

COVID-19 Lockdown Exit Analysis

10th Feb 2021

News Highlights

WHO does not find immediate answers in Wuhan investigation

A trip to Wuhan by World Health Organization (WHO) researchers to investigate the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic has not immediately yielded answers. [The first outcomes of the trip did not address open questions about the precise path of zoonotic transmission or whether the global outbreak stemmed from a wet market in Hunan](#) or came into China from elsewhere as has also been suggested. Researchers did say it was unlikely that the disease escaped from a lab, as conspiracy theorists have claimed.

Johnson & Johnson expresses interest in vaccine manufacturing in India, government suggests

Vinod K. Paul, a member of the Indian government thinktank Niti Aayog, [has told a news conference that drugmaker Johnson & Johnson is interested in manufacturing its COVID-19 vaccine in the country](#). India is home to the world's largest vaccine manufacturer, the Serum Institute of India. Paul also affirmed the government's confidence in the AstraZeneca/Oxford University vaccine, which is a core component of its mass vaccination drive.

AMLO declines to wear a face covering after COVID-19 recovery

Mexican president Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador told reporters 'no, no' when he was asked if he would wear a face mask following his recovery from COVID-19, claiming doctors told him he was not contagious. [This goes against the example of many of his government officials and public opinion in Mexico](#), which strongly favours the wearing of face masks. The country's death toll of more than 166,000 is the third-highest in the world, but Lopez-Obrador has not supported stricter containment measures in the country.

Deaths due to COVID-19 account for 46% of all deaths in England and Wales

The last week of January saw COVID-19 [account for almost 46% of all deaths registered in England and Wales, the highest proportion since the beginning of the pandemic](#). The period saw total deaths 44.6% higher than the 5-year average and almost 100% higher in London. The country is said to have passed the peak of the latest wave, as it rolls out vaccines - including [allowing over-70s to book appointments for a shot without being contacted by the National Health Service](#).

Lockdown Exit

European Union will not block Pfizer coronavirus vaccine doses bound for Australia, ambassador says

Millions of doses of the Pfizer coronavirus vaccine bound for Australia will be allowed to leave the European Union (EU), its ambassador has confirmed. Australia has secured 20 million doses of the vaccine, with Prime Minister Scott Morrison previously saying the goal was to vaccinate 80,000 people a week from the end of February. Concerns were raised about whether Australia would receive its order after the EU introduced new rules on exports of COVID-19 vaccines produced within the bloc, including Pfizer.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-02-09/european-union-not-block-pfizer-coronavirus-vaccine-australia/13134702>

South Korea's Seoul to test pet cats, dogs for COVID

Several weeks after South Korea reported its first COVID-19 case involving a pet cat, Seoul will start testing cats and dogs for coronavirus infection if they show symptoms of the illness, an official from the country's capital said on Tuesday. While the disease mostly spreads from person to person, it can also spread from people to animals, or from animals to human – although that is much less significant – according to health experts. A number of pet cats and dogs have been reported to be infected with the virus in several countries. Other animals including mink, gorillas, and tigers were also reported to have tested positive. The Seoul metropolitan government rolled out the test on Monday, the Yonhap news agency reported.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/2/10/south-koreas-seoul-to-test-pet-cats-dogs-for-covid>

Can Spanish tourism survive a second Covid summer?

Gabriel Escarrer hopes that foreign tourists will come back to Spain this year — but he knows how much his company and his industry will suffer if they do not. As chief executive of Meliá Hotels International, the 326-hotel, €1.4bn-valued group that takes pride in its beach resort roots, Escarrer is all too aware of the wounds left by last year's drastically shortened summer season. "If we lose this summer, we would be talking about practically zero activity from October 2019, when [travel agent] Thomas Cook collapsed, to June of 2022," he said, noting that about half of Spanish tourism revenues normally come between June and September. "It would be devastating for the fabric of the tourist industry."

<https://www.ft.com/content/db3f8536-a6be-456e-816e-5879b5916ca2>

One year after lockdown, Wuhan tones down Lunar New Year celebrations

The 2020 Spring Festival did not go as Wuhan people had expected. On Chinese New Year's eve last year, the 11-million-population city was put into a lockdown unparalleled in modern society that lasted for 76 days. A year on, the most important festival for Chinese people is approaching again. How are people in Wuhan, still reeling from the pain brought by the coronavirus, celebrating this time round? After suffering the panic and agony of the virus, emerging from lockdown in a swoon and then moving on cautiously after life returned to normal, many Wuhan people reached by the Global Times said they will "stay put, and quietly celebrate the Spring Festival this year... We don't want to bring trouble to others or to our country."

<https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202102/1215398.shtml>

No Covid-19 lockdowns in Hong Kong over holiday but residents told to stay vigilant

Hong Kong's leader has said the government will suspend its controversial "ambush-style" lockdown operations over the Lunar New Year holiday, even as a government adviser urged the public to remain vigilant or risk going "back to square one" after the festivities. Speaking ahead of her Executive Council meeting, Chief Executive Carrie Lam Cheng Yuet-ngor said on Tuesday the "very staff intensive" operations involving more than 10,000 workers would temporarily stop as the pandemic had started to ease, with the number of new infections – including untraceable ones – decreasing.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/politics/article/3121081/hong-kong-fourth-wave-government-suspend-coronavirus>

After Outbreak, Trains Start Running Again in North China City as Lockdown Loosens

Travel curbs on Shijiazhuang, the capital of North China's Hebei province and center of a recent flare-up of Covid-19, were eased on Monday, with trains to and from the city resuming after a 34-day suspension. However, travel by highway and air remains banned. Operators of the city's highways said business will "be resumed in an orderly manner" without giving a specific timeline, while intercity bus services will also stay suspended.

<https://www.caixinglobal.com/2021-02-09/after-outbreak-trains-start-running-again-in-north-china-city-as-lockdown-loosens-101662542.html>

WA Premier Mark McGowan would consider alternative health advice on borders from CHO

WA Premier Mark McGowan says he will consider any alternative advice to the current benchmark for lifting interstate borders, if it is provided by the state's Chief Health Officer. The WA Government has continued to rely on health advice that required states and territories to record 28 days of no community cases of COVID-19 before it considered lifting the border entirely to allow quarantine-free travel. In his latest advice, provided on January 29, Dr Andrew Robertson said health officials were reviewing a 14, 21, or 28-day policy, to determine the best option moving forward

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-02-09/wa-premier-says-fresh-health-advice-considered-border-threshold/13136030>

Covid: Why Australia's 'world-class' quarantine system has seen breaches

Australia's hotel quarantine system has been an extremely effective first line of defence against Covid-19. The country has largely eliminated the virus, often going weeks without a locally acquired infection. Hotel quarantine is credited a huge part of that success. But a series of isolated local cases in recent months - all from hotel quarantine leaks - have caused alarm. Since November, three cities have entered snap lockdowns on the back of such infections, aiming to halt outbreaks at their source. But how does the virus keep slipping through what officials hail as a "world-class" first defence?

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-australia-55929180>

Covid-19: Study says clearer information needed from Government in event of future lockdowns

Greater flexibility of bubble rules and more concise information from the Government is needed if New Zealand was to go back into a coronavirus lockdown, a new study has found. New Zealand spent 49 days at Covid-19 alert levels 4 and 3 after cases of the virus were reported in the community. People were asked to stay home and only leave in order to access essential services.

<https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/health/coronavirus/124189643/covid19-study-says-clearer-information-needed-from-government-in-event-of-future-lockdowns>

Austrian hairdressers reopen but COVID-19 rules ruffle some

Austrian hairdressers reopened for the first time in more than six weeks on Monday as a national lockdown loosened, but new rules including a coronavirus test requirement for customers ruffled some. Despite stubbornly high infection numbers, the conservative-led government let schools and non-essential shops reopen on Monday, arguing that the economic and social toll of lockdown would otherwise be too great. With the lockdown loosening came new rules aimed at slowing the spread of the virus. Shops can only have one customer for every 20 square metres of floor space at a time. For hairdressers it is half that, but customers must show a negative coronavirus test no more than 48 hours old.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-austria-hair/austrian-hairdressers-reopen-but-covid-19-rules-ruffle-some-idUSL8N2KE5BS>

Exit Strategies

Near complete uptake of Covid vaccine among people aged 75-79

Nearly 96% of people aged 75-79 have had their Covid-19 vaccine in the UK, the health secretary announced today. In a Covid update to the House of Commons on Tuesday afternoon, where he announced tough new border measures to control variants, Mr Hancock revealed the uptake

<https://www.pulsetoday.co.uk/news/clinical-areas/elderly-care/near-complete-uptake-of-covid-vaccine-among-people->

[aged-75-79/](#)

Uber and Walgreens team up to offer free rides and access to the COVID-19 vaccine for underserved communities

Uber and Walgreens are teaming up to distribute the vaccine to underserved communities by offering free rides and education to the communities who haven't received their share of doses, the companies said in a joint statement on Tuesday. As COVID-19 vaccines become widely available at retail pharmacies across the country starting February 11, the two companies partnered up to help "drive equitable access" to the shots as health organizations point to a disparity in who is receiving the majority of doses. Walgreens President John Standley said the companies are each using their expertise to "take bold action to address vaccine access and hesitancy among those hit hardest by the pandemic."

<https://www.msn.com/en-us/finance/other/uber-and-walgreens-team-up-to-offer-free-rides-and-access-to-the-covid-19-vaccine-for-underserved-communities/ar-BB1dxfnS>

COVID-19: Ignore 'scary headlines' about South Africa variant and get coronavirus vaccine, says Professor Jonathan Van-Tam

Britons "should not be concerned" that the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine could be less effective against the South African coronavirus variant, a government adviser has said. Professor Jonathan Van-Tam explained case numbers of the variant in the UK are "very small" and it is not likely to become more dominant than the strain first found in Kent. He was seeking to calm people's fears after South Africa halted the rollout of the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-south-african-variant-not-expected-to-become-uks-dominant-coronavirus-strain-12212708>

Ethiopia says it has secured 9 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines till April

Ethiopia has secured nine million doses of COVID-19 vaccines up until April and hopes to inoculate at least a fifth of its 110 million people by the end of the year, the health minister said on Tuesday. "For now up to April we have been allocated close to nine million doses," Lia Tadesse said. "Within this year we want to make sure we get at least 20% of the population," she told Reuters.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-ethiopia/update-2-ethiopia-says-it-has-secured-9-million-doses-of-covid-19-vaccines-till-april-idUSL1N2KF00F>

COVID-19: Over-70s can now book first coronavirus jab and don't need to wait for contact from NHS

People aged 70 and over in England who have not yet had a coronavirus vaccine are being urged to book an appointment with the NHS to get a jab. Health Secretary Matt Hancock announced the policy is changing to make sure no-one falls through the cracks as the drive to inoculate against COVID-19 continues. It comes as the race intensifies for all those in the top four priority groups to get their first jab by 15 February before attention turns to rolling the vaccine out to the other five priority groups, reaching all over-50s by May.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-over-70s-can-now-book-first-coronavirus-jab-and-dont-need-to-wait-for-contact-from-nhs-12212633>

Covid-19: Travellers face £1,750 cost for England quarantine hotels

Travellers having to stay in quarantine hotels in England will be charged £1,750 for their stay, Health Secretary Matt Hancock has announced. The measures, which come into force on Monday, apply to UK and Irish residents returning from 33 red list countries. Those who fail to quarantine in a government-sanctioned hotel for 10 days face fines of up to £10,000. Meanwhile, all travellers arriving into Scotland from abroad by air will have to go into quarantine hotels.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-55995645>

Schools could open if rest of lockdown stays, say researchers

Reopening UK schools to all pupils in early March is feasible, as long as other lockdown measures continue, say researchers who have modelled the likely impact on infection numbers. The London and Oxford team believes coronavirus cases could be kept in check while letting pupils have face-to-face lessons in the classroom. The least risky scenario would be to open primaries and only exam-critical years in secondary schools. It could keep R below 1, says the team. That would mean spread of the disease should continue to shrink, rather than grow.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-55980052>

COVID-19: All travellers arriving in UK to have to pay for £100 COVID tests while in quarantine

All travellers arriving in the UK are to face mandatory coronavirus tests - paid for by themselves - from next week, Health Secretary Matt Hancock is poised to announce to MPs. In a Commons statement, Mr Hancock will say that from next Monday, 15 February, all passengers arriving in the UK will be required to take a PCR test, which currently cost around £100 per test, on days two and eight after they arrive. The new rules, which will cause further dismay in the already-reeling airline industry, will apply to arrivals not just from 33 so-called Red Zone countries heading into hotel quarantine, but also those isolating at home.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-all-travellers-arriving-in-uk-to-face-mandatory-tests-from-next-week-12212903?dcmp=snt-sf-twitter>

Spain's government pinning hopes on a vaccination passport to help kick-start ailing tourism sector

The Spanish government is pinning its hopes on 2021 being a year of recovery. That said, the administration is well aware that one of the mainstays of the country's economy, tourism, will struggle to return to some kind of normality this year given the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. To deal with this issue, the coalition government - made up of the Socialist Party (PSOE) and junior partner Unidas Podemos - is looking for formulas to speed up the return to levels of tourism that existed pre-Covid. One of the key factors being considered is the creation of a Europe-wide vaccination card that could help bring back foreign tourists.

https://english.elpais.com/economy_and_business/2021-02-09/spains-government-pinning-hopes-on-a-vaccination-passport-to-help-kick-start-ailing-tourism-sector.html?utm_medium=Social&utm_source=Twitter&ssm=TW_CM_EN#Echobox=1612866445

Government adviser says people who 'society values most' could be first in line for Covid vaccines when over-50s are jabbed amid calls for teachers and police officers to be bumped up the queue

A Government adviser has said people who 'society values most' could be first in line for Covid vaccines in the coming weeks amid calls for teachers and police officers to be bumped up the queue when over-50s have been jabbed. The UK's Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) — which advises ministers on the priority order — is currently in talks over who should receive the jab after the first nine groups. JCVI member Professor Adam Finn, from the University of Bristol, claimed plans will be set out by the end of February or early March. By then, the UK is on track to have dished out up to 25million doses

https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-9240073/Government-advisers-set-think-line-Covid-19-jab.html?ito=social-twitter_dailymailUK

Partisan Exits

COVID app triggers overdue debate on privacy in Singapore

For a country that prides itself on being on the cutting edge of high-tech governance, there has been little national discussion in Singapore on the balance between data collection and individual privacy.

Now, COVID-19 has forced the conversation, after it was revealed that data from the government's contact-tracing app, contrary to initial promises, could also be used for criminal investigations. The public backlash prompted the government to not only acknowledge that it had made a mistake but also to introduce new legislation to restrict the use of the data. Under the new amendments to the COVID-19 (Temporary Measures) Act, passed in the Singapore Parliament this month, personal data collected by digital pandemic contact-tracing programmes can only be used to contact trace, unless it is required by law enforcement for investigations into "serious offences". Pritam Singh, the leader of the opposition, has called for an "immediate conversation" on the balance between individual privacy and the use of technology and data collection in Singapore.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/2/10/covid-app-triggers-overdue-debate-on-privacy-in-singapore>

Anger grows at Israel's ultra-Orthodox virus scofflaws, threatening rupture with secular Jews

As Israel endures its third national lockdown, social media has been inflamed by images of black-clad men brazenly crowding schools, weddings and other events, including 20,000 at a recent Jerusalem funeral of a leading rabbi. Secular critics have cast the ultra-Orthodox, fairly or not, as superspreaders supreme, a drag chute on the country's race to vaccinate its way out of the coronavirus's grip. The contentious relationship between public health officials and the Haredim goes back to the beginning of the pandemic. Most rabbinical leaders did obey early orders to close schools and synagogues, but only reluctantly, citing the central role of daily religious gatherings in Haredi life. As pandemic fatigue set in, defiance grew.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/israel-ultra-orthodox-religious-coronavirus/2021/02/08/306e894a-6702-11eb-bab8-707f8769d785_story.html

Furious Tories savage Matt Hancock over 'forever lockdown'

Furious Tories savaged Matt Hancock over a 'forever lockdown' today after the Health Secretary warned border restrictions may need to stay until autumn — despite figures showing the UK's epidemic is firmly in retreat. Lockdown-sceptic backbenchers took aim at Mr Hancock when he unveiled the latest squeeze aimed at preventing mutant coronavirus strains getting into the country. Meanwhile, the Department of Health announced 12,364 more coronavirus cases and 1,052 deaths in the past 24 hours as the winter wave continues to be brought under control during lockdown.

<https://www.msn.com/en-gb/news/uknews/furious-tories-savage-matt-hancock-over-forever-lockdown/ar-BB1dxqD4>

NHS 'nothing special' during pandemic and does not deserve 'adulation' claims free-market think tank

In the UK, the NHS's performance during the coronavirus pandemic has been 'nothing special' and many countries without similar public healthcare have performed better, a think tank claimed today. The Institute for Economic Affairs said 'there is no rational basis for the adulation the NHS is currently receiving' as it attacked 'confirmation bias' on both sides of the political spectrum. In a new report it accused politicians across the board of trying to fit the pandemic into their pre-existing world-view.

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-9240571/NHS-special-pandemic-does-not-deserve-adulation-claims-free-market-think-tank.html>

Wealthy German high-tech hub doubles as anti-vaxxer base

Christoph Hueck illustrates the challenge Germany faces in rolling out a mass vaccination campaign to tackle the coronavirus pandemic. A scientist living in a wealthy, high-tech region, he does not plan to have any of the shots on offer. "I will not get vaccinated," Hueck, a molecular geneticist who authored a string of immunology papers before changing careers, told Reuters with a smile. Now 59, he trains teachers for the Waldorf schools inspired by esoteric thinker Rudolf Steiner, which began in Stuttgart. He has also addressed several anti-lockdown and anti-vaccination protests, although he

does not reject vaccines altogether.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-germany-anti-vacci/wealthy-german-high-tech-hub-doubles-as-anti-vaxxer-base-idUSKBN2A91KQ>

Mexico president refuses face mask after Covid-19 recovery

Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador on Monday said he would not wear a face mask after his recovery from Covid-19, in spite of widespread support from top officials and the public for the measure. In his first news conference since testing positive for Covid-19 on January 24, Lopez Obrador brushed aside repeated questions from reporters about whether he would wear a mask to help contain the spread of the coronavirus. "No, no," the president said. "Additionally, according to what the doctors say, now I'm not contagious."

https://www.scmp.com/news/world/americas/article/3121123/mexico-president-refuses-face-mask-after-covid-19-recovery?utm_term=Autofeed&utm_medium=Social&utm_content=article&utm_source=Twitter#Echobox=1612851560

Revealed: UK Covid contact tracers working from abroad

Some contact tracers working on the UK's test and trace system are thought to have been working from abroad, the Guardian has learned, with one company resorting to tracking its employees' locations. Intelling, hired through outsourcing firm Serco and employing about 500 staff members, makes its workers turn on "geo-tracking" owing to concerns that some have been doing their job remotely from overseas. The Guardian was shown a presentation sent to workers at the company about working from home, which includes information for tracers about how to use geo-tracking, which ensures staff are working from a UK IP address. According to NHS professionals, the health service's job portal, clinical contact tracers "must be based in the UK to work".

https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/feb/09/revealed-uk-covid-contact-tracers-working-from-abroad?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other

Ghana Parliament shuts down over COVID outbreak among MPs, staff

Ghana's Parliament has shut down for at least three weeks over a surge in coronavirus cases among lawmakers and staff. At least 17 members of parliament and 151 support staff have been infected with the coronavirus, which had already forced lawmakers to limit their assembly meetings. The speaker of the house, Alban Bagbin, announced on Tuesday that the legislature would be in recess until March 2 to make way for "disinfection and sanitisation of the premises". "I have, in consultation with leadership, decided that sitting of the House be adjourned for three weeks," said Bagbin, adding that Parliament's appointments committee would continue to meet to consider the ministerial nominees of President Nana Akufo-Addo, who was re-elected in December. The West African country has reported 73,003 coronavirus cases, including 482 deaths, since the pandemic began.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/2/9/ghana-parliament-shuts-over-coronavirus-outbreak-among-mps-staff>

Russia, China expanding Middle East sway with COVID-19 vaccines

Russian and Chinese COVID-19 vaccines are being embraced by many countries in the Middle East – not just by those hostile to the United States, but also by its allies. Qatar, Oman, and Kuwait purchased US vaccines, claiming their efficacy rate is higher, and Iraq has ordered vaccines from the United Kingdom's AstraZeneca and the US's Pfizer. But the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, Egypt, and Turkey have signed up for vaccines from Moscow and Beijing as well buying US vaccines, while Iran and the Palestinian Authority are relying on Russian and Chinese jabs only. Iran's economy has struggled since the US reimposed sanctions on it under former President Donald Trump and the country's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei issued a diktat against the use of US and UK vaccines. Sputnik V was approved under special emergency-use authorization and Iran began rolling it out on Tuesday.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/2/9/russia-china-seek-to-expand-mena-influence-through-vaccines>

Continued Lockdown

Covid-19: Travel rule breakers could face £10k fines and prison terms

Health Secretary Matt Hancock has warned travel rule breakers they could face fines of £10,000 and even a decade in prison. Speaking in the Commons, Mr Hancock set out the "tough" measures for people who do not comply with the new quarantine rules for UK arrivals. He said the policy, which begins on Monday, applied to England but that the devolved administrations were looking at similar measures.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/av/uk-55994758>

Portugal poised to extend lockdown as COVID-19 cases fall

Portugal's COVID-19 infection rate has dropped sharply after a lockdown aimed at addressing a devastating January pandemic surge, but it is still recording the most daily deaths in the world by size of population, health experts said Tuesday. Portugal hit a peak of cases on Jan. 29, with a 14-day average of almost 1,700 cases per 100,000 habitants. Amid a lockdown, that rate has fallen to around 980 per 100,000 -- a marked improvement but still one of the European Union's highest rates. But Portugal's seven-day rolling average of daily deaths stands at 2.24 per 100,000 — significantly above other countries, according to data compiled by Johns Hopkins University.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/portugal-poised-to-extend-lockdown-as-covid19-cases-fall-portugal-lockdown-cases-infection-rate-covid19-b1799696.html>

Covid: Domestic abuse victims 'may be stuck' in lockdown with abusers

More support is needed to reach domestic abuse victims trapped in lockdown with their abusers, charities have warned. In August, Dyfed Powys Police received 900 reports of domestic abuse compared with 350 incidents a month in 2017. While reports have risen, there are fears many victims in rural areas are not seeking help. The West Wales Domestic Abuse Service (WWDAS) said many could not reach out for help while stuck at home. Chief Executive Michelle Pooley said that while the charity had seen more people referred for support, people living in tight-knit rural communities were less likely to seek help.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-wales-55989573>

UK lockdown reduces consumer spending to lowest levels since last spring

Britain's tough new lockdown measures have dented consumer confidence and reduced spending to levels not seen since last spring, according to two separate surveys. Both the British Retail Consortium and Barclaycard said spending in January was at its weakest since May as booming online activity failed to compensate fully for the closure of stores. One of Britain's leading thinktanks, the National Institute of Economic and Social Research (NIESR), added on Monday that after the UK's sluggish start to 2021 it had cut its forecast for growth this year and put back the start of the recovery.

<https://www.theguardian.com/business/2021/feb/08/niesr-uk-growth-forecast-covid-19-unemployment>

UK consumer spending slumps during latest lockdown

UK consumer spending and retail sales fell in January at the fastest pace since May, suggesting the economy has been hit harder by the current lockdown than November's restrictions despite people switching to online shopping. Consumer spending fell 16.3 per cent in January compared with the same month last year, the largest annual drop since the spring, according to Barclaycard data, tracking nearly half of all UK credit and debit card transactions. The drop was much sharper than the 1.9 per cent fall in November and it is consistent with the economy shrinking more severely than the 2.6 per cent contraction registered during that previous lockdown period.

<https://www.ft.com/content/e69547f9-904b-4306-bf0b-9ed90393658c>

Merkel wants German lockdown to continue until March - sources

German Chancellor Angela Merkel wants to keep restrictions to curb the spread of the coronavirus in place until at least March 1, participants in a meeting of her own conservative parliamentary group told Reuters on Tuesday. Merkel and leaders of Germany's 16 states are due to hold talks on Wednesday to discuss whether steps can be taken to ease lockdown measures which have been in place since November and were tightened in mid-December. "We have to wait until March 1," participants in the meeting cited Merkel as saying. "My goal would be not to have to correct steps to open up again with further closing steps." Primary schools, nurseries, hairdressers and retail would take priority in any easing but the overall aim was to avoid another lockdown, Merkel said.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/healthcoronavirus-germany-merkel/update-1-merkel-wants-german-lockdown-to-continue-until-march-sources-idUSL8N2KF5WZ>

Germany set to stay in lockdown for fear of virus mutations — draft document

German officials are considering lifting some measures in the coming weeks, but the shutdown will continue for now, DW learned on Tuesday. Federal and state representatives are set to announce their decision tomorrow. "Considering the virus mutations, the steps to lift the restrictions must come carefully and gradually in order to avoid risking the successful curbing of infections," Germany's top officials are expected to say, according to a draft statement obtained by DW. The document foresees the country continuing its shutdown until March. The authorities see reopening of day care centers and schools as a priority, the document states. They remain "optimistic that all citizens would be offered vaccination by the end of summer at the latest."

<https://www.dw.com/en/germany-set-to-stay-in-lockdown-for-fear-of-virus-mutations-draft-document/a-56514995>

Spain extends border controls with Portugal until March due to COVID-19

Spain's government announced on Tuesday it had extended controls along its 1,200-km (750-mile) border with Portugal until March 1, as both countries try to rein in a surge in coronavirus infections and deaths. "The severity of the restrictive mobility measures still in force in Spain and Portugal justifies maintaining ... controls at the internal land border ... with the same limitations applied during the initial ten days," the Spanish interior ministry said in the government's official bulletin. The two governments had agreed to close on Jan. 28 the border for non-essential travel with exceptions for cross-border workers, health workers and truck drivers.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-spain-portugal-idUSL8N2KF2F0>

Israelis take part in screaming sessions to waive lockdown blues

Tired of COVID-19 confinement and seeking both communion and emotional release, some Israelis have taken to group screaming. A record vaccine rollout has done little to ease Israel's pandemic curbs. Next month's election - the fourth in two years, due to coalition infighting and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's legal woes - has many complaining of malaise. While some Israelis take part in street demonstrations, others take to nature and shout to the heavens. "We decided to meet, our group together, in order to take the group screaming so that we can release our bad energies," said Mary Peery, leading 10 mostly elderly companions on a yell-punctuated hike through an orange orchard and over a hilltop. "When we do it in a group it's like a prayer and maybe God will hear us and release us from this COVID-19 curse." To scream, the group stood in choric proximity and removed their masks, drawing looks from passersby. One of the organisers played down any health risk, however, saying everyone in the group had either recovered from COVID-19 or been vaccinated.

<https://www.hindustantimes.com/trending/israelis-take-part-in-screaming-sessions-to-waive-lockdown-blues-101612871486397.html>

Dutch government to extend night curfew through March 2

The Dutch government will extend a night-time curfew intended to slow the spread of coronavirus through March 2, broadcaster RTL reported on Monday, citing sources in The Hague. The curfew, the

first in the Netherlands since World War Two, sparked several days of riots from anti-lockdown protesters when it was initially introduced on Jan. 23.. RTL reported that Mark Rutte's government would announce the extension at a news conference later Monday. New coronavirus cases in the Netherlands have been declining after months of lockdown measures, but the government is warning that a wave of new infections is coming due to the growth in more contagious variants of the coronavirus.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-netherlands-curfew/dutch-government-to-extend-night-curfew-through-march-2-rtl-idUSL1N2KE1Y>

To lift lockdown gloom, Israelis keep calm and carry on screaming

Tired of COVID-19 confinement and seeking both communion and emotional release, some Israelis have taken to group screaming. A record vaccine rollout has done little to ease Israel's pandemic curbs. Next month's election - the fourth in two years, due to coalition infighting and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's legal woes - has many complaining of malaise. While some Israelis take part in street demonstrations, others take to nature and shout to the heavens. "We decided to meet, our group together, in order to take the group screaming so that we can release our bad energies," said Mary Peery, leading 10 mostly elderly companions on a yell-punctuated hike through an orange orchard and over a hilltop.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-israel-scream/to-lift-lockdown-gloom-israelis-keep-calm-and-carry-on-screaming-idUSL8N2KF2UR>

Navajo Nation outpaces much of US in delivering COVID vaccines

The Navajo Nation announced on Tuesday it will receive about 29,000 additional doses of COVID-19 vaccines as the tribal area continues to outpace the broader United States in delivering jabs. Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez said that as of Sunday, the Navajo Area Indian Health Service (NAIHS) delivered 74,048 of the 78,520 vaccine doses it had received, a 94 percent rate. Nez said the goal is to administer 100,000 doses by the end of February. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the broader US has delivered 42,417,617 of its total 59,307,800 doses, or about 71 percent, as of Monday. Dr Loretta Christensen, chief medical officer of the NAIHS, told Al Jazeera the Navajo Nation has been "very good with what we have received and we've been very efficient and timely in using that vaccine". The success comes in administering the vaccine due to planning and high-level cooperation, Christensen said.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/2/9/navajo-nation-to-receive-29k-more-vaccines-has-used-94-percent>

Scientific Viewpoint

Are two masks better than one?

When it comes to protecting yourself against new coronavirus variants, two masks may be better than one. A number of politicians, including Vice President Kamala Harris and Senator Mitt Romney, have been spotted doubling up on face masks, and top infectious disease expert Anthony Fauci has recommended that everyday Americans do the same. As part of our #AskReuters Twitter chat series, Reuters gathered a group of health experts to answer questions about the coronavirus, including what they consider the "right" way to wear face coverings.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-healthcare-coronavirus-vaxchat/are-two-masks-better-than-one-idUSKBN2A9315>

Eli Lilly's antibody combination receives FDA emergency use authorization for COVID-19

Eli Lilly's combination antibody therapy to fight COVID-19 has been granted emergency use authorization by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, Lilly said on Tuesday. Lilly's combination therapy of two antibodies, bamlanivimab and etesevimab, helped cut the risk of hospitalization and death in COVID-19 patients by 70%, data from a late-stage trial showed in January. Lilly said the therapy will be available immediately.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-lilly-fda/eli-lillys-antibody-combination-receives-fda-emergency>

[-use-authorization-for-covid-19-idUSKBN2AA02P](#)

Covid-19 vaccines will turn virus into 'the sniffles', says Oxford professor

Inoculation could turn coronavirus into “the sniffles” even if it cannot stop variants causing illness, according to a vaccine expert. Professor Andrew Pollard, head of the Oxford Vaccine Group, which conducts studies of new and improved vaccines, told MPs that he believed vaccines would have a “huge impact on transmission” of the variants that had been identified in the Britain.

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/covid-19-vaccines-will-turn-virus-into-the-sniffles-says-oxford-professor-60db31l8w>

China's CanSino single-dose COVID-19 vaccine co-developed by Beijing's top military bio-warfare expert 'shows 65.7 per cent efficacy'

A single-dose COVID-19 vaccine developed by Chinese firm CanSino Biologics and a team led by Beijing's top military bio-warfare expert is reported to show 65.7 per cent efficacy in preventing symptomatic cases. The drug also demonstrated a 90.98 per cent success rate in stopping severe disease in an interim analysis of global trials, according to Pakistan's health minister who posted the figures on Monday. Chen Wei, a Major General of China's People's Liberation Army, headed a team of scientists from the Chinese military to work on the inoculation with CanSino Biologics (CanSinoBIO), a biotechnology company based in Tianjin and listed on Hong Kong Stock Exchange.

<https://www.msn.com/en-gb/news/world/chinas-cansino-covid-19-vaccine-shows-657-per-cent-efficacy/ar-BB1dx7HR>

Firm producing Novavax coronavirus vaccine outlines 'strong pipeline' of potential Covid partners

A firm chosen to manufacture millions of doses of coronavirus vaccines says it has a “strong pipeline” of companies that want to work with it in the battle against the pandemic. Teesside firm Fujifilm Diosynth Biotechnologies has recently been contracted to manufacture 60m doses of the Novavax vaccine at its Billingham site. Now it has released accounts for the year ending March 31 2020 which show that operating profit rose £900,000 to £23m even as revenues fell by 9% to £114.2m. The year saw the company invest in its facilities while it added almost 80 new employees to its headcount. In the accounts, the company said: “This result has been driven by a sustained demand for batch manufacture across the small scale, large scale and mammalian sectors and analytical services which continues to grow from strength to strength. “As the company continues to grow it has seen an increase in operational fixed costs to support this growth, however, the company continues to benefit from research and development expenditure credit which has offset this increase.”

<https://www.business-live.co.uk/enterprise/firm-producing-novavax-coronavirus-vaccine-19803673>

India says J&J interested in making COVID-19 vaccine in country

Johnson & Johnson is interested in manufacturing its COVID-19 vaccine in India, a government official told a news conference on Tuesday. India also currently has no concern over the efficacy of the AstraZeneca vaccine that is being used in the country's massive inoculation campaign, Vinod Kumar Paul said.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-india-johnson-johnson-idUSKBN2A91FL>

Common asthma medicine cuts need for COVID-19 hospitalization - Oxford study

A commonly used asthma treatment appears to reduce the need for hospitalizations as well as recovery time for COVID-19 patients if given within seven days of symptoms appearing, researchers at the University of Oxford said on Tuesday. The findings were made following a mid-stage study of the steroid budesonide, sold as Pulmicort by AstraZeneca Plc and also used for treating smoker's lung. The 28-day study of 146 patients suggested that inhaled budesonide reduced the risk of urgent care or hospitalization by 90% when compared with usual care, Oxford University said. Researchers said the trial was inspired by the fact that patients with chronic respiratory disease, who are often prescribed inhaled steroids, were significantly under-represented among hospitalized

COVID-19 patients during early days of the pandemic.

<https://www.msn.com/en-au/lifestyle/wellbeing/common-asthma-medicine-cuts-need-for-covid-19-hospitalization-oxford-study/ar-BB1dxmfN>

'Covid-19 is wrecking people's mental health'

The effects of the coronavirus pandemic is destroying our ability to connect with friends and family, disrupting our routines and consequently damaging our mental health, a professor of psychology has said. "If you had designed a disease that was specifically figured out to wreck our mental health, Covid would be it," Prof Laurie Santos told BBC Hardtalk's Stephen Sackur. Humans hate uncertainty, but the pandemic is seeing constantly changing lockdowns and a continued flux about when things will improve, all of which is bad for our mental health, she explained.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-55994849>

WHO investigation into Covid-19 origins offers no quick answers

The press conference given by the World Health Organization's investigative team in Wuhan is unlikely to silence the most conspiratorial of the conspiracy theorists who took their lead from the fever dreams of the former Trump administration. Indeed, the first and very partial findings in what was always going to be a long and drawn-out process have not told us much we did not already know about the origins of the coronavirus pandemic. Except, that is, to confirm what has long been a broadly held scientific consensus: that the virus did not escape from a Wuhan laboratory as suggested by Donald Trump's allies and their cheerleaders.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/feb/09/who-investigation-covid-19-no-quick-answers-wuhan>

New research to study whether Covid-19 causes strokes

A new research study will investigate reports that Covid-19 is causing life-threatening strokes. The study is being funded by the Stroke Association following what they described as "worrying" reports Covid-19 may increase the risk of having a stroke, using health data from patients across the UK. Data analysts will compare stroke in patients who have tested positive for the virus with those without it, along with characteristics including age, sex, ethnicity and geography to confirm who is most at risk. Research director at the Stroke Association Dr Rubina Ahmed said they're worried Covid-19 may lead to more strokes. In Northern Ireland, there are around 4,000 strokes every year. There are currently 39,000 stroke survivors.

<https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/health/coronavirus/new-research-to-study-whether-covid-19-causes-strokes-40067953.html>

Covid-19: How the UK's gene-sequencing labs could track every single case and help stop new variants

In the debate about how quickly to reopen the UK after the current lockdown, there are broadly two camps: those - including many Conservative backbenchers - who want the restrictions removed at pace in order to restart the economy, and those who lean towards a "zero Covid" strategy which would aim at the complete elimination of coronavirus from Britain. Much will depend on the progress of the vaccination roll-out, and the extent to which vaccines are shown to cut both serious illness and the transmission of the virus. And border controls - including those being set out by Matt Hancock on Tuesday - will continue to be part of the UK's defences against Covid-19 for the rest of this year at least.

<https://inews.co.uk/news/analysis/covid-19-uk-gene-sequencing-cases-track-stop-new-variants-coronavirus-864598>

COVID-19: 'Extremely unlikely' coronavirus came from Wuhan lab as evidence points to 'intermediary species'

It is "extremely unlikely" the novel coronavirus came from a laboratory incident in China, according to a joint mission investigating the origins of the pandemic. Investigators believe the most likely cause of the initial outbreak was the virus jumping from an "intermediary host species" to humans. It

means future investigations will not focus on a laboratory incident as a potential cause of the outbreak. An international team of World Health Organisation (WHO) scientists, working with experts in China, has been researching how the COVID-19 pandemic began.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-extremely-unlikely-novel-coronavirus-came-from-wuhan-lab-incident-says-joint-mission-12213121>

COVID-19: NHS Test and Trace app has prevented 600,000 cases, study suggests

As many as 600,000 coronavirus cases have been prevented as a result of the NHS COVID-19 app, new research suggests. Scientists at The Alan Turing Institute and Oxford University found that for every 1% increase in app users, the number of infections falls by up to 2.3%. The analysis, which is yet to be peer-reviewed, is based on data gathered in between the app launching in September and the end of last year. "The impact of the app could be increased by more people using it," said Professor Christophe Fraser at the University of Oxford.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-nhs-test-and-trace-app-has-prevented-600-000-cases-study-suggests-12212928>

Britain could be trapped in lockdown cycles for 'several YEARS', top SAGE scientist warns

Prof Sir Ian Boyd said UK could be stuck in 'control and release for long time.' Threw support behind longer lockdown to stop more variants from spawning. Several other SAGE scientists came out in favour of extending current curbs

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-9239863/Britain-trapped-lockdown-cycles-YEARS-SAGE-scientist-warns.html>

Study to examine psychological impact of lockdown

A new study looking at the psychological impact of Covid-19 restrictions and lockdowns is under way at Dundalk IT. The study is being led by University College London and is being carried out in 23 countries, including Ireland, the UK, Australia, USA, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Turkey and Norway. Researchers say there is no research on how lockdown during a pandemic, involving restrictions to freedom of movement, is perceived by the general population.

<https://www.rte.ie/news/leinster/2021/0209/1195964-lockdown-restrictions-study/>

Vaccines Aren't the Only Thing We Need to Safely Reopen

The recent surge of positive COVID-19 vaccine developments has sent waves of relief throughout a pandemic-weary world. However, no matter how effective these vaccines are, they will not be enough to end this global pandemic—and for many of the world's most vulnerable communities, they won't arrive fast enough. The Moderna and Pfizer vaccines were developed in record time. However, these announcements highlight significant challenges: delivering two-dose vaccines with stringent cold-chain requirements to almost eight billion people, many of whom reside in communities with underfunded and strained health systems, is no small feat. Even if we address the logistical challenges, the reality is that it takes time and funding to deliver vaccines, treatments and tests that reach everyone in need. It is a sobering reminder that when lifesaving antiretrovirals were introduced for HIV-positive people, it took seven years before the medicine reached the poorest communities. And during that time, millions of people died, and millions more were infected, and the HIV pandemic continued to grow.

<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/vaccines-arent-the-only-thing-we-need-to-safely-reopen/>

WHO team: Coronavirus unlikely to have leaked from Chinese lab

The coronavirus is unlikely to have leaked from a Chinese lab and is more likely to have jumped to humans from an animal, a World Health Organization team has concluded, an expert said Tuesday as the group wrapped up a visit to explore the origins of the virus. The Wuhan Institute of Virology in central China has collected extensive virus samples, leading to allegations that it may have caused the original outbreak by leaking the virus into the surrounding community. China has strongly rejected that possibility and has promoted other theories for the virus's origins. The WHO team that visited Wuhan, where the first cases of COVID-19 were discovered in December 2019, is considering

several theories for how the disease first ended up in humans, leading to a pandemic that has now killed more than 2.3 million people worldwide.

<https://www.politico.com/news/2021/02/09/who-team-coronavirus-unlikely-to-have-leaked-from-china-lab-467839>

Top scientists including US Covid expert Anthony Fauci call for double-masking to slash the spread of coronavirus but experts say claim it works better than one is not 'grounded in science'

Dr Anthony Fauci said it was 'common sense' to wear two masks at the same time But other experts have cautioned there is no 'strong evidence' for this Face masks stop Covid-19 from spreading by blocking infected droplets

https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-9239891/US-Covid-expert-Anthony-Fauci-calls-double-masking-slash-spread-coronavirus.html?ito=social-twitter_mailonline

China probe says SARS-CoV-2 jump from go-between host most likely

Representatives from China and an international joint mission team led by the World Health Organization (WHO) today in Wuhan detailed the results of a 2-week probe into the zoonotic source of the outbreaks, which didn't reveal a definitive source but did shed new light on the events. At the nearly 3-hour briefing, officials laid out four main theories, some of them less likely possibilities. The 10-person joint mission team has been in China since Jan 14 and followed investigation terms that a WHO advance team fleshed out with the country over the summer.

<https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2021/02/china-probe-says-sars-cov-2-jump-go-between-host-most-likely>

Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine reducing viral load, data from Israel suggests

Data from researchers in Israel, which has inoculated swathes of its population, suggests the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine is reducing viral load, a key signal that the intervention could diminish the spread of Covid-19. Evidence that the coronavirus vaccines being deployed globally are dramatically effective in reducing severe disease and death in symptomatic Covid-19 is abundant. But a big question remains unanswered: can they thwart transmission, in other words stop people from passing on the virus? Preventing the spread of infection is key to reducing the risk of more variants emerging and to achieving herd immunity, scientists say. People with higher viral load tend to be more infectious and are more likely to suffer from severe disease.

<https://www.theguardian.com/science/2021/feb/09/pfizerbiontech-covid-vaccine-reducing-viral-load-data-israel-suggests>

It's not the 'British variant.' It's B.1.1.7

When President Trump referred to the "Chinese virus," the media were quick to point out problems with this terminology, lambasting it as xenophobic and racist. But as new variants appear, some media outlets are doing the same thing: talk of the "British," "Brazilian," and "South African" Covid-19 variants abounds. Even scientific journals are using this terminology. But labeling viral variants by their geographic origin is incorrect. Just as the "China virus" should be called SARS-CoV-2 or the novel coronavirus, so too should new variants be described by their proper nomenclature: B.1.1.7, not "U.K. variant" and P.1, not the "Brazilian variant."

<https://www.statnews.com/2021/02/09/not-british-variant-call-it-b117/>

A Q&A with WHO's emergencies chief on Covid-19, why he's hopeful, and when normalcy might return

This time last year, Mike Ryan, head of the World Health Organization's health emergencies program, was strenuously urging the world to try to contain the new virus that was spreading in and from China. The world, he said, had the necessary tools: contact tracing, isolation, and quarantine. "There's enough evidence to suggest that this virus can still be contained," he told STAT in an interview for a story published Feb. 1, 2020. The world didn't move swiftly enough to put SARS-

CoV-2 “back in the box,” to borrow an expression sometimes used by scientists to describe viral containment. More than 100 million people around the globe have been infected with Covid-19, and more than 2.3 million people have died.

<https://www.statnews.com/2021/02/09/a-qa-with-whos-emergencies-chief-on-covid-19-why-hes-hopeful-and-when-normalcy-might-return/>

Coronavirus Resurgence

COVID-19: Another 1,052 UK deaths reported as 12.6 million receive first vaccine jab

Another 1,052 coronavirus-related deaths have been reported in the UK, according to the latest government figures. The number is up from the 333 fatalities confirmed on Monday. A further 12,364 infections were also confirmed on Tuesday, compared with the 14,104 cases reported yesterday. It brings the total number of cases in the UK to 3,972,148.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-another-1-052-uk-deaths-reported-as-12-6-million-receive-first-vaccine-jab-12213394>

Second wave of Covid deaths in England and Wales peaked on 19 January, says ONS data

The second wave of coronavirus peaked in England and Wales on 19 January at 1,404 deaths in a single day, according to the latest figures from the Office for National Statistics. The figure, which is based on reported deaths 28 days after a positive Covid test,

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/health/covid-deaths-daily-second-wave-b1799719.html>

COVID-19: 'Surge testing' in Manchester after mutation of Kent variant detected

Thousands of extra COVID tests are being rolled out in Manchester after a mutation of the Kent variant was found in the city. Four people from two unconnected households were found with the E484K mutation, Manchester City Council said, and 10,000 extra tests will now be distributed.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-surge-testing-in-manchester-after-mutation-of-kent-variant-detected-12212834>

UK coronavirus death toll up by 1,052 as infection rates continue to fall

The UK's official coronavirus death toll has risen by 1,052 and infections are up by 12,364 in the last 24 hours. The number of deaths has more than trebled since Monday when 333 people died - the lowest number since December 2020. Between February 3 - 9 the number of deaths have gone down by 25.7% compared to the previous seven days. While the number of infections over the same period is down by 26.6%. The figures suggest the lockdowns currently in place across the UK are continuing to have an impact in driving down the number of new reported cases of coronavirus. But Government scientific advisers have warned that the UK needs to "take the pain" of restrictions now or risk being trapped in a cycle of lockdowns due to variants of the virus

<https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/breaking-uk-coronavirus-death-toll-23470217>

UK Covid Lockdown: Record 46% of Deaths in England Wales Linked to Virus

The proportion of Covid-19 deaths in England and Wales climbed to a record in the last week of January, as the total number of fatalities associated with the disease continued to rise despite the severe lockdown. Almost 46% of total deaths in the week to Jan. 29 were linked to the virus, the highest since the pandemic began, the Office for National Statistics said Tuesday. The total number of fatalities mentioning Covid rose by 11 to 8,433, the most since the height of the first wave in April. While new infections have fallen since the lockdown began last month, and officials say the U.K. has passed the peak of the latest surge, the figures show how the devastating impact of the winter wave of the virus is still being felt.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-02-09/covid-accounts-for-record-46-of-deaths-in-england-and-wales>

Spain's primary healthcare centers struggling to cope with strain of pandemic

The coronavirus pandemic has pushed Spain's primary healthcare workers to the breaking point. When describing their situation, the words they use are “overwhelmed,” “disheartened” and

“exhausted.” In the first wave of the pandemic, primary healthcare workers were the protective wall against the epidemic. In the second, they were the guards looking out for the spread of virus on the street and in senior residences. Now, in the third wave, they are leading the charge, overseeing both the Covid vaccination campaign and assisting patients whose care has been delayed by the pandemic.

<https://english.elpais.com/society/2021-02-09/spains-primary-healthcare-centers-struggling-to-cope-with-strain-of-pandemic.html>

Keep students at home for a month to avoid new lockdown, say school doctors

School and university doctors in France have demanded the closure of all schools and colleges for four weeks to stem the spread of the coronavirus and avoid a third national lockdown. The syndicat national des médecins scolaires et universitaires (snmsu.unsa) made the call as school holidays got underway in one the three zones covering establishments in cities such as Marseille and Nice in the south, Amiens, Caen and Lille in the north as well as Nancy and Metz in the east and Nantes to the west. The doctors say a month-long break for all of the country’s pupils and students would help to cut the number of infections

<https://www.rfi.fr/en/france/20210208-keep-students-at-home-for-a-month-to-avoid-another-coronavirus-lockdown-say-school-and-uni-doctors>

Japan Keeps Its Covid Fight Simple With a Rule Starting at Dinnertime

Call it the Zen art of lockdowns. In the fight to suppress Covid-19, Japan has found success by stripping down its policy to one simple measure: closing restaurants and bars at 8 p.m. When the government declared a state of emergency in Tokyo and other urban areas on Jan. 7, it changed little, except to urge places that serve food and drinks to close by 8 p.m. Most complied in exchange for support that includes payments of about \$600 a day. Infections since then have fallen by more than two-thirds nationwide, even though other daily activities such as shopping and commuting have continued. The government hopes to lift the state of emergency by March 7. “In consultation with experts, we carefully crafted a policy centered on reducing the hours of restaurants and bars,” Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga said Feb. 2.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/japan-keeps-its-covid-fight-simple-with-a-rule-starting-at-dinnertime-11612866607>

Austria warns against travel to Tirol after Bavaria threatens border closure

Austria is warning against non-essential travel to Tirol after neighbouring Bavaria threatened to seal its borders over an outbreak of the South African Covid-19 variant in the Alpine province. “The government is warning against travel to Tirol in order to prevent the South African variant from spreading and the government asks all citizens to restrict journeys to Tirol to those that are absolutely necessary,” the Austrian chancellor, Sebastian Kurz, said in a statement. Authorities in Tirol, which contains several ski resorts popular with tourists, said on Monday morning it had so far detected 165 fully sequenced cases of people being infected with the South African variant. A further 112 suspected cases were being investigated, said Tirol’s governor, Günther Platter.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/feb/08/bavaria-threatens-close-austria-border-tirol-eases-covid-rules>

Texas, California see large drop in COVID-19 cases

Texas and California, two of the states hardest hit by COVID-19 since Thanksgiving, have reached new milestones indicating that the spread of infections is slowing. The number of new daily coronavirus cases in California fell to just over 10,000 yesterday, down from 50,000 a month ago, according to KQED. Gov. Gavin Newsom also reported a 25% decline in COVID-19 patients in intensive care units. “Everything that should be up is up, and everything that should be down is down,” Newsom said during remarks given yesterday at San Diego Petco Park, which will be the state’s first mass vaccine “super station.”

<https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2021/02/texas-california-see-large-drop-covid-19-cases>

Austria tries to contain S.African variant outbreak by voluntary means

Austria on Monday opted against placing the whole Alpine province of Tyrol under quarantine to contain an outbreak of the so-called South African variant of the coronavirus, instead urging the public not to go there unless they have to. The province, a winter sports hotspot, has so far been unable to explain how the variant arrived in the Ziller Valley, long a popular tourist area. Austrian ski lifts have been allowed to open since Dec. 24, but hotels are closed for all but business travel and restaurants can only serve takeaway meals. Tyrol's provincial government has opposed the idea of a province-wide quarantine in talks with the national government on how to contain the variant. Both governments are led by the conservative People's Party. Austria loosened a national lockdown on Monday, letting non-essential shops reopen.

<https://news.trust.org/item/20210208135541-tiksp>

New Lockdown

North Korean authorities lockdown cities in Chagang Province over COVID-19 fears - Daily NK

With North Korea placing the border cities of Hyesan and Samjiyon in Yanggang Province under lockdown due to a smuggling incident late last month, Daily NK has learned authorities recently placed Chasong and Manpo in Chagang Province under lockdown as well. A source in Chagang Province told Daily NK that authorities issued a lockdown order for Chasong and Manpo on Feb. 3. According to the source, the authorities issued the lockdown order ostensibly to strengthen quarantine efforts against COVID-19 after incidents of smuggling and defections in the two towns earlier this month.

<https://www.dailynk.com/english/north-korean-authorities-lockdown-cities-chagang-province-over-covid-19-fears/>

130 pupils to be quarantined as Hong Kong imposes more lockdowns

Hong Kong health authorities have sent more than 130 pupils and teachers from a government secondary school into quarantine and ordered mandatory Covid-19 testing for hundreds of others after two students who sat for an exam in the same hall were found to be infected. Both the infected pupils at Shau Kei Wan Government Secondary School live in Wai Lee Building in Quarry Bay, which has been hit by seven Covid-19 cases so far, and officials on Monday evacuated more than 20 households from the block after experts found evidence of vertical transmission of the disease as well as faulty pipes. Authorities confirmed 32 new cases citywide as they ordered another daily lockdown for mandatory testing overnight

<https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/health-environment/article/3120957/hong-kongs-latest-overnight-lockdowns-uncover>

France was right to decide against new national lockdown - health minister

The COVID-19 situation in France is currently stable and the government was right to have decided against imposing a new national lockdown, Health Minister Olivier Veran said on Tuesday. Veran also told France Info radio "it is possible and indeed preferable" that France would not have to be locked down again. "For three weeks we have had (on average) 20,000 new cases per day and 3,000-3,200 patients in intensive care units. It's stable but high...It does not call for national lockdown measures," Veran said. The number of people in France who have died from COVID-19 infections rose by 458 on Monday to 79,423 - the seventh-highest death toll globally.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-france-veran/france-was-right-to-decide-against-new-national-lockdown-health-minister-idUSKBN2A912H>