

COVID-19 Lockdown Exit Analysis

8th Feb 2021

News Highlights

South Africa pushes pause on rollout of Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine

Rollout of the Oxford University/AstraZeneca vaccine [has been put on pause in South Africa after new research indicated it offers limited protection against mild and moderate disease](#) caused by the variant. [Researchers have said a new form of the shot effective against mutant variants is likely to be available by autumn 2021](#). 'The AstraZeneca vaccine will remain with us....until the scientists give us clear indications as to what we need to do next,' said South Africa health minister Zweli Mkhize.

Calls to scale up rapid COVID-19 testing in U.S.

The U.S. is facing calls to scale up its testing system by using rapid tests to control the pandemic, as opposed to its current reliance on the PCR tests that have become the norm in hospitals and labs. ['Our whole testing approach has failed,' said Harvard University specialist Dr Michael Mina. However, other specialists are more hesitant](#), noting rapid tests may be prone to false results and have not been used en masse as is being pitched.

Even with optimism over vaccination, a return to normalcy is still a way off for the UK

Vaccine taskforce chair Dr Clive Dix has [expressed optimism the UK can meet its target of vaccinating all over-50s by May](#). However, [Prime Minister Boris Johnson has said it is too early to relax restrictions due to high infection rates](#), while pledging 'a steady programme for beginning to unlock' in the coming weeks. Scientists have said that even with 'ramped up' vaccinations, loosened restrictions [may still lead to more than 130,000 deaths between now and June 2022](#).

China approves Sinovac Biotech vaccine

Regulators in China have approved Sinovac Biotech's COVID-19 vaccine, the company announced. [It is the second vaccine approved in China for use among the general public after the one developed by the China National Pharmaceutical Group](#), or SinoPharm, got the greenlight. Several countries, including Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Indonesia, Laos, Uruguay and Turkey, have given emergency use authorisation to the Sinovac vaccine.

Lockdown Exit

World is on course for a coronavirus vaccine 'apartheid', experts warn

Senam Agbesi has been trying to make the best of lockdown in London. "I've done lots of Zooms, lots of walks," he said. The 34-year-old NHS manager believes he could get the vaccine this month, as he is starting a new job that would mean visiting hospitals regularly. Despite the good news about his own vaccine, he worries about his father, Yao, who lives in Accra, Ghana. Yao is 65 and has sickle cell trait, a condition that puts him at higher risk of suffering severe illness if he catches Covid-19. A close family friend recently died of the virus and Senam wishes his father would be more careful. "He thinks he's invincible. He drinks his little tea of lime juice and ginger in the mornings and thinks he has an invisible fortress around him," he told The Bureau of Investigative Journalism for this

report.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/health/coronavirus-crisis-vaccine-apartheid-b1798326.html>

South Africa's Ramaphosa says access to concessional loans key to Africa's recovery

Access to loans on favourable terms will be crucial to Africa's economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa said on Saturday. Ramaphosa, who is the outgoing chair of the African Union (AU), told the bloc's summit that even though the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank have deployed significant financial resources for the coronavirus outbreak response, more needed to be done. "Access to concessional finance will remain crucial as countries rebuild their economies," Ramaphosa told the virtual summit.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-africa-union-summit/south-africas-ramaphosa-says-access-to-concessional-loans-key-to-africas-recovery-idUSKBN2A60FF>

First doses of AstraZeneca to be given next week as 190,000 shots to arrive this month

Ireland will receive 190,000 AstraZeneca shots this month with an early delivery of 21,000 doses arriving this weekend, Health Minister Stephen Donnelly has said. Frontline healthcare workers who have not yet received their first dose will be first in the queue for these shots, Minister Donnelly confirmed. "Now, there aren't 190,000 people [in this category] so the rest of these will be scheduled accordingly, and we will begin looking at cohorts 4,5,6 and 7," Minister Donnelly said on RTÉ News at One.

<https://www.independent.ie/news/first-doses-of-astrazeneca-to-be-given-next-week-as-190000-shots-to-arrive-this-month-40057126.html>

Calls grow for US to rely on rapid tests to fight pandemic

When a Halloween party sparked a COVID-19 outbreak at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University, school officials conducted rapid screening on more than 1,000 students in a week, including many who didn't have symptoms. Although such asymptomatic screening isn't approved by regulators and the 15-minute tests aren't as sensitive as the genetic one that can take days to yield results, the testing director at the historically Black college credits the approach with quickly containing the infections and allowing the campus to remain open. "Within the span of a week, we had crushed the spread. If we had had to stick with the PCR test, we would have been dead in the water," said Dr. Robert Doolittle, referring to the polymerase chain reaction test that is considered the gold standard by many doctors and Food and Drug Administration regulators.

<https://apnews.com/article/joe-biden-pandemics-coronavirus-pandemic-b72e56902c9a682201dc7e2e95530551>

How AstraZeneca's vaccine was hit by flawed trials, defects and politics — but might still save the world

This account of a turbulent period for the Anglo-Swedish company is based on interviews with more than 30 executives, scientists and government officials in the UK, US and EU. Even before selecting their partner in April, the university scientists had made a head start — but took a route that would cause trouble later. The scientists decided not to test the vaccine among large groups of over-65s, until they had plenty of evidence that it was safe in younger people. Andrew Pollard, director of the Oxford Vaccine Group, told the FT the decision was "cautious — and at the time, that was right".

<https://www.ft.com/content/d0fd6c4c-939a-43c7-a9b9-47c8d3cab253>

The Latest: Sri Lankan officials say vaccinations advancing

Sri Lankan health officials said on Saturday that more than half of the health workers and frontline military and police officers have so far been vaccinated against COVID-19. Sri Lanka last week began inoculating its frontline health workers, military troops and police officers against COVID-19 amid warnings that the sector faces a collapse with a number of health staff being infected with the new coronavirus. The ministry had planned to first vaccinate 150,000 health workers and selected 115,000 military and police personnel. By Saturday, 156,310 had been given with COVISHIELD

vaccine. India had donated 500,000 doses of Oxford-AstraZenica vaccine also known as the COVISHIELD which is the only vaccine approved by the regulatory body in Sri Lanka. Health ministry says Sri Lanka has ordered 18 millions doses of COVISHIELD vaccines and also had asked to allocate 2 million doses of Pfizer-BioNtech. Besides, China has promised to provide 300,000 shots of Sinopharm vaccine this month.

<https://apnews.com/article/germany-india-coronavirus-pandemic-coronavirus-vaccine-00f4ee7af09143a881a09a44418929d5>

Europe moves toward COVID-19 vaccine passports but not every country is on board

A few European Union countries have taken steps to distribute special passes to allow citizens inoculated against the coronavirus that causes COVID-19 to travel freely. Others countries, including the U.K., are considering such a measure.

<https://www.marketwatch.com/story/europe-moves-toward-covid-19-vaccine-passports-but-not-every-country-is-on-board-11612532528>

Governor Cuomo Announces List of Comorbidities and Underlying Conditions Eligible for COVID-19 Vaccine Starting February 15

Governor Andrew M. Cuomo today released the list of comorbidities and underlying conditions that New York State will use to determine eligibility for the COVID-19 vaccine. New Yorkers who have one of the comorbidities on the list will be eligible for the vaccine beginning February 15. "New Yorkers with comorbidities and underlying conditions exist throughout the state's population—they're our teachers, lawyers and carpenters, in addition to the doctors who keep us safe every day, and they are a highly affected population," Governor Cuomo said. "We're committed to vaccinating vulnerable populations that have suffered the most as we distribute a strictly limited supply of vaccines, and people with comorbidities are 94 percent of the state's COVID deaths. That's why we'll open eligibility to people with comorbidities starting February 15 and give hospitals the ability to use extra doses they have to address that population. Local governments have a week to prepare for the new change—they need to get ready now."

<https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/governor-cuomo-announces-list-comorbidities-and-underlying-conditions-eligible-covid-19-vaccine>

Exit Strategies

Covid-19 Vaccine Promises Fall Short for Many Doctors, Elderly in Europe

Eugenio Del Rio, a 77-year-old writer, leaves his Madrid apartment only to shop for food and take an occasional stroll as he awaits his turn to get the coronavirus vaccine. The wait is getting longer and longer. So long, in fact, that he has come to realize a book he is writing, about the cultural factors that pushed some youth to oppose the Franco regime, might be published before the country is through the pandemic. "I hope to be vaccinated in April, but even if that happens it will be ages before we return to normal life because so many people will still need to be vaccinated," said Mr. Del Rio.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/covid-19-vaccine-promises-fall-short-for-many-doctors-elderly-in-europe-11612713600>

UK eyes COVID-19 booster in autumn, then annual vaccinations, says minister

A COVID-19 booster in the autumn and then annual vaccinations are very probable, Britain's vaccine deployment minister said on Sunday as countries race to administer injections in the face of new variants. Britain has already injected over 12 million first doses of COVID-19 vaccines and is on track to meet a target to vaccinate everyone in the top most vulnerable groups by mid-February. Among coronavirus variants currently most concerning for scientists and public health experts are the so-called British, South African and Brazilian variants, which appear to spread more swiftly than others.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-health-coronavirus-britain-vaccine-bo-idUSKBN2A70A9>

Cambodia gets first COVID-19 vaccine from key ally China

Cambodia on Sunday received its first shipment of COVID-19 vaccine, a donation of 600,000 doses from China, the country's biggest ally. Prime Minister Hun Sen, his senior Cabinet members and Chinese Ambassador Wang Wentian were at Phnom Penh International Airport for a reception ceremony for the Sinopharm vaccine carried by a Chinese Air Force flight. Hun Sen had announced that he would be the first person to be vaccinated, but backtracked last week, saying the Chinese-made Sinopharm vaccine was effective only for people aged between 18 and 59, while he is 68. He said Sunday at the airport that he would urge younger members of his family, as well as top officials and generals under 60, to get vaccinated Wednesday as an example to the public.

<https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/cambodia-covid-19-vaccine-key-ally-china-75738331>

COVID-19: Rapid testing to be offered to workplaces with more than 50 employees

Rapid tests will be offered to workplaces with more than 50 employees in an effort to control the COVID-19 pandemic. The lateral flow tests can produce results in less than 30 minutes but were previously only available to firms with more than 250 staff. Officials said the move is an effort to "normalise" testing in the workplace and ensure the safety of those who cannot work from home.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-rapid-testing-to-be-offered-to-workplaces-with-more-than-50-employees-12211167>

The U.S. needs a National Vaccine Day

Vaccines don't save lives. Vaccinations do. That is an essential lesson we have learned from working at the forefront of vaccine development and health communication. One of us (S.P.) helped develop vaccines for rubella, rabies, and rotavirus, that have played an essential role in reducing preventable childhood deaths in the United States and around the world — but only because of public health campaigns that built trust in vaccination and made vaccines easily accessible to people from every walk of life. Now along comes Covid-19, a highly infectious disease caused by a novel coronavirus, SARS-CoV2, that humans had never previously encountered. In an amazing feat of science and speed, we now have vaccines against this virus that are proving to be highly effective.

<https://www.statnews.com/2021/02/07/the-u-s-needs-a-national-vaccine-day/>

South Africa pauses rollout of AstraZeneca coronavirus vaccine

South Africa has stopped the use of the AstraZeneca vaccine after data emerged that showed it provided minimal protection against the South Africa coronavirus variant, which is currently dominant in the country. Reuters reports that Health Minister Zweli Mkhize made the announcement on Sunday following disappointing results from a trial conducted by the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. The outlet reports that the South African government had planned to roll out doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine on Monday but will now offer the vaccines developed by Johnson & Johnson and Pfizer instead.

<https://thehill.com/policy/international/africa/537742-south-africa-pauses-rollout-of-astrazeneca-coronavirus-vaccine>

South Africa Says AstraZeneca's Covid-19 Vaccine is Not Effective at Stopping Variant

South Africa halted use of the AstraZeneca-Oxford coronavirus vaccine on Sunday after evidence emerged that the vaccine did not protect clinical-trial participants from mild or moderate illness caused by the more contagious virus variant that was first seen there. The findings were a devastating blow to the country's efforts to combat the pandemic. Scientists in South Africa said on Sunday that a similar problem held among people who had been infected by earlier versions of the coronavirus: the immunity they acquired naturally did not appear to protect them from mild or moderate cases when reinfected by the variant, known as B.1.351.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/07/world/south-africa-astrazeneca-vaccine.html>

Coronavirus in Scotland: Restrictions will not be scrapped when vaccine rollout complete, says Deputy First Minister

Covid-19 restrictions will not be scrapped in Scotland once the vaccination programme is complete, Deputy First Minister John Swinney has said.

<https://www.scotsman.com/health/coronavirus-scotland-restrictions-will-not-be-scrapped-when-vaccine-rollout-compl-ete-says-deputy-first-minister-3126282>

NFL Offers All 30 Stadiums For Use As Coronavirus Vaccine Sites

Every NFL team will offer their stadium as a possible mass vaccination site to help fight the COVID-19 pandemic, NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell said in a letter to President Biden. The move would expand an effort that currently includes seven teams. Each team "will make its stadium available for mass vaccinations of the general public in coordination with local, state, and federal health officials," Goodell wrote in the letter, which was sent on Thursday. The effort would be helped, he said, by the experience the teams already have with transforming parts of their facilities into coronavirus testing sites. The NFL has 32 teams, but the offer comprises 30 stadiums, because pairs of teams share facilities in both New York and Los Angeles.

<https://www.npr.org/sections/coronavirus-live-updates/2021/02/05/964548535/nfl-offers-all-30-stadiums-for-use-as-coronavirus-vaccine-sites>

Scotland hits coronavirus vaccine milestone as more than three quarters of a million receive first dose

Health Secretary Jeane Freeman has hailed the "enormous efforts" of coronavirus vaccinators as the number of Scots to have been given their first injection passed three quarters of a million. Figures published by the Scottish Government showed that by Saturday morning, 786,427 people had now had their first jab - with 10,332 having received both doses of the vaccine. The figures were revealed as it was announced there had been a further 48 deaths among those who had tested positive for the virus in the past 28 days - taking the total number of deaths under this measurement to 6,431. In addition, a further 895 cases of Covid-19 have been reported in the past 24 hours - 5.9% of all those tested.

<https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/scottish-news/scotland-hits-coronavirus-vaccine-milestone-23454843>

Coronavirus: Vaccine chief 'optimistic' about over-50s May target

The UK can meet the target of vaccinating all over-50s by May, the chairman of the vaccines taskforce has said, adding he is "very optimistic". Dr Clive Dix told the BBC the taskforce has met every target set. The UK would be "ahead of the game" in terms of anticipating variants of coronavirus and was making "libraries of future vaccines", he said. He added that the UK would not hoard supplies but would distribute them globally, once the UK target is met. Downing Street has said everyone in the UK aged 50 and over should have been offered a coronavirus vaccine by May.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-55961387>

COVID-19: Still too early to talk about ending coronavirus restrictions amid 'very, very high' infection rates - PM

Boris Johnson says it is still too early to talk about ending coronavirus restrictions, with news reports suggesting pubs might be able to reopen by May. Downing Street has confirmed that it aims to vaccinate those aged over 50 and those aged 16 to 65 who have certain health conditions by May. And some MPs have said there would be little reason to keep restrictions once those in the nine priority groups have been vaccinated.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-still-early-days-to-talk-about-ending-coronavirus-restrictions-boris-johnson-12210032>

More COVID-19 vaccine megasites open nationwide, including at Yankee Stadium

More COVID-19 vaccination megasites opened this week across the country, including at a casino in Missouri and at Yankee Stadium in New York — where a long line formed as it opened on Friday to local residents. Legendary MLB player Mariano Rivera was there, encouraging people to get their

shots. "Now, it's time to support you and let you know that it's okay to be vaccinated," Rivera said. More sites are on the way. In California, Levi's Stadium in Santa Clara County will become the state's biggest vaccination site when it opens early next week, according to the county and the San Francisco 49ers. The goal is to be able to vaccinate as many as 15,000 people there a day.

<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/covid-19-vaccine-megasites-open-nationwide-yankee-stadium/>

Boris Johnson and Emmanuel Macron discuss Covid-19 collaboration

Boris Johnson and Emmanuel Macron have discussed co-operation in the global fight against Covid-19 in their first conversation since a vaccine row. No 10 said the two leaders agreed that collaboration between governments was vital in defeating coronavirus. They also discussed cross-channel relations amid continuing tensions over the UK's post-Brexit arrangements. The EU withdrew its threat last week to restrict vaccine exports to Northern Ireland after an outcry in the UK. But the dispute, prompted by concerns on the continent over the slow rollout of vaccinations, intensified calls for the post-Brexit rules governing trade between Britain and Northern Ireland to be reviewed.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-55957628>

Gradually easing lockdown and mass vaccination 'could still lead to 130,000 deaths'

Easing lockdown slowly and 'ramped up vaccinations' would still lead to over 130,000 deaths between now and next June, scientists have warned. A report to the Government's advisers claims vaccines are 'insufficient' to allow the UK to go back to normality 'within the year'. Academics who authored the paper, including Professor Neil Ferguson whose modelling led to the original lockdown, said 3 million doses a week were considered 'critical to avoid exceeding national hospital capacity after the current wave'. But even if this target was met and restrictions were lifted gradually, the dossier predicts 130,800 people could die between now and June 2022.

<https://metro.co.uk/2021/02/06/uk-lockdown-lifting-restrictions-and-vaccinations-could-still-lead-to-130k-deaths-14031932/>

Slovenia eases anti-coronavirus restrictions after criticism

Slovenia will reopen ski resorts and some shops and has eased restrictions on people entering the country imposed to help reduce the rate of COVID-19 infections, after coming under pressure over its handling of the pandemic. From Saturday, daily migrant workers and academics entering Slovenia from European Union countries that have lower 14-day incidences of COVID-19 will not have to present negative coronavirus tests, or be quarantined, the government said. Also, ski resorts as well as shops and service businesses not larger than 400 square meters will be allowed to reopen next week, with weekly mandatory testing of employees, Economy Minister Zdravko Pocivalsek said.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-slovenia/slovenia-eases-anti-coronavirus-restrictions-after-criticism-idUSL1N2KC08U>

Why aren't covid-19 vaccines being manufactured in standard prefilled syringes?

Prefilled syringes are the safest and standard recommended delivery device for most modern vaccines—so why are covid-19 vaccines being packaged in glass vials in the middle of a global glass shortage? Jane Feinmann reports By 24 January 2021 more than 5.8 million people in the UK had been given their first dose of covid-19 vaccine. The achievement is all the more remarkable given the tough and time consuming safety precautions that must be taken. For the AstraZeneca injection, healthcare professionals, working alone or in pairs, take "full responsibility" for following a lengthy, itemised standard operating procedure, which was published for NHS use only by the Specialist Pharmacy Service on 7 January 2021.

<https://www.bmj.com/content/372/bmj.n263>

Covid: All over-50s in UK to be offered vaccine by May

All adults aged 50 and over should have been offered a coronavirus vaccine by May, Downing Street

has confirmed. Previously ministers had said it was their "ambition" to vaccinate the first nine priority groups by the spring.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-55953848>

Israeli Health Officials Fear Worse COVID Outbreak if Schools Reopen Too Quickly

Senior Israeli official warns that an 'uncontrolled, rapid exit' from the lockdown could bring another spike in an already high rate of COVID19 illness particularly among young people

<https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/israeli-health-officials-fear-worse-outbreak-if-schools-reopen-too-quickly-1.9513430>

Britain to work with Germany's CureVac on vaccines against coronavirus variants

Britain on Friday said it had agreed on a deal with German biotech firm CureVac to work to develop vaccines against coronavirus variants, placing an initial order for 50 million doses in case they are needed. Prime Minister Boris Johnson has cited the possibility of new variants of the coronavirus as one of the biggest risks to the vaccine rollout and hopes that the economy can start to be reopened from lockdown in the spring. The government said both the Pfizer/BioNTech and Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccines being currently rolled out appear to work well against variants currently dominant in Britain.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-britain-curevac-idUSKBN2A51JT>

'A waste of money': The home Covid-19 test funded by the Biden administration is too costly and complex, critics say

For months, U.S. public health experts have called on the federal government to approve and fund cheap and fast at-home Covid-19 tests, to help bring the spread of infection under control. But when the Biden administration this week announced a \$231.8 million deal to ramp up production of the first fully at-home test, the experts' response was, to say the least, unenthusiastic. One dismissed it as "a spit in the ocean." It's not that home testing with a 15-minute turnaround time isn't a good idea, they said, it's just that the rollout of this initial kit is too little and too late, and the test too expensive and complicated, to help extinguish the raging pandemic fire. A number of experts called on the Biden administration to subsidize the home test for consumers, and said the Food and Drug Administration needs to do more to make such tests widely available.

<https://www.statnews.com/2021/02/05/a-waste-of-money-the-home-covid-19-test-funded-by-the-biden-administration-is-too-costly-and-complex-critics-say/>

Partisan Exits

Swiss march in lakeside tax haven to protest COVID-19 lockdown

Some 500 protesters marched through the Swiss tax haven of Zug on Saturday, wearing white protective suits and chanting dystopian slogans to voice displeasure with rules aimed at limiting the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. The demonstration was reminiscent of a rally a week ago in Vienna, where thousands opposed to that country's even-stricter lockdown faced off against police. Though Switzerland's restrictions have been less severe than those in Germany, Austria or Italy -- restaurants and non-essential shops are closed but ski areas are open -- there is still a steady buzz of opposition. In Zug, police watched but did not intervene as a group of protesters filed from the train station to the centre of the lakeside city known for shell companies with letter-box addresses and attractive tax rates.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-swiss-protests/swiss-march-in-lakeside-tax-haven-to-protest-covid-19-lockdown-idUSL8N2KC0D5>

Too soon to end German lockdown, says Bavarian leader Soeder

It is too soon for Germany to lift its lockdown without risking a third wave of COVID-19 infections, Bavarian premier Markus Soeder said on Sunday, ahead of a crunch meeting to review the

restrictions aimed at stemming the pandemic. Chancellor Angela Merkel and the leaders of Germany's 16 federal states are due to meet virtually on Wednesday to discuss whether to ease the restrictions from Feb. 15, or extend a lockdown that began in mid-December. "I think, basically, the lockdown will have to be extended for the time being," Soeder told broadcaster ARD.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-germany-lockdown/too-soon-to-end-german-lockdown-says-bavarian-leader-soeder-idUSKBN2A70TZ>

COVID-19: 'I'll wait for the English vaccine' - How 'nationalism' is affecting the fight against coronavirus

As 2020 drew to close after a tumultuous year, Boris Johnson was in celebratory mood as the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine was approved for use in the UK. "It is truly fantastic news - and a triumph for British science," the prime minister tweeted on 30 December. Health Secretary Matt Hancock was also keen to emphasise the UK's role in the newly-approved coronavirus vaccine, hailing it as "a huge British success story".

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-ill-wait-for-the-english-vaccine-how-nationalism-is-affecting-the-fight-against-coronavirus-12207629>

Fretful Boris Johnson plays it safe on lifting Covid-19 lockdown

Any day now a folder will land on Boris Johnson's desk. Inside will be longed-for data that will determine the nature of the next six months and very possibly his entire political legacy. Public Health England's best assessment of the effectiveness of the vaccination programme so far will in effect set the parameters for the nation's exit from lockdown. The assessment shows the jabs are working as expected in protecting people from infection. It may also show encouraging signs on transmission as well as early real-world data on reduced mortality and hospital admissions. If so the prime minister can plot a spring unlocking and promise a glorious summer.

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/fretful-boris-johnson-plays-it-safe-on-lifting-covid-19-lockdown-88lgg8qhq>

Science Not Politics: How Dr. Rochelle Walensky is Saving the CDC

There's no doubt that Walensky, 51, has the scientific and intellectual chops for her new job. Besides her now-former position at Mass General, the teaching hospital of Harvard, she is a prolific author of papers on the epidemiology of HIV and, at 43, was among the youngest women ever promoted to full professor at Harvard Medical School. As Julie Gerberding, M.D.—who led the CDC from 2002 to 2009—says, "Her credentials and reputation are impeccable. It's clear that the Biden administration played an ace in this decision."

<https://www.vogue.com/article/dr-rochelle-walensky-on-saving-the-cdc>

Nadhim Zahawi: Coronavirus vaccine refuseniks face visit from the persuaders

People who have not accepted vaccination offers could get knocks on the door from council staff in an attempt to convince sceptics "home by home", the vaccines minister has suggested. Nadhim Zahawi said the NHS was already trying to "identify to individual level the people that we need to reach" to ensure that all over-70s had a chance to get a jab by February 15.

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/nadhim-zahawi-coronavirus-vaccine-refuseniks-face-visit-from-the-persuaders-p3stfkfh0>

'Like going to war': Life and death on a Covid intensive care ward

On the intensive care ward of Northwick Park Hospital in north London, physiotherapist Mirko Vracar stands among dozens of coronavirus patients, surrounded by a cacophony of beeping alarms and hissing machinery. The patients lie comatose, ventilators breathing for them, while doctors and nurses speak in urgent, hushed tones, their voices muffled behind masks. For Mirko, redeployed to help the overstretched staff, the work is difficult and the stakes could not be higher. Since Christmas he has spent five days a week on these wards, working in a team that "prones" these patients - moving them on to their fronts so their Covid-ravaged lungs can breathe a little easier. They do this

as many as 25 times a shift.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/health/covid-hospital-nhs-intensive-care-icu-b1793511.html>

AP analysis: Federal executions likely a COVID superspreader

As the Trump administration was nearing the end of an unprecedented string of executions, 70% of death row inmates were sick with COVID-19. Guards were ill. Traveling prisons staff on the execution team had the virus. So did media witnesses, who may have unknowingly infected others when they returned home because they were never told about the spreading cases. Records obtained by The Associated Press show employees at the Indiana prison complex where the 13 executions were carried out over six months had contact with inmates and other people infected with the coronavirus, but were able to refuse testing and declined to participate in contact tracing efforts and were still permitted to return to their work assignments.

<https://apnews.com/article/public-health-prisons-health-coronavirus-pandemic-executions-956da680790108d8b7e2d8f1567f3803>

Turkey Uighurs fear sellout to China in exchange for vaccine

Abdullah Metseydi, a Uighur in Turkey, was readying for bed last month when he heard commotion, then pounding on the door. "Police! Open the door!" A dozen or more officers poured in, many bearing guns and wearing the camouflage of Turkey's anti-terror force. They asked if Metseydi had participated in any movements against China and threatened to deport him and his wife. They took him to a deportation facility, where he now sits at the center of a brewing political controversy. Opposition legislators in Turkey are accusing Ankara's leaders of secretly selling out Uighurs to China in exchange for coronavirus vaccines. Tens of millions of vials of promised Chinese vaccines have not yet been delivered. Meanwhile, in recent months, Turkish police have raided and detained around 50 Uighurs in deportation centers, lawyers say — a sharp uptick from last year.

<https://apnews.com/article/turkey-beijing-coronavirus-pandemic-ankara-china-c8b714974552c484c501a5784efc117a>

Burundi says it doesn't need COVID-19 vaccines, at least yet

Burundi has become at least the second African country to say it doesn't need COVID-19 vaccines, even as doses finally begin to arrive on the continent that's seeing a deadly resurgence in cases. The health minister of the East African nation, Thaddee Ndikumana, told reporters on Thursday evening that prevention is more important, and "since more than 95% of patients are recovering, we estimate that the vaccines are not yet necessary." The minister spoke while announcing new measures against the pandemic. The country closed its land and water borders last month. It now has well over 1,600 confirmed coronavirus cases.

<https://apnews.com/article/tanzania-coronavirus-pandemic-east-africa-africa-burundi-c4c90750e93dcdefadd24658ed36580d>

Coronavirus in Tanzania: The country that's rejecting the vaccine

For months Tanzania's government has insisted the country was free from Covid-19 - so there are no plans for vaccination. The BBC's Dickens Olewe has spoken to one family mourning the death of a husband and father suspected of having had the disease. The fear is that amid the denial, there are many more unacknowledged victims of this highly contagious virus. A week after Peter - not his real name - arrived home from work with a dry cough and loss of taste, he was taken to hospital, where he died within hours. He had not been tested for Covid. But then, according to Tanzania's government, which has not published data on the coronavirus for months, the country is "Covid-19-free". There is little testing and no plans for a vaccination programme in the East African country.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-55900680>

London COVID-19 jabs skewed to younger patients amid vaccine hesitancy fears

London has delivered a first dose of COVID-19 vaccine to nearly twice the proportion of patients aged 70-74 as the rest of England, but remains well behind other regions on vaccinating over-80s.

<https://www.gponline.com/london-covid-19-jabs-skewed-younger-patients-amid-vaccine-hesitancy-fears/article/1706529>

One in four Americans say they will NEVER get a COVID-19 vaccine

Monmouth University polled 809 Americans about their attitudes toward the pandemic and the US response. More than half of respondents said they will get a COVID-19 vaccine as soon as possible. But nearly a quarter said they would likely never get a shot if they didn't have to. Republicans were 10-times more likely than Democrats to refuse vaccination. Mistrust is among the issues holding up the US vaccine rollout which has seen just 8.2% of the population get one or more doses. Both vaccines by Moderna and Pfizer are safe and at least 94% effective.

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-9221721/One-four-Americans-say-NEVER-COVID-19-vaccine.html>

Continued Lockdown

Covid-19 vaccine denied for special school staff then reinstated

A clinical commissioning group has apologised for the confusion it created after cancelling Covid-19 vaccine appointments for special school staff – before reinstating them. Schools Week revealed last week that thousands of special school staff had been offered the vaccine. But the approaches nationwide vary, with some local authorities including staff in the priority roll-out as frontline care workers, or offering them leftover supplies. However, there was confusion in Berkshire after the local “allocations bureau” cancelled job appointments for special education needs (SEN) staff last week.

<https://schoolsweek.co.uk/covid-19-vaccine-denied-for-special-school-staff-and-then-reinstated/>

Long Covid kids: Mum's 'heartbreak' over children's illness

A mum has described how it was "horrendous to watch" as her son and daughter suffered the debilitating effects of so-called long Covid. Nichola Careless, from Ashington, said her daughter Eleni, 11, tested positive last year and was mildly ill at first. But her symptoms became severe and she continues to have shortness of breath, stomach ache, joint pain and dizziness. Her 12-year-old son, Immanuel, became even more ill and the once-keen sportsman now has to use a wheelchair. Although Eleni had a positive test for Covid in September, Immanuel's result was negative. But what at first seemed a common cold for him developed into a fortnight-long cough, before both children became severely ill.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-tyne-55938399>

Scientific Viewpoint

Oxford vaccine offers 'limited' protection against South Africa variant, study finds

AstraZeneca and the University of Oxford have said their vaccine has been found to provide only limited protection against mild and moderate disease caused by the South African variant of Covid-19 in early data from a small trial. However, Oxford vaccine researchers say a version of the jab that works against new variants should be available by the autumn. The study, which has not been peer-reviewed, was conducted by South Africa's University of the Witwatersrand and Oxford University. It analysed the E484K mutation in more than 2,000 people, with most of the participants considered young and healthy.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/health/covid-vaccine-oxford-south-africa-variant-b1798794.html>

Pfizer expects to cut COVID-19 vaccine production time by close to 50% as production ramps up, efficiencies increase

Pfizer expects to nearly cut in half the amount of time it takes to produce a batch of COVID-19 vaccine from 110 days to an average of 60 as it makes the process more efficient and production is built out, the company told USA TODAY. As the nation revs up its vaccination programs, the increase could help relieve bottlenecks caused by vaccine shortages. "We call this 'Project Light Speed,' and it's called that for a reason," said Chaz Calitri, Pfizer's vice president for operations for sterile

injectables, who runs the company's plant in Kalamazoo, Michigan. "Just in the last month we've doubled output."

https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/us/pfizer-expects-to-cut-covid-19-vaccine-production-time-by-close-to-50-as-production-ramps-up-efficiencies-increase/ar-BB1dsMWG?fbclid=IwAR2prGoxDdKZIVL_Y868_DUFbpZ8qhB0hy3SvETUV0eFE5pvlmRT2-S_OQI

Vaccine strategy needs rethink after resistant variants emerge, say scientists

Leading vaccine scientists are calling for a rethink of the goals of vaccination programmes, saying that herd immunity through vaccination is unlikely to be possible because of the emergence of variants like that in South Africa. The comments came as the University of Oxford and AstraZeneca acknowledged that their vaccine will not protect people against mild to moderate Covid illness caused by the South African variant. The Oxford vaccine is the mainstay of the UK's immunisation programme and vitally important around the world because of its low cost and ease of use. The findings came from a study involving more than 2,000 people in South Africa. They followed results from two vaccines, from Novavax and Janssen, which were trialled there in recent months and were found to have much reduced protection against the variant – at about 60%. Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna have also said the variant affects the efficacy of their vaccines, although on the basis of lab studies only.

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/feb/07/scientists-call-for-rethink-as-doubts-grow-about-achieving-herd-immunity>

Coronavirus Vaccine Nasal Spray Offers Hope To Needle Phobics

While most of the nation pins its hope on the coronavirus vaccine as a route out of the pandemic, Michelle Turner has mixed emotions. As a science teacher in a secondary school, Turner knows she has a rational brain. But put her in the same room as someone holding a needle and she admits all logic goes out the window as she has a total meltdown. "The moment a needle comes anywhere near me, I just flip my lid and start screaming, flinching, swearing and kicking out. It is like an out-of-body experience," she tells HuffPost UK. Her needle phobia has only got worse with time. "When I was pregnant with my daughter, it got to the point where the midwife said it was completely unethical to try and take blood from someone who got so distressed," says Turner, 35, who lives in Barrow-in-Furness, Cumbria.

https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/coronavirus-vaccine-nasal-spray-alternative-lancaster-university_uk_601ac2edc5b6f41348c5e003

China Approves Second Coronavirus Vaccine for Public Use

Sinovac Biotech Ltd. received regulatory approval from Chinese authorities for its coronavirus vaccine to be used by the general public in the country's second such authorization. The conditional approval was announced by the National Medical Products Administration on Saturday. Sinovac earlier said the protective efficacy of its vaccine, CoronaVac, met World Health Organization and China regulatory standards 14 days after the completion of two shots. With the approval, the vaccine can be administered to the general population following one developed by state-owned China National Biotech Group Co. which got permission in December. The Chinese regulator had endorsed CoronaVac for emergency use in July.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-02-06/china-gives-conditional-approval-for-sinovac-vaccine>

Could the climate crisis have played a role in the emergence of Covid-19?

Scientists have identified a "possible role" for the climate crisis in the origins of the Covid-19 pandemic. Covid-19 was first recorded in the Chinese city of Wuhan. However, it is not yet clear exactly how the virus emerged. Researchers suspect that the virus initially "spilled over" from bats to humans through an unknown intermediary animal, possibly a pangolin. A study published today finds that changing climate conditions could be linked to a greater diversity of bat species in

Yunnan, a province of southwestern China, and its surrounding regions. Early research suggests that the virus causing Covid-19, which is called SARS-CoV-2, could have arisen in this area.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/climate-change/news/covid-climate-china-wuhan-bats-b1798036.html>

Scientists helping to 'second guess' future mutations of Covid-19 to create new vaccines

Scientists are helping to “second guess” future mutations of coronavirus in order to create new potential vaccines, the chairman of the UK Vaccine Taskforce has said. Asked whether it was possible to produce a vaccine that was comprehensive at tackling new mutations, Clive Dix told BBC Radio 4’s Today: “Yes, absolutely. “The UK is properly at the forefront of surveying all of these variants. “We have actually sequenced nearly 50% of all the virus that has been sequenced in this pandemic at the Sanger centre in Cambridge.

<https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/uk-news/scientists-helpingto-second-guess-future-19784195>

What's the risk of dying from a fast-spreading COVID-19 variant?

The news is sobering, but complicated. Scientists have released the data behind a British government warning last week that the fast-spreading SARS-CoV-2 variant B.1.1.7 increases the risk of dying from COVID-19 compared with previous variants. But some scientists caution that the latest study — like the government warning — is preliminary and still does not indicate whether the variant is more deadly or is just spreading faster and so reaching greater numbers of vulnerable people. The latest findings are concerning, but to draw conclusions, “more work needs to be done”, says Muge Cevik, a public-health researcher at the University of St Andrews, who is based in Edinburgh, UK.

<https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-021-00299-2>

China approves Sinovac Biotech COVID-19 vaccine for general public use

Sinovac Biotech said on Saturday that its unit’s COVID-19 vaccine has been approved for use by the general public by China’s medical products regulator. It marks the second vaccine approved for public use in China, after one developed by a Beijing institute affiliated with state-owned China National Pharmaceutical Group (Sinopharm) was approved in December. Both vaccines, as well as a third candidate from Sinopharm, have already been used in China’s vaccination program which has administered over 31 million doses, mainly targeting groups at higher infection risk. A fourth candidate from CanSino Biologics is being used among military personnel.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-vaccine-sinovac/china-approves-sinovac-biotech-covid-19-vaccine-for-general-public-use-idUSKBN2A60AY>

COVID-19: Vaccines against new variants should be ready by October

Vaccines specifically designed to tackle new variants of coronavirus should be ready to be rolled out by October, according to the team behind the Oxford University/AstraZeneca jab. Professor Andrew Pollard, director of the Oxford vaccine group, said work on designing a new jab could be a quick process. Studies have shown that variants of COVID-19 that have the E484K mutation could reduce the efficacy of vaccines, but they are still expected to provide good protection against illness and severe disease. The mutation is present in the variant first identified in South Africa, with more than 100 cases of that variant detected in the UK so far. E484K has also been found in Bristol in the variant first recorded in Kent, and in Liverpool in a new variant on the original strain of coronavirus that first came to the UK.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-vaccines-against-new-variants-should-be-ready-by-october-12207572>

Covid-19: Avoid 'setting dates' for lifting lockdown, scientist warns

The UK government should avoid "setting dates" for when to lift lockdown and instead react to changing circumstances, a scientist has warned. Prof Graham Medley, a member of the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies, said leaders should not be "driven by a calendar". Meanwhile, the government has said all over-50s should be vaccinated by May. And a senior Conservative MP has

told the BBC that Downing Street should be "looking to open up" society. Sir Graham Brady, who leads the 1922 Committee of Conservative Party backbenchers, cited the falling infection level and success of the vaccine rollout, telling the BBC the situation was "optimistic".

<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-55947028>

Putin's Once-Scorned Vaccine Is Now a Favorite in Pandemic Fight

President Vladimir Putin's announcement in August that Russia had cleared the world's first Covid-19 vaccine for use before it even completed safety trials sparked skepticism worldwide. Now he may reap diplomatic dividends as Russia basks in arguably its biggest scientific breakthrough since the Soviet era. Countries are lining up for supplies of Sputnik V after peer-reviewed results published in The Lancet medical journal this week showed the Russian vaccine protects against the deadly virus about as well as U.S. and European shots, and far more effectively than Chinese rivals.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-02-06/putin-s-once-scorned-vaccine-is-now-a-favorite-in-pandemic-fight>

COVID-19: a heavy toll on health-care workers

The COVID-19 pandemic has challenged and, in many cases, exceeded the capacity of hospitals and intensive care units (ICUs) worldwide. Health-care workers have continued to provide care for patients despite exhaustion, personal risk of infection, fear of transmission to family members, illness or death of friends and colleagues, and the loss of many patients. Sadly, health-care workers have also faced many additional—often avoidable—sources of stress and anxiety, and long shifts combined with unprecedented population restrictions, including personal isolation, have affected individuals' ability to cope.

[https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanres/article/PIIS2213-2600\(21\)00068-0/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanres/article/PIIS2213-2600(21)00068-0/fulltext)

Moderna sets sights on \$200M vaccine factory in Seoul: report

With supply contracts for 50 million COVID-19 vaccine doses in Japan and 40 million in South Korea, Moderna has already made a push into the Asian market. Now, it's laying out plans for a factory all its own in the region. The Cambridge, Massachusetts-based drugmaker is in talks with the South Korean government to invest \$200 million into a vaccine production plant in the country, Park Young-sun, a former government minister involved in the plans, told the Asia Business Daily, Reuters reports. Moderna is eager to push into the region, she added.

<https://www.fiercepharma.com/manufacturing/moderna-sets-sights-200m-vaccine-factory-seoul-report>

No need 'to start at square one': FDA plans to lay out a speedy path for COVID-19 vaccines, drugs against variants

New coronavirus variants have prompted COVID-19 vaccine makers to start developing updates to their existing offerings. To speed their journey to a pandemic-fatigued public, the FDA says it's developing expedited review rules for the follow-up shots. The FDA's working on guidance for the types of data needed to support changes to COVID-19 vaccines. The new rules would provide for "streamlined clinical programs" that can demonstrate an immune response to new variants and "can be executed quickly," FDA's acting commissioner, Janet Woodcock, said in a statement Thursday. The draft plan could come in two to three weeks, Politico reported, citing four people familiar with the agency's internal discussions.

<https://www.fiercepharma.com/pharma/no-need-to-start-at-square-one-fda-mulls-over-speedy-path-for-covid-vaccines-drugs-against>

Talking Europe - 'Promising' signs for Covid-19 vaccines' efficiency against mutant strains: EMA head

As the EU's 27 member states scramble to contain the spread of new "mutant" strains of the Covid-19 virus, the head of the European Medicines Agency, Emer Cooke, tells FRANCE 24 that there are "promising" results from early studies into how well existing vaccines work against the new

variants. The so-called "UK variant", otherwise known as strain B.1.1.7, transmits more easily from person to person and there are predictions that it will become the dominant strain within weeks. EMA Executive Director Emer Cooke says that ongoing preliminary studies look "promising" – and that the EMA has asked vaccine producers to plan studies to prove their results "conclusively". Meanwhile, a growing list of European states are casting doubt on the efficacy, in people aged over 65, of the vaccine developed by Oxford University and AstraZeneca – one of the three authorised vaccines in the EU.

<https://www.france24.com/en/tv-shows/talking-europe/20210205-promising-signs-for-covid-19-vaccines-efficiency-against-mutant-strains-ema-head>

Pfizer withdraws COVID-19 vaccine emergency use bid in India | TheHill

Pfizer has removed its bid for emergency approval of its coronavirus vaccine in India, citing additional information needed by the country's drug regulator, the pharmaceutical company confirmed to The Hill. The decision, first reported by Reuters on Friday, came after a Wednesday meeting with India's Central Drugs Standard Control Organization. "Based on the deliberations at the meeting and our understanding of additional information that the regulator may need, the company has decided to withdraw its application at this time," Pfizer said in a statement shared with The Hill. The company added that it "will continue to engage with the authority and resubmit its approval request with additional information as it becomes available in the near future."

<https://thehill.com/policy/healthcare/537494-pfizer-withdraws-covid-vaccine-emergency-use-bid-in-india>

Sinovac says COVID-19 vaccine effective in preventing hospitalization, death

China's Sinovac Biotech on Friday said late-stage trial data of its COVID-19 vaccine from Brazil and Turkey showed it prevented hospitalization and death in COVID-19 patients, but had a much lower efficacy rate in blocking infections. The 12,396-person trial found the CoronaVac vaccine was 100% effective in preventing COVID-19 sufferers from being hospitalized or dying and 83.7% effective in avoiding cases that required any medical treatment, but only 50.65% effective at keeping people from getting infected, according to a statement. The trials evaluated the efficacy of the two-shot vaccine candidate 14 days after inoculation of participants, including healthcare workers who treat COVID-19 patients.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-sinovac-biotech-idUSKBN2A52Q6>

Coronavirus: Irish government 'right' on over 70s vaccine plan

The Irish government has made the "right decision" by not using the Oxford-AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccine on people aged over 70, an immunologist has said. Prof Kingston Mills from Trinity College Dublin said data was "limited" on its efficacy in the older population. The Irish government said over 70s will receive the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines. However, it has warned the rollout for this age group "may well be slower". On Thursday, Tánaiste (Irish deputy prime minister) Leo Varadkar told the Dáil (Irish parliament) the same number of vaccines will be administered, with a faster rollout for healthcare workers and some other groups who will receive AstraZeneca doses.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-55946669>

UK coronavirus variant found in 74% of Slovak cases; country to open some schools

The UK coronavirus variant, more infectious than the previously dominant strain, has taken over as the main cause of new COVID-19 cases in Slovakia, Prime Minister Igor Matovic said on Friday. The central European country of 5.5 million has struggled to bring down daily cases despite lockdown measures and widespread testing, which is required for people to go out including to work. Hospitals have been strained, with 3,560 coronavirus patients on Thursday. Matovic told a news conference the government had checked all positive samples of PCR laboratory tests taken in the country on Wednesday and results showed 74% were the UK variant, a touch above the 71% in partial findings he had reported earlier on Friday.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-slovakia-idUKKBN2A52Ij>

Johnson & Johnson asks FDA to authorize its Covid-19 vaccine

Johnson & Johnson officially asked the US Food and Drug Administration for an emergency use authorization of its Covid-19 vaccine Thursday, taking forward the possibility of a third coronavirus vaccine for the US market. "Today's submission for Emergency Use Authorization of our investigational single-shot COVID-19 vaccine is a pivotal step toward reducing the burden of disease for people globally and putting an end to the pandemic," Dr. Paul Stoffels, Chief Scientific Officer at Johnson & Johnson, said in a statement.

<https://edition.cnn.com/2021/02/04/health/johnson-and-johnson-ask-fda-eua/index.html>

COVID-19: Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine has 'similar effect' against Kent variant, researchers find

The Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine remains effective against the coronavirus variant first detected in Kent and the South East, researchers have found. The researchers who developed the jab say it has a similar efficacy against the variant compared to the original COVID-19 strain it was tested against. Professor Andrew Pollard, a chief investigator on the Oxford vaccine trial, said the new data suggests "the vaccine not only protects against the original pandemic virus, but also protects against the novel variant, B.1.1.7".

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-oxford-astrazeneca-vaccine-has-similar-effect-against-kent-variant-researchers-find-12209449>

Pregnant women 'should be included in Covid-19 vaccine trials'

Pregnant women should be included in coronavirus vaccine trials, experts have urged, as those in priority groups wrestle with whether or not to have the jab. Doctors are considering emerging evidence that pregnant women may face greater risks from Covid-19, although they are not at present a priority group. Professor Lucy Chappell, spokeswoman for the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG), said that it was not asking for this status to change but that it would discuss any risk with the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/pregnant-women-should-be-included-in-covid-19-vaccine-trials-n23ndqjv6>

Covid restrictions need to remain until 2022 due to mutant strains, experts claim

The ongoing spread of mutated coronavirus strains mean restrictions can't be lifted until 2022 despite the vaccine roll out, experts have warned. Researchers at Warwick University used simulations to model what could happen if Britain is unshackled in the coming months, before presenting their findings to SAGE. The paper, published on Friday, said despite nearly 11 million people across the UK having so far been inoculated, the unprecedented roll-out is "insufficient" to allow for a return to normal before the end of the year. The scientists warn such a move could be catastrophic and leading to thousands more hospitalisations and deaths.

<https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/covid-restrictions-need-remain-2022-23452424>

India's coronavirus puzzle: Why case numbers are plummeting

Back in November, Ajeet Jain felt like he was living a nightmare. The large public hospital where he works in India's capital was full of covid-19 patients, hundreds of them so ill they required intensive care. About 10 people were dying every day. Three months later, the situation is unrecognizable. The number of coronavirus patients at the hospital can be counted on one hand. Out of 200 ventilators, only two are in use. Hospitals treating covid-19 patients around the country report similar experiences. "It's a big, big relief," Jain said. The apparent retreat of the coronavirus in India, the world's second-most populous nation, is a mystery that is crucial to the future course of the pandemic.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/india-coronavirus-cases/2021/02/04/d7f92f72-6562-11eb-bab8-707f8769d785_story.html

Could mixing COVID vaccines boost immune response?

Researchers in the United Kingdom have launched a study that will mix and match two COVID-19 vaccines in a bid to ease the daunting logistics of immunizing millions of people — and potentially boost immune responses in the process. Most coronavirus vaccines are given as two injections: an initial 'prime' dose followed by a 'boost' to stimulate the immune system's memory cells and amplify the immune response. The clinical trial will test participants' immune responses to receiving one shot of a coronavirus vaccine produced by Oxford and drug firm AstraZeneca — which uses a harmless virus to carry a key coronavirus gene into cells — and one shot of the vaccine produced by drug company Pfizer, which uses RNA instructions to trigger an immune response. The trial, which is run by investigators at the University of Oxford, aims to begin enrolment on 4 February.

<https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-021-00315-5>

Coronavirus Resurgence

Burkina Faso hospitals worry as second COVID-19 wave hits

For nearly a year, Ousseni Yanogo thought he was doing everything he could to protect himself from the coronavirus. The 63-year-old retired gendarme diligently wore a mask, washed his hands and stayed a safe distance from other adults. When he held hands with his granddaughter to sing happy birthday when she turned 6, he never imagined he'd find himself fighting to survive in a coronavirus isolation ward weeks later. "I didn't know contact (with children) was that dangerous, otherwise I wouldn't have allowed the party to be organized," Yanogo said while seated on his bed at the Bogodogo Medical Teaching Hospital in Ouagadougou, the capital of the West African country of roughly 20 million.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/burkina-faso-hospitals-worry-as-second-covid19-wave-hits-burkina-faso-hospital-s-granddaughter-coronavirus-ap-b1798771.html>

Virus Variant First Found in Britain Now Spreading Rapidly in U.S.

A more contagious variant of the coronavirus first found in Britain is spreading rapidly in the United States, doubling roughly every 10 days, according to a new study. Analyzing half a million coronavirus tests and hundreds of genomes, a team of researchers predicted that in a month this variant could become predominant in the United States, potentially bringing a surge of new cases and increased risk of death. The new research offers the first nationwide look at the history of the variant, known as B.1.1.7, since it arrived in the United States in late 2020. Last month, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention warned that B.1.1.7 could become predominant by March if it behaved the way it did in Britain. The new study confirms that projected path.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/07/health/coronavirus-variant-us-spread.html>

Covid-19: Extra testing opens in Bristol and South Gloucestershire

Additional testing to track and suppress the spread of a Covid-19 variant has been rolled out in Bristol and South Gloucestershire. People who do not have symptoms but live in 24 postcode areas are "strongly encouraged" to get tested. Additional testing has been introduced in Worcestershire and Sefton after the South Africa variant was found. Bristol City Council's director of public health said people should follow existing health advice.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-bristol-55970229>

COVID-19: More than 11.4 million have now had first vaccine dose as UK reports another 828 deaths

A total of 11,465,210 people have received a first vaccine as the UK has reported another 828 deaths associated with the virus. The number of deaths is down from the 1,014 reported on Friday, and comes after another 18,262 cases were reported on Saturday, latest government figures show. The number of daily infections is less than the 19,114 cases confirmed yesterday and the 20,634 reported on Thursday.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-more-than-114-million-have-now-had-first-vaccine-dose-as-uk-reports-another-828-deaths-12210203>

Biden administration to survey schools on COVID-19 impact

The Biden administration will soon begin collecting data from thousands of U.S. schools to find out how they have been affected by the pandemic, including how many have returned to in-person instruction, officials said Friday. Led by the Education Department the effort will collect monthly data from 7,000 schools on a range of topics related to COVID-19. It's the first federal effort to gather data on the pandemic's impact on education. President Joe Biden called for the data in a Jan. 21 executive order on school reopening. The Trump administration declined to collect data on the subject, saying it wasn't the role of the federal government to do so.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/biden-administration-to-survey-schools-on-covid19-impact-joe-biden-education-department-schools-schools-data-b1798505.html>

Bolivia funeral homes, cemeteries overwhelmed as COVID-19 deaths mount

Corpses in Bolivia have begun to pile up as a fierce second wave of the coronavirus has overwhelmed funeral homes and cemeteries, according to officials, stoking fears the growing backlog could become yet another focal point of infection.

<https://www.msn.com/en-au/lifestyle/wellbeing/bolivia-funeral-homes-cemeteries-overwhelmed-as-covid-19-deaths-mount/ar-BB1drF7E>

Covid-19: NI records seven more coronavirus-related deaths

A further seven Covid-19 related deaths have been recorded by the Department of Health in Northern Ireland. The department's coronavirus death toll now stands at 1,922. The latest figures, released on Saturday, also recorded 390 new positive cases of the virus. There are 602 people being treated for Covid-19 in hospitals in Northern Ireland, with 67 of those patients being treated in intensive care units (ICU).

<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-55963481>

Covid-19: UK records 828 deaths and 18,262 cases

The UK has recorded a further 828 Covid-19 deaths and 18,262 cases in the past 24 hours, the Government has said. The number of deaths, 28 days after a positive test, still remains high with a seven-day average of 1,000 a day. But cases, hospitalisations and deaths continue to fall as the lockdown pushes down the number of people mixing in the community. The figures bring the total number of cases in the UK to 3,929,835 and deaths to 112,092 - one of the highest in the world.

<https://www.lbc.co.uk/news/covid-19-uk-records-828-deaths-and-18-262-cases/>

Covid-19: Are NI's pandemic trends turning in the right direction?

We're now into February, nearly a full year since Northern Ireland's first case of Covid-19. And we can say that we've just exited the worst month of the pandemic to date. The death toll in January far outstripped any other month so far. There were more positive cases last month than at any other time and more people ended up in our hospitals because of the virus than ever before. But there is much cause for optimism as we face into the spring - trends indicate that most of the numbers used to measure the pandemic in Northern Ireland are going in the right direction.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-55936107>

Germany's confirmed coronavirus cases rise by 10,485 - RKI

The number of confirmed coronavirus cases in Germany increased by 10,485 to 2,275,394, data from the Robert Koch Institute (RKI) for infectious diseases showed on Saturday. The reported death toll rose by 689 to 61,286, the tally showed.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-germany-cases-idUSKBN2A606O>

Up to 100 UK children a week hospitalised with rare post-Covid disease

Up to 100 children a week are being hospitalised with a rare disease that can emerge weeks after Covid-19, leaving them in intensive care, doctors have said. In a phenomenon that is worrying paediatricians, 75% of the children worst affected by paediatric inflammatory multi-system syndrome (PIMS) were black, Asian or ethnic minority (BAME). Almost four out of five children were previously healthy, according to an unpublished snapshot of cases. When PIMS emerged in the first wave of the pandemic, it caused confusion among doctors, concern among NHS bosses and alarm among parents. It was initially thought to be Kawasaki disease, a rare condition that mainly affects babies and infants. But PIMS has been recognised as a separate, novel post-viral syndrome that one in 5,000 children get about a month after having Covid, regardless of whether they had symptoms.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/feb/05/up-to-100-uk-children-a-week-hospitalised-with-rare-post-covid-disease>

New Lockdown

French health experts stress need for new COVID measures

Two leading French health officials called for new restrictive measures to rein in the COVID-19 pandemic on Friday, taking the opposite view of the government, which stood by its decision to not impose a new lockdown for now. Prime Minister Jean Castex said on Thursday that the COVID-19 situation in France remained fragile but that a third lockdown was not needed at present, despite demands from several leading French medics for such a measure. France is the sixth most infected country in the world in terms of COVID-19 cases, with a total of 3.27 million cases. Its death toll, at almost 78,000, is the seventh-highest globally.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-france-outlook-idUSL1N2KB0JA>

'Eye of the storm': Diverse east London grapples with virus

Taxicab driver Gary Nerden knows colleagues who got seriously ill from COVID-19. He knows the area of east London where he lives and works has among the highest infection rates in the whole of England. But since he can't afford not to work, he drives around picking up strangers for up to 12 hours a day, relying on a flimsy plastic screen to keep him safe. "I've got people telling me they won't wear a mask, saying they're exempt," said Nerden, 57. "I've got diabetes, I have to look after myself. I wipe the handles, the seat belt, after every customer, but that's all I can do, really."

<https://apnews.com/article/east-london-coronavirus-uk-f9064c59828b5601ba645e9ced4d10b5>

French hospital federation president calls for new COVID lockdown

Frederic Valletoux, president of the French hospital federation, on Friday called for a new national lockdown to deal with the COVID-19 situation, in the latest sign of tensions between the government and health officials on the issue. Valletoux, who is also mayor of Fontainebleau just south of Paris, told LCI TV that while the situation in hospitals was under control for now, it remained "very tense" in many areas. French Prime Minister Jean Castex said on Thursday that the COVID-19 situation in France remained fragile but there was no need for a new lockdown at present, although several leading French medics have said a new lockdown might be necessary.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-france-outlook/french-hospital-federation-president-calls-for-new-covid-lockdown-idUSFWN2KA1M2>