

COVID-19 Lockdown Exit Analysis

30th Nov 2021

Lockdown Exit

Omicron: Are gov'ts prepared to deal with a new COVID variant?

Countries around the world reimpose travel restrictions in response to new Omicron variant. Countries around the world were starting to reopen their borders and lift COVID-19 restrictions. But a new variant is now threatening to derail the progress made in the past few months. Several nations have already imposed travel restrictions to and from Southern Africa, where the Omicron variant was first detected.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/program/inside-story/2021/11/29/are-governments-prepared-to-deal-with-a-new-variant>

WHO warns that new virus variant poses 'very high' risk

The World Health Organization warned Monday that the global risk from the omicron variant is "very high" based on the early evidence, saying the mutated coronavirus could lead to surges with "severe consequences." The assessment from the U.N. health agency, contained in a technical paper issued to member states, amounted to WHO's strongest, most explicit warning yet about the new version that was first identified days ago by researchers in South Africa. It came as a widening circle of countries around the world reported cases of the variant and moved to slam their doors in an act-now-ask-questions-later approach while scientists race to figure out just how dangerous the mutant version might be.

<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-omicron-variant-covid-restrictions-82e53a7a17d1a4c30031065d389bda37>

Pilots union asks Britain to set up winter fund amid Omicron concerns

The British Airline Pilots Association (BALPA) on Monday urged the government to establish a "winter resilience fund" to support the ailing aviation industry, after some travel curbs were brought back to contain the spread of the Omicron coronavirus variant. "The latest changes have shattered the fledgling confidence in air travel including for Christmas and new year bookings," said BALPA in a statement. Britain, which has so far reported 11 cases of the variant, has said arrivals from all countries would have to self-isolate until they receive a negative result from a PCR test and that face masks must be worn in retail settings.

<https://www.reuters.com/markets/europe/pilots-union-asks-britain-set-up-winter-fund-amid-omicron-concerns-2021-11-29/>

Omicron COVID-19 variant poses risks to global growth, inflation -rating agencies

The Omicron COVID-19 variant could hurt global growth prospects while also pushing prices higher, rating agencies Fitch Ratings and Moody's Investors Service said on Monday, after the World Health Organization said the variant carried a very high risk of infection surges. "The Omicron variant poses risks to global growth and inflation, especially as it comes during a period of already stretched supply chains, elevated inflation and labor market shortages," Elena Duggar, Associate Managing Director at Moody's, told Reuters in emailed comments.

<https://www.reuters.com/markets/us/omicron-covid-19-variant-poses-risks-global-growth-inflation-rating-agencies-2021-11-29/>

White House says U.S. agencies can delay punishing unvaccinated federal workers

The White House told federal agencies on Monday they can delay punishing thousands of federal workers who failed to comply with a Nov. 22 COVID-19 vaccination deadline. On Wednesday, the

Biden administration said a total of 92% of U.S. federal workers have received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine. Overall, 96.5% of the 3.5 million federal workers were considered to be in compliance with the administration's mandate announced in September because they either were vaccinated or had an exemption request granted or under consideration.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/white-house-says-us-agencies-can-delay-punishing-unvaccinated-federal-workers-2021-11-29/>

Analysis: How fast does it spread?: Scientists ask whether Omicron can outrun Delta

As scientists race to understand the consequences of the Omicron COVID-19 variant, one of the most important questions is whether this new version of the coronavirus can outrun the globally dominant Delta variant. The World Health Organization on Friday designated Omicron a "variant of concern" just days after the variant was first reported in southern Africa. The WHO said it is coordinating with many researchers worldwide to better understand how the variant will impact the COVID-19 pandemic, with new findings expected within "days and weeks."

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/how-fast-does-it-spread-scientists-ask-whether-omicron-can-outrun-delta-2021-11-29/>

Singapore, Malaysia reopen land border amid worries over the Omicron variant

Singapore and Malaysia reopened one of the world's busiest land borders on Monday, allowing vaccinated travellers to cross after nearly two years of being shut due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Although travellers welcomed the chance to reunite with family and friends, there were concerns the border might be closed again due to the new Omicron coronavirus variant. As many as 300,000 Malaysians commuted daily to Singapore before the pandemic. The sudden closing of the border in March 2020 left tens of thousands stranded on both sides, separated from families and fearing for their jobs.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/singapore-malaysia-reopen-busy-land-border-vaccinated-travellers-2021-11-29/>

New Zealand to ease COVID measures this week despite Omicron threat - PM

New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said on Monday the country will move into a system of living with the COVID-19 virus later this week despite the new Omicron variant posing a fresh health threat to the world. There were no cases of the Omicron variant in New Zealand at this stage but the developing global situation showed why a cautious approach was needed at the borders, she said.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/new-zealand-ease-covid-measures-this-week-despite-omicron-threat-pm-2021-11-29/>

COVID passports, vaccines helped EU tourism recovery - U.N.

Widespread use of COVID-19 "passports" and vaccines helped tourism recover faster in the European Union than in other parts of the world in the third quarter of 2021, a U.N. report said on Monday. Globally, international tourist arrivals rose 58% between July and September compared with the same period in 2020, the U.N. World Tourism Organisation barometer said. That was still 64% below the same period in 2019, before the pandemic.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/eu-covid-19-passports-vaccines-helped-european-tourism-recovery-un-report-2021-11-29/>

Exit Strategies

China's Xi promises 1bn COVID-19 vaccine doses to Africa

President Xi Jinping has said China would offer another one billion doses of COVID-19 vaccines to African countries and would encourage Chinese companies to invest no less than \$10bn in Africa across the next three years. The pledge of additional vaccine doses – on top of the nearly 200 million that China has already supplied to the continent – comes as concerns intensify about the

spread of a new variant of the coronavirus, known as Omicron, which was first identified in southern Africa. The Chinese leader said that his country would donate 600 million doses directly. A further 400 million doses would come from other sources, such as investments in production sites

<https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/china-e2-80-99s-xi-promises-1bn-covid-19-vaccine-doses-to-africa/ar-AARgo mh>

Nursing unions around world call for UN action on Covid vaccine patents

Nursing unions in 28 countries have filed a formal appeal with the United Nations over the refusal of the UK, EU and others to temporarily waive patents for Covid vaccines, saying this has cost huge numbers of lives in developing nations. The letter, sent on Monday on behalf of unions representing more than 2.5 million healthcare workers, said staff have witnessed at first hand the “staggering numbers of deaths and the immense suffering caused by political inaction”. The refusal of some countries to budge on rules about intellectual property rights for vaccines had contributed to a “vaccine apartheid” in which richer nations had secured at least 7bn doses, while lower-income nations had about 300m, it argued.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/29/nursing-unions-around-world-call-for-un-action-on-covid-vaccine-patents>

Covid: Booster vaccine rolled out to all over-18s and gap after second jab cut to three months

Booster jabs should now be offered to all over-18s, the government’s Joint Committee on Vaccinations and Immunisations (JCVI), has said. The JCVI has also said gaps between the second Covid-19 vaccine and booster shots should be reduced from six months to three months. Although JCVI has advised all adults should now have their boosters, it has said those who are clinically vulnerable should be prioritised and in order of descending age groups, as was done during the second and first phases of the vaccination programme. Over 40s are already eligible to have their boosters. Those who are immunocompromised should be offered another booster, meaning they will have their fourth vaccination.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/health/covid-booster-vaccine-update-omicron-b1966147.html>

All adults to be offered Covid booster vaccine, says Prof Anthony Harnden

All adults in Britain are to be offered booster jabs to step up the battle against the Omicron Covid-19 variant, a vaccines chief said on Monday. Professor Anthony Harnden, deputy chair of the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI), confirmed the booster programme would be extended to 18 to 39-year-olds. Six more cases of the Omicron variant were confirmed in Scotland as health chiefs were racing to trace the contacts of other individuals who got the mutated virus including one person from southern Africa who visited the Westminster borough.

<https://www.standard.co.uk/news/uk/all-adults-offered-covid-booster-jab-anthony-harnden-jcvi-b968849.html>

Australia delays border reopening as Omicron cases rise

Australia said on Monday it would delay the reopening of its international border by two weeks after reporting its first cases of the Omicron coronavirus variant. Prime Minister Scott Morrison convened a meeting of his national security committee and said it received advice from Australia's chief health officer to delay the reopening after the first cases of the new variant were detected on Sunday.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/australias-reopening-plans-doubt-after-omicron-cases-2021-11-28/>

High COVID case count, Omicron prompt S.Korea not to relax curbs

South Korea said on Monday it has shelved plans to further relax COVID-19 restrictions due to the strain on its healthcare system from rising hospitalisation and death rates, as well as the threat posed by the new Omicron variant. President Moon Jae-in said the crisis had deepened and called for a united response to prevent the variant from entering the country, including the mobilisation of more personnel and tightening contact tracing.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/skorea-shelves-plans-ease-covid-measures-due-high-case-count-omicron-2021-11-29/>

China's Xi pledges another 1 bln COVID-19 vaccine doses for Africa

President Xi Jinping on Monday said China would offer another 1 billion doses of COVID-19 vaccines to African countries and would encourage Chinese companies to invest no less than \$10 billion in Africa over the next three years. The pledge of additional vaccine doses - on top of the nearly 200 million that China has already supplied to the continent - comes as concerns intensify over the spread of a new variant of the coronavirus, known as Omicron, which was first identified in southern Africa

<https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/chinas-xi-pledges-10-blm-credit-line-african-financial-institutions-2021-11-29/>

India steps up COVID-19 testing for international flyers

India will make on-arrival COVID-19 testing mandatory for flyers from more than a dozen countries, including South Africa and Britain where the Omicron variant has been detected, the health ministry said on Monday. The decision will be effective from Dec. 1 and comes after a man who recently returned from South Africa tested positive for COVID-19, though it is not yet clear which strain of the coronavirus he contracted.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/china/india-steps-ups-covid-19-testing-international-flyers-2021-11-29/>

South Africa mulling compulsory COVID-19 jabs for some places, activities

South African President Cyril Ramaphosa said on Sunday that authorities were considering making COVID-19 shots compulsory for certain places and activities, as a rise in infections linked to a new variant threatens to become a fourth wave. Only a quarter of South Africans are fully vaccinated against COVID-19 despite a sufficient supply of doses, owing partly to logistical problems getting them out to rural areas, but also to vaccine hesitancy and apathy among the population.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/safrica-faces-4th-covid-19-wave-new-variant-behind-rising-infections-2021-11-28/>

Philippines starts three-day, nine million person COVID jab drive

The Philippines has begun an ambitious campaign to vaccinate nine million people against COVID-19 over three days, as it temporarily suspended a decision to allow fully vaccinated tourists into the country after the emergence of the Omicron variant. The immunisation campaign was scaled back from an earlier target of 15 million shots, but would still be a record in a country where vaccine hesitancy remains an obstacle and there are logistical hurdles to reach people in the sprawling archipelago.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/11/29/philippines-starts-three-day-nine-million-person-covid-jab-drive>

Partisan Exits

Fauci fires back at Cruz over COVID claims about Chinese lab

Dr. Anthony Fauci, the government's top infectious diseases expert, blasted Sen. Ted Cruz for suggesting that Fauci be investigated for statements he made about COVID-19 and said the criticism by the Texas Republican was an attack on science. "I should be prosecuted? What happened on Jan. 6, senator?" Fauci, who is President Joe Biden's chief medical adviser, said in an interview that aired Sunday on CBS' "Face the Nation." It was a reference to the violent insurrection at the U.S. Capitol by supporters of then-President Donald Trump that was stoked as Cruz helped lead GOP objections to Congress' certifying the 2020 election results. "I'm just going to do my job and I'm going to be saving lives, and they're going to be lying," Fauci said.

<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-donald-trump-joe-biden-science-health-80ad119f24f6e7d2e1342429403fde70>

Judge blocks U.S. COVID-19 vaccine rule for health workers in 10 states

A federal judge on Monday blocked in 10 states a Biden administration vaccine requirement, finding the agency that issued the rule mandating healthcare workers get vaccinated against the coronavirus likely exceeded its authority. The ruling by U.S. District Judge Matthew Schelp in St. Louis prevents the U.S. Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) from enforcing its vaccine mandate for healthcare workers until the court can hear legal challenges brought by the 10 states. CMS in a statement said it was reviewing the ruling, adding that unvaccinated healthcare staff pose a threat to patient safety.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/judge-blocks-us-covid-19-vaccine-rule-health-workers-10-states-2021-11-29/>

Russian Vaccine Skeptics Oppose Covid Passes

Russia's rollout of a nationwide QR code system that would restrict access to public places and transport to encourage vaccination is running into widespread opposition from anti-lockdown activists, even as Russia's pandemic death toll continues to soar. With vaccine skepticism rife and only around 35% of Russians having received their jabs, moves to make jabs all but obligatory have been met with dismay, as polls show almost half of the population opposing the use of QR codes under any circumstances. "Forcing people to get vaccinated through QR codes violates at least six articles of the Russian Constitution," said Yevgeny Stupin, a Communist member of the Moscow City Duma who has campaigned against Covid restrictions.

<https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2021/11/29/russian-vaccine-skeptics-oppose-covid-passes-a75695>

Omicron COVID-19 variant not a worry for Mexico, president says

Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador said on Monday that there was no reason to worry in Mexico about the new COVID-19 variant omicron. Speaking in his regular morning news conference, he added that there was no information that existing vaccines are not effective against new variant.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/omicron-covid-19-variant-not-worry-mexico-president-says-2021-11-29/>

Thousands protest against Czech COVID measures as hospitals fill

Several thousand people protested in Prague against anti-coronavirus restrictions on Sunday as many Czech hospitals halted non-urgent procedures in the face of one of the world's fastest rates of new infections. Gathered in a park overlooking the Czech capital's centre, protesters waved national flags and carried signs with slogans such as: "Get vaccinated? Over your dead bodies".

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/thousands-protest-against-czech-covid-measures-hospitals-fill-2021-11-28/>

Scientific Viewpoint

India's Bharat Biotech resumes exports of COVID-19 vaccine

Indian vaccine maker Bharat Biotech said on Monday it has resumed export of its COVID-19 shot, Covaxin, and has executed long-pending orders in November. The company also said exports to additional countries will commence from December, according to a statement it shared on Twitter. It was not immediately clear whether or not these exports were made under the global vaccine-sharing facility COVAX.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/india/indias-bharat-biotech-resumes-exports-covid-19-vaccine-2021-11-29/>

Could the Omicron variant have been avoided? It could set back vaccine successes around the world

I am an epidemiologist working in global health, and have worked in the field of vaccines for nearly 15 years. While the scientific successes of Sars-CoV-2 vaccine development have been surreal, the inequity of the pandemic and access to vaccines has left me despondent. As Australia reaches almost 90% coverage for two doses of Covid-19 vaccination, it's a success story worth celebrating. Covid-19 vaccination has already proved to be highly effective at dampening wide-scale community transmission in settings such as New South Wales, where a rapid rollout with high levels of first-dose

coverage along with other public health measures helped with the bending of the curve. But the vast majority of low- and middle-income countries have only vaccinated a small proportion of their population. An analysis suggests that while 66% of people in high-income countries are fully vaccinated, only 2.5% of the population in low-income countries are fully protected.

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/nov/29/could-the-omicron-variant-have-been-avoided-it-could-set-back-vaccine-successes-around-the-world>

COVID-19: How the spread of Omicron went from patient zero to all around the globe

The speed with which new variants of the COVID-19 virus spread around the world can leave governments scrambling to catch up. What is sometimes more remarkable is the speed with which those new variants are detected. It has taken barely two weeks from the initial testing of 'patient zero', before potentially the entire globe is readying itself to examine COVID test samples to see if they contain the Omicron variant. Patient zero, called n=1 or the index case by the scientific community, arrived at Hong Kong International Airport on 11 November, having flown in from South Africa via Doha in Qatar, on flight QR818.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-how-the-spread-of-omicron-went-from-patient-zero-to-all-around-the-globe-12482183>

The new Omicron variant is a reminder that 'the virus is still in control' regardless of Covid-19 fatigue, medical professor says

The new Omicron variant might prompt a return to stricter Covid-19 measures if not enough people get vaccinated or boosted, health experts say. Omicron -- or the B.1.1.529 strain of novel coronavirus -- has already spurred international travel bans. The World Health Organization officially called it a "variant of concern" on Friday. The variant has not yet been detected in the US, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said in a Saturday update. "But it's fairly likely we'll see cases," said Dr. Francis Collins, director of the National Institutes of Health.

<https://www.cnn.com/2021/11/28/health/us-coronavirus-sunday/index.html>

South Africa's Aspen in advanced talks over COVID-19 vaccine deal

Aspen Pharmacare is in advanced discussions over a potential licensing agreement to package the COVID-19 vaccine in South Africa, it said on Monday. The South African company did not mention the name of the company with which it was in talks, but in early September it said it was in talks with U.S. pharma giant Johnson & Johnson over a vaccine packaging licence. Aspen currently packages J&J's COVID-19 vaccine at its South African plant under contract, which means it does not have any pricing or distribution power over the product. The company currently produces 300 million COVID-19 vaccine doses annually under its J&J contract, which are then supplied across Africa. It plans to ramp up capacity to 1.3 billion doses by February 2024, Chief Executive Stephen Saad told Reuters in October

<https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/south-africas-aspen-advanced-talks-over-covid-19-vaccine-deal-2021-11-29/>

BioNTech starts work on Omicron-specific vaccine

BioNTech SE said on Monday it had started work on a vaccine tailored to Omicron, the worrying new coronavirus variant detected in South Africa, though it was not yet clear if it would have to rework its established COVID-19 shot. The development of an adapted vaccine is part of the company's standard procedure for new variants, BioNTech, which makes vaccines together with Pfizer, said in a statement. "The first steps of developing a potential new vaccine overlap with the research necessary in order to evaluate whether a new shot will be needed," it added.

<https://www.reuters.com/markets/stocks/biontech-starts-work-omicron-specific-vaccine-2021-11-29/>

Omicron poses very high global risk, world must prepare -WHO

The heavily mutated Omicron coronavirus variant is likely to spread internationally and poses a very high risk of infection surges that could have "severe consequences" in some places, the World

Health Organization (WHO) said on Monday. No Omicron-linked deaths had yet been reported, though further research was needed to assess its potential to resist vaccines and immunity induced by previous infections, it added. Anticipating increased case numbers as the variant, first reported last week, spreads, the U.N. agency urged its 194 member states to accelerate vaccination of high-priority groups.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/omicron-poses-very-high-global-risk-countries-must-prepare-who-2021-11-29/>

Thermo Fisher says its COVID-19 tests accurately detects Omicron variant

Thermo Fisher Scientific Inc said on Monday its COVID-19 diagnostic tests can accurately detect the new coronavirus variant Omicron that has prompted several countries to shut their borders. The World Health Organisation (WHO) last week classified the Omicron variant as a SARS-CoV-2 "variant of concern," saying it may spread more quickly than other forms. Thermo Fisher's TaqPath COVID-19 assays can report accurate results even in the case where one of the gene targets is impacted by a mutation, the company said in a statement.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/thermo-fisher-says-its-covid-19-tests-accurately-detects-omicron-variant-2021-11-29/>

Omicron brings COVID-19 vaccine inequity 'home to roost'

The emergence of the new omicron variant and the world's desperate and likely futile attempts to keep it at bay are reminders of what scientists have warned for months: The coronavirus will thrive as long as vast parts of the world lack vaccines. The hoarding of limited COVID-19 shots by rich countries — creating virtual vaccine deserts in many poorer ones — doesn't just mean risk for the parts of the world seeing shortages; it threatens the entire globe. That's because the more the disease spreads among unvaccinated populations, the more possibilities it has to mutate and potentially become more dangerous, prolonging the pandemic for everyone.

<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-omicron-variant-inequality-65898ec544463b26ca78ba1e696edf19>

Moderna says Omicron vaccine could be ready by early 2022

Moderna Inc. is having its best two-day rally in a year after the company said a new vaccine to fight the omicron strain of the coronavirus could be ready by early 2022 if required. The stock soared as much as 14% to the highest level in two months, after jumping 21% during Friday's global risk-asset selloff, to reclaim its place as top performer on the S&P 500 year-to-date. The company mobilized hundreds of workers on Thanksgiving Day last Thursday in order to start work on omicron, Chief Medical Officer Paul Burton said over the weekend.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2021/11/29/moderna-says-omicron-vaccine-could-be-ready-by-early-2022>

Pfizer boosts Paxlovid manufacturing capacity as Merck's rival COVID pill hits surprise efficacy setback

The efficacy data for Pfizer's oral COVID-19 drug now look so appealing that the Big Pharma company is boosting manufacturing capacity even before an expected emergency use authorization from the FDA. Pfizer now expects to make 80 million courses of COVID drug Paxlovid by the end of 2022, Pfizer CEO Albert Bourla told CNBC during a Monday interview. The company previously said it plans to have capacity to make 50 million courses.

<https://www.fiercepharma.com/manufacturing/pfizer-boosts-paxlovid-manufacturing-capacity-as-merck-s-rival-covid-pill-sees>

Pfizer, Moderna, J&J and AstraZeneca assess omicron's effect on their COVID-19 vaccines

With the new omicron strain fueling fear around the globe that the coronavirus is regaining momentum, makers of the world's most successful vaccines are investigating whether they need to tweak their shots. Over the last few days, Moderna, Pfizer-BioNTech, Johnson & Johnson and AstraZeneca revealed plans to address the threat posed by omicron, which emerged in South Africa

and recently was detected in Australia, Israel, Hong Kong and parts of Europe. On Friday, the World Health Organization classified omicron as a “variant of concern.” Each of the companies said it's testing an omicron-specific vaccine. Moderna said it could have a tweaked version of its shot ready early next year if necessary. In the case of the delta and beta variants, Moderna needed “60-90 days” to advance new candidates to clinical testing, it said in a release.

<https://www.fiercepharma.com/pharma/companies-reveal-plans-to-deal-omicron-covid-19-variant-including-moderna-most-detail>

With winter looming, cancer patients and doctors seek more Covid protection

Michele Nadeem-Baker is steeling herself for another winter. Diagnosed with chronic lymphocytic leukemia in 2012, she lives with an impaired immune system that even a third dose of Moderna’s Covid-19 vaccine may not be able to rouse. Living in Boston in November now that the weather has turned cold means an end to backyard dinners and a return to a world narrowed by fear of infection. “I am not alone in that feeling,” said Nadeem-Baker, a patient advocate who also spoke to STAT in June. “Everyone is dreading yet another winter in lockdown. Just because there are these third vaccinations, it doesn’t mean everyone is protected. There is still a part of the population that is not.”

<https://www.statnews.com/2021/11/29/monoclonal-antibodies-covid-protection-cancer-patients-doctors/>

Scientists rapidly identified the Omicron variant. But firm answers about its impact could take weeks

The emergence of the Omicron variant of the coronavirus, with a suite of mutations that suggests it might be extra transmissible and be able to evade at least some immune protection, has the world eager for answers about what it means for the Covid-19 pandemic. But so much remains unknown largely because the variant appears to have been detected and publicized so quickly. With other variants, a matter of months passed between the time they were first documented until they were designated “variants of concern” — in some cases giving scientists more opportunity to understand them before they attracted widespread attention. With Omicron, initially identified as B.1.1.529, it all happened within about two weeks.

<https://www.statnews.com/2021/11/28/scientists-rapidly-identified-the-omicron-variant-but-firm-answers-about-its-impact-could-take-weeks/>

Coronavirus Resurgence

Omicron variant puts world in a 'race against time', says EU Commission President

The world is in a "race against time" with the Omicron coronavirus variant, said European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen on Sunday, warning during a visit to Latvia that scientists and manufacturers will need weeks to fully understand the new variant. As more cases are identified and governments around the world mobilize to respond to Omicron, an urgent meeting of G7 health ministers will be convened on Monday, the United Kingdom said. It also announced on Sunday new domestic public health rules requiring face coverings in shops and on public transport starting this week. Omicron was first identified by scientists in South Africa, who raised alarm over its unusually high number of mutations on Thursday. Since then, at least a dozen other countries have confirmed cases of the new strain, with several other reporting suspected cases.

<https://www.cnn.com/2021/11/28/world/coronavirus-omicron-variant-spreading-intl/index.html>

WHO flags global risk from Omicron, countries tighten curbs

The World Health Organization (WHO) said on Monday the Omicron coronavirus variant carried a very high risk of infection surges, while border closures by more countries cast a shadow over an economic recovery from the two-year pandemic. Big airlines acted swiftly to protect their hubs by curbing passenger travel from southern Africa, where the new Omicron variant was first detected, fearing that a spread of the variant would trigger restrictions from other destinations beyond the

immediately affected regions, industry sources said.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/spread-omicron-variant-forces-nations-rethink-plans-global-travel-2021-11-29/>

S.Africa's COVID-19 cases could triple this week, says expert

South Africa's daily COVID-19 infection rate could triple to more than 10,000 by the end of this week as the new Omicron variant spreads rapidly, an infectious disease expert said on Monday. Professor Salim Abdool Karim, the government's chief adviser during the initial response to the pandemic, also said that, while existing vaccines should be effective at preventing severe disease from the variant, South African hospitals could be under pressure from a flood of admissions within two to three weeks.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/safrican-expert-says-vaccines-likely-effective-vs-severe-covid-19-variant-2021-11-29/>

First suspected case of Omicron variant of COVID-19 detected in Switzerland

The first probable case of the Omicron variant of COVID-19 has been detected in Switzerland, the government said late on Sunday, as the country tightened its entry restrictions to check its spread. The case relates to a person who returned to Switzerland from South Africa around a week ago, the Federal Office for Public Health said on Twitter. Testing will clarify the situation in the coming days, it added.

<https://www.reuters.com/markets/europe/first-suspected-case-omicron-variant-covid-19-detected-switzerland-2021-11-29/>

Portugal finds 13 cases of Omicron variant at Lisbon soccer club

Portugal detected 13 cases of the Omicron coronavirus variant on Monday, all involving players and staff of top division soccer club Belenenses SAD, one of whose players recently returned from South Africa, health authority DGS said. The diagnoses were made after the Lisbon club played a Primeira Liga match against Benfica on Saturday that started with only nine Belenenses players on the pitch because of a COVID-19 outbreak.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/portugal-detects-13-cases-omicron-covid-19-variant-2021-11-29/>

France detects eight possible Omicron cases - Health Ministry

France's Health Ministry said on Sunday it had detected eight possible cases of the Omicron COVID-19 variant across the country after the government announced it would tighten restrictions to contain its spread. Omicron is potentially more contagious than previous variants, although experts do not know yet if it will cause more or less severe COVID-19 compared to other strains.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/omicron-variant-likely-be-circulating-france-health-minister-2021-11-28/>

Pressure mounts for more curbs in Germany as Omicron spreads

Several leading German politicians called on Sunday for tighter restrictions to contain a surge in coronavirus cases as the infection rate hit a new high and fears about the new Omicron variant rose. After the detection of two Omicron cases in the southern state of Bavaria on Saturday, an official in the western state of Hesse said a suspected case in a passenger arriving from South Africa had been confirmed.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/germany-confirms-suspected-omicron-case-bringing-total-three-2021-11-28/>

Wary, weary world slams doors shut, fearing omicron variant

The World Health Organization warned Monday that the global risk from the omicron variant is "very high" based on early evidence, saying the mutated coronavirus could lead to surges with "severe consequences." The U.N. health agency, in a technical paper issued to member states, said "considerable uncertainties" remain about the variant that was first detected days ago in southern Africa. But it said it is possible the variant has mutations that could enable it to escape an immune-

system response and boost its ability to spread from one person to another. "Depending on these characteristics, there could be future surges of COVID-19, which could have severe consequences, depending on a number of factors, including where surges may take place," it added. "The overall global risk ... is assessed as very high."

<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-omicron-variant-covid-restrictions-82e53a7a17d1a4c30031065d389bda37>

Biden pushes shots, not more restrictions as variant spreads

President Joe Biden called the new coronavirus variant omicron a cause for concern but "not a cause for panic" Monday and said he was not considering any widespread U.S. lockdown. He urged Americans anew to get fully vaccinated, including booster shots, and return to face masks indoors in public settings to slow any spread. Speaking Monday at the White House, Biden said it was inevitable that the new variant would reach the U.S., but he also said the country has the tools necessary to protect Americans — particularly the approved vaccines and booster shots. When omicron arrives, and it will, Biden said, America will "face this new threat just as we've faced those that have come before it."

<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-joe-biden-health-infectious-diseases-anthony-fauci-44fab8b3448ad31f0865aebb26f91741>

Japan to bar all foreign visitors over Omicron variant

Japan says it will bar the entry of all foreign visitors from around the world, just weeks after a softening of strict entry rules, following the emergence of the new Omicron variant of the coronavirus. "We will ban the (new) entry of foreigners from around the world starting from November 30," Prime Minister Fumio Kishida told reporters, saying the measures would take effect on Tuesday. Over the weekend, Japan tightened entry restrictions for people arriving from South Africa and eight other countries in the region, requiring them to undergo a 10-day quarantine at government-designated facilities. Monday's announcement means Japan will restore border controls it eased earlier this month for short-term business visitors, foreign students and workers.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/11/29/japan-to-bar-all-foreign-visitors-over-omicron-variant>

New Lockdown

Parts of northern China tighten curbs on new COVID-19 flare-ups

A resurgence of COVID-19 infections in northern China have forced two small cities to suspend public transport and tighten control over residents' movement, as the country has showed no willingness to go easy on local outbreaks. China reported 21 new locally transmitted COVID-19 cases with confirmed symptoms on Sunday, official data showed on Monday, marking the highest daily count since mid-November. Almost all of the new local cases were detected in the northern Chinese region of Inner Mongolia.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/china/parts-northern-china-tighten-curbs-new-covid-19-flare-ups-2021-11-29/>

Couple caught fleeing Dutch COVID-19 quarantine moved to "forced isolation"

A couple caught trying to escape from COVID-19 quarantine in the Netherlands after testing positive for the coronavirus have been transferred to a hospital where they were being held in isolation, an official said on Monday. The pair, a Spanish man and Portuguese woman, left the hotel where travellers who tested positive for the virus were staying after arriving at Amsterdam's Schiphol airport from South Africa. "They have now been transferred to a hospital elsewhere in the Netherlands to ensure they are in isolation. They are now in so-called forced isolation," said Petra Faber, spokesperson for Haarlemmermeer municipality, where Schiphol is located just outside of the capital.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/couple-caught-fleeing-dutch-covid-19-quarantine-moved-forced-isolation-2021-11-29/>