

COVID-19 Lockdown Exit Analysis

29th Jan 2021

News Highlights

Global vaccination needed to reduce the risk of new strains

Sir Jeremy Farrar, a member of the UK Scientific Group for Emergencies, has urged global vaccine rollout to prevent further new strains emerging. [He said countries with access to vaccines could donate a portion of their stock to the Covax Initiative](#), which seeks to ensure more equitable global access. 'The thing to do at the moment is to vaccinate as many people as we can in the world to drive down the amount of transmission and prevent these new variants springing up,' he said.

Africa secures new vaccine doses

A further 400 million COVID-19 vaccine doses have been procured for Africa via the Serum Institute of India. [The continent procured 270 million doses from AstraZeneca, Johnson & Johnson and Pfizer earlier this month](#). It also expects to receive 600 million through Covax. The continent seeks to vaccinate sixty percent of its 1.3 billion people to achieve herd immunity, as cases surge and it bears a death toll of 2.5% compared to the global average of 2.2%.

Lebanon sees deadly lockdown protests

Protestors and security forces clashed in Lebanon amidst an ongoing row over the country's lockdown measures and their effect on the country's economy. [One man died from injuries sustained during the clash, which occurred on the third consecutive night of demonstrations in Tripoli](#). More than 220 people required medical treatment. The lockdown, which has been extended to February 8th, has left many jobless and exacerbated the country's economic crisis.

EMA weighs in on second dose debate

The European Medicines Agency (EMA) has sided against the policy being adopted in some countries, including EU member states, of delaying the second dose of COVID-19 vaccine beyond the three weeks indicated by manufacturers. This approach seeks to maximise the number of initial vaccine doses available and ensure as many people as possible receive at least partial protection against COVID-19. [Now, the EMA recommends second dose injections are given within the manufacturer recommended three week timespan](#), as this was the gap between doses used by them when the new vaccine was studied in clinical trials.

Lockdown Exit

Covid-19: How to break the cycle of lockdowns

The dominance of new, more transmissible variants means that a policy of trying to "live with" the virus will fail, certainly in the UK where the new B.1.1.7 variant is now the most common. I know of no country that is successfully living with the virus while avoiding lockdown and restriction cycles, a high death toll, or—as in the UK—both. We need to set our sights instead on where we want to be and then work out how to get there. The role models we have are Vietnam (35 deaths, 98 million population), Thailand (73 deaths, 70 million population), South Korea (1371 deaths, 51 million population), and New Zealand (25 deaths, 5 million population) where people have been living much

more normal lives for months. Following their example, the way out is for the UK to pursue a national suppression strategy—zero tolerance for any community transmission—which comes with the added benefit of protecting ourselves from homegrown vaccine resistant variants.

<https://blogs.bmj.com/bmj/2021/01/27/covid-19-how-to-break-the-cycle-of-lockdowns/>

Behind AstraZeneca's Covid-19 Vaccine Stumble

The setbacks, which come on the eve of a decision from regulators whether to recommend the shot for use in Europe, suggest AstraZeneca is falling behind in the vaccine arms race. The company has relatively little experience in vaccines, a tricky, typically low-margin niche in the global pharmaceuticals industry. The manufacturing process the company uses, piggybacking on a chimpanzee cold virus, can be more difficult to quickly scale up than the one employed by Pfizer Inc. and Moderna Inc., both of which use a new genetic technology. The company has also proved maladroit politically. After learning of the glitches early this month, AstraZeneca deployed engineers to troubleshoot but didn't warn European officials, hoping the company could fix the problems to minimize the dent in production, according to a person familiar with the matter. Lower output of raw vaccine substance had first been spotted in December, but worsened in January, with the clock ticking. When production didn't improve, AstraZeneca's bad news hit like a bombshell. Now it is grappling with a political backlash just when the pandemic seems to be entering a more dangerous phase.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/behind-astrazenecas-covid-19-vaccine-stumble-11611871968>

Covid: Social workers 'braced for tsunami of needs' after lockdown

Social workers say they are braced for a "tsunami of needs" as the UK recovers from the pandemic. The British Association of Social Workers (BASW) expects workloads to increase as restrictions are lifted. One worker described a "big surge" in referrals after the first lockdown and the fears of missing something wrong. Officials in all four nations praised the efforts of social workers and highlighted schemes to help vulnerable children set up in the pandemic.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-55825991>

Opinion | Inside the U.K.'s Second Covid Wave

Nearly a year into the pandemic, the situation in Britain is dire. A vicious first wave has given way to an even more deadly second one. On Tuesday, the country passed a milestone of 100,000 deaths from the coronavirus — which amounts to one of the worst fatality rates in the world. A national lockdown, in place since Jan. 4, has only recently begun to lower the eye-wateringly high number of cases, fueled in part by the emergence of a new, apparently more contagious strain of the virus. The toll on the National Health Service is close to unbearable: Nearly 40,000 Covid-19 patients are in hospitals, almost double the peak last year.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/28/opinion/uk-covid-deaths-hospitals.html>

Australia extends Trans-Tasman travel bubble suspension for a further 72 hours, after New Zealand detects two new coronavirus cases

Australia has extended its suspension of the safe travel bubble with New Zealand for a further 72 hours. The decision was made after another two cases of the South African strain of coronavirus were detected in returned travellers in Auckland. "This recommendation has been made to the Australian Government," Acting Chief Medical Officer Professor Michael Kidd said. "The government has accepted the advice, and so the travel pause on green zone flights from New Zealand to Australia has been extended for a further 72 hours until 2pm on Sunday, 31 January."

<https://www.9news.com.au/national/australia-extends-transtasman-travel-bubble-suspension-for-a-further-72-hours/81f7a88d-4677-4e35-814a-054e3a8a191c>

Covid: Australian states to reopen to Sydney after outbreak contained

Two Australian states will reopen their borders to New South Wales (NSW) after it managed to

control a Covid-19 outbreak in Sydney. South Australia and Queensland will remove their travel restrictions on Sunday and Monday respectively. It comes after NSW reported 11 days without a locally acquired infection. About 180 cases were tied to the Sydney cluster, which emerged just before Christmas and prompted nationwide travel bans on the city's residents. "Credit to New South Wales. They got on top of their cases," said Queensland Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-australia-55836110>

Exit Strategies

Global Covid-19 vaccine passports 'probably' way to go, says Jason Leitch

Scotland's national clinical director has voiced guarded "support" for calls to introduce a global Covid-19 vaccine passport to suppress future spread of the virus. But Professor Jason Leitch warned more data would be needed on the impact of vaccines before pressing ahead with the move, which is being proposed by former Prime Minister Tony Blair. The ex-Labour leader says the UK could lead the way in the creation of a global ID that shows Covid-19 vaccine and disease status. Mr Blair claimed this would aid the recovery of the economy, including the vital tourism sector.

<https://www.msn.com/en-gb/health/medical/global-covid-19-vaccine-passports-probably-way-to-go-says-jason-leitch/ar-BB1daFRn>

Covid-19: Vaccines 'needed across world to reduce chance of new variants'

Coronavirus vaccines must be made available around the world in an effort to keep cases down and prevent new mutations which could escape the effects of the jabs, an expert has warned. Sir Jeremy Farrar, a member of the British government's Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (Sage), said the amount of virus circulating in the world will determine the chances of a new variant emerging. He said new strains are "a warning of what is coming, which we must take incredibly seriously" and suggested countries with access to vaccines could donate a percentage of their doses through the international Covax drive which aims to ensure equitable access.

<https://www.irishnews.com/news/worldnews/2021/01/28/news/covid-19-vaccines-needed-across-world-to-reduce-chance-of-new-variants--2202170/>

NI coronavirus vaccine roll-out: GPs raise concern about supply amid worry of speed of roll-out to 'higher priority groups'

The Royal College of GPs in Northern Ireland has spoken out about concerns over the supply of vaccines. Dr Laurence Dorman, who chairs the organisation, was responding to the decision to open Trust vaccination centres to those aged 65-69 while those aged 70-79 are asked to wait for an appointment to see their GP. "We fully support the principle of vaccinating as many people as possible, as quickly as possible and it is encouraging to see such high demand for appointments since the booking portal launched on Wednesday night," he said. "However, we have concerns about the speed of vaccine rollout to those people in higher priority groups."

<https://www.newsletter.co.uk/health/coronavirus/ni-coronavirus-vaccine-roll-out-gps-raise-concern-about-supply-amid-worry-speed-roll-out-higher-priority-groups-3116091>

Health workers, stuck in the snow, administer coronavirus vaccine to stranded drivers

Unlike many who have to drive miles to get a Covid-19 vaccine, some travelers in southwestern Oregon had the vaccine come to them Tuesday under treacherous weather conditions. Josephine County Public Health workers were returning from a mass vaccination clinic at Illinois Valley High School in Cave Junction when about 20 members of the group got stranded in a snowstorm at Hayes Hill, the agency said. They had with them six leftover doses of the vaccine. To keep those doses from going unused before expiring, the workers went from car to car to offer people the chance to get a shot, the health department said. An ambulance was waiting nearby in case any recipients had an adverse reaction

<https://www.cnn.com/2021/01/28/us/snow-storm-covid-vaccines-oregon-trnd/index.html>

Matt Hancock names Bristol one of the best areas in UK for Covid-19 vaccine rollout

Bristol and its surrounding areas have been named as one of the best performing parts of the UK for rolling out the Covid-19 vaccinations, according to Health Secretary Matt Hancock. The "fantastic efforts" of the vaccination teams were praised in a letter to a North Somerset MP Liam Fox. More than 80% of care home residents in the area covered by the Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire NHS clinical commissioning group (CCG) had received the vaccine, making it one of the "highest performing" parts of the country. In the letter, Matt Hancock said the success in Bristol and its surrounding areas was down to the "tireless" efforts of everyone involved in rolling out the vaccine. He praised the "incredible" community spirit that has contributed to the success.

<https://www.itv.com/news/westcountry/2021-01-28/matt-hancock-names-bristol-one-of-the-best-areas-in-uk-for-covid-19-vaccine-rollout>

Africa secures another 400 million COVID-19 vaccine doses

Another 400 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines have been secured for the African continent through the Serum Institute of India, the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said Thursday. With the new doses, on top of the 270 million doses announced earlier this month from Pfizer, AstraZeneca and Johnson & Johnson, "I think we're beginning to make very good progress," Africa CDC director John Nkengasong told reporters. An Africa CDC spokesman said the 400 million doses are of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine. As with many vaccine deals, there were no immediate details on cost or how much people might pay per dose.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/africa-secures-another-400-million-covid19-vaccine-doses-south-africa-vaccines-continent-vaccine-ap-b1794066.html>

COVID-19: Germany says Oxford/ AstraZeneca jab should not be given to over 65s

Germany has said the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine should not be offered to people over the age of 65, a source close to the country's government has told Sky News. It comes after Reuters reported Germany's vaccine committee made the recommendation, citing insufficient data about how effective the jab is for older people, not because of any safety concerns. But UK prime minister Boris Johnson said he was not worried because Britain's medicines regulator had judged it is "effective across all age groups and provides a good immune response across all age groups".

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-germany-says-oxfordastrazeneca-jab-should-not-be-given-to-over-65s-12201458>

Trust chiefs get Covid-19 jab while some people over 80 are still waiting

In Northern Ireland, the chief executives of health trusts have received a Covid-19 vaccine while some patients over 80 years old are still waiting for the potentially lifesaving jab, it has emerged. The row over the vaccination programme intensified on Wednesday night as a leading doctor hit out at the system that means healthcare staff working at home have been given priority over those most at risk of dying from the virus. Guidance from the UK advisory body the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) states that "as the risk of mortality from Covid-19 increases with age, prioritisation is primarily based on age".

<https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/health/coronavirus/trust-chiefs-get-covid-19-jab-while-some-people-over-80-are-still-waiting-40020497.html>

Covid-19: Self-isolation payment rules 'need to be reviewed'

In England, self-isolation payment rules need to be reviewed as some people have to choose between self-isolating or putting food on their tables, a council has said. Knowsley Council has rejected two thirds of applications for £500 as they did not meet government criteria, which includes those on low incomes. Councillor Jayne Aston said "only a small number of people who need this help actually qualify". Knowsley currently has the highest rate of Covid-19 infections in England, according to the latest data, with 822.6 infections per 100,000 people in the week to 23 January. "Our rates are beginning to fall, but only very slowly," Ms Aston said.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-merseyside-55835548>

EU warns it could block vaccine exports, wields legal threat at drugmakers

Europe's fight to secure COVID-19 vaccine supplies intensified on Thursday when the European Union warned drug companies such as AstraZeneca that it would use all legal means or even block exports unless they agreed to deliver shots as promised. The EU, whose member states are far behind Israel, the United Kingdom and the United States in rolling out vaccines, is scrambling to get supplies just as the West's biggest drugmakers slow deliveries to the bloc due to production problems. As vaccination centres in Germany, France and Spain cancelled or delayed appointments, the EU publicly rebuked Anglo-Swedish drugmaker AstraZeneca for failing to deliver and even asked if it could divert supplies from Britain.

<http://www.msn.com/en-gb/news/world/eu-warns-it-could-block-vaccine-exports-wields-legal-threat-at-drugmakers/ar-BB1db9sj>

Coronavirus: Germany may limit AstraZeneca jab to under-65s

Germany's vaccine committee has said AstraZeneca's Covid jab should only be given to people aged under 65. The committee cited "insufficient data" over its efficacy for older people. The European Medicines Agency is to decide on Friday whether to approve the vaccine for use across the EU. The UK has been using the AstraZeneca vaccine in its mass immunisation programme for weeks now, and public health officials say it is safe and provides "high levels of protection". The German announcement comes as the EU is in dispute with leading manufacturers over a shortage of vaccines on the continent.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-55839885>

India will make more home-grown coronavirus vaccines available, Modi tells World Economic Forum

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said the country would release more locally made Covid-19 vaccines as New Delhi continues to save the lives of people in other countries by exporting medicines and vaccines. "So far only two made-in-India vaccines have been introduced, but in the future many more vaccines will be made available," Modi said at a virtual meeting of the World Economic Forum, adding India had fulfilled its global responsibilities by setting up infrastructure related to vaccination. Modi also said India will issue health identity cards to 1.3 billion citizens. The South Asian nation, one of the world's biggest makers of medicines, is producing two vaccines - Covishield, licensed from Oxford University and AstraZeneca, and Covaxin, developed at home by Bharat Biotech in partnership with Indian Council of Medical Research.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/asia/south-asia/article/3119682/india-will-make-more-home-grown-coronavirus-vaccines-available>

Germany will mobilize up to 50 billion eur more state aid for firms

Germany has the fiscal strength to mobilize further state aid of up to 50 billion euros (\$60.5 billion) for companies affected by the second coronavirus lockdown, Economy Minister Peter Altmaier said on Thursday in a speech in parliament. This comes on top of grants already paid out of roughly 80 billion euros, an additional 23 billion euros as part of the Kurzarbeit job protection scheme, and a multi-year stimulus programme worth 130 billion euros, Altmaier told lawmakers.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-germany-economy/germany-will-mobilize-up-to-50-billion-eur-more-state-aid-for-firms-idUSKBN29X0Z7>

German minister sees COVID-19 vaccine shortage well into April

Germany faces a shortage of coronavirus shots well into April, its health minister said on Thursday, and called for a summit with the country's state leaders to discuss vaccinations as the government faced fresh criticism over the pace of the roll-out. "We will still have at least 10 tough weeks with a shortage of vaccine," Jens Spahn said in a Tweet, adding the meeting should focus on how Europe

gets its fair share of shots and what can be done to support the process. Germany, like the rest of the European Union, is scrambling to obtain shots as the West's biggest drugmakers slow deliveries to the bloc due to production problems. Germany's top-selling Bild newspaper described the problem of procuring enough vaccines as a "scandal".

<https://uk.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-germany/german-minister-sees-covid-19-vaccine-shortage-well-into-april-idUKKBN29X0UB>

Coronavirus: people of colour must get fair access to vaccines, Fauci says

The top US public health official and chief medical adviser to Joe Biden, Dr Anthony Fauci, has emphasised the need for people of colour to be prioritised for Covid-19 vaccines. "I think that's the one thing we really got to be careful of," Fauci told the New England Journal of Medicine. "Most of the people who are getting it are otherwise, well, middle-class white people. You really want to get it to the people who are really the most vulnerable ... you don't want to have a situation where people who really are in need of it, because of where they are, where they live, what their economic status is, that they don't have access to the vaccine."

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/jan/28/us-coronavirus-vaccines-poc-groups-fair-access-fauci>

Partisan Exits

Man arrested after suspicious package sent to Covid-19 vaccine plant

Police have detained a man after a suspicious package was sent to a coronavirus vaccine production site. All staff had to be evacuated from the Wockhardt site in Wrexham, North Wales, on Wednesday while the package was investigated. The global pharmaceutical and biotechnology company provides fill-and-finish services for the Oxford/AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccine - the final stage of putting the vaccine into vials. Production ground to a halt for hours while police and the Army investigated the suspicious package, though it is understood the production schedule was not affected. On Thursday afternoon, Kent Police announced that they had arrested a man on suspicion of sending the package. The 53-year-old, from Chatham, remains in custody.

<https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/uk/man-arrested-after-suspicious-package-sent-to-covid-19-vaccine-plant-40022716.html>

Probe into Italy virus response looks into preparedness plan

Prosecutors from northern Italy traveled to Rome on Thursday to question the health minister and others as part of their broadening investigation into whether to lay any criminal blame for Italy's horrific coronavirus toll, and whether a lack of preparedness contributed to it. Back in June, Bergamo prosecutors questioned Premier Giuseppe Conte, Health Minister Roberto Speranza and other top officials about the delayed lockdown in two Bergamo towns where infections were reported in the early days of the outbreak. Bergamo went on to become Italy's COVID-19 epicenter, the first in the West, registering a 571% increase in excess deaths in March compared to the previous five-year average.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/courts_law/probe-into-italy-virus-response-looks-into-preparedness-plan/2021/01/28/e69d5a0e-617e-11eb-a177-7765f29a9524_story.html

After Government Falls, Italy Must Navigate Pandemic on 'Cruise Control'

The Italian prime minister resigned on Tuesday and triggered the collapse of the government. This sort of thing happens all the time in Italy. But the return to a familiar state of political instability has never happened in the midst of a pandemic that has seared the country so deeply. After offering a terrible preview to the West of the misery wrought by the coronavirus, Italy is again an unfortunate vanguard. It is testing whether a country, even one well accustomed to governments that perennially dissolve and reform, can manage vaccine rollouts, national curfews, business restrictions and enormous economic bailouts during a full-blown political crisis.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/26/world/europe/italy-government-collapse.html>

Lebanese man dies of wounds after lockdown protests

A man died of his wounds Thursday in Lebanon after clashes between security forces and protesters angered by the combined impact of a severe economic crisis and a coronavirus lockdown. Omar Tayba sustained a bullet wound late Wednesday when protests in the northern city of Tripoli turned violent for the third night running, his brother Ahmad told AFP. "My brother was in Tripoli watching the protests when he was hit," he said. "He was transferred to hospital and died this morning.

<https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20210128-lebanese-man-dies-of-wounds-after-lockdown-protests>

Protesters in Lebanon clash with police over virus lockdown

Lebanese security forces opened fire in violent clashes Wednesday with dozens of protesters who took to the street in the country's north for a third consecutive day to denounce deteriorating living conditions amid a strict lockdown to prevent the spread of the coronavirus.

<https://www.france24.com/en/video/20210128-protesters-in-lebanon-clash-with-police-over-virus-lockdown>

Coronavirus: Man killed at protest against Lebanon's total lockdown

A man has died after protesters angry with a total coronavirus lockdown and dire economic conditions clashed with riot police in the Lebanese city of Tripoli for a third consecutive night. Omar Tayba, 29, was among 220 people injured during the unrest. His brother said he had been shot. Witnesses and local media reported that police fired live rounds at protesters. The round-the-clock curfew imposed this month to halt a surge in Covid-19 cases has worsened Lebanon's economic crisis. People are forbidden from leaving their homes unless they are essential workers, and they must rely on deliveries from supermarkets for food.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-55839957>

Decrying vaccines, Tanzania leader says 'God will protect' from COVID-19

President John Magufuli said on Wednesday that Tanzania did not need a coronavirus lockdown because God would protect his people and homespun precautions such as steam inhalation were better than dangerous foreign vaccines. Contradicting global scientific consensus and advice from the World Health Organization (WHO), Magufuli's government has largely eschewed mask-wearing and social distancing in Tanzania. It stopped reporting coronavirus data in mid-2020. "Vaccines are not good. If they were, then the white man would have brought vaccines for HIV/AIDS," Magufuli said during the opening of a new farm in his western home region.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-tanzania/update-2-decrying-vaccines-tanzania-leader-says-god-will-protect-from-covid-19-idUSL1N2K21FV>

Security forces clash with protesters in locked-down Lebanon

Lebanese security forces clashed for the third night with protesters in Tripoli angry about a coronavirus lockdown, with witnesses and local media reporting that riot police fired live bullets as protesters tried to storm the city's government building. Security forces fired tear gas and rubber bullets at protesters who threw stones, hurled Molotov cocktails and lit a car on fire, a witness and police said. Dozens were wounded. The police did not immediately comment on whether live rounds had been fired. Reuters footage showed sparks hitting the ground, apparently from ricocheting bullets, and the sound of gunfire. It marked the third night of violence in a row in one of Lebanon's poorest cities, where protesters railed against a strict lockdown that they say has left them with no means to survive the country's economic collapse.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-lebanon-protests-idUSKBN29W2W5>

Continued Lockdown

UK travellers to be questioned at border on reasons for going abroad

UK travellers will be interrogated at the border on their reasons for going abroad, Boris Johnson has said, as he confirmed that British citizens returning from high-risk countries must quarantine in

hotels at their own expense. The government is facing criticism from the Scottish and Welsh governments, as well as scientists, for rejecting a more comprehensive hotel quarantine system. They are warning that it could allow as yet unknown new variants to slip through the gaps. Speaking in the Commons, Johnson said no one should be travelling except for a narrow range of reasons. "I want to make clear that under the stay-at-home regulations it is illegal to leave home to travel abroad for leisure purposes and we will enforce this at ports and airports by asking people why they are leaving and instructing them to return home if they do not have a valid reason to travel," he said.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jan/27/arrivals-in-uk-from-high-risk-countries-to-pay-for-hotel-quarantine>

Covid-19: Schools in NI set to remain shut until 8 March

Most pupils in Northern Ireland will not return to school until Monday 8 March at the earliest, the Stormont Executive has agreed. First Minister Arlene Foster said the ongoing public health situation meant remote learning must continue. It may also be the case that only some year groups go back to school on 8 March, if a return then is possible. Mrs Foster said she recognised it would come as a "disappointment" for many parents and pupils. "The kitchen table is no substitute for the school desk," she said, giving details of the decision at a news conference in Dungannon. "It is also important though that we give people a clear view of what is happening so we thought it was important to indicate today that we would not be back before 5 March in schools."

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-55834042>

COVID-19 lockdowns could result in 300,000 fewer US babies this year, and long-lasting economic impact | TheHill

The birth rate in the United States has been declining for years, falling to a record low in 2020. Hopes of a second "baby boom" mirroring that of the mid-1900s have been dashed by the coronavirus pandemic. A new report by NBCLX found that birthrates are dropping at a faster rate than in previous years.

<https://thehill.com/changing-america/well-being/longevity/536007-the-coronavirus-pandemic-has-not-given-birth-to-the>

Almost 20% of U.K. Workforce Furloughed as Third Lockdown Got Under Way

Almost one in five of the U.K. workforce was on furlough leave as a third national lockdown to combat the spread of the coronavirus got under way, according to figures published Thursday. The report will raise concerns that removing government lifelines for jobs could wreak havoc on the economy following the worst slump in three centuries last year. Pulling the plug would threaten to decimate consumer spending, the engine of growth. The Office for National Statistics data show 17% were reliant on Treasury wage support in early January, the highest proportion since July, after the government ordered the public to stay home and retail and hospitality businesses were closed. The program pays as much as 80% of an employee's wage if they're kept on the payroll. The figures come a day after Prime Minister Boris Johnson put England on notice that the national lockdown will continue for at least another six weeks, warning that some rules may even be tightened in an attempt to suppress a virus that has claimed more than 100,000 lives in the U.K.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-01-28/almost-20-of-u-k-workforce-furloughed-as-third-lockdown-hit>

Blue-chip UK employers try to soothe parental lockdown pain amid fears of burnout

From unlimited paid time off to laptops for children, some of Britain's blue-chip employers are trying to persuade parent employees juggling jobs and childcare during the pandemic that they have their backs. A third British lockdown from Jan. 5, that shut schools to most children and confined many workers to their homes, has exacerbated a childcare crisis that unions warn could herald a drain of talent that disproportionately impacts women. On Wednesday, the government said schools will remain largely closed for at least another six weeks. Some banks, professional services firms, law

firms and insurers are offering staff flexible working arrangements, reduced hours and increased emergency leave alongside benefits such as free counselling and parent buddy schemes.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-britain-workers-carers-idUSKBN29X16K>

UK banks told to pause branch closures during pandemic lockdown

Britain's Financial Conduct Authority on Thursday told banks to rethink moves to close branches during the pandemic lockdown. The FCA said banks should consider the impact of national pandemic restrictions on their ability to comply with regulatory guidance on closing branches, including consulting customers affected. "We are concerned that these activities could have significant consequences for customers. It may be harder than usual to reach all customers under the current restrictions and engage with them on closure proposals effectively," the FCA said in a statement.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/britain-banks-regulator/uk-banks-told-to-pause-branch-closures-during-pandemic-lockdown-idUSL8N2K33D1>

Scientific Viewpoint

The coronavirus is mutating. Will our vaccines keep up?

Making vaccines is hard. Making vaccines that keep up with mutations is even harder. The race is now on to keep up with the mutating coronavirus. Mutations occur when the genetic code of an organism is not copied accurately during cell replication. This is true in humans and viruses, but viruses make orders of magnitude more copying mistakes than humans do. These mutations are random, and the vast majority have no impact on or damage the virus. For example, influenza mutates so rapidly that approximately 99 percent of virus particles produced by an infected cell are defective — so defective that they cannot infect another cell and replicate. Unfortunately, the part of the influenza virus most easily recognized by our immune systems — which the influenza vaccine mimics to stimulate an immune response — can mutate without destroying the virus's ability to infect. Vaccine makers are constantly playing catch-up.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/01/27/covid-vaccines-new-strains/>

Covid Ireland: Leo Varadkar says firm close to creating vaccine PILL

MSD Pharmaceutical are in 'advanced stages' of producing Covid-19 tablet. Deputy PM Leo Varadkar told his party of the development on Wednesday night. The company had previously discontinued two experimental vaccines. The US drug giant has extensive operations in Ireland across six sites

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-9195397/Irish-firm-advanced-stages-swallowable-coronavirus-vaccine-Leo-Varadkar-tells-MPs.html>

New Covid-19 test proves effective in detecting virus in asymptomatic patients

A new Covid-19 test has been shown to be effective in detecting the virus in people without symptoms, the Government has said. The tests use swab samples in the same way as a traditional PCR test - but were also found to be effective in saliva samples. Pilots found tests in patients with symptoms were 100% effective, while swab and saliva samples were more than 99% effective for asymptomatic patients. The tests were also able to pick up other winter viruses such as flu. Results from a large-scale analysis of LamPORE tests on asymptomatic patients revealed an overall sensitivity of 99.57% and specificity of 99.4%, meaning the test is highly effective for testing people without symptoms in the community. The tests use swab samples in the same way as a traditional PCR test - but were also found to be effective in saliva samples. Pilots found tests in patients with symptoms were 100% effective, while swab and saliva samples were more than 99% effective for asymptomatic patients. The tests were also able to pick up other winter viruses such as flu.

<https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/politics/breaking-new-covid-19-test-23403139>

New saliva Covid-19 test 'highly effective in detecting asymptomatic cases'

A new test for Covid that can detect the virus in saliva is highly effective in picking up asymptomatic

cases, ministers announced on Thursday. They revealed that a large-scale technical and clinical evaluation of the LamPORE Covid-19 test had confirmed its high sensitivity and specificity. Health Minister Lord Bethell said: "With one in three people not displaying symptoms of Covid-19, broadening asymptomatic testing is critical to protect those at highest risk. "Oxford Nanopore's LamPORE test is another example of British innovation leading the way, and is an incredibly useful addition to our Covid-19 testing toolkit - delivering accurate results to people with and without symptoms."

<https://www.msn.com/en-gb/news/newslondon/new-saliva-covid-19-test-e2-80-98highly-effective-in-detecting-asymptomatic-cases-e2-80-99/ar-BB1db4TP>

COVID-19: AstraZeneca boss says UK could have vaccinated 30 million people by March

AstraZeneca's chief executive has said the UK's target of vaccinating the top four priority groups against COVID-19 by mid-February will be possible. In an interview with Italian newspaper La Repubblica, Pascal Soriot said: "By March, the UK will have vaccinated maybe 28 to 30 million people. "The prime minister has a goal to vaccinate 15 million people by mid-February, and they're already at 6.5 million. So they will get there."

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-astrazeneca-boss-blames-glitches-for-vaccine-supply-delays-in-europe-12200035>

The Covid-19 Vaccine-Development Multiverse

We are writing in response to the editorial by Heaton (Nov.12 issue)¹ on Covid-19 vaccines. Currently, Blacks, Native Americans, and Hispanic or Latino persons are disproportionately affected by Covid-19,² and testing to detect SARS-CoV-2 is lagging in low-income and minority neighborhoods.³ New approaches will be needed to safely and equitably distribute Covid-19 vaccines. Drive-through SARS-CoV-2 testing sites in Los Angeles County are widely used by persons from racial and ethnic groups that are representative of that county (Table 1). A pilot influenza vaccination program was conducted at one SARS-CoV-2 drive-through testing site in an underserved neighborhood. Vaccines were refrigerated before administration, and trained health care professionals administered them. During the period from October 6 through November 5, 2020, vaccinations were offered on 9 days, and 661 persons were vaccinated (Table 1). The highest daily number of vaccinations was 148. SARS-CoV-2 testing was completed by 599 of the 661 persons who were vaccinated (90.6%).

<https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMc2034838>

How Covid-19 mutations are changing the pandemic

Early in its existence, Covid-19 gained an ability that would prove decisive in its relationship with human beings. The virus picked up a seemingly small change in its genetic code. It was likely an unfortunate accident - a fragment of genetic information from another virus got muddled up with that of the coronavirus while they were both infecting a bat. Included within this tiny piece of genome, however, were the instructions that altered a key part of the virus - its spike protein. This important protein studs the outside of the coronavirus and is the part that attaches to the outside of cells, helping the rest of the virus to sneak inside where it can replicate. This change to Covid-19's spike protein meant it could hijack an enzyme found in the human body called furin. This enzyme acts like a pair of molecular scissors, normally cutting open hormones and growth factors to activate them. But when furin snips part of the Covid-19 spike protein, which is normally folded in a series of loops on the outside of the virus, it opens like a hinge.

<https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20210127-covid-19-variants-how-mutations-are-changing-the-pandemic>

UK to study how much vaccines cut Covid transmission

The UK government has commissioned a study to investigate the effects of Covid-19 vaccination on transmission of the virus, which will play a big role in Boris Johnson's decision on when to ease

England's lockdown. Coronavirus vaccines have been found to have a high degree of efficacy in providing immunity from the disease, but their impact on transmission of the disease is less clear. Downing Street officials said cutting transmission was a "critical factor" in easing the current restrictions. The study, which is being overseen by Public Health England, is focused on frontline healthcare workers who were given jabs early in the vaccination programme. Jonathan Van-Tam, deputy chief medical officer, is closely involved with the research, which is expected to conclude in late February. Prof Van-Tam confirmed at a Downing Street press conference on Wednesday that the research was under way and it would be a question of "to what extent", not if, vaccines cut transmission rates.

<https://www.ft.com/content/f87523c9-5500-439e-bff2-28c6e2642254>

England lockdown starts to suppress Covid-19, study suggests

There are tentative signs that the lockdown in England is beginning to curb coronavirus transmission, according to a closely watched study, although stubbornly high infection rates will continue to strain the overstretched healthcare system. The React-1 study, led by Imperial College London, concluded that prevalence of the virus had started to flatten last week, with initial indications of a small decline. Researchers estimated that the reproduction number R, which measures the average number of people one individual infects, was between 0.92 and 1.04, with a central estimate of 0.98 — suggesting that the rate of infection is close to stable or falling slightly.

<https://www.ft.com/content/4a2cc45f-0c66-4e40-a2f8-1c9e8ee418ed>

Belgium in 72nd place for handling of Covid-19, New Zealand top

Belgium scored in 72nd place in a world ranking of 98 countries for its handling of the Covid-19 pandemic, according to a league table drawn up by Lowy Institute in Australia. Unsurprisingly, the New Zealand government of prime minister Jacinda Ardern took top spot with a score of 94.4 from a possible 100. New Zealand was given credit for getting the pandemic under control, thanks to a closure of its borders, lockdown measures and a 'swift and vigorous' contact tracing. The criteria used to determine a country's performance were: Reported cases and deaths, both aggregate and per capita; Tests per capita, and lower per capita positives; Rolling averages of cases, cases per million, deaths, deaths per million, positivity rate for tests, test per capita.

<https://www.brusselstimes.com/news/belgium-all-news/health/151522/belgium-in-72nd-place-for-handling-of-covid-19-new-zealand-top/>

Study ranks New Zealand Covid-19 response best, Brazil worst, US in bottom five

Brazil's handling of the coronavirus pandemic has been ranked the world's worst, while New Zealand topped the class, according to research published by a leading Australian think tank on Thursday. Sydney's Lowy Institute assessed almost 100 countries on six criteria, including confirmed cases, Covid-19 deaths and testing metrics. "Collectively, these indicators point to how well or poorly countries have managed the pandemic," according to the report by the independent body. Aside from New Zealand - which has largely kept the virus at bay with border closures and "go early, go hard" lockdowns and testing regimes - Vietnam, Taiwan, Thailand, Cyprus, Rwanda, Iceland, Australia, Latvia and Sri Lanka made the top 10 for their responses. In bottom place was Brazil, closely followed by Mexico, Colombia, Iran and the United States.

<https://www.france24.com/en/asia-pacific/20210128-study-ranks-new-zealand-covid-19-response-best-brazil-worst-us-in-bottom-five>

English COVID-19 infections starting to fall, but prevalence still high, study finds

The number of COVID-19 infections in England is starting to fall, possibly reflecting the impact of a new lockdown, but cases are not coming down quickly enough and prevalence remains very high, a large study showed on Thursday. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson on Wednesday indicated that the COVID-19 lockdown in England would last until at least March 8, dashing any lingering hopes

that schools would be able to fully reopen in February. The Imperial College London study found that the numbers infected with coronavirus are at their highest since the study began last May.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-britain-prevalence/english-covid-19-infections-starting-to-fall-but-prevalence-still-high-study-finds-idUSKBN29X00M>

Coronavirus: Novavax vaccine 89% effective in preventing Covid, preliminary analysis finds

The US company Novavax has said its coronavirus vaccine is 89.3 per cent effective in preventing Covid-19 and nearly as effective in protecting against the faster-spreading variant first discovered in Kent, according to a preliminary analysis. Data from the UK's Phase 3 trial for the jab showed the new variant was detected in more than half of the Covid-19 cases recorded, with the vaccine candidate shown to be 95.6 per cent effective against the original strain and 85.6 per cent effective against the variant. The study involved more than 15,000 participants aged 18 to 84, with 27 per cent aged over 65.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/health/coronavirus-novavax-vaccine-covid-b1794439.html>

South African COVID variant detected in South Carolina

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) today confirmed the first US cases of B.1.351, a variant of COVID-19 first discovered in South Africa, in South Carolina. In other US news, CDC experts discuss a rare COVID-related syndrome in children, a Johns Hopkins expert highlights hospital oxygen shortages, and Novavax reports good results for its vaccine. According to the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC), the variant was detected in two people with no known travel history and no contact with one another. "The arrival of the SARS-CoV-2 variant in our state is an important reminder to all South Carolinians that the fight against this deadly virus is far from over," said Brannon Traxler, MD, DHEC Interim Public Health Director. "While more COVID-19 vaccines are on the way, supplies are still limited."

<https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2021/01/south-african-covid-variant-detected-south-carolina>

Lingering lung, physical, mental symptoms 4 months after COVID-19

Four months after their release from the hospital, more than half of 238 adult COVID-19 patients in northern Italy still had impaired lung function or mobility issues, and about one-fifth had symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a prospective cohort study published yesterday in JAMA Network Open found. The findings add to growing evidence and discussion of so-called COVID-19 "long-haulers," or patients with function-impairing symptoms persisting for months after their initial recovery. Researchers from two universities in Novara, Italy, assessed the patients, who had been hospitalized from Mar 1 to Jun 29, 2020. Of the 219 patients who completed both lung function tests and carbon monoxide (CO) measurements, 113 (51.6%) had a diffusing lung capacity for CO of less than 80% of the expected level, indicating compromised lung function, and 34 patients (15.5%) had more severe impairment, with a value less than 60% of normal.

<https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2021/01/lingering-lung-physical-mental-symptoms-4-months-after-covid-19>

Pfizer and Moderna haven't proven their COVID-19 vaccines shield against new variants: analysts

Just as the U.S. government is starting to ramp up purchases of Pfizer's and Moderna's mRNA vaccines to prevent COVID-19, a troubling question is emerging in the scientific community: Can these shots protect people against aggressive new variants racing through the U.K., South Africa and Brazil? Several analysts have scoured the medical literature and interviewed infectious disease experts in an effort to answer that question. Their conclusion? There is no clear answer. At least not yet. When it comes to SARS-CoV-2, the virus at the heart of the pandemic, "we are in a state of ignorance with incomplete data," said SVB Leerink analyst Geoffrey Porges in a note to clients

Wednesday. He reached that conclusion after interviewing an infectious disease specialist who is also an official with the FDA, he said.

<https://www.fiercepharma.com/pharma/pfizer-and-moderna-have-not-yet-proven-their-covid-19-vaccines-shield-against-new-variants>

Scramble for specialty syringes as Pfizer, feds look to extract 6th vaccine doses

Syringe makers are scrambling to meet demand for so-called low dead space syringes as Pfizer and the U.S. look to squeeze out extra vaccine doses. The specialty needles are needed to eke out a sixth shot in Pfizer and BioNTech's Comirnaty prepared five-dose glass vials. Physicians and pharmacists discovered the potential extra dose after they began vaccinating patients. But initial enthusiasm has been dampened by the requirement of the now-scarce specialty needles to extract the last bit from each vial. Syringe maker Becton Dickinson contracted with the U.S. government to supply needles for COVID vaccinations without knowing about the niche need. The manufacturer confirmed to Fierce Pharma that its U.S. government contract includes a limited supply of the specialty needles. A spokesman told Reuters that Becton Dickinson is on target to provide 286 million syringes for use with COVID-19 vaccines, a figure that only includes about 40 million low dead space syringes.

<https://www.fiercepharma.com/pharma/scramble-for-specialty-syringes-as-feds-and-pfizer-look-to-extract-sixth-vaccine-doses>

Novavax says its Covid-19 vaccine is 90% effective, but far less so against one variant

Covid-19 vaccine from Novavax proved nearly 90% effective in preliminary results from a key clinical trial in the United Kingdom, the company said, but in a separate trial appeared far less effective against a new variant of the coronavirus that was first identified in South Africa. In its 15,000-volunteer U.K. trial, Novavax said, the vaccine prevented nine in 10 cases, including against a new strain of the virus that is circulating there. But in a 4,400-volunteer study in South Africa, the vaccine proved only 49% effective. In the 94% of the study population that did not have HIV, the efficacy was 60%. In the U.K. trial, Novavax observed 62 cases of symptomatic Covid-19, with 56 in the placebo group and six among volunteers who got the vaccine. One patient on placebo developed severe Covid-19, compared with zero in the vaccine group. The company provided few details on the vaccine's safety, saying only that the serious side effects were rare and balanced between the studies' vaccine and placebo groups.

<https://www.statnews.com/2021/01/28/novavax-says-its-covid-19-vaccine-is-90-effective-but-far-less-so-against-one-variant/>

EMA tightens rules for second vaccinations with the Pfizer/Biontech vaccine

The European Medicines Agency strongly recommends that you inject the second dose within three weeks. With a longer period between vaccinations, the effectiveness of the vaccine is uncertain as there is a lack of data available. The European Medicines Agency (EMA) has tightened the guidelines for the use of the corona vaccine from the manufacturers Pfizer and Biontech. After that, the second dose must be injected within three weeks, according to the decision published on Thursday in Amsterdam. The experts had previously recommended that there should be "at least 21 days" between the first and second vaccination dose. The term three weeks is now clearly being used and it is not advisable to extend the period. Various countries, including the Netherlands, had decided not to inject the second dose of Pfizer until after about six weeks due to the lack of vaccines. The rationale was that it should allow more people to be vaccinated. But remember, full protection against corona infection is only achieved after vaccination with both doses. The EMA now emphatically points out that the effectiveness is not certain in the event of a longer break: "There are currently no clinical data on the effectiveness of the vaccine if it is not administered in the interval of the clinical trials." The EMA has now noted that more than 93 percent of subjects in the clinical trials received the second dose of the vaccine within 19 to 23 days after the first. Only on

this basis was the effectiveness of the vaccine deemed to be around 95 percent.

<https://www.berliner-zeitung.de/news/ema-verschaerft-regeln-fuer-zweitimpfung-mit-pfizer-vakzin-li.136084>

New coronavirus variants call for more surveillance, control

The Covid-19 virus is evolving rapidly. That should come as no surprise: RNA-based viruses generate mutations constantly as a result of their error-prone replication. Wherever there are more infections, there are more opportunities for the virus to mutate. For a virus new to a species, as this coronavirus is to humans, some mutations are likely to make it more transmissible. Important new coronavirus variants have emerged in the United Kingdom, Brazil, and South Africa. What is worrisome about these variants is that even though they evolved independently, they have some similarities. All share the N501Y mutation in the virus's immunologically key spike protein. The strains in South African and Brazil also share the E484K mutation in the same protein, which some experiments suggest may at least partially evade the antibody response people generate after infection with older strains.

<https://www.statnews.com/2021/01/28/new-coronavirus-variants-call-for-intensified-surveillance-control-and-vaccination-efforts/>

Coronavirus Resurgence

Portugal breaks daily records in COVID-19 cases and deaths

Portugal reported a record-breaking 303 COVID-19 deaths and 16,432 cases on Thursday, as it struggles to contain a crippling surge in cases over the past month. The country of 10 million people, which has so far reported a total of 11,608 COVID-19 deaths and 685,383 cases, has the world's highest seven-day rolling average of cases and deaths per capita, according to data tracker

<https://www.msn.com/en-au/lifestyle/wellbeing/portugal-breaks-daily-records-in-covid-19-cases-and-deaths/ar-BB1dbj90>

Southern Africa caught in COVID-19 surge

The coronavirus pandemic has struck southern Africa harder than any other region on the continent. DW looks at stories from South Africa to Tanzania that shed light on how different countries are battling the disease. Southern Africa welcomed news on Thursday that the African Union (AU) had secured an additional 400 million doses of coronavirus vaccines for its member states. South Africa is set to receive its first dose of the AstraZeneca vaccine on Monday after approving it for emergency use. However, there is still little cause for celebration as the region's healthcare systems begin to wilt under the strain of the second wave of the coronavirus pandemic. The devastating reality of the pandemic is playing out differently in these five southern African countries.

<https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/southern-africa-caught-in-covid-19-surge/ar-BB1dbexj>

Covid-19 deaths rise by 1,239 as UK records 28,680 more infections

Some 1,239 more people in the UK have died within 28 days of testing positive for Covid-19, the government announced on Thursday. The number compares with 1,725 deaths reported the previous day and brings the total number of deaths from the disease in Britain to 103,126. The latest daily figure is slightly under the 1,290 fatalities reported on the same day last week and could raise hopes that the country's daily death toll is peaking. However, separate figures published by the UK's statistics agencies for deaths where Covid-19 has been mentioned on the death certificate, together with additional data on deaths that have occurred in recent days, show there have now been 120,000 deaths involving Covid-19 in the UK.

https://www.standard.co.uk/news/uk/uk-covid-daily-deaths-cases-b908343.html?itm_source=Internal&itm_channel=section_banner&itm_campaign=breaking-news-ticker&itm_content=1

UK coronavirus cases continue to decline with 28,680 more positive tests

Cases have been down week-on-week every day for 20 days in a row, the latest data from Health

chiefs shows. Death toll remains high as almost 37,000 patients are still receiving treatment in hospitals across the UK. Separate data shows lockdown 3.0 is bringing winter outbreak under control, although some say it is too slow

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-9198099/UK-coronavirus-cases-continue-decline-28-680-positive-tests.html>

France Inches Toward Tighter Curbs as Virus Variants Gain Ground

More dangerous variants of the coronavirus are becoming increasingly common in France, putting pressure on the hospital system and raising the likelihood the government will soon impose tighter curbs. Health authorities are finding more than 2,000 cases a day of new forms of the virus, up from “several hundred” at the start of January, Health Minister Olivier Veran said on Thursday, during a weekly update of the health situation. President Emmanuel Macron has been trying to give a national curfew, which runs from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m., a chance to slow the virus’s spread but he’s coming under mounting pressure to impose another lockdown, the third since the crisis began about a year ago. “The tension on the hospitals is real,” Veran said. “The curfew doesn’t allow us to sufficiently stop the variant from developing, and if we follow the development curve of these variants, we could enter an English, Portuguese or Spanish scenario, and you’ve seen the damages that can cause.”

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-01-28/france-has-more-than-2-000-cases-day-of-variants-veran>

Young People Spreading Covid a Concern in Rapidly Aging Japan

The world’s most rapidly aging society has long struggled to talk to its youth. That’s a disconnect that’s turning deadly in the pandemic. The difficulty in persuading young adults to upend their lifestyles to prevent Covid-19’s spread has challenged countries across the globe. Yet nowhere are the stakes higher than in Japan, where nearly a third of residents are over the age of 65, and the virus response depends on voluntary cooperation. The nation has so far relied on people changing their behavior in its largely successful fight against the virus, as authorities lack the legal ability to enforce lockdowns. But while calling for cooperation worked in the early days of fighting an unknown pathogen, like their global peers younger Japanese are increasingly hit with virus fatigue. That’s left officials struggling to persuade a demographic that’s least likely to be struck by a harsh bout of Covid, but most likely to pass the virus on.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-01-27/japan-s-old-politicians-can-t-convince-young-people-to-stay-home>

China’s Zero-Tolerance Covid Tactics Now Include Anal Swabs

China is ramping up efforts to neutralize the coronavirus as new outbreaks challenge its already stringent pandemic strategy, with another weapon added to an arsenal of border curbs, mass testing and hard lockdowns: anal swabs. While there’s no nationwide policy on use of the technique, some residents in China’s northern regions -- where more than 1,700 cases have emerged -- have been subjected to the swabs with little warning. The method involves the insertion of a saline-soaked cotton swab about two-to-three centimeters into the anus, with the sample then tested for active traces of the virus. More than 1,000 schoolchildren and teachers in Beijing were given anal, throat and nose swabs last week, along with a separate antibody test, after one asymptomatic virus case was detected on campus, according to local officials.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-01-27/china-s-zero-tolerance-covid-approach-now-includes-anal-swabs>

Chinese New Year: Clamping down on going home for the holidays

Today marks the start of the world's largest human migration - an event which sees millions of people travel thousands of miles across China to reach home in time for the Lunar New Year. For some, it is the only time they will see their families all year and is an event not to be missed. But there are fears the Spring Festival travel season, or Chunyun in Chinese, could become a

superspreader event. After all, last year's Chunyun is believed to have played a significant role in the spread of Covid-19. So the Chinese authorities have been left with a problem: how do you encourage people to stay local, without actually cancelling the country's biggest annual celebration?
<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-55791858>

All countries should pursue a Covid-19 elimination strategy: here are 16 reasons why

The past year of Covid-19 has taught us that it is the behaviour of governments, more than the behaviour of the virus or individuals, that shapes countries' experience of the crisis. Talking about pandemic waves has given the virus far too much agency: until quite recently the apparent waves of infection were driven by government action and inaction. It is only now with the emergence of more infectious variants that it might be appropriate to talk about a true second wave. As governments draw up their battle plans for year two, we might expect them to base their strategies on the wealth of data about what works best. And the evidence to date suggests that countries pursuing elimination of Covid-19 are performing much better than those trying to suppress the virus. Aiming for zero-Covid is producing more positive results than trying to "live with the virus".

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/commentisfree/2021/jan/28/all-countries-should-pursue-a-covid-19-elimination-strategy-here-are-16-reasons-why>

Third lockdown is working as Covid R rate falls to 0.9

The number of coronavirus infections is falling across the country and the R rate could be as low as 0.9, a new study shows. The findings from the eighth round of Imperial College London's React study indicates a drop in numbers last week, suggesting lockdown is starting to have an effect. But the research, which tested more than 167,600 volunteers in England between January 6 and 22, also shows Covid-19 cases remained high over this period, with one in 64 people infected. Scientists warned this number is still at the highest level recorded since May.

https://metro.co.uk/2021/01/28/lockdown-beginning-to-slow-spread-of-covid-as-r-rate-falls-to-0-9-13978208/?ico=more_text_links

Variant COVID among triggers for grim surge in Manaus, Brazil

In one of the most puzzling and worrisome developments in the pandemic, scientists are racing to explain what's happening in Manaus, Brazil, a city of 2.2 million at the edge of the country's rainforest that is experiencing a second explosive outbreak, even though the first one was so bad it was thought to have produced herd immunity. As the situation deepens in Manaus, overwhelming the city's health system again, researchers from Brazil and the United Kingdom yesterday said four possibilities might explain the recent dramatic resurgence, including variant SARS-CoV-2 viruses that arose in Brazil. They published their analysis yesterday in The Lancet.

<https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2021/01/variant-covid-among-triggers-grim-surge-manaus-brazil>

South Carolina identifies the first U.S. cases of coronavirus variant first seen in South Africa

Health authorities have identified the first U.S. cases of Covid-19 caused by a fast-spreading form of the coronavirus initially seen in South Africa, in two people in South Carolina. Neither person has a history of travel to countries where the variant has been confirmed, and there is no connection between the two people, South Carolina health officials said Thursday. That indicates there has been some local spread of the variant after it arrived in the United States. One case was found in South Carolina's Pee Dee region, and one in the Lowcountry. The announcement Thursday means that three coronavirus variants that appear to be more contagious and have emerged in recent months have all been documented in the United States. But in a way, the news was no surprise to experts. They had for weeks said the variant that first cropped up in South Africa, called B.1.351, was likely already in the U.S., but this country's limited system of surveillance for different iterations of the coronavirus meant the variant likely went unnoticed once it was imported via a traveler and could

have even been spreading.

<https://www.statnews.com/2021/01/28/south-carolina-first-cases-of-south-africa-variant/>

New Lockdown

France Weighs Third National Lockdown Over Variants Worries

French officials are considering a third nationwide lockdown as soon as Saturday, in an effort to stop the country's increase in Covid-19 cases and hospitalizations. Options under consideration include continuing the country's nationwide 6 p.

<https://www.wsj.com/livecoverage/covid-2021-01-28/card/N2kRYaWLRxf8Q3iX8RaQ>

France Will Likely Be Put Under A 3rd Nationwide Lockdown

The virus is hitting Europe with its full force. Across the continent, countries are fighting back with various restrictive measures to control COVID spread. France has Europe's strictest overnight curfew, but the government there says it hasn't been enough to slow the virus down. NPR's Eleanor Beardsley has more.

<https://www.npr.org/2021/01/28/961470089/france-will-likely-be-put-under-a-3rd-nationwide-lockdown>

Coronavirus pandemic: Is France heading back into a nationwide lockdown?

The French government admitted on Wednesday that current restrictions designed to contain the spread of coronavirus were not enough, raising the prospect of a third nationwide lockdown. FRANCE 24's International Affairs Commentator Doug Herbert tells us more.

<https://www.france24.com/en/video/20210128-coronavirus-pandemic-is-france-heading-back-into-a-nationwide-lockdown>

North Point buildings placed under sudden Covid-19 lockdown in Hong Kong

Chief Executive Carrie Lam spends 15 minutes in the area for a briefing from health officials and to show support for workers. Residents of four North Point tenement buildings locked down for testing overnight, with restrictions relaxing from 7am on Friday

<https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/health-environment/article/3119581/coronavirus-lockdown-fears-mount-neighbourhood>