

# COVID-19 Lockdown Exit Analysis

## 26th Feb 2021

---

### News Highlights

---

#### **UK concerned over low vaccination rates in large cities as it seeks to come out of lockdown**

The UK faces concerns over relatively low vaccination rates in a number of its major cities, including Birmingham, London and Manchester. [London accounts for the fifteen areas of England where the lowest percentage of adults have been inoculated](#). The reasons behind this trend include age, with Londoners' average age being lower than England's average, vaccine hesitancy among ethnic minorities, as well as deprivation in some poorer local authority areas.

#### **Naming of non-vaccine recipients permitted in Israel**

The Knesset has passed a law [allowing the names and contact details of those who refuse a COVID-19 vaccination to be shared with other authorities](#), including local governments, the director general of the education ministry and some in the welfare ministry. The law is intended to allow outreach to those who refuse vaccines to encourage them to do so, but its passage has led to concerns over privacy.

#### **Two more vaccines approved in China**

China's National Medical Products Administration has provided provisional approval for two more COVID-19 vaccine candidates for wider use, one by state-owned Sinopharm and CanSino Biologics. [The country has now authorised four vaccine candidates for wider use](#). The CanSino Biologics candidate requires just one shot and the company claims 65.28% efficacy 28 days after receiving the vaccine, which has now also been approved in Mexico and Pakistan.

#### **AstraZeneca pledges to meet EU targets using its global network**

Following claims by an EU official that AstraZeneca's promised delivery of millions of doses in the second quarter of 2021 would be missed by almost half, the manufacturer has said it will meet the target by leveraging supplies from elsewhere in its global network. [An EU official had previously said the bloc would receive a total of 130 million doses as opposed to the planned target of 300 million](#), the reason given was that it was a knock-on effect from AstraZeneca manufacturing issues during the first quarter. AstraZeneca said it will now scale-up manufacturing in the EU and 'make use of its global presence to ensure targets are met.'

### Lockdown Exit

---

#### **COVID-19: Major cities falling well behind in UK's bid to vaccinate its way out of lockdown**

So, while it's clear that age is a major factor driving the different pace of vaccination locally, it isn't the only one. The reason for the difference is made more difficult to determine in affluent areas of central London which may be skewed by non-residents. Ethnicity and deprivation appear to be key in determining uptake and could mean some parts of England have less protection from COVID-19 than others.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-why-cities-are-falling-behind-in-the-uks-vaccination-race-12228718>

### **South Korea preps coronavirus vaccines after political scuffle over first shots**

South Korean politicians won't be the first in line when the country kicks off its coronavirus vaccination drive on Friday, despite calls from the opposition party for the president to roll up his sleeve and take a shot to reassure vaccine sceptics. Leading political figures spent the week trading rhetorical shots over who should be the first to take a literal jab, but in the end, health authorities said widespread acceptance of vaccines in South Korea means they would stick to plans to vaccinate healthcare workers and other at-risk individuals first. On Thursday, the first doses of AstraZeneca's coronavirus vaccine were distributed to clinics in preparation for the initial inoculations.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-southkorea/south-korea-preps-coronavirus-vaccines-after-political-scuffle-over-first-shots-idUSKBN2AP0HU>

### **COVID-19: Lockdown easing risks 'cold wave' hospital pressure as non-COVID patients return to A&E**

Senior hospital staff have admitted the prime minister's roadmap out of lockdown is making them "a bit anxious and nervous". Doctors and nurses at Warrington Hospital have weathered the first and second wave of the pandemic and are now bracing themselves for the "cold wave". This is the winter surge of patients coming into their emergency department with seasonal respiratory illnesses. This year the cold wave came late, but the sharp spike in A&E attendances means it is here now.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-hospital-staff-nervous-over-pms-lockdown-plan-as-cold-wave-adds-to-pandemic-pressures-12228159>

### **New Zealand still candidate for Covid-19 'best responder' but slow vaccination a concern, Time magazine says**

New Zealand remains a contender for the title of Covid-19 "best responder" but this country's slow rate of vaccination is a cause for concern, according to an article in Time magazine. A year into the Covid-19 pandemic, the group took a second look at several countries it had considered to be standouts for their handling of the initial stages of the pandemic. Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern has explained the timing of New Zealand's vaccination rollout, pointing out this country did not have the Covid-19 public health emergencies being experienced by some other countries where vaccine emergency use authorisations had been granted. The Government wanted to ensure vaccines being used in New Zealand were "safe for New Zealanders" and were approved by regulator Medsafe, Ardern said.

<https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/health/coronavirus/124357134/new-zealand-still-candidate-for-covid19-best-responder-but-slow-vaccination-a-concern-time-magazine-says>

### **Covid 19 coronavirus in NZ: One year into the pandemic, five lessons for 2021 and beyond**

Exactly one year ago tomorrow, the first confirmed case of Covid-19 arrived in Aotearoa New Zealand. What are some of the lessons we have learned about this pandemic? And what are the implications for improving our response in future? Arguably, New Zealand's greatest lesson is that an elimination strategy is the optimal response for a moderate to severe pandemic like Covid-19. The strategy provides a vivid example of how protecting public health also protects the economy when compared with mitigation or suppression strategies. This successful approach has required decisive science-backed government action and outstanding communication to create the social licence needed for an effective response.

<https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/covid-19-coronavirus-in-nz-one-year-into-the-pandemic-five-lessons-for-2021-and-beyond/7OMSQORNGBOW3APVOVHEJZAOCM/>

### **COVID-19: EU leaders divided over vaccine passports to allow European travel this summer**

European Union leaders are divided over developing vaccine passports to open the continent up to tourism this summer. Some countries want an EU-wide approach instead of individual nations having their own certificates, while others are concerned such documentation could result in discrimination. Leaders of the EU's 27 countries met online on Thursday to start a two-day summit to discuss the pandemic, and while they agreed to work on vaccine certificates, they could not come up with a unified plan.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-eu-leaders-divided-over-vaccine-passports-to-allow-european-travel-this-summer-12229094>

## **Exit Strategies**

---

### **CVS Pharmacies Adds Coronavirus Vaccines at 40 California Locations, Including in San Diego County**

CVS Pharmacies will continue its rollout of the coronavirus vaccine Thursday as it makes doses available at 40 more select CVS locations across California – including several in San Diego County. The company said approximately 49,140 doses of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine are being made available to distribute at these locations in California through the Federal Retail Pharmacy Program.

<https://www.nbcsandiego.com/news/local/cvs-pharmacies-adds-coronavirus-vaccines-at-40-california-locations-including-in-san-diego-county/2531938/>

### **'It's Up to You': Ad campaign to encourage coronavirus vaccination gets underway**

For tens of millions of Americans still unsure about taking coronavirus vaccine shots, advertising industry experts and government scientists have a new message: "It's Up to You." That message and accompanying ad campaign — shaped by months of consumer research and backed by more than \$50 million in donated funds — is to be unveiled Thursday across TV and digital video, social media and audio platforms like Pandora and Spotify. It also will include messaging tailored toward Black and Hispanic communities, where studies have found a lack of trust about the coronavirus vaccines and their long-term effects. The ads and related events will feature celebrities, scientists and members of the faith community.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2021/02/25/covid-vaccine-ad-council/>

### **Coronavirus vaccine: one of UK's largest care home firms introduces 'no jab, no job' policy**

One of the UK's largest care home operators has instituted a no jab, no job policy for new staff amid ongoing concern about vaccine take-up among care workers. A spokesperson for Care UK, which runs 120 homes and has seen more than two-thirds of its staff vaccinated, said: "Everyone applying for a role which requires them to go into a home will be expected to have been vaccinated before they start work." The move comes after Barchester, which operates more than 220 private care homes, said it would insist that current staff are vaccinated, warning that if they "refuse ... on non-medical grounds [they] will, by reason of their own decision, make themselves unavailable for work".

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/feb/25/one-of-uks-largest-care-home-firms-introduces-no-jab-no-job-policy>

### **Kenya to Receive First Batch of Covid-19 Vaccines Next Week**

Kenya will receive its initial batch of Covid-19 vaccines in the first week on March, according to President Uhuru Kenyatta's office. Health-care workers and frontline personnel, including security officers, teachers, vulnerable persons and those in the hospitality sector, will be the first priority for inoculation, the presidency said in a statement

<https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/kenya-to-receive-first-batch-of-covid-19-vaccines-next-week/ar-BB1e18xM>

### **COVID-19 vaccine tiers may disappear as supply chain ramps up, Garcetti says**

After setbacks and shipment delays tied to winter weather, the supply of COVID-19 vaccines in Los Angeles is ramping up again, officials said. Tuesday was the second-busiest day at city-run

vaccination sites, Mayor Eric Garcetti said, with 17,572 doses administered. And while some scarcity remains, the numbers are expected to improve in the days and weeks to come. "While we still don't have clarity on the supply chain, in the next week or two, simple math indicates we should only see more and more supply in the weeks ahead," Garcetti said. "So get ready." The city is still primarily providing second-dose appointments but hopes to be able to "accelerate once again first-dose appointments" starting next week, the mayor said

<https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2021-02-25/covid-19-vaccine-tiers-may-disappear-as-supply-chain-ramps-up-garcetti-says>

### **One third of Scotland's adult population given a Covid-19 vaccine, Sturgeon says**

A third of Scotland's adult population have been given a coronavirus vaccine, with more than 1.5 million jabs administered, Nicola Sturgeon has said. Speaking to MSPs in the Scottish Parliament, the First Minister said 1,515,980 people in Scotland have received their first dose. "The fact that more than one and a half million people have now received the first dose of vaccination is, I think, a really significant milestone," she said.

<https://www.eveningexpress.co.uk/news/scotland/one-third-of-scotlands-adult-population-given-a-covid-19-vaccine-sturgeon-says/>

### **Coronavirus Vaccine Finder Aims to Help Americans Get Shots**

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, hoping to make it easier for Americans to find Covid-19 vaccines, is backing the test of a centralized online portal where the public can search for nearby vaccination locations with doses on hand. The website, called VaccineFinder, is run by Boston Children's Hospital with the help of several collaborators. It grew out of the H1N1 flu pandemic of 2009 and has been used for years to coordinate the distribution of flu and childhood vaccines. It expanded on Wednesday to include the availability of coronavirus vaccines at more than 20,000 locations, concentrated in several states. If the program goes well, the website's developers plan to expand it nationwide in coming weeks to include nearly all vaccine providers that agree to be featured.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/24/business/vaccine-finder-org.html>

### **Germany's Merkel warns of third wave if lockdown is lifted too quickly**

German Chancellor Angela Merkel has warned that her country could be caught in a third wave of Covid-19 if it lifts its lockdown too quickly. Her comments come as daycare centers and elementary schools were reopened in 10 of the Germany's 16 states this week, and as the nation mulls ways to lift the heavy restrictions that have shuttered the country's non-essential businesses for more than 10 weeks. "Because of (variants), we are entering a new phase of the pandemic, from which a third wave may emerge," Merkel told the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, in an interview published on Wednesday. "So we must proceed wisely and carefully so that a third wave does not necessitate a new complete shutdown throughout Germany."

<https://www.cnn.com/2021/02/25/europe/germany-merkel-third-wave-warning-europe-intl/index.html>

### **Travel restrictions have no end in sight as European leaders worry about new variants**

Looking to holiday in Greece or Spain? You could be waiting some time. European leaders are expected to say on Thursday that all non-essential travel needs to remain restricted as the Covid health situation remains "serious" across the continent, according to a document seen by CNBC. The European Union's 27 heads of state will gather virtually on Thursday afternoon to discuss the current state of the pandemic in the region. The EU is still one of the worst hit parts of the world by the coronavirus, with a number of nations still in lockdown or with strict social restrictions in place. At the same time, vaccination efforts have faced a bumpy start and some question whether the EU will reach its target of vaccinating 70% of its adult population by the summer.

<https://www.cnbc.com/2021/02/25/travel-restrictions-continue-in-europe-leaders-worry-about-covid-variants-.html>

### **More schools, gyms to open as Cyprus eases lockdown**

Cyprus on Thursday announced that more children will return to school while tentatively opening gyms as it gradually exits a national lockdown to contain Covid-19 infections. Health Minister Constantinos Ioannou said the government was determined to allow a return to normal life "slowly, carefully and in a controlled manner". The number of new Covid-19 infections has been stabilising and hospital admissions are down, he said.

<https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20210225-more-schools-gyms-to-open-as-cyprus-eases-lockdown>

### **COVID rules set to revert to pre-Christmas restrictions**

COVID-19 restrictions similar to those that were in place at Christmas are set to return, with the government expected to relax rules that have lingered since the end of the five-day lockdown. Nine senior Victorian ministers will meet on Friday morning to finalise a plan to ease mask restrictions and allow more people inside homes, provided there are no new locally-acquired cases. Thursday was the sixth day in a row with no new local cases. The intention, according to two government sources familiar with the plans who spoke on the condition of anonymity because the details are subject to change, is to revert to a set of rules resembling the "COVID-safe summer" restrictions that were in place before an outbreak in late December that was traced to a Thai restaurant in Black Rock.

<https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/covid-rules-set-to-flip-back-to-the-ones-in-place-at-christmas-20210225-p575v1.html>

### **British vaccine minister says confident in supply from manufacturers**

Britain has confidence in its supply of COVID-19 vaccines and has good visibility on future supplies thanks to regular contacts with manufacturers over timetables for deliveries, the minister responsible for rolling out shots said on Wednesday. The country has accelerated its vaccine rollout plans with a view to easing lockdown, although Monday saw the lowest number of first doses given since daily figures were first reported. "We have real confidence in our supply and our visibility of supply," Nadhim Zahawi told lawmakers.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-britain-vaccine/british-vaccine-minister-says-confident-in-supply-from-manufacturers-idUSKBN2A01DA>

### **Youngsters can sing again as Swiss start lockdown exit**

Switzerland's young people will be able to sing again from March 1, the government on Wednesday, as it announced the first phase in a cautious easing from COVID-19 restrictions. The cabinet, conscious of the impact the lockdown and social distancing is having on the psychological health of youngsters, said it was allowing sports and cultural activities for under-20s to resume, raising the age limit from 16. Children's and youth choirs will be able to practise and hold events, albeit without audiences.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-swiss/update-1-youngsters-can-sing-again-as-swiss-start-lockdown-exit-idUSL8N2KU68V>

### **India's health workers balk at taking homegrown COVID vaccine**

India is struggling to convince its healthcare and front-line workers to take a homegrown COVID-19 vaccine controversially approved without late-stage efficacy data, government data showed on Thursday, days ahead of a wider roll-out. The country has the world's second-highest number of COVID-19 infections after the United States, with cases recently surging as mask-wearing declines and states have eased social distancing measures. A lack of confidence in a homegrown vaccine could prevent India from meeting its target of vaccinating 300 million of its 1.35 billion people by August.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/2/25/indias-health-workers-balk-at-taking-homegrown-covid-vaccine>

## **Partisan Exits**

---

### **Oxford University says research not affected after media reports of COVID lab hack**

Oxford University said on Thursday it was investigating a digital intrusion after a researcher said he had seen evidence that a laboratory researching COVID-19 had been hacked. The breach took place in mid-February and occurred at the Division of Structural Biology, known as Strubi, which has been carrying out research into COVID-19, according to Alex Holden, founder of Wisconsin-based Hold Security. Forbes first reported the breach. Strubi is distinct from the Jenner Institute, which develops the Oxford COVID-19 vaccine in partnership with AstraZeneca.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-health-coronavirus-britain-cyber-idUSKBN2AP2RP>

### **COVID-19: Anti-fraud probe as EU nations are offered 900 million 'ghost' jobs worth €12.7bn**

Fraudsters are trying to cash in on mistakes made by the EU's coronavirus vaccination campaign by offering millions of scam jobs to member states. The bloc's anti-fraud agency OLAF said around 900 million vaccines have been pitched to several countries for €12.7bn (£11bn). These offers were said to be made by "alleged intermediaries," prompting OLAF to investigate. Pharmaceutical companies involved in making vaccines against COVID-19 say they sell to governments direct only.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-anti-fraud-probe-as-eu-nations-are-offered-900-million-covid-ghost-jobs-worth-total-of-eur12-7bn-12228695>

### **COVID-19: Almost 70,000 COVID lockdown fines handed out, with steep rise since Christmas**

Police have handed out nearly 70,000 fines to people for breaching COVID-19 lockdown rules since they came into force, with more than 6,000 issued in a single week, new data shows. Figures published by the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) on Thursday show that a total of 68,952 Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) were issued by forces. Of this figure, 63,201 fines were handed out in England and 5,751 in Wales between 27 March last year and 14 February.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-almost-70-000-fines-handed-out-for-coronavirus-lockdown-breaches-12228548>

### **The Good, the Bad, and the Embarrassing in America's COVID-19 Response**

The pandemic has been both a bad and an embarrassing time to be an American. Bad in an actuarial sense, because per-capita death rates here have been among the highest in the world. Embarrassing at the level of national identity. In Washington, last year, the President promised that the virus would be gone by Easter, and when it wasn't he mused that Americans might self-treat with bleach. In Michigan, armed men guarded a barbershop that had defied public-health orders to close. On South Padre Island, in Texas, spring break proceeded as usual—packed and unmasked—even as cases were climbing. The state's lieutenant governor, Dan Patrick, insisted that there were "more important things than living"; later, he urged Texans to keep the economy open even if it meant more deaths.

<https://www.newyorker.com/news/the-political-scene/the-good-the-bad-and-the-embarrassing-in-americas-covid-19-response>

### **Far right 'exploiting' anger at lockdowns to radicalise wellness community, police say**

Rightwing extremist groups have "exploited" anger at Covid-19 lockdowns to radicalise Australians in wellness and alternative medical circles into adopting white supremacist ideologies, Victoria police have warned a parliamentary inquiry into extremism. The inquiry into extremist movements and radicalism has separately been warned by the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation that Australians as young as 13 are involved in onshore terrorism, both in Islamist and rightwing extremist circles, and that encrypted online communication channels are preventing authorities from intervening before "lone actors" become radicalised and carry out attacks.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/feb/25/far-right-exploiting-anger-at-lockdowns-to-radicalise-wellness-community-police-say>

## **Mark Woolhouse denies Sturgeon's claim Covid-19 was 'reseeded' into Scotland from other parts of UK**

An adviser to Nicola Sturgeon has challenged the first minister's claim that coronavirus was "reseeded" into Scotland from other parts of the UK and claimed her "elimination" strategy was unattainable. The first minister has claimed that coronavirus was "almost eliminated" in Scotland last summer but was brought back into the country from travellers coming in from outside.

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/mark-woolhouse-denies-sturgeons-claim-covid-19-was-reseeded-into-scotland-from-other-parts-of-uk-q9bqv3m9>

## **EU says UK, U.S. have vaccine export bans, EU allows exports of Pfizer, Moderna shots**

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said on Thursday that the EU was allowing exports of COVID-19 vaccines, mostly from BioNTech/Pfizer and Moderna, while the United States and Britain had mechanism to block them. Von der Leyen told a news conference that approximately 95% of EU-made vaccines that had been exported since Jan. 30 were manufactured by Pfizer and BioNTech, and the remainder by Moderna. She said that both were honouring their supply contracts with the EU and therefore there was no limitation on their export, while on AstraZeneca's exports the EU was keeping "a very close eye" because of the company's shortfalls in deliveries to the 27-nation bloc.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-eu-vonderleyen-idUSKBN2AP2RS>

## **Vaccinate prisoners en masse, not police or teachers, JCVI tells ministers**

Teachers, police and other key workers should not get priority for Covid jabs but prisoners can be vaccinated en masse, the government's advisory body has concluded. The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) handed final recommendations to ministers on Sunday advising that under-50s be vaccinated by age rather than occupation, and that people from ethnic minorities should not get priority, The Times understands. At least 150,000 more people with learning disabilities have been added to the present vaccine priority list, after concerns that too many with severe problems were being missed. Ministers are due to sign off the next phase of the vaccine programme imminently and are expected to follow the committee's advice. On Monday Nadhim Zahawi, the vaccines deployment minister, said: "We will absolutely follow what they recommend."

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/vaccinate-prisoners-en-masse-not-police-or-teachers-jcvi-tells-ministers-mwfj29kql>

## **Israel passes law to name and shame those who decline Covid vaccine**

Israel has passed a law allowing the identities of people who have not been vaccinated to be shared with other authorities. The decision on Wednesday raises concerns over privacy for those who may opt against getting the jab. It passed by 30 votes to 13 and gives local governments, the director general of the education ministry and some in the welfare ministry the right to receive the names, addresses and phone numbers of everyone who has not had the vaccine. The objective of the measure - which remains valid for three months or until the Covid-19 pandemic is declared over - is 'to enable these bodies to encourage people to vaccinate by personally addressing them', according to a statement issued by parliament. Read more: <https://metro.co.uk/2021/02/25/israel-passes-law-to-name-and-shame-people-who-havent-had-covid-jab-14143058/?ito=cbshare> Twitter: <https://twitter.com/MetroUK> | Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/MetroUK/>

<https://metro.co.uk/2021/02/25/israel-passes-law-to-name-and-shame-people-who-havent-had-covid-jab-14143058/>

## **Continued Lockdown**

---

## **COVID-19: New ad campaign urges people to keep staying at home despite coronavirus transmission rates declining**

An advertising blitz has been launched to encourage people to keep staying at home until COVID-19 restrictions can be lifted. The campaign also urges them to continue with mask wearing, social

distancing and hand washing. And it appeals to people to understand the importance of remaining in lockdown, despite declining coronavirus transmission rates, the success of the vaccine rollout and the launch of the roadmap out of lockdown.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-new-ad-campaign-urges-people-to-keep-staying-at-home-despite-declining-coronavirus-transmission-rates-12227892>

### **Covid-19: Adverts urge people to 'keep going' and remain at home**

An advertising campaign has been launched to encourage people across the UK to "keep going" and remain at home. The government adverts come amid falling infection rates, the success of the vaccine rollout and the launch of the roadmap out of lockdown. People are also being urged to continue behavioural changes, including social distancing, hand washing and wearing face masks. The TV advert is being shown for the first time on Wednesday night on ITV.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-56187666>

### **Coronavirus in Austria: Viennese cafés open their doors to students despite lockdown**

Only a little jazz tune disturbs the studious atmosphere. In a downtown café, young Viennese residents enjoy the calm, space and comfort of the red benches, escaping from the closed doors to which the Covid-19 lockdown is forcing them. The city has launched an initiative to allow students to reserve time slots to study at cafes. Drinks are not allowed, but bottled water, small snacks and internet access are available.

<https://www.france24.com/en/video/20210225-coronavirus-in-austria-viennese-caf%C3%A9s-open-their-doors-to-students-despite-lockdown>

### **Aussie expats who've had COVID-19 jab amidst long UK lockdown: 'I feel privileged, I feel honoured'**

Thousands of Australians have lined up this week as the coronavirus vaccine rollout finally commenced. But half a world away, many Australians have already rolled up their sleeves to be some of the first in the world fully vaccinated against COVID-19. In the UK almost 18 million people have been inoculated since its vaccine drive began in mid-December, which includes many Australian expats. England's Chief Medical Officer Professor Jonathan Van-Tam said on Wednesday the government didn't expect the vaccine uptake to be as high as it has been, though it is pushing to stay as close to the 90 per cent or higher it has already achieved in priority groups.

<https://www.9news.com.au/world/australian-expats-on-what-its-like-living-in-covid-riddled-uk-and-share-their-vaccine-experience/d98735df-5c35-499e-87e3-211cedfafdf4>

### **Hungary extends lockdown, sees 'exceptionally difficult' two weeks ahead as infections rise**

Hungary is entering its toughest period since the start of the coronavirus pandemic and over the next two weeks hospitals will come under strain like never before, Prime Minister Viktor Orban said on Thursday. "I have only bad news," Orban said in a Facebook video. "We are facing the hardest two weeks since the start of the pandemic. The number of infections is rising sharply and will continue to rise due to the new mutations." On Thursday, Hungary reported 4,385 new infections, the highest number this year.

<https://www.msn.com/en-au/lifestyle/wellbeing/hungary-extends-lockdown-sees-exceptionally-difficult-two-weeks-ahead-as-infections-rise/ar-BB1e0uXD>

## **Scientific Viewpoint**

---

### **China approves two more COVID-19 vaccines for wider use**

China approved two more COVID-19 vaccines for wider use Thursday, adding to its growing arsenal of shots. The National Medical Products Administration gave conditional approval to a vaccine from CanSino Biologics and a second one from state-owned Sinopharm. Both are already being used

among select groups of people under an emergency use authorization. China now has four vaccines to immunize its population. CanSino said its one-shot vaccine candidate is 65.28% effective 28 days after the dose is given. It can be stored at 2 degrees to 8 degrees Celsius, "making it more accessible especially to the regions with underserved public health," it said in a statement.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/china-approves-two-more-covid19-vaccines-for-wider-use-china-vaccines-vaccines-shots-vaccine-b1807346.html>

### **COVID-19: One in seven people now have coronavirus antibodies as vaccine rollout continues**

One person in seven has antibodies against COVID-19, with the vaccine starting to add to the population's immunity, according to new research. Blood tests on more than 154,000 people across England showed that between 26 January and 8 February,

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-one-in-seven-people-now-have-coronavirus-antibodies-as-vaccine-rollout-continues-12228223>

### **Pfizer's Covid-19 vaccine is 92% effective at preventing serious illness, Israeli study says**

Ninety-two per cent of recipients of the Pfizer vaccine have been protected from developing severe symptoms of Covid-19, the most comprehensive study of the jab has found. The study, published in The New England Journal of Medicine, was based on data from 1.2 million patients of Israel's largest healthcare provider, half of whom had received the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine. It was conducted by doctors and researchers led by Professor Ran Balicer, of Israel's Clalit Health Services, along with a team of senior researchers from Harvard University, and is the largest study of its kind.

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/pfizer-s-covid-19-vaccine-is-92-effective-at-preventing-serious-illness-q927mfwcm>

### **California coronavirus variant is resistant to antibodies, but vaccines should still work**

Early studies show the coronavirus variant that's spreading widely across California is somewhat resistant to antibodies that fight off infection, but the vaccines still should offer plenty of protection, infectious disease experts say. Antibodies generated by the vaccines, or by previous coronavirus infection, were two to four times stronger against earlier versions of the virus compared to the new variant, scientists at UCSF found in laboratory studies. They released preliminary results this week.

<https://www.sfchronicle.com/health/article/California-coronavirus-variant-is-resistant-to-15976713.php>

### **First universal coronavirus vaccine will start human trials this year**

The coronavirus sweeping around the world isn't the first to make the leap into humans and it won't be the last. Vaccines against SARS-CoV-2 were developed in record time and are performing well. But now we urgently need a different kind of vaccine, say scientists: one that will protect us against other coronaviruses, even those we haven't met yet.

<https://www.newscientist.com/article/mg24933233-500-first-universal-coronavirus-vaccine-will-start-human-trials-this-year/>

### **How would COVID-19 vaccine makers adapt to variants?**

How would COVID-19 vaccine makers adapt to variants? By tweaking their vaccines, a process that should be easier than coming up with the original shots. Viruses constantly mutate as they spread, and most changes aren't significant. First-generation COVID-19 vaccines appear to be working against today's variants, but makers already are taking steps to update their recipes if health authorities decide that's needed.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/how-would-covid19-vaccine-makers-adapt-to-variants-viruses-process-covid-vaccines-technology-b1807115.html>

### **Pfizer and BioNTech Studying Third Covid-19 Vaccine Dose to Fight New Strains**

Pfizer Inc. and BioNTech SE have begun a study testing in people whether the companies' Covid-19 shot can provide protection against emerging strains of the coronavirus. The companies said

Thursday they have started the small study to see whether a third dose of their authorized Covid-19 vaccine would increase its effectiveness against new variants, such as the strain first identified in South Africa. The approach differs from that of Moderna Inc., which said Wednesday it had made a new vaccine targeting the strain found in South Africa and shipped doses to U.S. government researchers for human testing.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/pfizer-and-biontech-studying-third-covid-19-vaccine-dose-to-fight-new-strains-11614253507>

### **GSK narrows focus on elderly in trial to treat pneumonia from COVID-19**

GlaxoSmithKline will extend a trial testing an experimental rheumatoid arthritis drug on patients suffering from pneumonia related to COVID-19 to focus on the elderly as it seeks to firm up encouraging findings so far.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-gsk-otilimab-idUSL8N2KT6D6>

### **Moderna sees \$18.4 billion in sales from COVID-19 vaccine in 2021**

Moderna Inc said on Thursday it was expecting sales of \$18.4 billion from its coronavirus vaccine this year, putting it on the path to post a profit for the first time since its formation in 2010. Moderna and Pfizer Inc are the only drugmakers whose vaccines have been cleared for emergency use against COVID-19 in the United States so far. Pfizer earlier this month forecast \$15 billion in its share of sales from the COVID-19 vaccine it developed jointly with partner BioNTech.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-moderna/moderna-sees-18-4-billion-in-sales-from-covid-19-vaccine-in-2021-idUSKBN2AP1JG>

### **England minorities: Higher COVID-19 cases, fewer vaccinated**

England's ethnic minority communities have higher levels of COVID-19 infections and lower levels of vaccine acceptance than other groups, according to a new study that highlights how the pandemic is worsening health inequalities. The study found that 92% of people across England either have received or would accept a vaccine. But that figure dropped to 87.6% for Asians and 72.5% for Blacks, according to the study released Thursday by Imperial College London. Researchers also found that most people of all age groups produced disease-fighting antibodies after two doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/england-minorities-higher-covid19-cases-fewer-vaccinated-vaccine-study-minorities-health-inequalities-communities-b1807392.html>

### **AZ to divert COVID-19 vaccines from global supply chain to meet EU target -**

AstraZeneca has said it will be able to meet a target to deliver 180 million COVID-19 vaccines to the EU in the second quarter, by topping up the supply from its global production network. The company released a statement saying it will meet the EU's targets by using its global supply chain to make up for any shortfall in Europe, where it is struggling to get production up to speed. It released the statement following a Reuters report citing a European official, directly involved with talks over vaccine supply, stating less than half of the 180 million doses ordered will be delivered in the second quarter.

<https://pharmaphorum.com/news/az-to-miss-q2-covid-19-vaccine/>

### **Experimental arthritis drug could prevent severe Covid-19 in over 70s, study finds**

An experimental drug usually used to treat arthritis could help prevent severe coronavirus symptoms in those most at risk from the disease, a study has suggested. Otilimab was found to have a potential clinical benefit in treating the severe lung disease associated with Covid-19.

<https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/uk-news/experimental-arthritis-drug-could-prevent-19913286>

### **Moderna begins studying potential COVID-19 vaccine booster targeting variant first detected in South Africa**

Drug manufacturer Moderna says it will begin testing a variant-specific version of its COVID-19 vaccine that would target the B1351 variant first detected in South Africa. The company has previously reported that its original two-dose vaccine — already approved for use in Canada — appears to provide protection against the B117 variant first detected in the U.K., as well as the B1351 variant, though its own research suggests it may be less effective against the latter. The company says it will study the B1351 variant-specific vaccine both as a potential booster to the original COVID-19 vaccine and as a standalone for people who have not yet received a vaccine at all.

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/health/moderna-vaccine-b1351-variant-south-africa-1.5926894>

### **Why global Covid infections have plummeted**

One explanation for the stubbornly high number of infections in Brazil is the role played by new variants, which can spread quickly across the population without a strict lockdown in place to contain them. Similarly in the UK, the B.1.1.7 variant spread rapidly before the current lockdown. Despite recent success in tackling the virus, scientists emphasised that all countries remained vulnerable to surges in new cases. “Any rapid relaxation of protective measures could produce spikes in infection rates,” said Ted Cohen, professor of infectious disease epidemiology at Yale University. “There are large pools of susceptible individuals still at risk.”

<https://www.ft.com/content/f671f030-1b09-4c1e-ade6-111c2cd22622>

### **China approves two COVID-19 vaccines from Sinopharm's affiliate, CanSino**

China's medical products regulator said on Thursday that it had approved two more COVID-19 vaccines for public use, raising the number of domestically produced vaccines that can be used in China to four. The two newly cleared vaccines are made by CanSino Biologics Inc (CanSinoBIO) and Wuhan Institute of Biological Products, an affiliate of China National Pharmaceutical Group (Sinopharm). They join a vaccine from Sinovac Biotech approved earlier this month, and another from Sinopharm's Beijing unit approved last year. Prior to formal approval for wider public use by the National Medical Products Administration, millions of doses of the two Sinopharm vaccines and Sinovac shot had been administered in China's vaccination program.

<https://www.msn.com/en-au/lifestyle/wellbeing/china-approves-two-covid-19-vaccines-from-sinopharm-s-affiliate-cansino/ar-BB1e0vLn?pfr=1&c=1926525302346318136%2c15658142127634877230&mkt=en-us%2cen-us>

### **China's death rates didn't rise overall at start of pandemic, study finds**

In the first three months of 2020, mortality rates in Wuhan were 56 per cent higher than estimates based on average in previous years. But elsewhere they were lower than expected, which researchers said may be related to behavioural changes during lockdown

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/science/article/3122993/coronavirus-apart-wuhan-chinas-death-rates-didnt-rise-st-art>

### **In boost for COVID-19 battle, Pfizer vaccine found 94% effective in real world**

The first big real-world study of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine to be independently reviewed shows the shot is highly effective at preventing COVID-19, in a potentially landmark moment for countries desperate to end lockdowns and reopen economies. Up until now, most data on the efficacy of COVID-19 vaccines has come under controlled conditions in clinical trials, leaving an element of uncertainty over how results would translate into the real world with its unpredictable variables. The research in Israel – two months into one of the world's fastest rollouts, providing a rich source of data – showed two doses of the Pfizer shot cut symptomatic COVID-19 cases by 94% across all age groups, and severe illnesses by nearly as much.

<https://www.euractiv.com/section/health-consumers/news/in-boost-for-covid-19-battle-pfizer-vaccine-found-94-effective-in-real-world/>

### **Three-shot combo? Pfizer, BioNTech roll COVID-19 booster trial as real world data back first vaccine**

As Pfizer and BioNTech start testing whether a third dose of their COVID-19 shot can help fend off new coronavirus variants, a massive real-world study has confirmed that its first, two-dose regimen is 94% effective. The third-dose study now underway will gauge the effects of that follow-up dose on circulating and new COVID-19 virus variants. At the same time, the companies are in talks with the FDA and EMA about studying a new booster specifically designed to tackle new variants. They're hoping to validate "future modified mRNA vaccines with a regulatory pathway similar to what is currently in place for flu vaccines," according to a press release.

<https://www.fiercepharma.com/pharma/three-shots-pfizer-and-biontech-rolls-third-dose-vaccine-trial-as-real-world-data-verifies>

### **Researchers find worrying new coronavirus variant in New York City**

Two separate teams of researchers said this week they have found a worrying new coronavirus variant in New York City and elsewhere in the Northeast that carries mutations that help it evade the body's natural immune response -- as well as the effects of monoclonal antibody treatments. Genomics researchers have named the variant B.1.526. It appears in people affected in diverse neighborhoods of New York City, they said, and is "scattered in the Northeast." One of the mutations in this variant is the same concerning change found in the variant first seen in South Africa and known as B.1.351. It appears to evade, somewhat, the body's response to vaccines, as well. And it's becoming more common.

<https://edition.cnn.com/2021/02/25/health/variants-coronavirus-new-york-city/index.html>

### **BNT162b2 mRNA Covid-19 Vaccine in a Nationwide Mass Vaccination Setting**

All persons who were newly vaccinated during the period from December 20, 2020, to February 1, 2021, were matched to unvaccinated controls in a 1:1 ratio according to demographic and clinical characteristics. Study outcomes included documented infection with the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), symptomatic Covid-19, Covid-19-related hospitalization, severe illness, and death. We estimated vaccine effectiveness for each outcome as one minus the risk ratio, using the Kaplan–Meier estimator.

<https://www.nejm.org/doi/10.1056/NEJMoa2101765>

## **Coronavirus Resurgence**

---

### **California death toll from Covid-19 tops 50,000 after winter surge**

California's Covid-19 death toll rose above 50,000 on Wednesday, after Los Angeles county reported another 806 deaths during the winter surge. The county, which has a quarter of the state's 40 million residents, said the deaths mainly occurred between 3 December and 3 February. The department of public health identified them after going through death records that were backlogged by the sheer volume of the surge's toll. Johns Hopkins University put California's overall Covid-19 death toll at 50,890, about one-tenth of the US total from the pandemic. The grim figure comes days after the US recorded a half-million deaths.

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/feb/25/california-coronavirus-death-toll-covid-19-50000>

### **UK Covid alert level drops as NHS threat 'reduced'**

The four UK chief medical officers and NHS England's national medical director agreed the change following advice from the Joint Biosecurity Centre. The alert level has been at level five since early January, when Scotland and England began their latest lockdowns. The top medics urged people to "remain vigilant" by following lockdown rules. A change in alert system does not automatically mean restrictions can ease, but it helps to inform government decisions on lockdown rules.

<https://www.msn.com/en-xl/news/other/uk-covid-alert-level-drops-as-nhs-threat-reduced/ar-BB1e0UEY>

### **UK Covid hospital deaths up 311 as cases plunge 78% since start of England's lockdown**

The UK's coronavirus hospital death rate has risen by 311. England has recorded 254 further deaths,

Wales 21, Scotland 31 and Northern Ireland, five. It marks a 75 drop on last week's figures - when 386 hospital deaths were recorded across the UK. Confirmed cases of coronavirus have plunged by more than 78% since the start of England's lockdown, new figures show today.

<https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/breaking-uk-covid-hospital-deaths-23564855>

### **France, Germany to beef up COVID-19 controls at common border**

France said on Thursday it would bring in new COVID-19 restrictions for the area around its common border with Germany, as President Emmanuel Macron's government tries to contain a surge of coronavirus variants in the French region of Moselle. Cross-border workers, who had exemptions until now, will need to present negative PCR tests to get through if travelling for reasons unrelated to their jobs, France's European affairs and health ministers said in a joint statement. Home working in the area will also be reinforced, they said, after France and Germany said earlier this week they were trying to find ways to prevent a closure of their common border.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-france/france-germany-to-beef-up-covid-19-controls-at-common-border-idUSL1N2KV0IK>

### **Spain leaves 'extreme risk' coronavirus situation, with incidence rate falling to 235 cases per 100,000**

Spain has finally left a situation of "extreme risk" due to the coronavirus. According to the latest report from the Health Ministry, released Tuesday evening, the epidemiological curve in the country continues to fall, and the 14-day cumulative number of coronavirus cases per 100,000 inhabitants is now at 235. This is below the limit of 250 that the ministry had set as a situation of maximum alert and that indicated that the pandemic was not under control.

<https://english.elpais.com/society/2021-02-24/spain-leaves-extreme-risk-coronavirus-situation-with-incidence-rate-falling-to-235-cases-per-100000.html>

### **Ukraine faces almost 40% jump in new daily COVID-19 cases**

Ukraine has registered an almost 40% jump in new coronavirus cases over the past 24 hours, Health Minister Maksym Stepanov said, just as the country starts its COVID-19 inoculation. A total of 8,147 cases were registered on Wednesday, the highest figure since mid-January when the number of new cases stood at 8,199, Stepanov said on Facebook. There were 5,850 new cases as of Feb. 24.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-ukraine/ukraine-faces-almost-40-jump-in-new-daily-covid-19-cases-idUSL1N2KV0F8>

### **Sweden readies new measures as COVID-19 cases accelerate**

Sweden is preparing new measures to try to curb a resurgence in COVID-19 cases as the coronavirus strain first detected in Britain spreads rapidly, the architect of Sweden's pandemic strategy said on Tuesday. Sweden has avoided lockdowns throughout the pandemic. But health statistics agency figures on Tuesday showed 10,933 new coronavirus cases had been registered since Friday, a rise from 9,458 in the corresponding period the previous week. "The British variant is increasing very fast," Chief Epidemiologist Anders Tegnell told a news conference. "This variant will with fairly high probability be the dominant one within a few weeks or a month."

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-sweden-cases/sweden-readies-new-measures-as-covid-19-cases-accelerate-idUSKBN2AN1L7>

### **Czech government seeks tougher COVID measures to tame virus surge**

The Czech government will meet on Thursday to decide on tougher lockdown restrictions to rein in one of the world's fastest spreads of COVID-19. Prime Minister Andrej Babis said on Wednesday hospitals faced "catastrophe" if no action is taken. His minority government met late into the evening on Wednesday and will reconvene on Thursday evening after talks with opposition parties to shore up support. The central European country of 10.7 million has struggled with a renewed surge in COVID-19 cases, straining hospitals as the number of patients in serious condition hits records.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-czech/czech-government-seeks-tougher-covid-measures-to-tame-virus-surge-idUSL8N2KV3DT>

### **European countries battle more COVID-19 flare-ups**

A handful of European countries are grappling with new spikes in COVID-19 activity, such as the Czech Republic, where intensive care units are nearly overrun. Meanwhile, as groups look ahead to the future, the World Health Organization (WHO) yesterday published its strategic operations plan to target the pandemic in 2021 and European officials eyed a vaccine passport system, with hopes that it could preserve this year's tourist season.

<https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2021/02/european-countries-battle-more-covid-19-flare-ups>

## **New Lockdown**

---

### **France imposes weekend lockdown near Belgian border after corona outbreak**

The French region of Dunkirk, right next to the border with Belgium, will be placed under a weekend-long lockdown after an “alarming” rise in the number of coronavirus cases was reported, French Health Minister Olivier Véran announced on Wednesday. In the vicinity of the coastal town, the rate of infection was around nine times higher than the national average, reportedly as a result of a breakout of the British variant, which is believed to be the cause of around 75% of all regional cases.

<https://www.brusselstimes.com/news/156881/france-imposes-weekend-lockdown-near-belgian-border-after-corona-outbreak/>

### **Finland to begin three-week lockdown on 8 March**

Finland will go into a three-week lockdown starting on 8 March and is prepared to declare a state of emergency, Prime Minister Sanna Marin has said, as the country faces a rising number of coronavirus cases. The lockdown will not include a curfew but will involve the closure of restaurants and ordering school students who are 13 or older to move to remote learning, the government said. Ms Marin said she is ready to declare a state of emergency next week, having discussed this with the president.

<https://www.rte.ie/news/coronavirus/2021/0225/1199234-covid-world/>

### **Lockdown for Dunkirk, other areas under watch as French COVID-19 cases spike**

France's government on Wednesday ordered a weekend lockdown in the Dunkirk area to arrest an “alarming” rise in COVID-19 cases, signalling extra curbs might also be needed elsewhere as daily cases nationwide hit their highest since November. Unlike some of its neighbours, France has resisted a new national lockdown to control more contagious coronavirus variants, hoping a curfew in place since Dec. 15 can contain the pandemic. But it reported 31,519 new infections on Wednesday, up from 25,018 a week ago and the most since mid-November. Government spokesman Gabriel Attal said the national situation was deteriorating, and “a source of worry in about 10 regional departments”. Some required “rapid and strong” containment measures.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-france-attal/update-1-covid-19-situation-worrying-in-10-french-departments-government-says-idUSL1N2KU117>