-consultant-biden/>

Exit Strategies

Around 50,000 receive first dose of Covid-19 vaccine in Northern Ireland

Around 50,000 people have received a first dose of coronavirus vaccine in Northern Ireland, Health Minister Robin Swann said. Nine in 10 care home residents have been inoculated. By January 18, more supplies are expected to be received from manufacturer AstraZeneca. Mr Swann urged the public to stay at home while the programme gathers steam. "This is a time to hunker down and weather the crisis," he said.

<https://www.itv.com/news/utv/2021-01-06/around-50000-receive-first-dose-of-covid-19-vaccine-in-northern-ireland>

South African medical schemes to fund COVID-19 vaccines for 30% of adults

Millions of South Africans will have their COVID-19 vaccinations subsidised by medical schemes that pool health insurance premiums through an agreement with the government, a top medical scheme administrator said. Under the arrangement, medical schemes will pay above cost for doses for their members - roughly 7 million adults over the age of 15 - subsidising procurement for another 7 million adults who are without private medical cover, Ryan Noach, chief executive of the country's largest medical scheme administrator, Discovery Health, said. In all, vaccines for around 30% of the country's adult population would be financed by the agreement.

<https://uk.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-safrica-vaccines/south-african-medical-schemes-to-fund-covid-19-vaccines-for-30-of-adults-idUKKBN29B2GB>

Mafia on the hunt for coronavirus vaccines, say Italian police

The mafia will be trying to get their hands on COVID-19 vaccines, Italian police have warned. Giving vaccines to millions of people is proving problematic for most governments and now law enforcement authorities are bracing for an additional challenge — criminals targeting vaccine distribution. "Their interest in vaccines is due to the high demand and the low initial supply," the Italian police body monitoring mafia infiltration of the economy said in an internal report, extracts of which were released on Wednesday.

<https://www.politico.eu/article/mafia-hunt-coronavirus-vaccine-italy-police/>

Israel expects to receive first Moderna coronavirus vaccines on Thursday

Israel expects to receive its first shipment of Moderna Inc coronavirus vaccines on Thursday and will administer them to people confined to homes or otherwise unable to go to clinics, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said. His statement, issued late on Wednesday, did not detail the size of the shipment. Moderna said on Monday that Israel had approved the vaccine, securing 6 million doses. Israel has since Dec. 19 been administering Pfizer Inc's coronavirus vaccine, with the Health Ministry saying on Wednesday that some 16% of citizens had received a first shot.

<https://uk.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-israel-vaccine-idUKKBN29B2EE>

Coronavirus: Dutch shocked to be EU vaccination stragglers

The Dutch army is cleared to help hospitals, intensive care units borrow beds from other wards, patients are sent to Germany for treatment, routine operations are postponed, a nationwide lockdown is in place - and still no vaccinations. In a proudly well-organised country, with a well-funded health service, the first Dutch nationals will receive their coronavirus jabs on Wednesday - ten days after their European neighbours and nearly a month after the UK. The Dutch government has come in for stinging criticism. One former public health director, Roel Coutinho, warned the country's "shameful" vaccination strategy was "going to cost lives". During an emergency debate in parliament, opposition politicians called the approach "chaotic and confusing".

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-55549656>

Serbia praises Russian COVID vaccine as first shots administered

Top Serbian politicians urged greater international acceptance of Russia's coronavirus vaccine on

Wednesday as they joined the front of their country's queue for shots, days after Moscow delivered the first consignment. The first batch of 2,400 doses of Sputnik V vaccine arrived on Dec. 30, and Russian sovereign fund RDIF said it had agreed to supply more up to a total of 2 million. Serbia started inoculations with the two-stage drug on Wednesday, including a shot for parliament speaker Ivica Dacic, who urged the World Health Organization to register it.

<https://uk.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-serbia-russia-vaccine/serbia-praises-russian-covid-vaccine-as-first-shots-administered-idUKL8N2JH27K>

Merkel 'open' to producing Russian coronavirus vaccine in the EU

German Chancellor Angela Merkel has told Russian President Vladimir Putin that she is "open to the idea" of using European manufacturing capacities to increase the production of Russia's Sputnik V vaccine, a German government spokesperson said on Wednesday. News of a Merkel-Putin call on Tuesday to discuss cooperation on vaccine production was first made public by the Kremlin that same day. Speaking at a German government press briefing Wednesday, deputy spokesperson Ulrike Demmer said that Merkel had told Putin "that she is open to the idea of bilateral cooperation for the purpose of tapping European production capacities [for the Russian vaccine]." Demmer added that this would only happen if the European Medicines Agency (EMA) gives its approval to the Sputnik V vaccine.

<https://www.politico.eu/article/angela-merkel-vladimir-putin-russian-vaccine/>

As cases spike, Europe mulls delaying 2nd coronavirus vaccine shot

Faced with surging coronavirus cases, some European countries are considering whether to change tack and join the U.K. in vaccinating as many people as possible with just one dose rather than the two administered during clinical trials so far. This issue has been live since December 30, when the U.K. announced its decision to delay second doses by up to 12 weeks when it approved the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine for emergency use. The switch also applied to the BioNTech/Pfizer jab. Just this week, Denmark announced its decision to delay the second dose of both the Pfizer and forthcoming Moderna jabs by up to six weeks. The German health ministry has also confirmed looking into widening vaccination coverage by similar delays between doses.

<https://www.politico.eu/article/europe-coronavirus-vaccine-shot-delay/>

COVID-19: Britons must take coronavirus test before travelling to Ireland

Visitors to Ireland will have to produce a negative COVID-19 test taken within the previous 72 hours, as the country's government brings in a raft of tough new restrictions.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-britons-must-take-coronavirus-test-before-travelling-to-ireland-12180841>

Azar: states should not let prioritization slow COVID-19 vaccinations

U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar said on Wednesday that states should not let recommendations to prioritize certain groups like essential workers slow the pace of COVID-19 vaccinations. "Those are simply recommendations, and they should never stand in the way of getting shots in arms," Azar said at a press conference for the Operation Warp Speed vaccination program. If states are struggling to distribute the vaccine "then by all means you want to be opening up to people 70 and over or 65 and over," he said.

<https://uk.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-vaccines/azar-states-should-not-let-prioritization-slow-covid-19-vaccinations-idUKFWN2JH0XN>

Covid-19: Johnson warns England's lockdown won't end 'with a bang'

The end of England's lockdown will not happen with a "big bang" but will instead be a "gradual unwrapping", Boris Johnson has told MPs. The prime minister made the comments in the Commons ahead of a retrospective vote later on the lockdown measures. He said the legislation runs until 31 March to allow a "controlled" easing of restrictions back into local tiers. Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer said the government's decisions "have led us to the position we're now in". Health

Secretary Matt Hancock said there were now 30,074 patients with coronavirus in UK hospitals. All of the UK is now under strict virus curbs, with Wales, Northern Ireland and most of Scotland also in lockdown.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-55561024>

Covid Vaccine Rollouts in Europe Are Off to a Shaky Start

With a more contagious variant of the coronavirus forcing England to impose a strict new national lockdown and European nations extending restrictions in the face of rising cases, political leaders have promised that mass vaccinations will bring an end to the suffering. But in the race to beat the virus, the virus is still way out in front. There are shortages of needles in Italy, Greece and other countries. Spain has not trained enough nurses. France has only managed to vaccinate around 7,000 people. Poland's program was rocked by scandal after it was revealed that celebrities were given preferential treatment. There are calls in Germany to take control over vaccine purchases from European Union authorities. Nearly every country in Europe has complained about burdensome paperwork.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/05/world/europe/europe-covid-vaccinations.html>

Balkans feel abandoned as vaccinations kick off in Europe

When thousands of people across the European Union began rolling up their sleeves last month to get a coronavirus vaccination shot, one corner of the continent was left behind, feeling isolated and abandoned: the Balkans. Balkan nations have struggled to get access to COVID-19 vaccines from multiple companies and programs, but most of the nations on Europe's southeastern periphery are still waiting for their first vaccines to arrive, with no firm timeline for the start of their national inoculation drives. What is already clear is that Albania, Bosnia, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia — home to some 20 million people — will lag far behind the EU's 27 nations and Britain in efforts to reach herd immunity by quickly vaccinating a large number of their people.

<https://apnews.com/article/europe-albania-kosovo-serbia-montenegro-d91575ce2e00705f9fa733737b83da25>

British PM Johnson says England's lockdown will be slowly unwrapped

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson won parliament's backing for England's latest lockdown on Wednesday after telling lawmakers that schools would be the first to reopen when he can start a "gradual unwrapping" of the strict measures. Faced with criticism over the timing of the lockdown and the abrupt closure of all schools, Johnson defended his decision by saying the new, more contagious, coronavirus variant and the threat it posed to the health service offered little choice. Johnson justified his decision on schools, which some lawmakers said threatened to hurt the opportunities of millions of children, by saying he did "everything in our power to keep them open" until "every other option had been closed off".

<https://uk.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-britain-johnson/british-pm-johnson-says-englands-lockdown-will-be-slowly-unwrapped-idUKKBN29B1G4>

Partisan Exits

Leak of November lockdown plan linked to 'surge in new infections'

The leak of plans for a November lockdown in England to the media approximately a week before restrictions came into force has been linked by researchers to a jump in Covid-19 cases caused by people rushing to socialise before the deadline. "There was a surge in new infections starting a couple of days before the lockdown - and running for about a week or so after the lockdown was implemented," said the study's lead author, Paul Hunter, a professor in medicine at the University of East Anglia.

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/jan/06/leak-of-november-covid-lockdown-plan-linked-to-surge-in-new-infections-say-researchers>

Retreat of the UK coronavirus lockdown skeptics

What a difference a month (and a new strain of coronavirus) makes. The last time MPs held a major vote on coronavirus measures, on December 1, it prompted the biggest rebellion of Boris Johnson's premiership with 55 of his backbenchers voting against new restrictions. When the House of Commons is asked to vote on the new national lockdown on Wednesday, any such backlash among the lockdown-skeptic wing of Johnson's party is likely to be much smaller, several MPs predicted, with a number of former rebels saying they would now back the government.

<https://www.politico.eu/article/retreat-of-the-uk-coronavirus-lockdown-skeptics/>

Covid lockdown England: Met Police arrest rule-breakers in London

From today across England it is illegal to leave home without a 'reasonable excuse' such as essential shopping - Scotland Yard arrests suspects in Parliament Square and seven outside Assange case including Eric Levy, 92 - Boris Johnson will give statement to the Commons today ahead of a vote on his lockdown measures tonight - Police have warned they will be taking a tougher line on enforcing the rules with fines issued more quickly - But some officers say it will be impossible to fine every lockdown-flouter as people lie about why they're out

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-9117399/Lockdown-LAW-Boris-Johnson-set-face-MPs-ahead-vote.html>

'No law can order us': Greek Christians defy COVID ban on Epiphany services

Greek Christian churches held Epiphany services on Wednesday, openly defying government coronavirus restrictions that banned public gatherings including religious ceremonies on one of the most important days of the Orthodox calendar. Despite a plea by Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis for Church authorities to set an example during a crisis that has killed more than 5,000 in Greece, worshippers attended morning services, although limits were placed on the number allowed into churches at one time. "State orders are one thing and faith is another," said a 38-year-old worshipper who gave her name as Stavroula, after attending morning service at a church in the outskirts of Athens. "No law can order us what to do."

<https://uk.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-greece-epiphany/no-law-can-order-us-greek-christians-defy-covid-ban-on-epiphany-services-idUKL8N2JG482>

Continued Lockdown

Germany toughens lockdown as it struggles to control second wave

Germany is extending its lockdown until the end of January and banning non-essential travel in those areas worst-hit by the coronavirus pandemic, as it battles to control an upsurge in new infections. "We are appealing to people to reduce their contacts to an absolute minimum," Angela Merkel told reporters after a videoconference with the leaders of Germany's 16 federal states. The chancellor said infection rates were still too high and many hospitals were reaching the limits of their capacity. Germany also had to be "particularly careful" in view of the new viral variant spreading from the UK that was much more infectious than previous forms of the coronavirus, she said.

<https://www.ft.com/content/2ec52089-b9e3-4ad2-bb23-f3a4a09eccbe>

Merkel Tightens German Lockdown

Markets are eyeing an ever-worsening situation with coronavirus in many parts of the world. In the U.K., Prime Minister Boris Johnson says one in 50 people in England and one in 30 in London have the virus as the nation steps up its vaccination drive. In Europe's biggest economy, the lockdown has been extended and tightened. German Chancellor Angela Merkel and state leaders agreed to limit movements and sharpened restrictions on private gatherings. Bloomberg's Maria Tadeo reports on "Bloomberg Daybreak: Europe."

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/videos/2021-01-06/merkel-tightens-german-lockdown-video>

Israel economy to lose up to \$1.3 billion a week from tighter lockdown

A tightening of Israel's third nationwide coronavirus lockdown is expected to cost the country's economy as much as 4.0 billion shekels (\$1.3 billion) a week, according to government and central bank estimates. New restrictions that will tighten a lockdown imposed on Dec. 27 will take effect at midnight and last 14 days. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has described the curbs as Israel's final push to stop a sharp rise in COVID-19 cases while it presses ahead with a rapid vaccination drive, hoping to emerge from the crisis within weeks. Israel's vaccination campaign has reached nearly 15% of its 9 million population in about two weeks.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-israel-economy/israel-economy-to-lose-up-to-1-3-billion-a-week-from-tighter-lockdown-idUSKBN29B1HM>

Hungary should extend partial lockdown beyond Monday, surgeon general says

Hungary should extend a partial lockdown currently due to end on Monday because of a rise in coronavirus infections in neighbouring countries, Surgeon General Cecilia Muller said on Wednesday. The measures imposed by Prime Minister Viktor Orban's government in November include a 1900 GMT curfew, a ban on all gatherings and the closure of hotels and restaurants.

<https://uk.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-hungary-lockdown/update-1-hungary-should-extend-partial-lockdown-beyond-monday-surgeon-general-says-idUKL1N2JH0S4>

German economy can get through long virus lockdown - finance minister

Europe's biggest economy can hold out through a coronavirus shutdown for a long time, German Finance Minister Olaf Scholz said on Wednesday, adding he expected lower levels of government debt than after the financial crisis of 2008. "We can hold out for a long time," Scholz told ZDF television. "Budget legislators in the German parliament have authorised us to provide the aid that is needed," he said.

<https://uk.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-germany-scholz/german-economy-can-get-through-long-virus-lockdown-finance-minister-idUKL8N2JH0RE>

Swiss plan to extend COVID-19 restrictions to end of February

Switzerland plans to extend its lockdown restrictions by five weeks to the end of February, including closing all restaurants, cultural and recreational sites, the government said on Wednesday. A formal decision is due next week after consultations with cantons. Exemptions for regions less severely hit by the coronavirus have been scrapped, the government said, with a country-wide approach now entering force. The extension of the so-called lockdown-light is needed because "it is already foreseeable that the number of cases will not decrease significantly and sustainably in the coming weeks," the government said.

<https://uk.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-swiss-idUKZ8N2HS00G>

Scientific Viewpoint

Welsh researchers developing 'revolutionary' skin patch vaccine for coronavirus

Welsh researchers developing a 'revolutionary' skin patch vaccine for coronavirus say they hope to have a prototype ready as early as March. The body-worn patches - similar to those used by people aiming to give up smoking - are designed to break the skin barrier and deliver medicines in a less invasive way. Swansea University scientists say the world-first 'smart patches' will also be able to tell how effective the vaccine is for each recipient by measuring their body's response. Researchers say the patches could prove a cheaper and easier way of administering vaccines, and would be welcomed by those who dislike traditional hypodermic needles.

<https://www.itv.com/news/wales/2021-01-06/welsh-researchers-developing-revolutionary-skin-patch-vaccine-for-coronavirus>

COVID-19: Moderna vaccine approved by EU drugs regulator

Moderna's COVID-19 vaccine has been approved for use by the EU's drug regulator. The decision by the European Medicines Agency came on the same day as the Netherlands began administering its first doses against coronavirus. EMA executive director Emer Cooke said: "This vaccine provides us with another tool to overcome the current emergency." The decision, which must be rubber stamped by the EU's executive commission, came hours after nurse Sanna Elkadiri, 39, became the first person in the Netherlands to receive the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-moderna-vaccine-approved-by-eu-drugs-regulator-12180512>

COVID-19: Single vaccine dose leads to 'greater risk' from new coronavirus variants, South African experts warn

Britain is putting vulnerable people at risk from mutant variants of the coronavirus by delaying the second dose of the vaccine, according to South Africa's top adviser on immunisations. South Africa is suffering a sharp spike in cases, driven by a new variant that may reduce the effectiveness of vaccines. That threat has been underlined by new lab tests showing that antibodies may be at least 10 times less effective against the new variant, which is separate to the mutation that was originally identified in England.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-single-vaccine-dose-leads-to-greater-risk-from-new-coronavirus-variants-south-african-experts-warn-12180837>

South African Covid variant may affect vaccine efficacy, warn scientists

The new coronavirus variant linked to a surge in Covid-19 cases in South Africa is not only more infectious than previous forms of the virus but could make some vaccines less effective. Scientists racing to understand the new strain said they still expected the current crop of approved vaccines to work but were worried that a specific mutation, also identified in a new variant in Brazil, could affect the way the virus responds.

<https://www.ft.com/content/c2aa5ea4-66b9-4f64-9e74-7c89c12f9461>

Moderna COVID-19 vaccine approved in Europe, Dutch play catch-up

COVID-19 vaccine won regulatory approval in Europe on Wednesday and the Netherlands belatedly started its vaccination campaign as European countries accelerated a patchy drive to defeat the coronavirus pandemic.

<https://uk.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus/moderna-covid-19-vaccine-approved-in-europe-dutch-play-catch-up-idUKKBN29B1DM>

COVID-19: UK scientists develop first 'skin patch' coronavirus vaccine for those scared of needles

The device from experts at Swansea University is covered in tiny microneedles. It would work like a nicotine patch and need to be worn on the arm for 24 hours. It has been designed to monitor the body's response to the COVID-19 vaccine. The concept could also be adapted to deliver vaccines against other diseases. A working model will come before April, and commercial release within 3 years.

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-9118339/Researchers-claim-world-s-coronavirus-vaccine-patch.html>

COVID-19: China blocks WHO team from entering country to study coronavirus origin

The head of the World Health Organisation has said he is "very disappointed" China has denied its experts access to investigating the origins of coronavirus. A ten-strong team of international scientists and virologists had been due to set off in early January as part of a long-awaited mission to probe early cases of coronavirus, first reported over a year ago in China's Wuhan province. But Chinese officials have not yet finalised the necessary permissions for the team to enter the country, despite the WHO having been talking with Chinese officials since July.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-china-blocks-who-team-from-entering-country-to-study-coronavirus-origin-12180308>

WHO team investigating origins of Covid denied entry to China

A World Health Organisation (WHO) team due to investigate the origins of Covid in the Chinese city of Wuhan has been denied entry to the country. The WHO said the problem was a lack of visa clearances. The long-awaited probe was agreed upon by Beijing in December after many months of negotiations with the WHO. WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said he was "disappointed" Chinese officials have not finalised the permissions to allow a team of experts into China.

<https://www.standard.co.uk/news/world/who-team-investigating-origins-of-covid-denied-entry-to-china-b711454.html>

Early convalescent plasma may lower risk of severe COVID in seniors

Plasma from recovered COVID-19 patients with high levels of antibodies appeared to delay or stop progression of illness in mildly ill older adults infected with the novel coronavirus, a study published today in the New England Journal of Medicine concluded. Researchers at Fundacion INFANT in Buenos Aires, Argentina, led the small randomized, controlled, double-blind trial of the effects of infusing convalescent plasma in 160 older adults within 72 hours of symptom onset from Jun 4 to Oct 25, 2020, half of whom received the treatment. The patients were either 75 years and older (88 [55%]), with or without underlying illnesses, or 65 to 74 years with at least one underlying condition (72 [45%]).

<https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2021/01/early-convalescent-plasma-may-lower-risk-severe-covid-seniors>

Governors urged to ensure COVID vaccination as CDC addresses adverse events

Today in separate press conferences the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and members of Operation Warp Speed addressed the two major hurdles facing COVID-19 vaccination campaigns in the United States: slow distribution and safety concerns. Since the vaccines were approved for emergency use in mid-December, most states have focused on vaccinating the recommended top priority groups: healthcare workers and residents of long-term care facilities. But no states have yet to fully use their current allotment of vaccine. "We cannot let perfection be the enemy of good," said Department of Health and Human Services Director Alex Azar during an Operation Warp Speed media briefing on vaccine rollout. "Prioritized recommendations are simply recommendations, they should never stand in the way of getting shots in the arms."

<https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2021/01/governors-urged-ensure-covid-vaccination-cdc-addresses-adverse-events>

European officials OK Moderna vaccine for emergency use

The European Medicines Agency (EMA) today cleared Moderna's COVID-19 vaccine for emergency use, clearing the way for a second vaccine to be used in much of Europe, where the more transmissible B117 variant virus appears to be spreading quickly. In a statement today, the EMA said the vaccine is authorized for use in adults and provides another tool for battling the pandemic. In Ireland, hospitalizations have now topped the country's first peak, according to CNN. Tony Holohan, MBBS, MPH, chief medical officer of Ireland's health department, today warned that the country is in a serious phase of its surge and there is evidence of an increasing presence of the UK variant.

<https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2021/01/european-officials-ok-moderna-vaccine-emergency-use>

Moderna scores COVID-19 vaccine backing in Europe, setting off another major vaccination push

Two weeks after European regulators endorsed Pfizer and BioNTech's COVID-19 vaccine, a second shot is getting ready for a broad rollout in the region. Moderna scored regulatory support for its vaccine, enabling health officials to expand their vaccination push amid fresh lockdowns and increases in cases. The European Medicines Agency recommended a conditional marketing

authorization for Moderna's vaccine, and the European Commission signed off. The shot "provides us with another tool to overcome the current emergency," EMA's executive director Emer Cooke said in a statement. Europe has secured 160 million doses of the vaccine, and the first deliveries are set to begin next week.

<https://www.fiercepharma.com/pharma/moderna-scores-covid-19-vaccine-backing-europe-setting-off-another-major-vaccination-push>

Coronavirus Resurgence

More infectious COVID-19 variant in at least five U.S. states - NIH Director

A more contagious variant of COVID-19 that has swept through the United Kingdom has been reported in at least five states in the U.S., National Institutes of Health Director Francis Collins said in an interview to the Washington Post on Wednesday. "We have now seen that same UK virus in the U.S. in at least five states and I would be surprised if that doesn't grow pretty rapidly," Collins said, adding that it doesn't however seem to be more severe. Last week, Reuters reported that Florida became the third known U.S. state to identify such a case, with two other cases identified in Colorado and California. Scientists have said newly developed vaccines should be equally effective against both variants.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-nih/more-infectious-covid-19-variant-in-at-least-five-u-s-states-nih-director-idUSKBN29B2H6>

Record-high COVID-19 hospitalizations strain southwestern Ontario health-care system

A southwestern Ontario hospital grappling with record-high COVID-19 admissions was cancelling surgeries and transferring patients to other facilities this week while another scrapped procedures to free up staff who could care for the gravely ill. The capacity crunch due to rising cases of the novel coronavirus had the head of a group representing Ontario's hospitals warning that the acute-care system is more stretched than ever and the situation could get worse. The Windsor Regional Hospital cancelled all non-urgent, elective surgeries indefinitely and is preparing to send patients to hospitals near and far, hospital CEO David Musyj said Wednesday. Some acute-care patients are being transferred to the hospital in nearby Chatham-Kent, Ont., he said, while those with higher needs are being transferred to London, Ont.

<https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2021/01/06/record-high-covid-19-hospitalizations-strain-southwestern-ontario-health-care-system.html>

COVID-19: Benjamin Netanyahu blames Israel's spike in coronavirus cases on 'British mutation'

Benjamin Netanyahu has blamed the "British mutation" of COVID-19 for a big spike in coronavirus cases in Israel. The Israeli prime minister said the pandemic was "spreading at top speed with the British mutation" as his government placed the country under stricter lockdown measures for the third time. "It [the British mutation] has reached Israel and is claiming many lives. We need to impose a full lockdown immediately," said Mr Netanyahu.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-benjamin-netanyahu-blames-israels-spike-in-coronavirus-cases-on-british-mutation-12180641>

U.S. sets COVID-19 hospitalization record as states work to ramp up vaccination efforts

More Americans were hospitalized with COVID-19 on Wednesday than at any time since the pandemic began, as total coronavirus infections crossed the 21 million mark, deaths soared across much of the United States and a historic vaccination effort lagged. U.S. COVID-19 hospitalizations reached a record 130,834 late on Tuesday, according to a Reuters tally of public health data, while 3,684 reported fatalities was the second-highest single-day death toll of the pandemic. That appalling toll meant that on Tuesday someone died from COVID-19 every 24 seconds in the United States. With total deaths surpassing 357,000, one in every 914 U.S. residents has died from

COVID-19 since the pandemic began, according to a Reuters analysis.

<https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-health-coronavirus-usa/us-sets-covid-19-hospitalization-record-as-states-ramp-up-vaccination-efforts-idUKKBN29B254>

Covid-19: UK records more than 1,000 daily virus deaths

The UK has reported a further 1,041 people have died with coronavirus, the highest daily death toll since April. It came as 62,322 new cases were recorded, the highest daily rise since mass testing began, and as MPs supported England's lockdown. Health Secretary Matt Hancock earlier said doctors could be forced to ration treatment without the new curbs. There are 30,074 Covid patients in UK hospitals, he said, as an ambulance trust told of severe pressure. Current patient numbers are 39% higher than the previous peak on 12 April last year, when 21,684 were in hospital. The number of those who died within 28 days of a positive test in the past week is 37% higher than the previous seven days.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-55565254>

Swamped Hospitals Expose Depth of Britain's Unfolding Crisis

If the British government's goal throughout the coronavirus pandemic has been to protect the health service, the next few weeks will be the biggest challenge yet. After overtaking Italy again as the country with Europe's highest death toll, the U.K. is at the epicenter of the continent's struggle to contain Covid-19. Daily infections are at a record—one in 50 people in England now have the disease—while Prime Minister Boris Johnson this week shut schools and ordered the population to stay at home. Medical staff say they may be forced to turn people away from hospitals if the latest lockdown fails to curb quickly enough a new strain of the virus that emerged in southeast England last month.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-01-06/swamped-hospitals-expose-depth-of-britain-s-unfolding-crisis>

New strain of coronavirus has been circulating in Spain for two weeks, experts conclude

The mutation of SARS-CoV-2 first identified in the United Kingdom has been detected by a research foundation in Valencia in two patients with no epidemiological connection to the country. The new, more contagious strain of the coronavirus that was first detected in the United Kingdom is already circulating in Spain between people who have no epidemiological connection with that country. That's according to a preliminary genetic analysis carried out by the Fisabio Foundation research institute in Valencia, which has found the same mutations of SARS-CoV-2 that were detected in the UK in samples taken two weeks ago from two patients who had not traveled to the country, nor come into contact with someone who had.

<https://english.elpais.com/society/2021-01-06/new-strain-of-coronavirus-has-been-circulating-in-spain-for-two-weeks-experts-conclude.html>

Health Secretary Says Spain Can Avoid New Lockdown

Silvia Cazon, Spain's Secretary of State for Health, has claimed that Spain can avoid a full national lockdown despite fears of a third wave alongside the new British mutant strain. Speaking to Hoy por Hoy, Silvia Cazon said that Spain can implement "immediate measures" using "current instruments" to curb the rise in Covid cases without resorting to another national lockdown.

<https://www.euroweeklynews.com/2021/01/06/health-secretary-says-spain-can-avoid-new-lockdown/>

Spain's regions tighten restrictions as Covid-19 cases surge

Valencian authorities are confining 26 municipalities, Extremadura is closing bars and restaurants in its main cities, and La Rioja will limit all social gatherings to four people. After partially loosening restrictions during the Christmas holidays, Spanish regional governments are tightening their coronavirus measures again as cases continue to soar amid what experts are already describing as a third wave of the pandemic. The decisions come as Health Ministry data on Tuesday showed a 25% rise in reported cases over the last seven days. Nine Spanish territories now have an incidence

rate categorized as “extreme risk” by health authorities.

https://english.elpais.com/spanish_news/2021-01-05/spains-regions-tighten-restrictions-as-covid-19-cases-surge.html

COVID-19: UK records 1,041 COVID deaths and highest daily increase in cases

The UK has recorded its highest number of COVID-related deaths since 21 April, and the highest daily increase in cases. The government figures reported on Wednesday afternoon showed another 1,041 people had died within 28 days of testing positive for the virus. This is the 10th time since the pandemic began that the daily number of deaths has been above 1,000. The figure was a significant increase from the 830 deaths reported on Tuesday, with both days likely to contain some deaths that took place over the Christmas and New Year period that have only just been reported.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-uk-records-1-041-covid-deaths-and-highest-daily-increase-in-cases-12180762>

A third lockdown should not be ruled out in France, says health expert

A third national lockdown to rein in the COVID-19 pandemic should not be ruled out in France, where new daily cases are picking up, but it is still too early to make that decision, a senior medical expert said on Wednesday. "A new lockdown should not be ruled out," Eric Caumes, head of infectious diseases expert at Paris' Pitie-Salpetriere hospital, told BFM TV.

<https://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/a-third-lockdown-should-not-be-ruled-out-in-france--says-health-expert/46263934>

3rd Lockdown In France? Bars Restaurants Fear The Worst Amid Vaccination Controversy

With Covid-19 cases hitting a plateau in France, it appears bars and restaurants will remain closed beyond the target date of January 20. The news comes as the government tries to reboot a vaccination strategy that has been widely criticized as too slow. Back in late November, President Emmanuel Macron spelled out 3 stages for re-opening the country after its second lockdown when daily cases peaked at 86,852 on November 7. But following the first stage that allowed many local businesses to re-open, France's case stopped falling and eventually settled into a more or less steady pace of 15,000 per day.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/chrisobrien/2021/01/06/3rd-lockdown-in-france-bars-restaurants-fear-the-worst-amid-vaccination-controversy/>

Covid variant behind latest UK lockdown now spreading in France, officials say

French health officials say a potentially more contagious strain of the virus causing Covid-19 has caused a handful of cases in the country, including the Paris region. The variant, identified in Britain last month, has been linked to a surge in cases that has forced the UK government to impose the most restrictive lockdown since early last summer. As France scrambles to catch up with its neighbours in vaccinating against Covid-19, top officials said they were closely watching for signs of the potentially highly contagious new variant, which has been identified in a small number of cases. "At this stage, we have about 10 suspected or confirmed cases" of the variant, which "is not spreading widely in France" for the moment, Health Minister Olivier Véran told RTL radio.

<https://www.rfi.fr/en/france/20210105-covid-variant-behind-strict-new-uk-lockdown-spreading-in-france-officials-say>

Tokyo daily coronavirus cases exceed 1,500, renewing record - media

Rising infections have driven Tokyo and surrounding areas to the highest level of a four-stage alert, prompting regional governors to call for a declaration of emergency that Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga is expected to announce on Thursday. The health ministry held a meeting of infectious disease experts on Wednesday, the second in as many days. They have called for stricter and longer countermeasures, while Suga has sought a more limited response to avoid damaging the economy. "Even if we take strong measures immediately, it will be difficult to bring the Tokyo metropolitan area down to stage 3 by the end of January," Takaji Wakita, chief of the National Institute of Infectious Diseases, told reporters after the meeting

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-japan/tokyo-daily-coronavirus-cases-exceed-1500-renewing-record-media-idINKBN29B0L4>

Legal revisions would add weight to Japan's COVID-19 response

With numbers of new COVID-19 cases across the Tokyo region surging to record levels, the government is expected to announce a state of emergency this week for the capital and three adjacent prefectures. But Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga's government already has doubts about its effectiveness, and wants the Diet to approve a bill by the start of next month that would revise the 2020 special measures law on infectious diseases. The revision could strengthen the existing law by levying fines against businesses that ignore government demands to shorten their hours or shut to prevent the spread of infection.

<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2021/01/06/national/japan-coronavirus-response/>

China hits city of 11 million with tight restrictions as more than 100 COVID cases discovered

Travel has been restricted to a northern Chinese city of 11 million people and schools closed as authorities moved on Wednesday to snuff out a cluster of COVID-19 cases after more than 100 infections were confirmed. Ten major highways leading into the city of Shijiazhuang, around 200 miles south of Beijing, have been closed and a bus terminus was closed in an attempt to prevent the virus spreading beyond the city in Hebei province. China's state-run Global Times newspaper said all train ticket sales from neighboring Hebei province into the capital were halted and Shijiazhuang's long-distance bus station closed as officials declared Hebei in "wartime mode" against the virus.

<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/china-covid-lockdown-hebei-shijiazhuang-city-coronavirus-cases-discovered/>

Virus Has Recently Infected 1 in 50 in England

As England re-entered lockdown on Tuesday, new figures showed that one in 50 people had recently been infected with the virus, and officials warned that some restrictions on daily life could still be needed next winter. Speaking at a news conference, Prime Minister Boris Johnson promised to focus government efforts on rolling out its strained mass vaccination program intended to prevent a surge in infections of a highly transmissible variant of the virus from overwhelming the health service.

<https://www.nytimes.com/live/2021/01/05/world/covid-19-coronavirus>

NSW tightening protocols on hotel quarantine drivers to stop COVID-19 spread

New South Wales health authorities will ramp up testing on workers transporting Australians returning from overseas, after an infected driver unwittingly put thousands of people in Greater Sydney at risk of contracting COVID-19. Drivers had been getting weekly throat and nose swabs for the virus, but from January 21, all people transporting passengers coming back from overseas will have a daily saliva test. The test involves taking a small amount of saliva to detect fragments of the virus and is about 85 per cent accurate at picking up COVID-19.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-01-07/coronavirus-testing-for-hotel-quarantine-drivers-and-transport/13037400>

Australian nurses in the frontline fight to save lives as coronavirus overwhelms UK hospitals

The coronavirus health crisis facing the United Kingdom is dire, this week forcing the country back into lockdown until at least mid February as authorities brace for the potential of hospitals being completely overwhelmed. There are routinely more than 50,000 new cases being recorded each day as an aggressive new strain of the virus takes hold. Health workers are stretched to the limit, and among them are many Australian professionals. Here, three Australian nurses tell first-hand of their experiences

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-01-06/australian-nurses-describe-working-in-english-uk-hospitals/13031940>

Indonesia to impose more targeted restrictions to fight COVID-19

Indonesia will impose two weeks of increased coronavirus restrictions in parts of its most populous island of Java from Jan. 11 and in the resort island of Bali, to support hospitals and reduce fatality rates, a minister said on Wednesday. The chief economic minister, Airlangga Hartarto, said some of

the measures include changes to opening hours for malls and limited capacity at restaurants and places of worship.

<https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-health-coronavirus-indonesia/indonesia-to-impose-more-targeted-restrictions-to-fight-covid-19-idUKKBN29B0M5>

New Lockdown

Ministers convene to approve full lockdown starting Friday

Netanyahu and Gantz said to agree on plan to shutter schools and most businesses; both appear to blame UK virus variant for recent steep rise in cases. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defense Minister Benny Gantz have reached an agreement on tightening the current nationwide lockdown for 10 days, shuttering schools and nonessential businesses and closing supermarkets at 7 p.m., according to Hebrew media reports Tuesday, with the aim of reversing a steep spike in infections that have passed 8,000 a day.

<https://www.timesofisrael.com/ministers-expected-to-back-full-10-day-lockdown-closing-schools-and-businesses/>

Boris Johnson says no end date for lockdown

Prime minister Boris Johnson has confirmed that the end of lockdown may be delayed beyond mid-February, telling MPs the government will be "extremely cautious" about lifting restrictions and reopening schools. His comments came as anti-lockdown backbenchers raised concern about lockdown regulations published last night which set a date of 31 March for them to remain in force. Announcing England's third national lockdown on Monday, Mr Johnson said that the vaccination could progress fast enough to allow restrictions to be eased "by the middle of February, if things go well and with a fair wind in our sails".

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/lockdown-england-end-date-boris-johnson-b1783177.html>

Lockdown in Hebei provincial capital amid most daily Covid-19 cases in months

Shijiazhuang, capital of Hebei, enters lockdown after accounting for most of province's 63 cases, the highest daily figure for months in mainland China. First locally transmitted infections in the northern province since June, and health authorities expect case numbers to rise

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/science/article/3116597/coronavirus-china-raises-alarm-after-63-local-infections-found>

Lockdown uncertainty causing anxiety among UK students

Lockdown uncertainty is causing anxiety among students in the UK as classes have been moved to remote learning and exams cancelled in a bid to stem the spread of COVID-19. In England, schools and universities have been closed for seven-weeks as part of Prime Minister Boris Johnson's latest COVID-19 lockdown. The government has confirmed students will not be asked to sit GCSE and A-level exams. A-Level student Maryam Mazhar said she is hoping to go to university to study history. "I definitely feel quite anxious now, especially because the government hasn't outlined what the methods of grading are going to be this year," Ms Mazhar said. The exams regulator is now considering a number of options. Both families and schools are desperately hoping pupils will return after half-term.

https://www.skynews.com.au/details/_6220513010001

Coronavirus: Met to enforce lockdown rules more strictly

Met Police officers have been told to enforce Covid regulations more strictly during the latest lockdown. Under the new instructions, people who attend large gatherings will be fined along with organisers, while those not wearing face coverings without good excuse will also be targeted. Londoners have also been warned to expect officers to be "more inquisitive" if they are seen outside. Deputy Assistant Commissioner Matt Twist said police would "act robustly". England's third national lockdown legally came into force overnight with measures including a stay-at-home order

and the closure of schools to most pupils.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/amp/uk-england-london-55557034>

Britain's Asda urges lockdown shoppers not to stockpile

British supermarket group Asda on Wednesday urged its customers to shop considerately and not buy more than they normally would after new COVID-19 lockdowns were introduced across the United Kingdom to stem the spread of the virus. Under the new rules in England, schools are closed to most pupils, people should work from home if possible, and all hospitality and non-essential shops are closed. Semi-autonomous executives in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have imposed similar measures. With the hospitality sector shut, there is pressure on supermarkets to meet demand. December trade hit record levels.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-asda-idUSL8N2JH20J>

COVID risk 'extraordinarily high' if lockdown rules ignored - official

The risks for Britons without COVID-19 vaccinations were extraordinarily high if people don't follow the current lockdown rules, England's Chief Medical Officer Chris Whitty said on Tuesday, adding that the risks will not disappear in the spring. "If people don't take the 'stay at home' seriously, the risk at this point in time, in the middle of winter with this new variant, is extraordinarily high," Whitty said. "We shouldn't kid ourselves ... this just disappears with spring."

<https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-health-coronavirus-britain-whitty/covid-risk-extraordinarily-high-if-lockdown-rules-ignored-official-idUKKBN29A281>