

COVID-19 Lockdown Exit Analysis

8th Dec 2021

Lockdown Exit

Norway Tightens Restrictions on Omicron Spread

Norway is tightening restrictions again to try to regain control of the spread of the omicron variant and prevent an overloading of an hospital system already struggling with other types of illness as winter sets in. Social distancing and limiting the number of guests in private homes to 10 is recommended again, while bars and restaurants must stop selling alcohol at midnight and face masks are now mandatory where a meter's distance can't be maintained, Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Store told reporters on Tuesday.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-12-07/norway-advises-guest-limits-social-distancing-to-fight-omicron>

Bill Gates Thinks 'Acute Phase' of Pandemic Will End in 2022 Despite Omicron

To Bill Gates, 2021 did not bring as much improvement to the pandemic as he had hoped. With more Covid-19 deaths this year than in 2020, the delta variant and challenges with vaccine uptake, progress has been underwhelming, the billionaire indicated in a year in review post on his blog Tuesday. "I underestimated how tough it would be to convince people to take the vaccine and continue to use masks," Gates said. But the Microsoft Corp. co-founder is optimistic about 2022. "I think the acute phase of the pandemic will come to a close some time in 2022," Gates said. His prediction comes as the world deals with a new variant and in the U.S. cases are approaching 50 million.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-12-07/bill-gates-thinks-acute-phase-of-pandemic-will-end-in-2022>

U.S. judge blocks last remaining Biden admin COVID-19 vaccine rule

A federal judge on Tuesday blocked the last of the Biden administration's COVID-19 vaccine mandates for businesses, saying the government exceeded its authority with a requirement that millions of employees of federal contractors be inoculated. The ruling was the latest setback for President Joe Biden, a Democrat, who announced a series of measures in September aimed at increasing vaccination rates to fight the pandemic that continues to kill more than 1,000 Americans daily. "Abuse of power by the Biden administration has been stopped cold again," Republican South Carolina Attorney General Alan Wilson, who joined the lawsuit, said in a statement. U.S. District Judge Stan Baker in Savannah, Georgia, said Congress did not clearly authorize the president to use procurement to impose a vaccine requirement on contractors that will have "vast economic and political significance."

<https://www.reuters.com/legal/litigation/us-judge-blocks-last-remaining-biden-admin-covid-19-vaccine-rule-2021-12-07/>

Africa needs to make own vaccines but hurdles are high, experts say

Africa needs to make its own vaccines to avoid a repeat of its supply problems in the COVID-19 pandemic but faces big obstacles in turning itself from a pharmaceutical testing ground into a place where vaccines are created, experts said on Tuesday. The Partnership for African Vaccine Manufacturing (PAVM) has set as a target that 60% of the continent's routine vaccine needs, or between 1.4 and 1.7 billion doses yearly, should be met by local manufacturing by 2040, up from about 1% now. Experts meeting at a PAVM conference in Rwanda said the pandemic had shown Africa urgently needed to tackle its dependence on imported vaccines. But they outlined daunting obstacles, from brain drain to power shortages.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/africa-needs-make-own-vaccines-hurdles-are-high-experts-say-2021-12-07/>

The world has the tools to end the coronavirus pandemic. They're not being used properly

The Covid-19 pandemic will not last forever. It will likely continue to fizzle and fade as it heads towards its third year, resurging with new variants and then waning in the face of vaccines, mitigation measures and human behavior. But even if the virus is never stamped out, immunity will improve and the world will eventually be able to live with Covid. On that, experts generally agree. "The large majority of infectious disease specialists think, and have thought for many months, that SARS-CoV-2 is here to stay," said Paul Hunter, professor in medicine at the University of East Anglia in the UK. "Our grandchildren's grandchildren will still be catching (the virus)," he said. But "Covid, the disease, will become part of our history as the infection morphs into just another cause of the common cold."

<https://www.cnn.com/2021/12/05/health/covid-pandemic-global-solutions-toolkit-cmd-intl/index.html>

Exit Strategies

Covid Patients in Japan Are Recovering in Robot-Staffed Hotels

Step into the lobby of its east tower, though, and it's a different world. The only formal greeting guests receive is from Softbank Corp.'s robot, Pepper. They're given written instructions on their rooms and stay. That's because the new arrivals all have one thing in common: they're infected with coronavirus. In Japan, some Covid patients get a hotel booking -- and can enroll in clinical trials during their stay -- with their positive test results. The approach offers a respite for a dysfunctional health care system where individual hospitals are able to opt-out of caring for Covid patients, resulting in a situation where patients are being turned away despite available resources. It's also aimed at reducing the risk of transmission among inter-generational households when space is at a premium in one of the most densely populated countries in the world.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-12-07/japan-s-health-care-dysfunction-forces-hotels-into-covid-duty>

BOJ Likely to Scale Down Longer Covid Aid, Former Executive Says

The Bank of Japan is likely to narrow the scope of its Covid aid, but keep it in place for longer in an attempt to focus the measures on businesses that still need help, says a former top official. A partial extension is possible," said Eiji Maeda, who led the central bank's pandemic crisis response before stepping down from his post as executive director in May last year. "Funding is becoming an issue that's focused on some businesses and some sectors. It's no longer an issue for monetary policy, which addresses the overall economy."

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-12-07/boj-likely-to-scale-down-longer-covid-aid-former-executive-says>

Omicron sets back airline industry's recovery hopes

New travel restrictions prompted by the Omicron coronavirus variant have set back the nascent recovery in international flights, creating delays and headaches in some regions, according to airline and airport officials. The flurry of new testing rules and border closings has raised concerns ahead of the important Christmas travel season, but some airline bosses said they hope any backward moves will be short-lived. Global airlines have blamed a patchwork of shifting rules for depressed demand for international travel, which is critical for their return to profit following steep COVID-19 pandemic-related losses in 2020.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/asia-airlines-hope-omicron-setback-will-be-short-lived-2021-12-07/>

Booster shots may be needed to keep fully vaccinated status in Australia in future

A booster dose could be necessary to keep your green Covid-19 vaccination tick in the future, the health department secretary Brendan Murphy says. Booster shots are being rolled out across Australia amid warnings that immunisation from the initial vaccinations wanes with time. The federal government distinguishes these “booster” doses from the third vaccine dose some immunocompromised people need to get a standard level of protection.

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/dec/07/booster-shots-may-be-needed-to-keep-fully-vaccinated-status-in-australia-in-future>

COVID-19: Mandatory jabs are 'absolute last resort', says WHO Europe chief as several EU countries consider introducing them

The World Health Organisation's top official in Europe has said mandatory coronavirus vaccinations are an "absolute last resort", as several EU countries consider introducing them. "Mandates around vaccination are an absolute last resort and only applicable when all feasible options to improve vaccination uptake have been exhausted," WHO Europe director Hans Kluge said. Several European countries are debating whether to make COVID-19 vaccines mandatory.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-mandatory-jabs-are-absolute-last-resort-says-who-europe-chief-as-several-eu-countries-consider-introducing-them-12489021>

World Bank says its funding helped deliver 100 mln COVID-19 vaccine doses

The World Bank on Monday said its funding had helped deliver 100 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines around the world and it would reach the 150-million mark by the end of the month, if doses arrive as expected. World Bank President David Malpass said the multilateral development bank had contracted for nearly 300 million doses, with some \$7.5 billion in vaccine financing operations for 69 countries to be committed by the end of December.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/world-bank-says-its-funding-helped-deliver-100-mln-covid-19-vaccine-doses-2021-12-07/>

New York City expands COVID vaccine mandates for children, private sector

New York City expanded its array of COVID-19 mandates on Monday, setting vaccine requirements for children as young as 5 years old and for workers at all private-sector companies as the highly transmissible Omicron variant pushes into more U.S. states. The most-populous U.S. city set a Dec. 27 deadline for all 184,000 businesses within its limits to make their employees show proof they have been vaccinated, Mayor Bill de Blasio said. In addition, children 5 to 11 years old must get at least one dose by Dec. 14 and those 12 and older need to be fully vaccinated by Dec. 27 to enter restaurants and participate in extracurricular school activities, such as sports, band and dances

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/new-york-city-mandates-vaccines-all-private-businesses-omicron-spreads-2021-12-06/>

Mexico's capital rolls out first COVID-19 booster shots

Mexico City officials will begin offering a third COVID-19 vaccine dose to residents over the age of 60 on Tuesday, officials said, part of a government plan to roll out booster shots. President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador said last week the third doses would be made available as soon as possible, beginning with elderly people who are more vulnerable to the coronavirus. The first booster shots in the massive capital of nearly 10 million people will be AstraZeneca doses given to residents of the southern Tlalpan neighborhood, officials told a news conference on Monday.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/mexico-reports-110-more-covid-19-deaths-752-new-cases-2021-12-07/>

Poland to introduce mandatory COVID jabs for some workers, says health minister

Poland will introduce compulsory vaccinations for doctors, teachers and security service personnel, and will require staff in places like restaurants to check customers' COVID-19 vaccination certificates, the health minister said on Tuesday.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/poland-introduce-mandatory-covid-jabs-some-workers-says-health-minister-2021-12-07/>

We don't think COVID Plan B is required - UK's Raab

Britain will not require stricter domestic COVID restrictions in the run-up to Christmas because vaccines had put the country into a more resilient position than a year ago, Justice Secretary Dominic Raab said on Tuesday. "We don't think Plan B is required," he told BBC radio. "Why? Because of the success of the vaccine programme."

<https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/we-dont-think-covid-plan-b-is-required-uks-raab-2021-12-07/>

Austria plans to lift lockdown, but not for the unvaccinated

The unvaccinated will stay in lockdown when Austria lifts its wider general lockdown on Sunday, Chancellor Karl Nehammer confirmed on Tuesday, a day after he took office. Austria went into lockdown two weeks ago to counter a surge in daily COVID-19 infections to record levels, with restaurants, bars, theatres and non-essential shops shut to all but take-away business. Hotels are closed to tourists. Infections have plunged since but intensive-care bed occupancy is still rising.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/austrias-unvaccinated-will-remain-lockdown-next-week-chancellor-says-2021-12-07/>

Armed gangs raise risks in vaccinating rural Nigerians

As the emergence of the omicron variant underscores the importance of inoculating more people to prevent new mutations of the coronavirus, Nigeria also is facing a difficult path: Only 3.78 million are fully vaccinated. Going directly to the villagers is one way to overcome any hesitancy they might have in getting the shots, said Bawa. "When you meet them in their home, there is no problem," he added. "Everybody will take (the vaccine)." On Dec. 1, Nigeria began requiring government employees to be vaccinated or show a negative test for the virus in the past 72 hours. Although authorities emphasize the country is capable of getting the Western-manufactured vaccines to everyone, health care workers in rural areas are struggling, mostly because of delayed government funding.

<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-health-religion-africa-coronavirus-vaccine-42fee2eeeb1848988a9b74a4e77a1045>

Partisan Exits

Slovak Ruling Parties Agree on \$337 Bonus for Vaccinated Seniors

Slovakia's ruling parties agreed on a lower-than-planned payment worth 300 euros (\$337) to people aged 60 and over for getting fully inoculated against Covid-19 to increase one of the European Union's lowest vaccination rates. The government is expected to give final approval on Wednesday, but that should be a formality given the cabinet's makeup, daily newspaper Sme reported. The coalition also agreed to relax some coronavirus measures for the vaccinated, such as access to all shops, from Friday. Children attending sixth grade and higher will switch to online learning from Monday. "We have a good agreement," Prime Minister Eduard Heger said after the coalition meeting on Tuesday.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-12-07/slovak-parties-agree-on-337-bonus-for-vaccinated-seniors>

As many as 6 million eligible Britons may not have had a Covid jab. Who are they?

The Omicron variant has refocused attention on vaccination rates as data shows disparities in uptake across age, region and ethnicity. Hundreds of cases of the new Omicron Covid-19 variant have now been confirmed in the UK and experts have called for a renewed focus on vaccination rates.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/dec/07/as-many-as-6-million-eligible-britons-may-not-have-had-a-covid-jab-who-are-they>

COVID rules were not broken at Downing Street party, UK's Johnson says

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson's staff appeared to joke about holding a Christmas party last year while much of the country faced tough COVID-19 restrictions, in a leaked video released by broadcaster ITV on Tuesday. Johnson has faced questions and criticism since the Mirror newspaper reported last week there were many social gatherings at Johnson's 10 Downing Street office over the Christmas period. In the video from Dec. 22, 2020, Johnson's staff hold a mock press conference and appear to joke about holding a Christmas party.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/covid-rules-were-not-broken-downing-street-party-uks-johnson-says-2021-12-07/>

Bolsonaro dismisses vaccination requirement for entry into Brazil

Brazil will require that unvaccinated travelers entering the country go on a five-day quarantine followed by a COVID-19 test, its health minister said on Tuesday, after its president said he opposed the use of a vaccine passport. President Jair Bolsonaro criticized Brazil's health regulator Anvisa for proposing the vaccination passport be required for arriving travelers to help prevent the spread of new coronavirus variants. "Anvisa wants to close the country's airspace now. Not again, damn it," Bolsonaro, a vaccine skeptic, said at a business event in Brasilia.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/bolsonaro-dismisses-vaccination-requirement-entry-into-brazil-2021-12-07/>

Scientific Viewpoint

Study suggests Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine only partially protects against Omicron

The Omicron variant of the coronavirus can partially evade the protection from Pfizer Inc (PFE.N) and partner BioNTech's COVID-19 vaccine, the research head of a laboratory at Africa Health Research Institute in South Africa said on Tuesday. Alex Sigal, a professor at the Africa Health Research Institute, said on Twitter there was "a very large drop" in neutralization of the Omicron variant relative to an earlier strain of COVID. The lab tested blood from 12 people who had been vaccinated with the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine, according to a manuscript posted on the website for his lab. The preliminary data in the manuscript has not yet been peer reviewed.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/pfizer-covid-19-vaccine-partially-protective-against-omicron-bloomberg-news-2021-12-07/>

Scientists find 'stealth' version of Omicron that may be harder to track

Scientists say they have identified a "stealth" version of Omicron which cannot be distinguished from other variants using the PCR tests that public health officials deploy to gain a quick picture of its spread around the world. It came as the number of cases of the original Omicron variant detected in the UK rose by 101 to 437 in a single day and Scotland announced a return to working from home. The stealth variant has many mutations in common with standard Omicron, but it lacks a particular genetic change that allows lab-based PCR tests to be used as a rough and ready means of flagging up probable cases. The variant is still detected as coronavirus by all the usual tests, and can be identified as the Omicron variant through genomic testing, but likely cases are not flagged up by routine PCR tests that give quicker results.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/dec/07/scientists-find-stealth-version-of-omicron-not-identifiable-with-pcr-test-covid-variant>

Impact of obesity and metabolic disorders on severity of COVID-19 and vaccine-breakthrough infections

Obesity and impaired metabolic health are important risk factors for severe COVID-19. Novel data indicate that these risk factors might also promote vaccine-breakthrough SARS-CoV-2 infections in fully vaccinated people. In a Nature Reviews Endocrinology "Year in Review" article DZD-Researcher Norbert Stefan summarizes the most important and up-to-date findings about the relationships of obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular diseases with the severity of COVID-19 and SARS-CoV-2 vaccine-breakthrough infections.

<https://www.eurekalert.org/news-releases/937102>

Cuba's COVID vaccines: the limited data available suggests they're highly effective

Cuba has been quietly working on its own vaccines, immunising its population and selling doses abroad. Cuba's vaccine efforts have maintained a relatively low profile in the west to date. Politics may well be a reason. The US embargo against Cuba that began in the cold war is still in effect, and tensions between the countries remain high. But for those familiar with Cuba, its COVID vaccine development should come as no surprise – the country has a long history of manufacturing its own vaccines and medicines. Nor should it be surprising that two of its COVID vaccines – Abdala and Soberana 02 – appear to have performed very well in trials. Here's how they work...

<https://theconversation.com/cubas-covid-vaccines-the-limited-data-available-suggests-theyre-highly-effective-172725>

Medicago and GSK announce CoVLP, a plant-based coronavirus vaccine

Pharmaceutical companies Medicago and GlaxoSmithKline announced on Tuesday “positive efficacy and safety results” from a global trial using what they say is the world's first plant-based coronavirus vaccine.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2021/12/07/plant-coronavirus-vaccine-gsk-medicago-covlp/>

The explosion of Covid PTSD cases is a mental health crisis in the making

When the Covid-19 pandemic began, people working in the trauma field knew the psychological toll would be colossal. In the spring of 2020, I began interviewing professionals about the mental health fallout of the pandemic, specifically its impact on frontline medical staff. During the first wave, two in every five intensive care staff in England reported symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. That work continued for almost a year, during which time a second wave hit and the initial traumas were exacerbated. But it wasn't only frontline workers who were experiencing trauma symptoms: Covid has posed perhaps the biggest threat to mental health in England since the second world war. Now, at the tail end of 2021, the pandemic is still not over. The NHS forecasts that nationally, there will be 230,000 new cases of PTSD as a result of Covid-19.

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/dec/07/covid-ptsd-cases-mental-health-crisis-early-intervention-trauma-uk>

Growing use of home Covid-19 tests leaves health agencies in the dark about unreported cases

When fans of the band Phish started falling ill with Covid-19 all over the country after a Halloween concert weekend in Las Vegas, public health officials were largely in the dark about what appears to have been a superspreader event. In a Facebook post from mid-November with hundreds of responses, concertgoers compared symptoms and positive test results, many of those from tests taken at home. But those data weren't added to state public health tallies of Covid's spread. It's a story that's becoming commonplace in the era of rapid home Covid testing: People who test positive are almost never counted by public health agencies charged with bringing the pandemic to heel. While home tests have distinct advantages — they're convenient and quickly inform people of their infection status so they can take steps to avoid spread the virus — most who test positive don't come to the attention of health officials unless they are sick enough to see a doctor.

<https://www.statnews.com/2021/12/07/growing-use-of-home-covid19-tests-leaves-health-agencies-in-the-dark/>

Canadian drugmaker says its COVID-19 vaccine is effective

A Canadian drugmaker said its plant-based COVID-19 vaccine showed strong protection against the virus and will soon seek authorization at home and elsewhere. Medicago announced Tuesday that its two-dose vaccine was 71% effective at preventing COVID-19 infection in a large, late-stage study that included several variants including the delta variant. The company's results did not include the emerging omicron variant, which wasn't circulating during the study period. The Quebec City company said it will seek Canadian approval “imminently” and has also begun the process to file

with regulators in the U.S., U.K. and other countries. The company said it's also preparing to send its data to the World Health Organization.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/covid-glaxosmithkline-world-health-organization-quebec-city-b1971310.html>

COVID-19: Early indications Omicron is more transmissible than Delta variant, Boris Johnson says

The early indications are that the Omicron variant of coronavirus is more transmissible than Delta, the prime minister has said. Boris Johnson made the comment as he updated his team of ministers on the latest COVID-19 situation at a cabinet meeting on Tuesday morning. Downing Street said it is still unclear how severe the disease caused by Omicron is and what impact the vaccines have on the variant.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-early-indications-omicron-is-more-transmissible-than-delta-variant-boris-johnson-says-12489029>

COVID-19: Previous infection and vaccination combine for best protection against variants

People who have overcome a coronavirus infection and also received a vaccine have higher-quality antibodies against variants, researchers have found. The new study comes amid concerns that new variants of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, such as Omicron, can still infect people who have received two vaccine doses. According to researchers at the American Society for Microbiology, the study could help identify the optimal mix of antibodies to "help guide future preventive efforts".

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-previous-infection-and-vaccination-combine-for-best-protection-against-variants-12489031>

UK study shows mixing Pfizer and AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccines with Moderna elicits better immune response

Results show support in favour of heterologous dosing which may help to advance vaccination programmes in poorer countries. A British study mixing COVID-19 vaccines has found that people had a better immune response when they received their first dose of AstraZeneca or Pfizer-BioNTech shots, followed by Moderna nine weeks later, according to Reuters. These results support mix-and-match dosing, otherwise known as heterologous dosing. This is expected to boost vaccine drives in poor and middle income countries, which may need to combine different brands between first and second shots if supplies are running low. Matthew Snape, the Oxford professor behind the study dubbed Com-COV2, said: "We found a really good immune response across the board..., in fact, higher than the threshold set by Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine two doses

https://www.pharmatimes.com/news/uk_study_shows_mixing_pfizer_and_astrazeneca_covid-19_vaccines_with_moderna_elicits_better_immune_response_1384945

Merck ties up with Thermo Fisher to make its COVID-19 pill in Canada

Drugmaker Merck & Co on Monday announced a deal with Thermo Fisher Scientific to manufacture its experimental COVID-19 pill at the medical device maker's site in Whitby, Ontario. The site will manufacture the pill, molnupiravir, for distribution in Canada and the United Kingdom as well as markets in the European Union, Asia Pacific and Latin America. The Ontario site is one of three manufacturing sites in the world for the pill, which is being developed with Ridgeback Biotherapeutics.

<https://www.reuters.com/markets/deals/merck-ties-up-with-thermo-fisher-make-its-covid-19-pill-canada-2021-12-06/>

EU regulator backs Roche's arthritis drug for treating severe COVID-19

The European Union's drug regulator on Monday recommended extending the use of Roche's RoActemra arthritis drug for adult COVID-19 patients on systemic treatment with steroids and those who need oxygen support or mechanical ventilation. The European Medicines Agency (EMA) said its human medicines committee evaluated data from a main study involving over 4,000 hospitalised

adults, and concluded that the medicine's benefits outweigh the risks for these patients. The EMA's endorsement comes after Europe crossed at least 75 million coronavirus cases as the world braces for the new Omicron variant. Formal approval is up to the European Commission, which typically follows EMA recommendations.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/eu-regulator-backs-extending-roactemra-use-adults-with-severe-covid-19-2021-12-06/>

New data shows GSK-Vir drug works against all Omicron mutations

British drugmaker GSK said on Tuesday its antibody-based COVID-19 therapy with U.S. partner Vir Biotechnology is effective against all mutations of the new Omicron coronavirus variant, citing new data from early-stage studies. The data, yet to be published in a peer-reviewed medical journal, shows that the companies' treatment, sotrovimab, is effective against all 37 identified mutations to date in the spike protein, GSK said in a statement.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/new-data-shows-gsk-vir-drug-works-against-all-omicron-mutations-2021-12-07/>

Novavax COVID-19 vaccine could be approved very soon, says EMA chief

The head of the European Medicines Agency (EMA) on Tuesday said that it could soon approve the COVID-19 vaccine developed by U.S. biotech company Novavax (NVAX.O). "The vaccine from Novavax could be authorised in the very near future," Emma Cooke told EU health ministers during a public session of a meeting in Brussels.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/novavax-covid-19-vaccine-could-be-approved-very-soon-says-ema-chief-2021-12-07/>

EU agencies endorse mix-and-match of COVID-19 vaccines

EU health agencies have recommended that COVID-19 vaccines be mixed and matched for both initial courses and booster doses as the region battles rising cases ahead of Christmas. Evidence suggests that the combination of viral vector vaccines and mRNA vaccines produces good levels of antibodies against the coronavirus causing COVID-19, the European Medicines Agency (EMA) and the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) said in a joint statement on Tuesday.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/eu-health-bodies-recommend-mix-and-match-covid-19-vaccines-2021-12-07/>

Omicron v. delta: Battle of coronavirus mutants is critical

As the omicron coronavirus variant spreads in southern Africa and pops up in countries all around the world, scientists are anxiously watching a battle play out that could determine the future of the pandemic. Can the latest competitor to the world-dominating delta overthrow it? Some scientists, poring over data from South Africa and the United Kingdom, suggest omicron could emerge the victor. "It's still early days, but increasingly, data is starting to trickle in, suggesting that omicron is likely to outcompete delta in many, if not all, places," said Dr. Jacob Lemieux, who monitors variants for a research collaboration led by Harvard Medical School.

<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-science-health-southern-africa-pandemics-2a445501cff8d0354fabcf493418365e>

New data shows GSK-Vir drug works against all Omicron mutations

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<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/new-data-shows-gsk-vir-drug-works-against-all-omicron-mutations-2021-12-07/>

Coronavirus Resurgence

South Africa's Covid Hospital Admissions More Than Double

The daily number of people admitted to hospital in South Africa with Covid-19 more than doubled on Tuesday from a day earlier. According to the National Institute for Communicable Diseases 383 people have been admitted to hospital with the disease in the last 24 hours compared with 175 in the preceding period. Of the 13,147 new cases recorded 64% were in Gauteng, the province that includes Johannesburg and Pretoria, compared with 70% of the 6,381 cases the day earlier, according to a statement from the NICD. The positivity rate of tests was 24.9% on Tuesday, down from 26.4% the day earlier. Over the 24 hours 27 deaths due to Covid-19 were recorded, taking the total confirmed death toll in the country since the pandemic began to 90,002.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-12-07/s-africa-daily-covid-hospital-admissions-more-than-double>

COVID-19: UK records 101 new Omicron variant cases in past 24 hours taking total to 437

Another 101 Omicron COVID variant cases have been recorded in the UK, taking the total across the country to 437. This compares with 90 new cases reported on Monday. The latest daily data from the UK Health Security Agency shows 72 cases were in England, 28 in Scotland, and one in Wales. So far, no confirmed Omicron cases have been recorded in Northern Ireland.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-uk-records-101-new-omicron-variant-cases-in-past-24-hours-taking-total-to-437-12489139>

COVID-19: UK records 101 new Omicron variant cases in past 24 hours taking total to 437

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<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-uk-records-101-new-omicron-variant-cases-in-past-24-hours-taking-total-to-437-12489139>

France now has 25 Omicron Covid variant cases - minister

France now has identified 25 positive cases of the Omicron COVID-19 virus variant, of which 21 were imported from people returning from Southern Africa, and four who were the result of local infection, Health Minister Olivier Veran said on Monday. Veran said the Omicron variant seems much more contagious than the Delta variant.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/france-now-has-25-omicron-covid-variant-cases-minister-2021-12-06/>

Danish health minister isolates in Brussels hotel after testing COVID-19 positive

Denmark's Health Minister Magnus Heunicke on Tuesday tested positive for COVID-19 and is now self-isolating in a hotel in Brussels, the ministry said in a statement. Heunicke had stayed in his hotel room and not been in contact with other ministers, Denmark's permanent representation in the EU told Reuters

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/danish-health-minister-isolates-brussels-hotel-after-testing-covid-19-positive-2021-12-07/>