

COVID-19 Lockdown Exit Analysis

2nd Dec 2021

Lockdown Exit

COVID-19: Emerging picture from South Africa suggests Omicron variant could be real cause for concern

These graphs are showing a "sustained increase" in cases in recent days in most of South Africa's provinces. Out in front, is Gauteng province, home to Johannesburg and South Africa's capital Pretoria. This is where the Omicron was first documented. I've been told that data being published later this week will show that nearly all this increase is likely due to cases of the Omicron variant. Like labs here in the UK, a PCR test for Omicron looks clearly different to the previously dominant Delta variant due to the "S-gene dropout". This is now the typical feature of cases in South Africa's fourth wave.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-emerging-picture-from-south-africa-suggests-omicron-variant-could-be-real-cause-for-concern-12484064>

Exit Strategies

Israel's coronavirus czar: We need to consider making vaccines mandatory

Coronavirus czar Salman Zarka said Wednesday that Israel should weigh introducing a national vaccine mandate compelling all citizens to get themselves inoculated against the coronavirus, a notion that mirrors legislation under consideration in several European countries. "I think we need to examine all the options, including the option of mandating vaccination in the State of Israel," Zarka told Radio 103FM in an interview. Zarka stressed that the opinion was his alone and not that of the Health Ministry. "This option of mandating a vaccine in the State of Israel, similar to several countries in the world, whether in the context of legislation or in the context of other means, must be examined, it must be considered," he said.

<https://www.timesofisrael.com/coronavirus-czar-vaccine-mandate-must-be-examined-considered-in-israel/>

Japan starts Covid booster vaccinations amid omicron scare

Japan on Wednesday started offering coronavirus vaccine booster shots to health care workers amid growing concerns over a new variant of the virus that has already been detected in the country. Japan's initial vaccination drive kicked off in mid-February and some medical workers who received jabs more than nine months ago are now eager to get additional protection ahead of a possible next wave of infections — especially after the new variant known as omicron, which was first reported in South Africa last week, was found in Japan on Tuesday. At Tokyo Medical Center, a group of nurses and doctors received booster shots. "It's an important first step for our patients and their families to be treated with a sense of safety," said hospital chief Kazuhiro Araki.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/asia/japan/japan-covid-vaccine-booster-omicron-b1967430.html>

Children 5 and older now have a coronavirus vaccine. But many parents of younger kids are still anxiously waiting.

Even with the recent authorization of a coronavirus vaccine for children ages 5 to 11, many parents and grandparents are still in limbo, anxiously awaiting shots for younger children. Although children are less likely to suffer severe disease, they can still contract and transmit the virus to others. Those who test positive must quarantine — and children may even have to stay home from day care or preschool when their classmates become ill after exposure to the virus. This forces parents to find alternative child care or take time off from work to care for them, which some families say has

become common.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2021/11/30/covid-vaccine-children-under-5/>

All adults to be offered COVID-19 booster jabs by end of January 2022

The UK government has aimed to expand their COVID-19 vaccination programme, in accordance with guidance from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI). All eligible adults in England aged 18 and over will be offered a COVID-19 booster vaccine by 31 January 2022. Everyone who is currently eligible – including those aged 40 and over, health and social care workers and those at increased risk from the virus due to preexisting health conditions – will be able to book their jab from three months after their second dose. This means that an additional seven million people over 40 are now eligible.

https://www.pharmatimes.com/news/all_adults_to_be_offered_covid-19_booster_jabs_by_end_of_january_2022_1384745

Some Teenagers Under 18 Could Soon Get A Pfizer COVID-19 Booster Shot : Shots - Health News

For the first time, people under the age of 18 may soon be eligible for a COVID-19 booster shot in the U.S. On Tuesday, Pfizer CEO and Chairman Albert Bourla said the vaccine maker had submitted its request to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to expand the emergency use authorization of a booster dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine to include 16- and 17-year-olds. Bourla made the announcement on Twitter, saying that "it is our hope to provide strong protection for as many people as possible, particularly in light of the new variant" — a reference to omicron, which has not yet been detected in the U.S.

<https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2021/11/30/1060281550/pfizer-fda-covid-booster-16-and-17-year-olds>

Despite variants, Singapore's COVID-19 strategy on track

When Singapore embarked upon its strategy of living with COVID-19, backed by one of the world's leading vaccine programs, the wealthy city-state saw a spike in its rate of infections, leading many to question whether the time was right. But with the numbers now dropping as rapidly as they rose, there's cautious optimism that the widely watched plan has helped Singapore turn the corner in the pandemic, even with the discovery of the new worrisome omicron variant, and provide a better understanding of what is effective, and what isn't. "I guess now COVID seems like it's just a normal flu to everybody," said Glacier Chong, taking a break from shopping on Singapore's popular Orchard Road to people-watch by a fountain and listen to the Christmas music being piped out of large speakers lining the street.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/singapore-malaysia-data-apple-bangkok-b1967437.html>

COVID-19: Help vaccinate poor countries or face more new variant shocks, rich economies told

The world's rich nations must help vaccinate the poorest nations or else they will face a continual cycle of economic shocks and restrictions in the face of new variants, the OECD's chief economist has said. Laurence Boone told Sky News that the Omicron variant could cause the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) to downgrade its outlook for economic growth and inflation, but it is too early to say what damage it could cause. She said that the variant was a reminder that for the richest countries - a group represented by the OECD - funding vaccinations in the developing world would cost only a fraction of their outlay in the past 18 months yet would bring immeasurable benefits.

<https://news.sky.com/story/help-vaccinate-poor-countries-or-face-more-new-variant-shocks-rich-economies-told-12483692>

WHO warns against blanket travel bans over Omicron coronavirus variant

Countries should apply "an evidence-informed and risk-based approach" with any travel measures

related to the Omicron variant of the coronavirus, including possible screening or quarantine of international passengers, but blanket bans do not prevent its spread, the World Health Organization (WHO) said on Tuesday. The WHO, in its latest guidance to authorities and travellers, said that people over 60 years of age who are not fully vaccinated or do not have proof of previous SARS-COV-2 infection and those with underlying health conditions should be advised to postpone travel as they are at higher risk of disease and death.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/who-warns-against-blanket-travel-bans-over-omicron-coronavirus-variant-2021-11-30/>

EU brings forward Pfizer/BioNTech COVID shot for younger children to Dec 13

The European Union-wide rollout of Pfizer (PFE.N) and BioNTech's (22UAY.DE) COVID-19 vaccine version for five- to 11-year-old children will begin Dec 13, one week earlier than previously planned, Germany's health ministry said on Wednesday. "Given the current pandemic situation, this is good news for parents and children. Many are awaiting this eagerly," acting health minister Jens Spahn said in the statement. Germany is due to receive 2.4 million doses for use as a two-dose regimen, the ministry said, adding it has commitment on the new date from the manufacturer.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/eu-launch-pfizerbiontech-covid-shot-younger-children-brought-forward-dec-13-2021-12-01/>

Vaccine champions Spain, Portugal focus on the reluctant few

Juan Esteban Mariño, a healthy 29-year-old, has been part of the rare cohort in Spain who have resisted health authorities' strong recommendations to get their vaccine shots. His position only changed when he planned an end-of-the-year holiday in Portugal, where authorities are cracking down on unvaccinated visitors as they confront a surge of infections and try to limit the spread of the omicron variant. "I needed to get the jab to leave the country and return without any inconveniences," Mariño said Wednesday at a large vaccination center in Madrid as he pressed sterile gauze against his left arm and rolled down his sleeve. "With the new variant and restrictions complicating life, getting the vaccine has become unavoidable," he added.

<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-lifestyle-health-europe-portugal-66ad07ae486a8c396cf8a8f72eb8e30f>

India asks states to step up COVID testing over Omicron

India's health ministry says the states should ramp up COVID-19 testing as the world battles the new coronavirus variant Omicron, while some cities have delayed the reopening of schools as a precautionary measure. The ministry on Tuesday also said the Omicron variant "doesn't escape RT-PCR and RAT (testing)", appeasing some concerns among domestic health workers that changes in the spike protein of the virus could lead to conventional tests failing to detect the mutation.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/12/1/india-states-covid-testing-omicron>

Partisan Exits

Greece imposes monthly fines of 100 euros on the over-60s who refuse a Covid vaccine

Failure to get a first dose of a coronavirus shot by Jan. 16 for anyone aged 60 and above will result in a monthly fine of 100 euros (\$114). As of Tuesday, about 62% of the Greek population was fully vaccinated against the virus. This is below the EU's average of 66%, according to the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control. Greece's announcement comes at a time when other European nations are also considering compulsory vaccination.

<https://www.cnn.com/2021/12/01/greece-compulsory-covid-vaccination-for-those-aged-60-and-above.html>

Anti-vaccine Christian broadcaster Marcus Lamb dies from Covid-19

Texas-based Daystar Television Network announced Lamb's death on Tuesday. Conservative christian network has been a vocal opponent of Covid vaccines. The broadcaster becomes the latest

anti-vaccine radio host to succumb to virus

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10262127/Anti-vaccine-Christian-broadcaster-Marcus-Lamb-dies-Covid-19.html>

COVID-19: Downing Street denies Boris Johnson broke COVID lockdown rules with No 10 parties at Christmas

Downing Street has denied claims that Boris Johnson broke coronavirus rules with parties at No 10 last Christmas. The Mirror claims the PM made a speech at a leaving do on 27 November - when the country was in the second lockdown - and allowed a festive party to proceed on 18 December when London was in the grips of Tier 3 restrictions. A No 10 spokesperson told Sky News: "COVID rules have been followed at all times."

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-downing-street-deny-boris-johnson-broke-covid-lockdown-rules-with-no-10-parties-at-christmas-12483509>

Courts block two Biden administration COVID vaccine mandates

The Biden administration was blocked on Tuesday from enforcing two mandates requiring millions of American workers to get vaccinated against COVID-19, a key part of its strategy for controlling the spread of the coronavirus. U.S. District Judge Terry Doughty in Monroe, Louisiana, temporarily blocked the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) from enforcing its vaccine mandate for healthcare workers until the court can resolve legal challenges. Doughty's ruling applied nationwide, except in 10 states where the CMS was already prevented from enforcing the rule due to a prior order from a federal judge in St. Louis.

<https://www.reuters.com/legal/government/us-judge-blocks-vaccine-mandate-contractors-three-states-2021-11-30/>

Scientific Viewpoint

COVID-19: Most Omicron cases are 'mild' and there's no evidence to suggest vaccines may be less effective against the variant, says WHO official

Early indications suggest most Omicron coronavirus cases are "mild", an official at the World Health Organisation (WHO) has said. Speaking on behalf of the organisation, the official said there is no evidence to suggest the efficacy of vaccines has been reduced by the new strain - but did say some mutations of the virus indicate an increased risk of quicker transmission. They said more than 40 different mutations have been identified with the Omicron variant. The WHO official, quoted by Reuters, added there is still a lot unknown about the new strain.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-most-omicron-cases-are-mild-and-theres-no-evidence-to-suggest-vaccines-may-be-less-effective-against-the-variant-says-who-12483729>

COVID-19: NERVTAG scientists 'can't rule out' Omicron causing biggest wave of infections yet that may overwhelm NHS

The Omicron variant could trigger a surge in COVID infections bigger than previous waves in the UK with a risk it may overwhelm the NHS, a key group of scientists have warned. Experts on the New and Emerging Respiratory Virus Threats Advisory Group (NERVTAG), which advises the government, held an extraordinary meeting last week to consider the new COVID variant, known scientifically as B.1.1.529, following its detection in South Africa. According to a note of their meeting, which was observed by both a key Department of Health official and England's deputy chief medical officer Jonathan Van-Tam, the group concluded the introduction of Omicron to the UK "might have very serious consequences".

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-nervtag-scientists-cant-rule-out-omicron-causing-biggest-wave-of-infections-yet-that-may-overwhelm-nhs-12483709>

Severe Covid infection doubles chances of dying in following year, study finds

Patients who survive severe Covid are more than twice as likely to die over the following year than

those who remain uninfected or experience milder virus symptoms, a study says. The research, published in *Frontiers in Medicine*, suggests that serious coronavirus infections may significantly damage long-term health, showing the importance of vaccination. The increased risk of dying was greater for patients under 65, and only 20% of the severe Covid-19 patients who died did so because of typical Covid complications, such as respiratory failure.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/dec/01/severe-covid-infection-doubles-chances-of-dying-in-following-year-study>

Philippines says COVID variants highlight need for local vaccine development

New coronavirus variants highlight the need for countries to do their own research and development on COVID-19 vaccines, said a senior Philippines trade official, adding that people will only be safe once the whole world is vaccinated. The Philippines is looking to work with its trading partners on this as vaccine demand is unlikely to wane anytime soon, said Allan Gepty, assistant secretary at the Department of Trade and Industry in an interview at the Reuters Next conference. The new COVID-19 variants highlight that "we have to continue doing our respective research and development in this area because there is a truism that ...no one is safe unless everyone is safe," said Gepty.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/philippines-says-covid-variants-highlight-need-local-vaccine-development-2021-12-01/>

BioNTech CEO says vaccine likely to protect against severe COVID from Omicron

BioNTech and Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine will likely offer strong protection against any severe disease from the new Omicron virus variant, BioNTech's Chief Executive told Reuters, as the firm weighs the need to upgrade its commonly used shot. Lab tests are underway over the next two weeks to analyse the blood of people who had two or three doses of BioNTech's Comirnaty vaccine to see if antibodies found in that blood inactivate Omicron, shedding light on whether new vaccines are needed.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/biontech-ceo-says-current-vaccine-likely-protect-against-severe-covid-omicron-2021-11-30/>

Regeneron's COVID-19 antibody drug may be less effective against Omicron

Regeneron Pharmaceuticals Inc's COVID-19 antibody drug could be less effective against Omicron, it said on Tuesday, adding to fears about the efficacy of existing treatments after Moderna's top boss raised similar concerns about the company's vaccine. Global markets tumbled after comments from Moderna's chief executive officer rekindled worries that the variant may weigh on a nascent global economic recovery.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/regeneron-says-covid-19-drug-could-be-less-effective-against-omicron-variant-2021-11-30/>

U.S. FDA panel narrowly backs Merck's at-home COVID-19 pill

A panel of expert advisers to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration on Tuesday narrowly voted to recommend the agency authorize Merck & Co's (MRK.N) antiviral pill to treat COVID-19. If the FDA authorizes the drug, it would be the first at-home treatment for the virus nearly two years into the pandemic. The authorization would likely be limited to patients at high risk of developing severe disease, although the exact population would be defined by the agency. Merck published data last week suggesting the drug was significantly less effective than previously thought, reducing hospitalizations and deaths in its clinical trial of high-risk individuals by around 30%.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/us-fda-panel-weigh-mercks-covid-19-antiviral-drug-2021-11-30/>

WHO members agree to start drafting global pandemic convention

Member states of the World Health Organization (WHO) have agreed to start drafting a global

agreement to prevent and tackle the next global pandemic. Countries adopted a resolution on Wednesday at a special meeting in Geneva, launching the process that it is hoped should result in a new agreement on pandemics.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/12/1/who-members-kick-off-process-to-draft-global-pandemic-convention>

Weak immune systems tied to more COVID-19 breakthrough infections

While COVID-19 breakthrough infections—cases after vaccination—are rare, fully vaccinated people with compromised immune systems have them three times more often than those with strong immune systems and have more severe illnesses, according to a real-world US study involving nearly 1.3 million people. In the retrospective study, published today in the Journal of Medical Economics, a team led by researchers from Pfizer analyzed the health records of 1,277,747 people aged 16 or older who had received two doses of the Pfizer/BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine from Dec 10, 2020, to Jul 8, 2021. The latter part of the study period included the emergence of the Delta (B1617.2) variant in the United States.

<https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2021/11/weak-immune-systems-tied-more-covid-19-breakthrough-infections>

Merck's COVID-19 antiviral narrowly clears FDA panel—but committee echos support for revoking nod in favor of superior option

Merck and Ridgeback's recent report that its antiviral molnupiravir wasn't nearly as effective as previously indicated put a damper on enthusiasm that a game-changing oral treatment for COVID-19 was near. It also drew questions at the FDA on whether to approve the pill on an emergency use basis at all. On Tuesday, an FDA advisory committee voted by the narrow margin of 13-10 to endorse the use of molnupiravir. The recommendation comes despite a host of concerns, including over the efficacy and safety of the antiviral medicine. "In my many years of chairing this committee, this is the first meeting that has gone over (its time limit), which I think speaks to the complexity of the issues," said Lindsey Baden, M.D., of the Brigham and Women's Hospital of Boston.

<https://www.fiercepharma.com/pharma/by-narrow-vote-fda-advisory-committee-recommends-eua-merck-s-covid-19-oral-drug-molnupiravir>

A reason for optimism on Omicron: Our immune systems are not blank slates

The emergence of a new Covid-19 variant with a startlingly large constellation of mutations has countries around the world sounding alarms. While the concerns are understandable, experts in immunology say people need to remember a critical fact: Two years and 8 billion vaccine doses into the pandemic, many immune systems are no longer blank slates when it comes to SARS-CoV-2. The new SARS-2 variant, known as Omicron, may more easily sidestep some of the immunity of some vaccinated and previously infected people. But there's good reason to think people who already have some immune protections may avoid the worst of what Covid infections can do to immunologically naïve people.

<https://www.statnews.com/2021/12/01/a-reason-for-optimism-on-omicron-our-immune-systems-are-not-blank-slates/>

Pfizer research head envisions a sprint to develop Omicron vaccine, if it's needed

A top Pfizer executive says the company is hopeful that booster shots will provide sufficient protection against the Omicron variant — but has already envisioned a timeline for the development of a new vaccine if that's not the case. Mikael Dolsten, Pfizer's chief scientific officer, likened the company's researchers to firefighters: They don't know how serious the blaze will be, but need to prepare for the worst. And in this case, the worst would mean the need to develop new vaccines. "We do take the new variant of concern, Omicron, with seriousness," Dolsten told STAT. "It can indeed be a potential new threatening wave ... although we don't know that yet. But we always start with being prepared for the worst."

<https://www.statnews.com/2021/11/30/pfizer-research-head-envisions-a-sprint-to-develop-omicron-vaccine-if-its-need>

[ed/](#)

Coronavirus Resurgence

Omicron was in Europe long before travel bans on southern Africa

When South African officials sounded the alarm on the new Omicron variant last Thursday, stocks around the world tumbled and up to 70 countries, including the United States, imposed travel bans and restrictions to southern African countries. The knee-jerk response followed the news that the variant had an unusually high number of mutations, which scientists feared could make it more transmissible and result in immune evasion. Much is still unknown about Omicron, including its origin, severity and its transmissibility. Researchers are also racing to discover if it could displace existing variants and become dominant, as Delta has. Early "indications" show that people who have received the coronavirus vaccine booster are "protected" against the new variant, Israeli Health Minister Nitzan Horowitz said Tuesday.

<https://www.cnn.com/2021/12/01/world/coronavirus-newsletter-intl-01-12-21/index.html>

COVID in Europe: Portuguese hospital worker tests positive for Omicron

A hospital worker in Portugal tested positive for the new COVID-19 variant called Omicron, forcing the paediatric services unit to close. The worker had been in contact with members of a Portuguese football club where there were at least 13 cases of the new, concerning variant of coronavirus that was first identified in South Africa. The hospital said it will close both emergency and outpatient paediatric services for two weeks even though staff in contact with the hospital worker tested negative for the virus. New virus restrictions entered into force in Portugal from midnight as the country works to contain a new surge in cases. A digital certificate proving vaccination or recovery from COVID-19 must be shown to enter restaurants, cinemas and hotels. Face masks will also be mandatory once again.

<https://www.euronews.com/2021/11/30/greece-will-fine-over-60s-100-a-month-for-refusing-covid-19-vaccine>

China local COVID-19 cases jump to most in nearly a month

China detected 91 domestically transmitted COVID-19 cases with confirmed symptoms for Tuesday, marking the highest daily count since Nov. 2 and a significant jump from 21 cases a day earlier, as the country fights a fresh outbreak in the north. All of the 91 local symptomatic cases were reported in the northern Chinese region of Inner Mongolia, data from the National Health Commission showed on Wednesday. Mainland China has not detected any infections caused by the Omicron variant, Xu Wenbo, an official at Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention, said on Tuesday at a news briefing.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/china-reports-highest-daily-local-covid-19-cases-nearly-month-2021-12-01/>

U.S. tightens travel rules as more countries secure borders to quell Omicron

Heavily mutated Omicron is rapidly becoming the dominant variant of the coronavirus in South Africa less than four weeks after it was first detected there, and the United States on Wednesday became the latest country to identify an Omicron case within its borders. The first known U.S. case was a fully vaccinated person in California who returned to the United States from South Africa on Nov. 22 and tested positive seven days later. The person had mild symptoms and was in self-quarantine, Dr. Anthony Fauci, the top U.S. infectious disease official, told reporters at the White House.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us-tightens-covid-19-travel-rules-countries-race-quell-omicron-threat-2021-12-01/>

COVID: France extends suspension of flights from high-risk southern African countries

France has decided to extend until at least Saturday its suspension of flights from southern African countries which have been hit hard by the Omicron variant of the COVID-19 virus, said French

European Affairs Minister Clement Beaune. "As of this morning, we have extended the suspension of flights from seven southern African countries until Saturday," Beaune told RTL radio. The Omicron COVID variant - first reported in southern Africa and which the World Health Organization (WHO) said carries a "very high" risk of infection surges - has triggered global alarm, with border closures casting a shadow over a nascent economic recovery from a two-year pandemic

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/covid-france-extends-suspension-flights-high-risk-southern-african-countries-2021-12-01/>

South Korea reports two Omicron cases on flight from Nigeria - media

South Korea reported its first five cases of the Omicron variant on Wednesday, officials said, as daily coronavirus infections rose above 5,000 for the first time, stoking concern over a sharp rise in patients with severe symptoms. A fully vaccinated couple tested positive for the variant after arriving last week from Nigeria, followed by two of their family members and a friend, according to the Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency (KDCA).

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/south-korea-reports-daily-record-over-5000-new-covid-19-infections-2021-12-01/>

Munster COVID-19 cases reach 14, remainder depart South Africa

Munster reported 13 new COVID-19 cases in their camp in South Africa, taking the total count to 14, as the remainder of the squad departed Cape Town on Tuesday, the Irish rugby team said. Both staff and players have tested positive and will quarantine in a hotel in Cape Town, joining the first player who returned a positive test on Sunday. Welsh side Cardiff also said they had two positive cases over the weekend. Munster did not say if any of the positive tests were for the new Omicron variant of the virus, which was first detected in southern Africa.

<https://www.reuters.com/lifestyle/sports/nine-more-munster-test-positive-covid-19-south-africa-2021-11-30/>

Germany reports highest daily COVID-19 death toll for 9 months

Germany is likely to reach a peak of its fourth wave of COVID-19 infections by mid-December and this could mean 6,000 intensive care beds occupied by Christmas, the country's association for intensive care medicine (DIVI) said on Wednesday. Andreas Schuppert, a forecaster for the DIVI association, told a news conference he was "moderately optimistic" the peak in new cases would come in the next two weeks, but warned this would take time to have its full impact on hospitals. "It is an ominous situation," DIVI president Gernot Marx told reporters. "We would be well advised to react immediately. We must get ahead of the situation."

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/german-state-reports-four-fully-vaccinated-people-infected-with-omicron-2021-12-01/>

Germany to act to counter COVID-19 fourth wave

Germany's federal and regional governments agreed on Tuesday to take action to counter a fourth wave of COVID-19, including stepping up the vaccination campaign and restricting contact, especially for unvaccinated people. Facing a surge in cases over the last few weeks and warnings from virologists that exponential growth rates would overload hospitals, outgoing Chancellor Angela Merkel held video talks with her successor, Olaf Scholz, and regional leaders. "There is agreement that the fourth wave has led to an extremely serious, in some regions dramatic situation in our healthcare system to which federal and state governments will respond jointly and decisively," said government spokesman Steffen Seibert.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/rise-german-covid-19-infections-flattens-2021-11-30/>

Sydney braces for more Omicron cases but no lockdowns for now

Australian authorities on Wednesday flagged another probable case of the Omicron variant in Sydney as they braced for more infections after at least two international travellers visited several locations in the city while likely infectious. Officials in New South Wales (NSW), home to Sydney, said

initial testing "strongly indicates" a man in his 40s, who arrived from southern Africa on Nov. 25, had been infected with the Omicron variant and had spent time in the community. "We believe it is likely it will be confirmed later this afternoon as a definite Omicron case," NSW Health Minister Brad Hazzard told reporters, but he ruled out lockdowns to contain the newly identified variant.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/sydney-braces-more-omicron-cases-no-lockdowns-now-2021-12-01/>

Germany to act to counter COVID-19 fourth wave

Germany's federal and regional governments agreed on Tuesday to take action to counter a fourth wave of COVID-19, including stepping up the vaccination campaign and restricting contact, especially for unvaccinated people. Facing a surge in cases over the last few weeks and warnings from virologists that exponential growth rates would overload hospitals, outgoing Chancellor Angela Merkel held video talks with her successor, Olaf Scholz, and regional leaders. "There is agreement that the fourth wave has led to an extremely serious, in some regions dramatic situation in our healthcare system to which federal and state governments will respond jointly and decisively," said government spokesman Steffen Seibert.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/rise-german-covid-19-infections-flattens-2021-11-30/>

Omicron keeps world jittery as more information drips out

The U.S. recorded its first confirmed case of the omicron variant Wednesday — in a vaccinated traveler who returned to California after a trip to South Africa — as scientists around the world race to establish whether the new, mutant version of the coronavirus is more dangerous than previous ones. Dr. Anthony Fauci, the United States' top infectious-disease expert, announced the finding at the White House. "We knew it was just a matter of time before the first case of omicron would be detected in the United States," he said. The infected person was identified as a traveler who had returned from South Africa on Nov. 22, developed mild symptoms and tested positive for COVID-19 Monday. Researchers at the University of California, San Francisco obtained a sample from the patient Tuesday evening and worked feverishly overnight to assemble the genetic sequence.

<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-business-health-europe-japan-192d15ef14bb3dd478bc36ab4aa325f0>

Netherlands detections hint at earlier Omicron spread

In a statement today, the Netherlands' National Institute for Public Health (RIVM) said that the samples that yielded the Omicron variant were obtained on Nov 19 and 23, before South Africa announced its findings and before travel bans went into effect. The samples were taken during municipal health service testing, and investigations and contact tracing are under way. RIVM also provided more details about the results of COVID-19 testing of 624 people returning from South Africa who arrived at Schiphol airport on Nov 26. Of 61 who tested positive for COVID-19, 14 had the Omicron variant. Sequencing revealed different strains of the Omicron variant, suggesting that people were probably infected from different sources and locations. Meanwhile, more countries reported Omicron cases. Japan confirmed its first case, which involves a Namibian diplomat who arrived in Japan on Nov 28, before the country's travel ban went into effect. Officials said the man had been fully vaccinated and was asymptomatic upon his arrival in Japan but developed a fever the next day.

<https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2021/11/netherlands-detections-hint-earlier-omicron-spread>