

COVID-19 Lockdown Exit Analysis

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News Highlights

AstraZeneca to develop vaccine against new variant by mid-to-late 2021

A number of ['variant-versions' of its COVID-19 vaccine are in the pipeline, according to drugmaker AstraZeneca](#). A new version of its vaccine is expected to be ready by mid-to-late 2021, amidst concerns over new strains emerging which may be resistant to existing vaccines. AstraZeneca's vaccine is still encouraged for use by the World Health Organization, [but concerns over efficacy have led to restricted use in almost half of EU countries](#) and South Africa has halted rollout of the vaccine.

South Africa turns to Johnson & Johnson and Pfizer vaccines after scrapping AstraZeneca

President Cyril Ramaphosa has said South Africa has procured nine million doses of the Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine and twenty million doses of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine. [The country initially focused on using the AstraZeneca vaccine but halted rollout over worries it had lower efficacy against the new COVID-19 variant in the country](#). Ramaphosa said the switchover 'should not delay the start of the vaccination programme by much' but 'will affect the choice of vaccines and the manner of their deployment.'

Biden speaks of 'national emergency' facing the U.S.

At the National Institutes of Health, president Joe Biden told scientists ['we're in a national emergency' as his administration works to ensure enough vaccine supply to inoculate 300 million Americans by July](#). While the U.S. is on track to exceed its target of 100 million vaccinations in Biden's first 100 days, supply falls far short of demand. The U.S. faces what Biden described as 'one of the most difficult operational challenges we have ever undertaken as a nation.'

Germany sees another lockdown extension extension, with Merkel defending the move

Yet another extension in lockdown [restrictions has been announced in Germany as well as the reinstalling of some border controls](#). The decision to extend lockdown to March 7 by Chancellor Angela Merkel and regional leaders has angered businesses, but [Merkel defended the move, saying it was necessary to curb new variants spreading](#) and prevent a second surge as the country saw last year. The lockdown, [she told lawmakers, will not last a day longer than necessary](#).

Lockdown Exit

AstraZeneca expects COVID variant vaccine by mid to late 2021

AstraZeneca has said it expects to have a new version of its COVID-19 vaccine ready for use by mid to late 2021, responding to concerns about emerging variants of the disease that may be more transmissible or resistant to existing vaccines. The Anglo-Swedish company, which makes a vaccine developed by the University of Oxford, said on Thursday that researchers began the work on the updates months ago when the new variants were first detected. "We're moving fast and we've got a number of variant versions in the works that we will be picking from as we move into the clinic,"

Mene Pangalos, head of biopharmaceuticals research for AstraZeneca, said on a conference call with reporters. The comments came as CEO Pascal Soriot defended the company's efforts to develop and ramp up production of the shot amid criticism from the European Union and a preliminary study that raised concerns about the vaccine's ability to combat a variant of COVID-19 first discovered in South Africa.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/2/11/astrazeneca-expects-new-version-of-coronavirus-vaccine-by-autumn>

Indigenous leaders warn of missionaries turning Amazon villages against vaccines

Medical teams working to immunize Brazil's remote indigenous villages against the coronavirus have encountered fierce resistance in some communities where evangelical missionaries are stoking fears of the vaccine, say tribal leaders and advocates. On the São Francisco reservation in the state of Amazonas, Jamamadi villagers sent health workers packing with bows and arrows when they visited by helicopter this month, said Claudemir da Silva, an Apurinã leader representing indigenous communities on the Purus river, a tributary of the Xingú. "It's not happening in all villages, just in those that have missionaries or evangelical chapels where pastors are convincing the people not to receive the vaccine, that they will turn into an alligator and other crazy ideas," he said by phone.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-brazil-amazon/indigenous-leaders-warn-of-missionaries-turning-amazon-villages-against-vaccines-idUSKBN2AB2JR>

Over 100,000 people from Mumbai got Covid-19 vaccine shots

After vaccinating 5,707 beneficiaries on the 20th day of the vaccination drive, Mumbai crossed the milestone of 100,000 beneficiaries on Thursday. A total of 1,01,364 beneficiaries have been vaccinated in Mumbai since January 16, when the vaccination drive began. Of these, 85,034 are healthcare workers (HCWs) and 16,330 are frontline workers (FLWs). On Thursday, the turnout was 61%, but the average turnout over the past 20 days is over 70%.

<https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/mumbai-news/over-100-000-people-from-mumbai-got-covid-19-vaccine-shots-101613066779282.html>

France is seeing a baby bust nine months after its first covid lockdown

When France confined more than 64 million people under one of the world's strictest coronavirus lockdowns last spring, there was widespread speculation that a baby boom would follow. Nine months on, though, instead of a boom, France is witnessing a sharp decline in births. Economic uncertainty, social stress and in some cases anxieties about the virus itself appear to have prompted families to abandon or postpone plans to have a baby. The number of babies born at the Saint-Denis hospital plummeted by about 20 percent between mid-December and mid-January and is expected to remain below 2020 levels for at least the first half of the year. While the coronavirus wards were hives of activity last week, lights in the maternity ward were dimmed and the corridors empty.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/france-births-covid-lockdown/2021/02/10/285385ae-656c-11eb-bab8-707f8769d785_story.html

People getting slack about protecting themselves from Covid risk, government survey shows

In New Zealand, a government survey suggests people are becoming increasingly relaxed about protecting themselves from the risk of Covid-19. Use of the Tracer app, wearing masks, washing hands, and taking precaution when coughing or sneezing are all being reviewed on a monthly basis by the Ministry of Health. Other survey questions focus on mental health and how worried people are about catching the virus. The Ministry of Health's latest Health Survey shows that in January 27.5 percent of people recorded where they had been and who they were with. That marks a sharp fall from 45.6 percent of respondents questioned in September last year who said they were doing this.

<https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/436196/people-getting-slack-about-protecting-themselves-from-covid-risk-government-survey-shows>

South Africa to use J&J, Pfizer COVID vaccines, says Ramaphosa

President Cyril Ramaphosa says country has secured 9 million Johnson & Johnson and 20 million Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine doses. South Africa has secured millions of doses of the Johnson & Johnson (J&J) and Pfizer-BioNTech vaccines to fight a highly infectious variant of the coronavirus that is dominant in the country, according to President Cyril Ramaphosa. During a televised annual state of the nation address, Ramaphosa said on Thursday the continent's hardest-hit country had secured nine million doses of the yet-to-be approved J&J vaccine, of which 500,000 would arrive over the next four weeks so authorities could start vaccinating health workers. Another 20 million Pfizer doses have also been secured, he added, with deliveries expected to begin at the end of March.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/2/11/south-africa-use-ji-pfizer-covid-vaccines-ramaphosa>

Exit Strategies

Churches pair up with clinics to deliver coronavirus vaccine to those who need it most

Pastor Joseph Daniels folded his 6-foot-3-inch frame into the mobile coronavirus vaccine clinic outside Pennsylvania Avenue Baptist Church in Southeast Washington on Wednesday and joked that he was no fan of needles. Before he knew it, a nurse wearing a face shield, a mask and gloves was applying a bandage to his upper arm. "Oh, okay," he said. "That was easy." Daniels was one of a handful of pastors, along with their spouses, who received a vaccination Wednesday morning as part of the city's pilot program staging clinics at churches, part of an effort to combat vaccine hesitancy and improve access to the shots in hard-hit neighborhoods where vaccination rates are low

https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/churches-coronavirus-vaccine-clinics/2021/02/10/522025f8-6b17-11eb-ba56-d7e2c8defa31_story.html

Ministers to discuss vaccine certificates for international travel

Ministers are set to discuss plans on Friday for vaccination and test certificates to ease international travel after lockdown is lifted. But the discussion will not involve "vaccine passports" to prove immunity at venues in the UK. Instead, it will focus on how Britain can co-operate with the international system expected to be introduced eventually to facilitate journeys between different countries. A source said proposals were at a very early stage, and any scheme is not expected to be put into effect for some time.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/coronavirus-vaccine-passport-international-travel-b1801104.html>

Dr Fauci declares April 'open season' for COVID-19 vaccinations

Dr Anthony Fauci has predicted that any American who wants one will be able to get a coronavirus vaccine by April. 'By the time we get to April, that will be what I would call, for better wording, "open season," namely, virtually everybody and anybody in any category could start to get vaccinated,' Dr Fauci said during a Thursday Today show interview. 'Hopefully as we get into the middle and end of the summer we will have accomplished the goal of...the overwhelming majority of people have gotten vaccinated.'

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-9250911/Dr-Fauci-declares-April-open-season-COVID-19-vaccinations.html>

Roadmap out of lockdown may not be revealed on February 22 after all

The date for unveiling a roadmap out of lockdown has been pushed back, in a move that could delay the reopening of schools. Boris Johnson had previously promised to set out a plan for lifting restrictions on Monday February 22, but today his official spokesperson broadened the deadline by saying it would be published some time that week. If the plans are not published until the end of the week, on February 26, schools would not be able to reopen until at least March 12, which is on a Friday. That is a week later than the previous target date of March 8. It has previously been reported that some outdoor socialising could be allowed within weeks of pupils going back to the classroom and that pubs could reopen by May.

<https://metro.co.uk/2021/02/11/roadmap-for-lifting-lockdown-may-no-longer-be-on-february-22-14065171/>

Nicola Sturgeon warns staycations at risk in lockdown 'trade off'

Scots should “be cautious” about booking any holiday staycations this summer despite progress in beating back the virus, Nicola Sturgeon warned. The First Minister addressed public health concerns as the country prepares for tough quarantine rules on international travel. However, there remain serious concerns today about differences in approach between the UK and Scottish governments. It’s feared the English plan to quarantine people from a “red list” of higher risk countries will be “leaky” and provide a backdoor for people coming back to Scotland unchecked.

<https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/politics/nicola-sturgeon-warns-staycations-risk-23483614>

Britain can beat Covid and avoid more lockdowns with vaccine rollout, says top scientist Jeremy Farrar

Britain can beat the virus to avoid any more lockdowns by getting “population immunity” with the vaccine roll-out, a top scientist said today. Sir Jeremy Farrar, director of the Wellcome Trust, stressed that there was still a long way to go to cut Covid-19 infection levels and warned against lifting lockdown too early. However, he also made clear that an end is in sight to the nightmare epidemic if Covid jabs are offered to the whole population, including school children.

<https://www.standard.co.uk/news/health/britain-beat-covid-vaccine-lockdowns-immunity-jeremy-farrar-b919396.html>

UK set for 'easier' end to lockdown restrictions than expected, says Matt Hancock

In England, Matt Hancock has said that the unexpectedly high uptake of Covid vaccinations means that the country is set for an “easier” and safe exit from lockdown. The Health Secretary spoke to BBC Breakfast, voicing his optimism about the UK’s vaccination programme and what it means for the relaxation of lockdown measures. The Health Secretary’s comments reflect this success but come after Boris Johnson’s press conference yesterday, in which the Prime Minister said that people would have to be “patient” about making plans for summer.

<https://www.cambridge-news.co.uk/news/uk-world-news/lockdown-restrictions-end-uk-announcement-19816455>

Why have almost half EU countries restricted use of the Astrazeneca vaccine?

The World Health Organization (WHO) has recommended the rollout of Astrazeneca’s Covid vaccine for use in all age groups, after a slew of European countries slapped limitations on the jab’s distribution. WHO officials said a “preponderance of evidence weighed in favour of not constraining the vaccine for certain age groups”, and refused to recommend an upper age limit for the drug. But almost half of all EU countries have now applied age restrictions to the rollout of the Astrazeneca jab, despite it receiving official approval for all over-18s by the European Medicines Agency (EMA) last month.

<https://www.cityam.com/why-have-almost-half-eu-countries-restricted-use-of-the-astrazeneca-vaccine/>

Hunt for the 2million unvaccinated Britons as Boris Johnson urges vulnerable people to come forward

Ministers are hunting for the final two million vulnerable Britons who have not yet come forward for their Covid vaccine, warning that having large numbers of unprotected people could delay the easing of lockdown. The Government has made it its mission to inoculate the 15million Brits most at risk of dying from the coronavirus by Monday, which includes everyone over 70, care home residents, their carers and frontline NHS staff, as well as patients classed as clinically extremely vulnerable, such as those with terminal illnesses. But while 13 million in the most vulnerable categories have had the jab, including 90 per cent of the over-70s and care home residents, the Prime Minister has warned there is still a group numbering roughly twice the population of Birmingham who had yet to receive one.

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-9248813/Hunt-2million-unvaccinated-Britons-Boris-Johnson-urges-vulnerable-people-come-forward.html>

Spain’s regions favor higher age limit for AstraZeneca vaccine

Following the Spanish government's decision that the AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccine will only be administered to people between the ages of 18 and 55, several regional leaders said they would seek to raise that threshold to 65. Andalusian premier Juan Manuel Moreno and the deputy premier of the Madrid region, Ignacio Aguado, both said they would make this request at the Wednesday gathering of central and regional health officials known as the Inter-Territorial Council of the National Healthcare System, which meets every week to discuss coronavirus policy.

https://english.elpais.com/spanish_news/2021-02-10/spains-regions-favor-higher-age-limit-for-astrazeneca-vaccine.html

Covid lockdown could wind down in May if UK follows Israel's roadmap

Britain will only begin to emerge from lockdown at the end of May, if it follows the Israeli roadmap for defeating coronavirus. Israel has started implementing a three-stage plan to exit draconian Covid restrictions - similar to the blueprint Boris Johnson is set to lay out on February 22. Israeli officials hope to let non-essential shops, gyms and libraries reopen within a fortnight. But ministers will only give the move the green light on February 23 if 90 per cent of over-50s have been vaccinated and at least a third of the country have had their booster dose. Infection rates must also continue to plummet.

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-9247717/Britain-start-getting-Covid-lockdown-late-follows-Israelis-roadmap.html>

Coronavirus in the UK: Prof Devi Sridhar says 'very open debate' is needed over easing of lockdown restrictions

Devi Sridhar, professor of global public health at the University of Edinburgh, described how vaccines could be used to enable schools to reopen and people to visit crowded bars and restaurants, but said "the cost is restricted movement internationally". Asked whether fully stopping transmission of the disease could be done, Profesor Sridhar told BBC Radio 4's Today programme: "We have seen that it's possible. "If we look across the world to New Zealand, Australia, East Asian countries, and even the debate's now happening within Japan and now in Germany, you're seeing there's a turn towards saying: 'Do we want to use our vaccines and the tools we have to actually just stop transmission of the virus and be able to get back our normal life', which means normal schooling, fully open and crowded restaurants and bars, gyms and fitness studios, live music festivals, large spectator sports events, but the cost is restricted movement internationally?"

<https://www.scotsman.com/health/coronavirus/coronavirus-uk-prof-devi-sridhar-says-very-open-debate-needed-over-easing-lockdown-restrictions-3131257>

Quarantine hotel chaos as booking website crashes minutes after launching

In the UK, the government's plan to quarantine international arrivals in hotels has today been thrown into chaos as its booking website crashed minutes into its launch, while travellers were not allowed to reserve rooms for the first two days. Arrivals from a 'red list' of 33 countries - who will only be allowed to fly into one of five airports - will be expected pay £1,750 to quarantine for 10 full days (11 nights) in designated hotels from Monday. Those who attempt to evade quarantine by providing false information face a fine of up to £10,000, and up to 10 years in prison, while those who do not book a hotel place before arriving in England face a £4,000 fine. But as the booking website for the scheme was launched, searches at Birmingham, Glasgow and Heathrow airports showed they weren't 'any applicable hotels' for passengers to stay in.

https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-9249613/Passengers-stream-Heathrow-arrivals-three-days-hotel-quarantine-rules-introduced.html?ito=social-twitter_dailymailUK

Covid-19 vaccination rates follow the money in states with the biggest wealth gaps, analysis shows

Connecticut has the most glaring disparity in vaccination rates between its richest and poorest

communities — a difference of 65% — according to a STAT analysis of local-level vaccine data in 10 states with the biggest wealth gaps. Four other states — California, Florida, New Jersey, and Mississippi — also have vaccinated a significantly higher proportion of people in the wealthiest 10% of counties. The discrepancies vary: In California, 156 shots have been given to residents in the richest areas for every 100 vaccines in the poorest counties, while in Mississippi, 111 vaccines have been given to residents of the richest counties for every 100 doses in the poorest places. The findings back up, with hard data, anecdotal reports from around the country that wealthy people have been able to gain access to vaccines ahead of low-income people.

<https://www.statnews.com/2021/02/11/covid19-vaccination-rates-follow-the-money-in-states-with-biggest-wealth-gap/>

Partisan Exits

Biden says US faces ‘national emergency’ amid vaccine shortage

President Joe Biden said that the United States is facing a “national emergency” in the coronavirus pandemic and his administration is working to supply enough COVID-19 vaccine to inoculate 300 million Americans. “We’re in a national emergency,” said Biden, wearing a mask during remarks to scientists at the National Institutes of Health just outside Washington, DC on Thursday. “This will be one of the most difficult operational challenges we have ever undertaken as a nation. It’s going to take time,” Biden said. The US is on pace to exceed Biden’s goal of administering 100 million vaccine doses in his first 100 days in office, with more than 26 million shots delivered in his first three weeks. The 300 million doses would be delivered by the end of the US summer, Biden said. “We’re now on track to have enough supply for 300 million Americans by the end of July,” he announced. Biden said the US coronavirus death toll is likely to reach 500,000 next month. He urged Americans to wear masks as a “patriotic duty” to prevent the spread.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/2/12/biden-says-us-faces-national-emergency-amid-vaccine-shortage>

COVID-19: UK prepared for the wrong pandemic, former health secretary admits

Former health secretary Jeremy Hunt has admitted the UK had been concentrating all of its pandemic planning only on flu. Speaking on a Sky News' special programme, Covid Crisis: Learning the Lessons, Mr Hunt - Britain's longest ever serving health secretary - was candid. Asked if he felt he should take some responsibility for the off-target NHS planning, he replied: "Yes, I do.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-uk-prepared-for-the-wrong-pandemic-former-health-secretary-admits-12214583>

Venezuelan government and opposition begin talks on vaccine financing

Venezuelan government officials and opposition leaders have met to discuss buying coronavirus vaccines through the COVAX program using cash frozen in the United States by economic sanctions, two sources familiar with the matter said on Thursday. Opposition leader Juan Guaido last week said that Venezuelan funds controlled by the U.S. Treasury Department could be used to pay for vaccines. The cash-strapped government of President Nicolas Maduro has signed up for COVAX, co-led by the World Health Organization (WHO) to provide vaccines globally, but has not made the associated payments. The meeting marks a step forward in what will likely be a long process requiring that U.S. authorities approve the use of the funds, as well as the completion of a vaccination roll-out plan for crisis-stricken Venezuela.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-venezuela/venezuelan-government-and-opposition-begin-talks-on-vaccine-financing-idUSKBN2AC07J>

Nigel Farage’s natural supporters won’t buy his lockdown sceptic party

Nigel Farage’s renamed party has a problem, in that it was formed to fight the lockdown, which is likely to be lifting, if not lifted, by the time of its first electoral test, the elections on 6 May. I wrote that on Tuesday, and now a new study suggests the problem for Reform UK is even more serious. Research by my colleagues at King’s College London suggests that Leave voters tend to support the

lockdown as much as Remainers do. This seems surprising, because most leading lockdown sceptics are Brexiteers. Among public figures, the Venn diagram of Euroscepticism and lockdown scepticism seems to consist mostly of overlap.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/independentpremium/voices/nigel-farage-reform-lockdown-sceptics-covid-b1800925.html>

'Safety is very lax': staff tell of being forced into the office during UK's third lockdown

One in five employees are going into the workplace for part or all of their working week despite being able to do their job from home, according to a poll from the Trades Union Congress (TUC). We spoke to people who say their employers have been breaking Covid guidance by asking them to return to offices unnecessarily. None would agree to be named publicly for fear of losing their job. Thomas worked from home throughout the first lockdown but in September he was called back to his office. He was one of several staff who voiced concerns about spreading the virus. "Around September they asked HR to brief us on what would happen when we went back to the office. A lot of people on these calls said they were anxious and that they didn't want to run the risk of catching anything."

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/feb/11/safety-is-very-lax-staff-tell-of-being-forced-into-the-office-during-uks-third-lockdown>

NHS workforce 'on its knees' - without 'recuperation' burnt-out staff will leave, warn leaders

The Government is being urged to have an "honest" conversation with the public. The sustained and constant pressure of the pandemic has left the NHS workforce "on its knees" and burnt-out staff will look to leave unless action is taken, warn senior NHS leaders. In a letter sent to the Prime Minister on Monday by the NHS Confederation, senior leaders from all parts of the NHS have issued several stark warnings alongside calling for a period of "recuperation" before returning to normal operations. With around 4.46 million patients awaiting routine surgery and up to 20% of the UK population needing mental health support, the Government is being urged to be "honest" about what the NHS can realistically deliver in the coming months to years.

<https://nursingnotes.co.uk/news/workforce/nhs-workforce-on-its-knees-without-recuperation-burnt-out-staff-will-leave-warn-leaders/>

Merkel Defends Extension of Germany COVID-19 Lockdown

German Chancellor Angela Merkel Thursday defended her decision to extend the nation's COVID-19 lockdown, saying the variant strains of the virus pose a threat and she does not want to make the mistakes that led to a second surge last year. Following a meeting Wednesday with Germany's 16 state governors, Merkel announced they agreed to extend the current COVID-19 lockdown - due to expire Sunday - to March 7. Speaking to the Bundestag - the lower house of the German parliament - Merkel said they did not act fast enough in 2020 to prevent a second surge in infections late in the year, and as health officials now warn about the spread of more virulent variant COVID-19 strains in the country, she said they need to learn from their mistakes.

<https://www.voanews.com/covid-19-pandemic/merkel-defends-extension-germany-covid-19-lockdown>

Continued Lockdown

Covid-19: Ireland may have Level 5 restrictions until Easter

The Republic of Ireland could see a continuation of high level restrictions to the Easter period, Taoiseach (Irish PM) Micheál Martin has warned. Speaking on RTÉ's Morning Ireland, Mr Martin said the government is revising its Living with Covid Plan. He said it made sense to take a cautious approach as the vaccination programme is being rolled out across the country. On Wednesday, there were 54 additional coronavirus-related deaths reported. The Republic of Ireland's overall toll of coronavirus-related deaths is 3,794.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-56023912>

You're not lazy — Why you need to stop feeling guilty in lockdown, according to an expert

Retailers are calling for more financial support from the government after the UK's Covid lockdowns in 2020 cost £22bn in lost non-food sales. The high street was hit by its biggest fall in sales for non-food stores on record – down 24% – as footfall decreased by two-fifths, according to data from the trade body the British Retail Consortium (BRC). While many retailers continued to sell online, that did not make up for sales lost from shops. Profits were also affected by the cost of setting up and operating home delivery systems.

<https://www.cnbc.com/2021/02/11/heres-why-you-can-stop-feeling-guilty-about-laziness-in-lockdown.html>

In an era of division, lockdown unites us

Lockdown scepticism has been increasingly hard to sustain of late — but that hasn't deterred some. The most prominent of these voices seem to have something else in common, in supporting Brexit. From Julia Hartley-Brewer, Allison Pearson and Toby Young, to Steve Baker, Daniel Hannan and Nigel Farage, most high-profile lockdown sceptics also share a dislike of the European Union. Nigel Farage even started a new political party, Reform UK, whose initial focus was promoting lockdown scepticism

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/in-an-era-of-division-lockdown-unites-us-7tckfgln6>

U.K. Retailers See \$31 Billion Cost of Three Covid Lockdowns

Britain's three pandemic lockdowns have cost retailers that have been ordered to close about 22 billion pounds (\$31 billion) in lost sales, according to a trade group. In a sign of the mounting toll Covid-19 is taking on one of the country's biggest employment sectors, the British Retail Consortium says 2020 was the worst year on record, with in-store non-food sales declining by 24%, compared with 2019. Foot traffic in stores was down more than 40% in 2020 as Covid-wary consumers avoided malls and town centers and turned to online shopping instead, the group said in a statement.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-02-11/u-k-retailers-see-31-billion-cost-of-three-national-lockdowns>

Covid: Prisoners like 'caged animals' in lockdown jails

Prisoners in England's jails have been locked in their cells for more than 90% of the day to keep them safe from Covid-19, the prisons watchdog says. And the extra restrictions, which began in March, have led to a decline in their mental and physical health and a rise in drug taking and self-harm. "It's being imprisoned while you're in prison," one inmate told inspectors. Predictions up to 2,000 inmates would die in the pandemic in England and Wales without action have been avoided.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-55957048>

Germany to reinstate border controls over virus variant

The German government decided Thursday to temporarily reinstate border controls along its southeastern frontier after designating the Czech Republic and parts of Austria as "mutation areas" due to their high number of variant coronavirus cases, German news agency dpa reported. The temporary border controls and certain entry restrictions will start Sunday at midnight, dpa reported. Travelers coming from certain areas of Austria or the Czech Republic will have to provide proof of a negative coronavirus test in order to enter Germany a requirement that will present a hurdle for thousands of cross-border workers. It was not clear for how long the border controls would last.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/germany-to-reinstate-border-controls-over-virus-variant-government-ap-czech-republic-austria-germany-b1801060.html>

Covid-19 school closures are widening Europe's class divisions

No one is ever truly ready for lockdown. But when the Netherlands closed its schools in December, the Herman Wesselink College, a high school in a well-off suburb of Amsterdam, was readier than

most. About half its students have parents who completed higher education. Nearly all have their own bedroom to study in. The school has given its pupils laptops for years, and during the first lockdown last spring switched smoothly to remote learning. The director says students have not fallen behind a whit in terms of content, though their study skills have languished. The Mundus College, a trade school in a poorer Amsterdam neighbourhood, has had it rougher. About a third of its students are new immigrants or refugees. Vocational education is hard to do remotely. Classes have stayed open at half-size under an exception for vulnerable students, but it is impossible to follow social-distancing rules for subjects like nursing, says Diana Brummelhuis, the director:

<https://www.economist.com/europe/2021/02/13/covid-19-school-closures-are-widening-europes-class-divisions>

Amid variant fears, Germany extends Covid-19 lockdown until March 7

Chancellor Angela Merkel's government agreed Wednesday to continue a partial lockdown to fight the coronavirus pandemic until at least March 7, even as Germans grow increasingly weary of the tough restrictions. Following crunch talks with the leaders of Germany's 16 states, Merkel said that the number of new Covid-19 infections in Europe's top economy was dropping after more than two months of shuttered schools and shops. "When we look at this development we can be quite satisfied," she told reporters. But she called on Germans to be patient as fears grow over more contagious virus variants first detected in Britain and South Africa.

<https://www.france24.com/en/europe/20210211-amid-variant-fears-germany-extends-covid-19-lockdown-until-march-7>

Ireland's third virus lockdown set to last to April

Ireland's virus lockdown is set to be extended until April, Prime Minister Michael Martin said as the country battles to get infection rates and deaths down. "Certainly we are looking at a continuation of high levels of restrictions until the Easter period," Martin told state broadcaster RTE. Restaurants and pubs across Ireland have been shut since Christmas Eve and the non-essential retail sector has been closed since New Year's Eve.

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/europe/irelands-third-virus-lockdown-set-to-last-to-april/articleshow/80847599.cms>

Retailers call for more Covid help after £22bn loss in non-food sales

Retailers are calling for more financial support from the government after the UK's Covid lockdowns in 2020 cost £22bn in lost non-food sales. The high street was hit by its biggest fall in sales for non-food stores on record – down 24% – as footfall decreased by two-fifths, according to data from the trade body the British Retail Consortium (BRC). While many retailers continued to sell online, that did not make up for sales lost from shops. Profits were also affected by the cost of setting up and operating home delivery systems. Central London has been one of the hardest hit parts of the country; the loss of tourists and many commuters contributing to a surge in closures of shops and other high street businesses. The number of empty units in the City of London increased by 47% last year as the number of workers and visitors slumped, according to figures from analysts at Local Data Company.

<https://www.theguardian.com/business/2021/feb/11/retailers-call-for-more-covid-help-after-22bn-loss-in-non-food-sales>

German businesses dismayed by further lockdown extension

The German business community expressed consternation on Thursday after Chancellor Angela Merkel and regional leaders agreed to extend the coronavirus lockdown until March 7. "Politicians are leaving industry in the lurch," said Andrea Belegante from the BdS lobby group that represents the restaurant and catering business, adding she was "stunned". "Again there are no prospects, again no concrete steps towards an opening strategy, again only a postponement without prospects to the beginning of March."

<https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-germany-economy/german-businesses-dismayed-by-further-lockdown-extension-idUSL8N2KH2Y5>

Merkel says lockdown won't last a day longer than necessary

German Chancellor Angela Merkel said on Thursday restrictions imposed to curb the spread of the coronavirus which have been extended until March 7 will not be maintained a day longer than necessary.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/healthcoronavirus-germany-merkel/merkel-says-lockdown-wont-last-a-day-longer-than-necessary-idUSS8N2IR017>

More than 40% of Britons in poor health or struggling financially amid pandemic, says UK regulator

More than 40 percent of Britons are struggling financially or suffering poor health, a sharp increase from last year driven by the COVID-19 pandemic, Britain's Financial Conduct Authority said on Thursday. The FCA said there are now 27.7 million adults in Britain affected by low financial resilience, poor health or other recent negative life events, up from 24 million in February 2020, a month before the country went into its first lockdown to fight the pandemic. Britain's total population is 67 million. Having just one of the characteristics puts a consumer at greater risk of harm, the FCA said in the latest findings of its regular Financial Lives survey. The survey contacted 16,000 people between August 2019 and February 2020, with a follow up survey of 22,000 people in October last year.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-britain-finance-regulator/more-than-40-of-britons-in-poor-health-or-struggling-financially-amid-pandemic-says-uk-regulator-idUSKBN2AB107>

Portugal Extends COVID-19 Lockdown as Overstretched Hospitals Struggle

Portugal extended on Thursday a nationwide lockdown until March 1 to tackle its worst surge of COVID-19 infections since the pandemic began as authorities scramble to relieve pressure on overstretched hospitals. The country of just over 10 million fared better than other nations in Europe in the first wave of the pandemic, but 2021 brought a devastating surge in infections and deaths, in part blamed on the rapid spread of the British variant of the virus and the easing of restrictions over Christmas.

<https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2021-02-11/portugal-extends-covid-19-lockdown-as-overstretched-hospitals-struggle>

Scientific Viewpoint

Manitoba agrees to purchase 2M doses of Providence Therapeutics coronavirus vaccine

The Manitoba government has committed to buy two million doses of a made-in-Canada COVID-19 vaccine currently under clinical trial. Premier Brian Pallister announced the purchase of the Providence Therapeutics COVID-19 vaccine at a Thursday morning press conference. "With today's announcement we're taking a big step ... to creating a secure, stable supply of Canadian-made COVID vaccines," Pallister said. A human trial for the prospective vaccine was started in Toronto in late January. In a release Jan. 26 Providence said the vaccine, dubbed PTX-COVID19-B, is a messenger RNA (mRNA) vaccine, and is the first fully-made in Canada vaccine to reach the human clinical trial stage.

<https://globalnews.ca/news/7634493/manitoba-covid-vaccinations/>

Bolivia signs deal with China's Sinopharm for coronavirus vaccine

Bolivia said on Thursday it had inked an agreement with China's Sinopharm locking in an initial supply of half a million doses of the company's vaccine against coronavirus by the end of February. Bolivian President Luis Arce said China's President Xi Jinping had agreed to sell Bolivia 400,000 doses and had donated another 100,000 doses to the South American nation, among the poorest in

the region. Bolivia has been rocked by political and social upheaval since contested elections in 2019 saw longtime president Evo Morales leave office. It has lagged behind wealthier regional neighbors in securing bilateral vaccine supply deals. The Andean nation has since signed agreements with Russia for its Sputnik V vaccine and India's Serum Institute for AstraZeneca's COVID-19 shot. It has also signed a deal with the World Health Organization-backed COVAX initiative.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-bolivia-vaccine/bolivia-signs-deal-with-chinas-sinopharm-for-coronavirus-vaccine-idUSKBN2AB1BB>

Does the coronavirus vaccine work on Bristol's variant? This is what Public Health England says

Public Health England has shared a reassuring statement about Bristol's coronavirus variant in relation to vaccines. Several experts have raised doubts about the mutation present in this particular 'variant of concern', as experiments suggest it might make antibodies less effective in attacking the infection. Speaking to ITV last night (Wednesday, February 10), a member of the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies said the variant "may be able to re-infect people who've been previously infected or who've been previously vaccinated". However, Public Health England (PHE) remains optimistic about the efficacy of current vaccines - at least in the primary aim of preventing serious illness and death. Speaking to ITV last night (Wednesday, February 10), a member of the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies said the variant "may be able to re-infect people who've been previously infected or who've been previously vaccinated". However, Public Health England (PHE) remains optimistic about the efficacy of current vaccines - at least in the primary aim of preventing serious illness and death.

<https://www.bristolpost.co.uk/news/bristol-news/coronavirus-vaccine-work-bridstols-variant-4991416>

AstraZeneca Plans to Double Covid-19 Vaccine Output

AstraZeneca PLC said it was fixing problems with the manufacturing of its Covid-19 vaccine and expects to roughly double monthly production to 200 million doses by April, as it seeks to move past a rocky start to the shot's rollout. The Anglo-Swedish drugmaker reported strong full-year earnings and forecast increased 2021 earnings growth. The forecast doesn't factor in sales of the pandemic vaccine it developed alongside the University of Oxford.

https://www.wsj.com/articles/astrazeneca-plans-to-double-covid-19-vaccine-output-as-it-fixes-production-issues-11613048354?mod=lead_feature_below_a_pos1

CDC: people who have received two Covid-19 vaccine doses can skip quarantine

People who have received the full course of Covid-19 vaccines can skip the standard 14-day quarantine after exposure to someone with the infection as long as they remain asymptomatic, US public health officials advised. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said late on Wednesday the vaccines have been shown to prevent symptomatic Covid-19, thought to play a greater role in the transmission of the virus than asymptomatic disease. "Individual and societal benefits of avoiding unnecessary quarantine may outweigh the potential but unknown risk of transmission (among vaccinated individuals)," the CDC said.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/feb/11/cdc-two-vaccine-doses-skip-quarantine-covid-19>

Roche arthritis drug reduces COVID-19 deaths in trial in hospitalised patients

Roche's arthritis drug tocilizumab cuts the risk of death among patients hospitalised with severe COVID-19, also shortening the time to recovery and reducing the need for mechanical ventilation, results of a large trial showed on Thursday.

<https://www.nasdaq.com/articles/roche-arthritis-drug-reduces-covid-19-deaths-in-trial-in-hospitalised-patients-2021-02-11>

When will kids be able to get COVID-19 vaccines?

Students as young as first grade might be able to get vaccinated against COVID-19 by September, White House chief medical adviser Dr. Anthony Fauci predicted in an interview published by ProPublica on Thursday. Fauci cited clinical trials now underway in the U.S. from vaccine developers Pfizer and Moderna to test the safety and efficacy of the doses in children. He had said previously that the Food and Drug Administration might allow for vaccinations in American children "by the time we get to the late spring and early summer." So far, except for a handful of errors, the nationwide vaccine rollout has not included children.

<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/covid-19-vaccine-kids-school/>

Pfizer says it expects data on COVID-19 vaccines for children in 'early part of 2021'

Pfizer says it has completed enrollment of its clinical trial of 12-to-15 year olds and believes it will have data in 'the early part of 2021.' Moderna is still recruiting children for its trial of 12-to-18 year olds and says it expects to have preliminary data 'around mid-year 2021.' Neither company has yet started pediatric trials testing their coronavirus vaccines in those aged 11 and younger. Dr. Anthony Fauci says he believes children as young as first graders may be able to receive COVID-19 vaccines by the school year start in September. But pediatricians believe studies are moving too slowly and that not immunizing children threatens herd immunity and increases the risk of variants spreading.

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-9250373/Pfizer-says-expects-data-COVID-19-vaccines-children-early-2021.html>

Government ordered to investigate link between PPE shortages and NHS COVID-19 deaths

A report by the House of Commons public accounts committee (PAC) highlighted concerns among frontline staff that guidance did not specify a high enough level of PPE to properly protect them against infection, while some supplies were substandard or insect-infected. Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) staff were more likely to report experiencing PPE shortages or feeling pressured to work without adequate protection - over twice as many BAME doctors reported experiencing PPE shortages compared with white colleagues. The BMA has urged the government to learn from 'these terrible shortcomings' and listen to the experiences of frontline workers during the first wave of the pandemic to ensure that healthcare workers are properly protected in the future.

<http://www.gponline.com/government-ordered-investigate-link-ppe-shortages-nhs-covid-19-deaths/article/1706987>

COVID-19 linked with new set of symptoms, according to study of over a million people

Chills, loss of appetite, headache and muscle aches could be a sign of COVID-19 infection, according to new findings. Based on swab tests and questionnaires taken from June up until last month as part of Imperial College London's REACT study of over one million people, those with the above symptoms were more likely to test positive for the virus. This is in addition to the "classic" symptoms of COVID-19 already included in NHS guidance, which are: - Fever - New persistent cough - Loss of sense of smell and/or taste

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-linked-with-new-set-of-symptoms-according-to-study-of-over-a-million-people-12214163>

Bristol Covid-19 variant: Experts monitor new mutation

A new coronavirus variant found in Bristol may be able to infect people who have already had Covid-19 or who have been vaccinated. But experts said jabs will still protect against people becoming seriously ill with the disease. The Bristol variant contains the E484K mutation also found in the South African and Brazilian variants. Health officials in the city say getting as many people vaccinated as possible is key. The Bristol variant has been defined by the New and Emerging Respiratory Virus Threats Advisory Group (Nervtag) as the Kent variant with the E484K mutation. Laboratory studies have shown that viruses with that mutation are able to escape human defences, making them more efficient at evading natural and vaccine-triggered immunity.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-bristol-56024103>

'More than 40% of people suffer trauma following Covid-19'

Many people suffer trauma with symptoms such as flashbacks after catching Covid-19, even if they did not require clinical assistance or hospitalisation, a study has found. The Imperial College London and University of Southampton study, published on Tuesday, looked at 13,049 people with experience of coronavirus.

<https://www.pulsetoday.co.uk/news/clinical-areas/mental-health-and-addiction/more-than-40-of-people-suffer-trauma-following-covid-19/>

COVID-19: AstraZeneca on course to roll out jab for new variants by autumn

AstraZeneca has said it is on course to roll out a coronavirus vaccine that is effective against new variants by the autumn. The company, which has produced a COVID-19 vaccine alongside University of Oxford, said clinical trials for the next generation of jab would commence in the spring.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-astrazeneca-on-course-to-roll-out-jab-for-new-variants-by-autumn-12215002>

Is It Safe to Delay a Second COVID Vaccine Dose?

Vaccine shortages and distribution delays are hampering efforts to curb the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic. So some scientists have suggested postponing the second shots of two-dose vaccines to make more available for people to get their first doses. The original recommended interval was 21 days between doses for the Pfizer vaccine and 28 days for the Moderna shots, the two currently authorized in the U.S. Now the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has updated its guidance to say that people can wait up to 42 days between doses, though the agency still advises individuals to stick to the initial schedule. And developers of the University of Oxford–AstraZeneca vaccine—which is authorized for use in the U.K.—suggest even longer stretches are possible, saying their shot performs better when its doses are spaced 12 weeks apart.

<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/is-it-safe-to-delay-a-second-covid-vaccine-dose/>

AstraZeneca working to adapt Covid-19 vaccine to new strains

AstraZeneca said Thursday it's working with the University of Oxford to adapt its COVID-19 vaccine to protect against new strains of the virus as public health officials raise concerns about mutations that may make the virus more resistant to existing vaccines. The Anglo-Swedish drugmaker worked with Oxford to develop one of the first COVID-19 vaccines authorized for widespread use. AstraZeneca said it hopes to cut the time needed to produce large amounts of any new vaccine to between six and nine months.

https://www.business-standard.com/article/international/astrazeneca-working-to-adapt-covid-19-vaccine-to-new-strains-121021100956_1.html

C.D.C. Urges Better Masking for Increased Virus Protection

Wearing a mask — any mask — reduces the risk of infection with the coronavirus, but wearing a more tightly fitted surgical mask, or layering a cloth mask atop a surgical mask, can vastly increase protections to the wearer and others, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported on Wednesday. New research by the agency shows that transmission of the virus can be reduced by up to 96.5 percent if both an infected individual and an uninfected individual wear tightly fitted surgical masks or a cloth-and-surgical-mask combination.

<https://www.nytimes.com/live/2021/02/10/world/covid-19-coronavirus>

Long Covid: The illness wreaking havoc behind the pandemic

Coronavirus has been dominating the headlines for a year – but behind the grim death statistics and hospital admissions, a related illness has been quietly wreaking havoc on the lives of thousands of Scots. Long Covid, or post-covid syndrome, has been described by some as the “pandemic behind the pandemic”. Research is in its infancy and there is no clear treatment or cure. The post-viral

condition affects people who fell ill with coronavirus, but did not make a full recovery within three months.

<https://news.stv.tv/feature/long-covid-the-pandemic-wreaking-havoc-behind-the-pandemic?top>

Kent Covid variant mutation must be taken seriously, warns UK scientist

The Kent variant of the coronavirus with a key mutation that enables the South African variant to escape some of the vaccines used against it must be taken very seriously in the UK, according to a leading microbiologist. Prof Ravi Gupta of the Cambridge Institute for Therapeutic Immunology and Infectious Diseases, who is a member of the government's scientific advisory body NERVTAG, warned that the mutated variant, at the moment causing just 21 known cases, should be treated with as much concern as the South African variant. The Kent variant B.1.1.7, which spreads twice as fast as the original coronavirus, is now dominant in the UK and is present in many countries around the world. But Public Health England has identified 21 cases of B.1.1.7 that also have the E484K mutation: 14 in the Bristol region, four in Greater Manchester and three elsewhere. E484K is the change to the spike protein in South Africa that scientists believe is chiefly responsible for vaccines triggering a lower antibody response to infection.

https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/feb/10/mutated-kent-covid-variant-must-be-taken-seriously-warns-uk-scientist?CMP=share_btn_tw

CDC alters COVID-19 quarantine guidance for vaccine recipients

If you have received two doses of the COVID-19 vaccine and are exposed to someone with the virus, you no longer have to quarantine for 14 days as long as you remain free of symptoms, according to new recommendations issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Because the vaccines prevent symptomatic COVID-19 infections, and symptomatic people are thought to be more contagious, the CDC said the risk of unnecessary quarantine outweighs the potential unknown risk of transmission among vaccinated people.

<https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2021/02/cdc-alters-covid-19-quarantine-guidance-vaccine-recipients>

Tocilizumab cuts death rate in severe COVID-19, study finds

Hospitalized COVID-19 patients given the anti-inflammatory monoclonal antibody tocilizumab were less likely to die or require invasive mechanical ventilation, according to preliminary results of the UK RECOVERY trial posted today on the medRxiv preprint server. Led by University of Oxford researchers, the ongoing Randomised Evaluation of COVID-19 Therapy (RECOVERY) trial involved assigning 4,116 severely ill coronavirus patients to receive either intravenous tocilizumab, a rheumatoid arthritis drug, or usual care. Most (82%) of the participants also received a systemic corticosteroid such as dexamethasone.

<https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2021/02/tocilizumab-cuts-death-rate-severe-covid-19-study-finds>

Merck canned its own COVID-19 vaccines. Now, it's in talks to manufacture other companies' shots

After Merck & Co. got off to a late start in the COVID-19 vaccine race and made an early exit, the drug giant is in talks to aid the global vaccine manufacturing effort. The drugmaker is "actively involved" in discussions with governments, health agencies and other pharmaceutical companies to "identify the areas of pandemic response where we can play a role, including potential support for production of authorized vaccines," a spokesman said via email. News of the talks comes about two weeks after Merck abandoned both its coronavirus vaccine candidates—one it acquired through its Themis buyout and the other it was studying in partnership with IAVI. Merck said the two shots had produced immune responses weaker than those prompted by natural infections as well as by other COVID-19 vaccines.

<https://www.fiercepharma.com/pharma/merck-after-canning-covid-19-vaccine-programs-talks-to-help-shot-production>

Coronavirus Resurgence

COVID-19 surge takes toll on Portugal's undertakers

Standing next to the sealed coffin of yet another COVID-19 victim in Portugal, funeral parlour worker Carlos Carneiro wept as the bereaved family played a record of a traditional fado song as a final goodbye. Carneiro, 37, has been in the undertaking business for two decades helping people cope with loss, but never felt as affected by sorrow and fear as now. Portugal fared better than others in Europe in the first wave of the pandemic in March-April, but the new year brought a devastating surge in infections and deaths, overwhelming the health service and funeral homes. More than 14,700 people have died of COVID-19 in Portugal, with cumulative infections since the start of the pandemic at nearly 775,000.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-portugal-funeral/covid-19-surge-takes-toll-on-portugals-undertakers-idUSL8N2KF5LK>

NI records one of its lowest numbers for new daily Covid-19 infections in months

In data published in its daily Covid-19 dashboard the DoH reported 253 new infections in the last 24 hours. To put this into context, two weeks ago, on Thursday January 28 the DoH reported 592 new infections in 24 hours and 4,066 in the seven days leading up to that date. Fast-forward two weeks to today, Thursday February at the number of daily infections is down 57 per cent to 253 and the number of infections in the last seven days is down 42 per cent to 2,377.

<https://www.newsletter.co.uk/health/coronavirus/ni-records-one-of-its-lowest-numbers-new-daily-covid-19-infections-months-3131922>

UK announces 13,494 more coronavirus cases and 678 deaths

Department of Health data show cases fell by over a third on last Thursday and deaths down by 26 per cent. Adds to further evidence to Britain being past the worst of the second wave which wreaked havoc over winter. NHS Test & Trace showed the weekly total of cases was last week a quarter down on the week before it. And Public Health England figures show positive test rates down in all regions and ages, and most boroughs

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-9250773/UK-announces-13-494-coronavirus-cases-678-deaths.html>

Spain reports 18,114 new coronavirus cases, adds 643 deaths to official toll

The epidemiological curve in Spain continues to fall, but the coronavirus pandemic in the country is still far from a situation whereby transmission is under control. In its Wednesday report, the Health Ministry reported 18,114 new infections and added 643 victims to the official death toll - below the record figure since the first wave that was set on Tuesday of 766 fatalities. The slowdown in the transmission of the virus is also being seen in a fall in the 14-day cumulative number of coronavirus cases per 100,000 inhabitants, which is now at 584. But while this downward trend is positive, the third wave is still a serious threat in Spain: the average incidence across the country is double the level of 250 considered to be extreme risk by the Health Ministry, and the pressure on the country's intensive care units (ICUs) persists. The ministry called on citizens not to lower their guard, but some regions, such as Madrid, Andalusia, Extremadura and Castilla-La Mancha, are already talking about relaxing social restrictions.

<https://english.elpais.com/society/2021-02-11/spain-reports-18114-new-coronavirus-cases-adds-643-deaths-to-official-toll.html>

Sewage samples show COVID-19 spreading fast in some French cities

Sewage samples from a new nationwide COVID-19 monitoring system show that in some French cities traces of coronavirus are spiking above levels seen during the second wave of the epidemic in the autumn. France's new "Obepine" network continuously samples city sewage in nearly 50 waste water stations and publishes charts that indicate the quantity of genetic material from the SARS-CoV-2 virus which causes COVID-19. For cities where data are available from spring 2020, the indicator charts show a strong correlation with charts of the number of positive cases and can give

early warning signals. "In Lille, Marseille and Strasbourg we see a strong uptick, while in the Paris region the situation seems more under control," said Vincent Marechal, a Sorbonne university virology professor and co-founder of the Obepine network.

<https://thepeninsulaqatar.com/article/11/02/2021/Sewage-samples-show-COVID-19-spreading-fast-in-some-French-cities>

Tanzania experiencing surge in COVID-19 cases, says U.S.

The United States said on Wednesday that Tanzania, whose president has advised citizens to shun coronavirus vaccines, is experiencing a surge in COVID-19 cases and its healthcare facilities could be quickly overwhelmed. In a statement, the U.S. embassy in Dar es Salaam said it was "aware of a significant increase in the number of COVID-19 cases since January". "The practice of COVID-19 mitigation and prevention measures remains limited ... healthcare facilities in Tanzania can become quickly overwhelmed in a healthcare crisis."

<https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-health-coronavirus-tanzania/tanzania-experiencing-surge-in-covid-19-cases-says-us-idUSKBN2ABOFH>

Experts urge caution as coronavirus variants spread in Japan

The number of people found infected with new strains of the coronavirus in Japan has topped 100, with community infections reported and major clusters seen in Saitama Prefecture, north of Tokyo. The World Health Organization (WHO) said that one variant was up to 70% more transmissible than the original, and experts in Japan are calling for people to be careful. The first variant cases were detected on Dec. 25 last year at Haneda Airport in the capital, and Kansai International Airport in western Japan. Then on Jan. 18, three people who'd had no contact with people who returned from overseas were confirmed to have been infected in Shizuoka Prefecture in what were believed to be cases of community transmission.

<https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20210211/p2a/00m/0na/025000c>

Europe tracks variant spread as COVID deaths spike in Africa

The head of the World Health Organization (WHO) European office today said that the region's 4-week drop in cases is good news but warned that outbreaks and community transmission involving variants is increasing, requiring a close watch and careful response decisions. At a briefing today, Hans Henri Kluge, MD, MPH, said daily case numbers and deaths are still too high. "At this point, the overwhelming majority of European countries remain vulnerable," he said. "Right now, it's a thin line between the hope of a vaccine and a false sense of security."

<https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2021/02/europe-tracks-variant-spread-covid-deaths-spike-africa>

New Lockdown

Fears of a Victoria lockdown after Holiday Inn cluster reaches 13

There are reports Victoria could enter a snap lockdown as the Holiday Inn cluster grows to 13 cases with the latest two cases announced by Victoria Health being household contacts of previous infections. It is believed the virus spread in the hotel after the use of a nebuliser by a resident in quarantine, raising questions as to why the person was in the facility whilst being dependent on the device. There are also fears hotel quarantine workers are not wearing the correct PPE after a nurse was spotted at the Intercontinental Hotel without even a mask. The majority of the cases have already been linked to the highly contagious UK variant.

https://www.skynews.com.au/details/_6231170248001