

# COVID-19 Lockdown Exit Analysis

## 10th Dec 2021

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### Lockdown Exit

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#### **India's Serum Institute let Africa down on vaccines: Africa CDC**

The Serum Institute of India, the world's biggest vaccine maker, let Africa down by pulling out of talks to supply COVID-19 vaccines, creating distrust that has affected demand, according to the head of the Africa Centres for Disease Control. John Nkengasong on Thursday denounced recent comments from Serum that uptake of its COVID-19 shots had slowed because of low demand from Africa and vaccine hesitancy, saying the real problem was that Serum had acted unprofessionally. Nkengasong said Serum had engaged in discussions last year with the Africa Vaccine Acquisition Task Team (AVATT), and that at one point he had believed a deal was very close, but then Serum abruptly ended the talks. "Serum just decided to act in a very unprofessional manner and stop communicating with AVATT team, so that created a situation where we found ourselves extremely unhappy ... and then engaged with Johnson & Johnson," he said.

<https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/india-e2-80-99s-serum-institute-let-africa-down-on-vaccines-africa-cdc/ar-AAREO6t>

#### **Austria plans to fine vaccine holdouts up to 3600 euros a quarter**

Austria's conservative-led government on Thursday gave details of its plan to make coronavirus vaccines compulsory, saying it will apply to people 14 and over and holdouts face fines of up to 3,600 euros (\$4,071) every three months. Roughly 68% of Austria's population is fully vaccinated against COVID-19, one of the lowest rates in western Europe. Many Austrians are sceptical about vaccines, a view encouraged by the far-right Freedom Party, the third biggest in parliament.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/austria-announce-details-planned-covid-19-vaccine-mandate-2021-12-09/>

#### **How will the world decide when the pandemic is over?**

The pandemic may be widely considered over when WHO decides the virus is no longer an emergency of international concern, a designation its expert committee has been reassessing every three months. But when the most acute phases of the crisis ease within countries could vary. "There is not going to be one day when someone says, 'OK, the pandemic is over,'" says Dr. Chris Woods, an infectious disease expert at Duke University. Although there's no universally agreed-upon criteria, he said countries will likely look for sustained reduction in cases over time. Scientists expect COVID-19 will eventually settle into becoming a more predictable virus like the flu, meaning it will cause seasonal outbreaks but not the huge surges we're seeing right now. But even then, Woods says some habits, such as wearing masks in public places, might continue. "Even after the pandemic ends, COVID will still be with us," he says.

<https://apnews.com/article/when-is-pandemic-over-viral-questions-2c47fdd7611411a418a7ea18a61f5d1c>

#### **Vaccine equity is essential. Vaccine makers need to drop barriers to reaching refugees and other displaced people**

It is estimated that 167 million people, concentrated in low- and middle-income countries, are at risk of outright exclusion from Covid-19 vaccination campaigns. That number is subject to sudden shifts: overnight, a storm, a flood, an intensifying conflict, a toppled government, disputed boundary, or shifted frontline can push hundreds of thousands of people out of health systems' oversight. More people have been forcibly displaced in the last decade than ever before, because the weather is both more extreme and less predictable and violent conflict is increasingly common. For everyone,

but most starkly for the most vulnerable people, the pandemic has had a compounding effect on insecurity. Not only are these individuals omitted from vaccination campaigns, but many of them are at extra-high risk of contracting the disease because they live in close quarters with limited ability to physically distance or self-isolate and often with poor sanitation.

<https://www.statnews.com/2021/12/09/vaccine-equity-is-essential-vaccine-makers-need-to-drop-barriers-to-reaching-refugees-and-other-displaced-people/>

### **Ending the pandemic requires global solidarity, not blame**

When historians write about the Covid-19 pandemic, they will certainly highlight the essential research behind safe and effective vaccines, the remarkable pace of vaccine development, and the sacrifices made by clinicians and clinical trial participants. They will also write about the gross neglect of global partners when designing a worldwide public health strategy, which has been plagued by vaccine inequity, nationalism, and fear. The latest misguided response by the U.S. government bans incoming travel from a number of southern African countries — some which have no known cases of Covid-19 caused by the Omicron variant — but not from European ones where the variant has already been detected. Moreover, the ban does not apply to U.S. nationals flying into the U.S., who need show only proof of a negative Covid-19 test.

<https://www.statnews.com/2021/12/08/ending-pandemic-requires-global-solidarity-not-blame/>

## **Exit Strategies**

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### **Indiana hospitals see record patient count amid virus surge**

Indiana hospitals are seeing their highest-ever overall patient counts amid a monthlong COVID-19 surge and the state's largest hospital system announced Thursday it had enlisted National Guard assistance. Indiana University Health said it sought the support of the six-person National Guard teams for most of its 16 hospitals across the state because the strain on its "team members, nurses and providers has never been greater." The IU Health system isn't alone as the number of COVID-19 patients in Indiana hospitals has more than doubled in the past month, with about 2,750 such patients as of Wednesday as about 30 people a day are dying from the illness, according to state health department tracking.

<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-health-indiana-indianapolis-indiana-university-d1b1e610c0001df5a3c39d7329b54a5a>

### **More than 200 million people in the U.S. are now fully vaccinated, though deaths and cases are still rising**

The United States reached a significant milestone late Wednesday, with more than 200 million people now fully vaccinated against the coronavirus — about 60 percent of the population. In the past week, an average of 1.92 million doses per day were administered — a 35 percent increase over the week before — according to data from The Washington Post's tracker.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2021/12/09/coronavirus-vaccine-milestone-us-omicron/>

### **Fauci predicts 'matter of when, not if' fully vaccinated definition includes three jabs**

Dr Anthony Fauci, the Director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease, said he believes that the definition of "fully vaccinated" will soon include having a third Covid booster shot. The doctor made the comments during an interview on CNN. "It's going to be a matter of when, not if" getting a booster shot will be considered being "fully vaccinated," Dr Fauci said. He stressed that the comment was his personal view, and was not indicative of any current policy discussions in the Biden administration to make coronavirus vaccine boosters mandatory for full vaccination status. Dr Fauci's comments come as US health workers continue to grapple with a spike in cases and hospitalisation caused by the delta variant and researchers continue to investigate the newly emerged omicron variant.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/fauci-booster-vaccinated-omicron-coronavirus-b1972>

[400.html](#)

### **Covid-19 news: England activates Plan B to slow omicron spread**

UK prime minister Boris Johnson has announced new measures in England to reduce the spread of covid-19 with cases of the omicron variant growing rapidly. Mandatory mask-wearing will be extended to indoor public venues including cinemas, theatres and places of worship from Friday but will not be required in pubs and restaurants, while the guidance to work from home where possible will return on Monday. The NHS covid pass, which can be obtained by having two vaccines or a negative lateral flow test, will be required for entry into nightclubs and other large venues from 15 December. Johnson warned it is clear that the new variant is "growing much faster" than the delta variant, and cases of omicron could be doubling every two or three days. He said Christmas parties and nativities could go ahead, but urged people to "exercise due caution" and get their booster jabs. The Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) warned omicron is spreading "rapidly" and it is possible hospital admissions from the new variant in England could exceed 1000 per day - and still be increasing - by the end of the year. "The overall scale of any wave of hospitalisations without interventions is highly uncertain, but the peak could reach several times this level," the minutes from a meeting held on Tuesday said.

<https://www.newscientist.com/article/2237475-covid-19-news-england-activates-plan-b-to-slow-omicron-spread/>

### **WHO exec: donated COVID-19 vaccines with short shelf life 'major problem'**

Wealthy countries donating COVID-19 vaccines with a relatively short shelf life has been a "major problem" for the COVAX dose sharing programme, a senior official at the World Health Organization said on Thursday. Kate O'Brien, the WHO's vaccine director, said in a briefing the proportion of wasted doses is smaller in countries receiving doses through COVAX than in many high-income countries. Her comments come as concerns grow that many African countries are finding they do not have the capacity to get shots in arms before they expire.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/who-exec-donated-covid-19-vaccines-with-short-shelf-life-major-problem-2021-12-09/>

### **Austria to announce details of planned COVID-19 vaccine mandate**

Austria's conservative-led government on Thursday gave details of its plan to make coronavirus vaccines compulsory, saying it will apply to people 14 and over and holdouts face fines of up to 3,600 euros (\$4,071) every three months. Roughly 68% of Austria's population is fully vaccinated against COVID-19, one of the lowest rates in western Europe. Many Austrians are sceptical about vaccines, a view encouraged by the far-right Freedom Party, the third biggest in parliament.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/austria-announce-details-planned-covid-19-vaccine-mandate-2021-12-09/>

### **U.S. campaign to vaccinate young children off to sluggish start despite abundant supply**

The United States rushed millions of COVID-19 vaccine doses for children ages 5 to 11 across the nation, but demand for inoculations for younger kids has been low, more than a dozen state public health officials and physicians said. Of the 28 million eligible U.S. children in that age group, around 5 million have received at least one dose, according to federal data, likely satisfying initial pent up demand from parents who were waiting to vaccinate their kids.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/us-campaign-vaccinate-young-children-off-sluggish-start-despite-abundant-supply-2021-12-09/>

### **Finland to require proof of COVID-19 vaccination from healthcare workers**

Finland plans to make COVID-19 vaccines mandatory for health and social care workers, the government said on Wednesday. The new legislation would also allow social and health care employers to access information about employees' COVID-19 vaccinations and possible infections in the past. "This regulation would make it possible to ensure the health and safety of social and healthcare workers and thus the availability of services, Minister of Family Affairs and Social Services Krista Kiuru told a news conference.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/finland-require-proof-covid-19-vaccination-healthcare-workers-2021-12-08/>

### **Capital injection: Slovakia offers cash to over-60s to get COVID shots**

Slovakia is to give cash handouts to people over 60 who get vaccinated against the coronavirus or have their booster shot, aiming to spur inoculation rates lagging others in the European Union. Parliament approved the payments on Thursday, giving the go-ahead to a proposal by the government which had at first considered handing out vouchers for hotels or restaurants but opted instead on payouts. Those receiving booster shots by mid-January will get 300 euros (\$340), while over-60s who sign up for the vaccine by that time are entitled to 200 euros.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/capital-injection-slovakia-offers-cash-over-60s-get-covid-shots-2021-12-09/>

### **WHO: wealthy countries may hoard COVID-19 shots again to fight new variant**

Wealthy countries may start to hoard COVID-19 vaccines again, threatening global supplies as they seek to shore up stocks to fight the new Omicron variant of the virus, a senior World Health Organization official said on Thursday. The warning by the WHO's vaccine director, Kate O'Brien, comes as supplies to the COVAX dose-sharing programme run by the WHO and vaccine charity GAVI have increased in the past few months due to donations from wealthy countries and after India eased limits on exports of vaccines.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/who-wealthy-countries-may-hoard-covid-19-shots-again-fight-new-variant-2021-12-09/>

### **People with health issues or inactivated vaccine should get COVID-19 booster - WHO**

The World Health Organization (WHO) recommended on Thursday that people who are immunocompromised or received an inactivated COVID-19 vaccine should receive a booster dose to protect against waning immunity. Many countries have been rolling out booster shots, targeting the elderly and people with underlying health issues, but worries about the new, more transmissible Omicron variant have prompted some to expand their use to larger portions of their populations.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/whos-advisory-panel-outlines-recommendations-boosters-2021-12-09/>

### **Eritrea has not started vaccinating against COVID, says Africa CDC**

Eritrea has yet to start vaccinating its population against COVID-19, the head of the African Centres for Disease Control said on Thursday. "Eritrea is the only country now that has not joined the family of 55 member states (of the African Union) that are moving forward with vaccination, but we are not giving up," John Nkengasong told an online media briefing.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/eritrea-has-not-started-vaccinating-against-covid-says-africa-cdc-2021-12-09/>

### **WHO warns against vaccine hoarding as poor countries go without**

Slovakia will on Friday re-open non-essential shops and some services for those vaccinated against COVID-19 while at the same time extending a lockdown for others and closing some schools, Health Minister Vladimir Lengvarsky said. The central European country of 5.5 million people has struggled with one of the world's worst coronavirus waves in the past few weeks, and shut shops and services for all people for two weeks ending Dec. 9.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/who-warns-against-vaccine-hoarding-poor-countries-go-without-2021-12-09/>

### **Slovakia to re-open shops for vaccinated, others face longer lockdown**

Slovakia will on Friday re-open non-essential shops and some services for those vaccinated against COVID-19 while at the same time extending a lockdown for others and closing some schools, Health Minister Vladimir Lengvarsky said. The central European country of 5.5 million people has struggled with one of the world's worst coronavirus waves in the past few weeks, and shut shops and services

for all people for two weeks ending Dec. 9. Lengvasky had sought to extend the general lockdown until Dec.16, and to ease it for the vaccinated from Dec. 17.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/slovakia-re-open-shops-vaccinated-others-face-longer-lockdown-2021-12-08/>

### **After party outcry, Britain implores people:obey COVID-19 rules**

Britain on Thursday implored people to obey tougher restrictions to slow the spread of the Omicron coronavirus variant, after revelations about alleged lockdown parties at Prime Minister Boris Johnson's residence provoked an outcry over hypocrisy. Johnson imposed restrictions on England on Wednesday, just hours after apologising for a video apparently showing staff laughing about a party in Downing Street during a 2020 Christmas COVID-19 lockdown when such festivities were banned.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/acting-now-covid-will-help-avoid-lockdown-later-britains-javid-says-2021-12-09/>

### **The U.S. is at a Kasserine Pass moment for Covid leaders**

Two years into the pandemic, the country's efforts have stagnated. We have endured the catastrophic winter surge of 2020-2021, the Delta surge this summer, and are now being buffeted by the entirely predictable global rise of the Omicron variant of SARS-CoV-2. It is too early to predict Omicron's impact, but the failure to detect it, and the surprise U.S. health care leaders have expressed about its appearance, are intolerable. All of these result from an unrealistic and simplistic response to Covid-19 and a failure to address the basic tendency of viruses to mutate and become immune to a single vaccine or therapeutic.

<https://www.statnews.com/2021/12/09/kasserine-pass-moment-covid-leaders/>

## **Partisan Exits**

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### **Coronavirus: Vaccine refused by more than 230 Hertfordshire hospital workers**

More than 230 hospital workers in parts of Hertfordshire have refused to have a Covid-19 vaccination, NHS bosses said. Last month the government announced proposals that health workers undertaking any CQC-regulated activity should be fully vaccinated by April. A meeting of the West Herts Hospitals Trust board identified 239 staff who had so far refused the vaccination and the status of 132 staff was "unknown". The trust said 91% of its staff had been vaccinated. The report presented to the board said senior leaders and clinicians would play a role in proactively encouraging staff to take the vaccine, the Local Democracy Reporting Service said.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-beds-bucks-herts-59592801>

### **U.S. Senate passes Republican bill to overturn Biden vaccine mandate**

The Democratic-controlled U.S. Senate on Wednesday approved a Republican measure that would overturn President Joe Biden's COVID-19 vaccine-or-test mandate for private businesses, with two Democrats joining Republicans to back the initiative. The 52-48 vote sends the legislation to the Democratic-led House of Representatives, where it faces strong headwinds, while Biden has threatened to veto it.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/senate-republican-push-block-bidens-vaccine-mandate-secures-democratic-support-2021-12-08/>

### **Ukraine spa town stands out amid nation's vaccine hesitancy**

A small spa town in western Ukraine is standing out in a European country where only 29% of the people have received COVID-19 vaccine shots, and locals credit their community spirit for fending off the worst of the pandemic. In Morshyn, a scenic town nestled at the Carpathian foothills in the Lviv region, 74% of its 3,439 residents had been fully vaccinated as of late November. While Ukrainian authorities have imposed new restrictions amid a surge of infections and deaths blamed on a slow pace of vaccination and designated the region around Morshyn as a "red zone" where most public places have been shut down, the wellness centers in Morshyn have remained fully open.

<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-lifestyle-health-business-europe-0ae2cb191355aebd9c36b28dcb28>

## Scientific Viewpoint

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### FDA expands Pfizer COVID booster, opens extra dose to age 16

The U.S. is expanding COVID-19 boosters, ruling that 16- and 17-year-olds can get a third dose of Pfizer's vaccine. The U.S. and many other nations already were urging adults to get booster shots to pump up immunity that can wane months after vaccination, calls that intensified with the discovery of the worrisome new omicron variant. On Thursday, the Food and Drug Administration gave emergency authorization for 16- and 17-year-olds to get a third dose of the vaccine made by Pfizer and its partner BioNTech -- if it's been six months since their last shot.

<https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/us/fda-expands-pfizer-covid-booster-opens-extra-dose-to-age-16/ar-AAREJ77>

### Could a One-Shot Coronavirus Vaccine Protect You From All Variants?

As Covid-19 began spreading in early 2020, one of Linfa Wang's first ideas was to test the blood of people who'd survived a previous coronavirus outbreak. The virologist, who works out of Duke-NUS Medical School, a collaboration between Duke and the National University of Singapore, has been studying bat-borne viruses for decades. He'd helped show that SARS-CoV-1, which killed almost 800 people in 2003, likely jumped to humans from horseshoe bats. Wang's new theory was that people who'd recovered from the original SARS might harbor antibodies that could help fight the new one, SARS-CoV-2.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2021-12-09/could-a-one-shot-coronavirus-vaccine-protect-you-from-all-variants>

### COVID-19: Omicron variant may be 'milder' but its infection rate could be 'devastating', expert warns

The new Omicron variant of coronavirus appears to be causing "milder" cold-like symptoms, but its reported rapid infection rate "even in the vaccinated" could still have "devastating" consequences, a top scientist has warned. Early data has suggested the new variant could result in less severe disease than previous waves. However, Tim Spector, lead scientist on the Zoe COVID Study, warned against complacency, saying, "this is not a reason to be relaxed about Omicron".

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-omicron-variant-may-be-milder-but-its-infection-rate-could-be-devastating-expert-warns-12490761>

### Doctors weigh COVID-19 impact on children as vaccine drives ramp up

One month after her son Eran had recovered from a mild case of COVID-19, Sara Bittan rushed the three-year-old to the emergency room. He had high fever, a rash, his eyes and lower body were swollen and red, his stomach was hurting and he was crying in pain. Eventually diagnosed with the rare multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children (MIS-C), also known as pediatric inflammatory multisystem syndrome, or PIMS, Eran was hospitalized in October for a week and has fully recovered, Bittan said.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/doctors-weigh-covid-19-impact-children-vaccine-drives-ramp-up-2021-12-09/>

### Britain starts recruiting for real-world COVID antiviral trial

British researchers on Wednesday started recruitment for a clinical trial to test antiviral COVID-19 treatments for use in people early on in the disease who are at higher risks of complications, starting with Merck's molnupiravir. Britain became the first country in the world to approve molnupiravir, which was jointly developed by U.S.-based Merck & Co Inc and Ridgeback Biotherapeutics, in November. Britain's Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) recommended the antiviral pill for use in people with mild to moderate COVID-19 and at least one risk factor for developing severe illness, such as obesity, older age diabetes, and heart disease.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/britain-starts-recruiting-real-world-covid-antiviral-trial-2021-12-08/>

### **U.S. FDA authorizes use of AstraZeneca COVID-19 antibody cocktail**

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration on Wednesday authorized the use of AstraZeneca's antibody cocktail to prevent COVID-19 infections in individuals with weak immune systems or a history of severe side effects from coronavirus vaccines. The antibody cocktail, Evusheld, is only authorized for adults and adolescents who are not currently infected with the novel coronavirus and have not recently been exposed to an infected individual, the regulator said. The authorization for the therapy, made up of two monoclonal antibodies tixagevimab and cilgavimab, marks a significant step for AstraZeneca, whose widely used COVID-19 vaccine is yet to be approved by U.S. authorities.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/us-fda-authorizes-astrazenecas-covid-19-antibody-drug-2021-12-08/>

### **China approves Bii Biosciences antibody COVID treatment**

China's medical products regulator said on Wednesday it had approved the use of Bii Biosciences' neutralising antibody cocktail for COVID-19, the first treatment of its type against the virus given the go-ahead in the country. The combination of BII-196/BII-198 showed a 80% reduction of hospitalisation and deaths in non-hospitalised COVID-19 patients at high risk of developing severe disease, based on final results from a Phase III clinical trial, Bii said in a statement on Thursday.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/china-approves-bii-biosciences-covid-19-treatment-2021-12-08/>

### **Vaccine makers racing to update COVID shots, just in case**

Vaccine makers are racing to update their COVID-19 shots against the newest coronavirus threat even before it's clear a change is needed, just in case. Experts doubt today's shots will become useless but say it's critical to see how fast companies could produce a reformulated dose and prove it works -- because whatever happens with omicron, this newest mutant won't be the last. Omicron "is pulling the fire alarm. Whether it turns out to be a false alarm, it would be really good to know if we can actually do this -- get a new vaccine rolled out and be ready," said immunologist E. John Wherry of the University of Pennsylvania.

<https://apnews.com/article/omicron-variant-vaccine-makers-updating-shots-ea635d3e28d208ab1e4083537506bb99>

### **The AP Interview: CDC chief says omicron mostly mild so far**

More than 40 people in the U.S. have been found to be infected with the omicron variant so far, and more than three-quarters of them had been vaccinated, the chief of the CDC said Wednesday. But she said nearly all of them were only mildly ill. In an interview with The Associated Press, Dr. Rochelle Walensky, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, said the data is very limited and the agency is working on a more detailed analysis of what the new mutant form of the coronavirus might hold for the U.S. "What we generally know is the more mutations a variant has, the higher level you need your immunity to be. ... We want to make sure we bolster everybody's immunity. And that's really what motivated the decision to expand our guidance," Walensky said, referencing the recent approval of boosters for all adults.

<https://apnews.com/article/ap-interview-coronavirus-omicron-rochelle-walensky-83c6607d1809a922ae0f892e22a5377f>

### **FDA expands authorization for Pfizer's Covid-19 booster to cover 16- and 17-year-olds**

The Food and Drug Administration on Thursday expanded the emergency use authorization for Pfizer and BioNTech's Covid-19 booster shot to cover 16- and 17-year-olds, making it the only booster shot currently available in the United States for teenagers in this age group. Within hours, Rochelle Walensky, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, signed off on the expanded authorization, clearing the way for 16- and 17-year olds to book booster shot appointments. "Today, CDC is strengthening its booster recommendations and encouraging everyone 16 and older to

receive a booster shot," Walensky said in a statement. "We know that Covid-19 vaccines are safe and effective, and I strongly encourage adolescents ages 16 and 17 to get their booster if they are at least 6 months post their initial Pfizer vaccination series."

<https://www.statnews.com/2021/12/09/fda-expands-authorization-for-pfizers-covid-19-booster-to-cover-16-and-17-year-olds/>

## **Coronavirus Resurgence**

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### **US Covid cases surge as vaccine progress slows and Omicron variant sparks fears**

For Dr Rina D'Abramo of the MetroHealth System in Cleveland, it's difficult when patients in the emergency room tell her they have not been vaccinated. "You can hear it in their voice when you say, 'Are you vaccinated?'" said D'Abramo, who works at a hospital in the Brecksville suburb. "They shrink down and are like, 'No. Now I know why I need to be vaccinated.'" Unfortunately, there are plenty of people in Ohio and the rest of the US too who have not yet learned that lesson, even as infection rates nationally start to surge again amid fears of the possibly highly contagious new Omicron variant. Ohio is one of the states that has seen the largest recent increases in hospitalizations due to Covid as the number of cases climbs across the country. There has been 19% increase in hospitalizations over the past two weeks in the United States, according to a New York Times analysis of data

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/dec/09/us-covid-cases-surge-vaccine-progress-slows-omicron-variant>

### **Public urged to regularly use lateral flow tests to fight Covid-19 spread**

The public is being urged to regularly take lateral flow tests as a measure to stem the spread of Covid-19. Chief medical officer Sir Michael McBride said it has been in Executive guidance for some period of time. He described it as important to delay as long as possible further introductions of the Omicron variant.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/northern-ireland-chief-medical-officer-omicron-pcr-test-public-health-agency-b1972324.html>

### **Pakistan detects its first case of the Omicron variant of coronavirus**

Pakistan has detected its first case of the Covid omicron variant that has now spread to almost 60 countries. Authorities on Thursday announced that the first case had been found in Pakistan's most populous city of Karachi in a resident who was undergoing treatment at a private hospital. Without revealing any further details, spokesperson for the southern province of Sindh told Reuters news agency that the person was unvaccinated and had recently travelled to another country. The spokesperson added that the infected person's contacts were being traced.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/asia/south-asia/pakistan-covid-omicron-variant-cases-b1972723.html>

### **WHO's Tedros says Omicron coronavirus variant highlights "perilous situation"**

The emergence of the Omicron coronavirus variant highlights the "perilous situation" the world is in roughly two years after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said on Thursday. He added that he was disappointed that countries had imposed blanket travel bans on southern Africa over Omicron and that transparency would help end the pandemic.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/whos-tedros-says-omicron-coronavirus-variant-highlights-perilous-situation-2021-12-09/>

### **Japan's COVID-19 cases defy Asia rebound, yet fears remain for winter wave**

Japan's COVID-19 infections are falling in contrast with rebounds in other parts of Asia, baffling experts. New daily infections have slowed to fewer than one per million people, the least among major economies except China, and fatalities have fallen to zero in recent days. South Korea, with similar vaccination coverage, is seeing record infections. Cases remain elevated in Singapore and

are rising again in Australia as authorities there relax stringent controls on movement

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/japans-covid-19-cases-defy-asia-rebound-yet-fears-remain-winter-wave-2021-12-09/>

### **Denmark reintroduces some COVID-19 restrictions**

Denmark will again impose restrictions aimed at curbing the rapid spread of COVID-19 including the new Omicron variant, the country's prime minister said on Wednesday.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/denmark-reintroduces-some-covid-19-restrictions-2021-12-08/>

### **South Africa reports nearly 20000 COVID-19 cases, an Omicron-wave record**

South Africa reported nearly 20,000 new COVID-19 cases on Wednesday, a record since the Omicron variant was detected, and 36 new COVID-related deaths. It was not immediately clear how many of the infections were caused by Omicron, given only a fraction of samples are sequenced, but experts believe it is driving South Africa's fourth wave of infections. The statistics from the National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD) brought the confirmed number of cases in the country to 3.071 million, with more than 90,000 COVID-linked deaths since the pandemic started.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/south-africa-reports-nearly-20000-new-covid-19-cases-record-omicron-wave-2021-12-08/>

### **Coronavirus spreads in Australia's pubs; Omicron cases linked to party boat**

COVID-19 infections have been spreading in pubs and clubs in Australia's biggest city, including three new cases of the Omicron variant found among people who went on a harbour party cruise, sending officials rushing to trace contacts. Authorities have been easing restrictions in Sydney since early October when the city emerged from a nearly four-month lockdown to contain the Delta coronavirus variant after the population reached higher vaccination levels. "We have seen recently increased transmission in larger social venues ... and that is certainly a contributing factor to the increase in cases," Marianne Gale, New South Wales Deputy Chief Health Officer, said in a video posted on Twitter.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/coronavirus-spreads-australias-pubs-omicron-cases-linked-party-boat-2021-12-09/>