

COVID-19 Lockdown Exit Analysis

18th Jan 2022

Lockdown Exit

Beijing Says International Mail Is Possible Culprit in First Omicron Case

Health authorities in Beijing said they haven't been able to trace the source of the Chinese capital's first local Omicron infection but indicated it might have arrived by international mail. Beijing announced the Omicron case on Saturday after the patient developed a low-grade fever on Friday and took a voluntary test that came back positive for Covid-19. Authorities sealed off the patient's residential compound and office building, and launched contact-tracing efforts. Tests for more than 16,500 people identified as potentially being exposed to the patient came back negative, Pang Xinghuo, deputy director of the city's municipal Center for Disease Control and Prevention, said at a press conference on Monday.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/beijing-says-international-mail-is-possible-culprit-in-first-omicron-case-11642421284>

CDC Director Aims to Improve Covid-19 Messaging, Data Collection

One year into her tenure as director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Rochelle Walensky acknowledged that she hasn't been clear enough with the American public. She says the pandemic threw curveballs that she should have anticipated. She thinks she should have made it clearer to the public that new rules and guidelines were subject to change if the nature of the fight against Covid-19 shifted again. "I think what I have not conveyed is the uncertainty in a lot of these situations," Dr. Walensky said in an interview with The Wall Street Journal. The CDC director has come under fire from public-health experts for the way she has communicated pandemic guidelines from mask wearing to isolation requirements. Some Biden administration officials said the CDC's explanations of new and amended guidelines can sometimes be hard to grasp.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/cdc-director-aims-to-improve-covid-19-messaging-data-collection-11642429801>

Chile Toughens Mobility Limits in Santiago on Covid-19 Surge

Chile's Health Ministry toughened mobility restrictions in Santiago's Metropolitan Region and 45 other municipalities nationwide, as the government copes with a surge in Covid-19 cases due to the Omicron variant. Fewer people will be allowed at events in homes and public spaces, and restaurants will cut seating capacity, the Health Ministry informed on Monday. Healthcare workers will also start receiving a second booster shot this week.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-17/chile-toughens-mobility-limits-in-santiago-on-covid-19-surge-kvj20o56>

Fourth Pfizer Dose Is Insufficient to Ward Off Omicron, Israeli Trial Suggests

A fourth dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine was insufficient to prevent infection with the omicron variant of Covid-19, according to preliminary data from a trial in Israel released Monday. Two weeks after the start of the trial of 154 medical personnel at the Sheba Medical Center in Tel Aviv, researchers found the vaccine successfully raised antibody levels. But that only offered a partial defense against omicron, according to Gili Regev-Yochay, the trial's lead researcher. Vaccines which were more effective against previous variants offer less protection with omicron, she said. Still, those infected in the trial had only slight symptoms or none at all.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-17/israel-trial-suggests-4th-dose-not-warding-off-omicron-infection>

Beijing Olympics tickets will not be publicly sold due to COVID-19

Olympics set to begin on Feb. 4 will be distributed to "targeted" groups of people and will not be sold to the general public, the organising committee said on Monday, in the latest setback to the Games inflicted by COVID-19.

<https://www.reuters.com/lifestyle/sports/beijing-olympics-tickets-will-not-be-publicly-sold-due-covid-19-2022-01-17/>

French COVID hospitalisations see biggest jump since Nov 2020

The number of people with COVID-19 in French hospitals rose by 888 to 25,775, the health ministry said on Monday, the biggest one-day increase since early November 2020 - before the start of the country's vaccination campaign. The last time the number of COVID patients was over 25,000 was on Dec. 17, 2020. Health ministry data on Monday also showed that the number of people with COVID-19 in intensive care units rose by 61 to 3,913, after being flat to stable for four days.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/french-covid-hospitalisations-see-biggest-jump-since-nov-2020-2022-01-17/>

Chinese cities on high COVID-19 alert as peak Lunar New Year travel season starts

Several Chinese cities went on high COVID-19 alert as the Lunar New Year holiday travel season started on Monday, requiring travellers to report their trips days before their arrival, as the Omicron variant reached more areas including Beijing. Authorities have warned the highly contagious Omicron adds to the increased risk of COVID-19 transmission as hundreds of millions of people travel around China for the Lunar New Year holiday starting at the end of the month. Cities such as Luoyang in central China and Jieyang in the south said on Sunday travellers need to report to communities, employers or hotels their trips three days ahead of arrival. The southwestern city of Yulin said on Saturday those who want to enter should fill in a digital form including their health credentials and trip details one day in advance.

<https://arynews.tv/china-cities-covid-19-lunar-new-year-travel-season-starts/>

COVID updates: Canada approves Pfizer COVID pill

Several Chinese cities are on high alert as hundreds of millions of people travel around China before the Lunar New Year celebration on February 1. Governments around the world are also enforcing stricter measures to contain the spread of the highly contagious Omicron variant. In the Philippines, unvaccinated commuters have been banned from accessing public transport, despite opposition.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/1/17/china-on-high-covid-alert-ahead-of-lunar-new-year-liveblog>

Analysis: China's 'zero-COVID' campaign under strain as Omicron surges

China is doubling down on its "zero-COVID" strategy, saying the spread of the potentially milder Omicron variant is no reason to lower its guard amid warnings of economic disruptions and even public unrest as lockdowns drag into a third year. As other countries talk about a transition from "pandemic" to "endemic", China has stepped up policies to stamp out any new outbreak as soon as it arises, sealing off cities, shutting transport links and launching mass testing programmes.

<https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/analysis-chinas-zero-covid-campaign-under-strain-as-omicron-surges/ar-AASRZS4>

Return of the flu: EU faces threat of prolonged 'twindemic'

Influenza has returned to Europe at a faster-than-expected rate this winter after almost disappearing last year, raising concerns about a prolonged "twindemic" with COVID-19 amid some doubts about the effectiveness of flu vaccines. Lockdowns, mask-wearing and social distancing that have become the norm in Europe during the COVID-19 pandemic knocked out flu last winter, temporarily eradicating a virus that globally kills about 650,000 a year, according to EU figures.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/return-flu-eu-faces-threat-prolonged-twindemic-2022-01-17/>

Beijing Winter Olympics: Tickets won't be sold to general public due to 'severe and complex' COVID-19 situation

Tickets for Beijing's Winter Olympics will not be sold to the general public due to worries about

COVID. Only "targeted" groups will be able to get tickets for the games - which start on 4 February, said organisers. International fans are already excluded because of China's strict border policy to prevent importing cases

<https://news.sky.com/story/beijing-winter-olympics-tickets-wont-be-sold-to-general-public-due-to-severe-and-complex-covid-19-situation-12518391>

French parliament approves vaccine pass

France's parliament gave final approval on Sunday to the government's latest measures to tackle the COVID-19 virus, including a vaccine pass contested by anti-vaccine protestors. Lawmakers in the lower house of parliament voted 215 in favour to 58 against, paving the way for the law to enter force in the coming days. The new law, which had a rough ride through parliament with opposition parties finding some of its provisions too tough, will require people to have a certificate of vaccination to enter public places like restaurants, cafes, cinemas and long-distance trains.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/french-parliament-approves-vaccine-pass-2022-01-16/>

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<https://www.reuters.com/world/china/chinese-cities-high-covid-19-alert-peak-lunar-new-year-travel-season-starts-2022-01-17/>

COVID review for England could come this week, early next - source

A review of "Plan B" measures to tackle the spread of COVID-19 in England could take place this week or early next, a senior government source said on Monday, part of efforts to move attention away from lockdown-breaking events at Downing Street. Prime Minister Boris Johnson hopes to reset his agenda after coming under fire for attending a gathering in the garden of his Downing Street office and residence in May 2020, when strict COVID-19 rules forbade almost all socialising.

[reuters.com/world/uk/covid-review-england-could-come-this-week-early-next-source-2022-01-17/](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/covid-review-england-could-come-this-week-early-next-source-2022-01-17/)

'Upside down again': Omicron surge roils U.S. small businesses

Phillip Howard pointed toward a stack of black ski pants piled atop a counter in his winter sports shop as evidence of the hurdles small business owners still face as the pandemic drags on. The pants were supposed to arrive by August at Troy's Ski Lubbock shop in west Texas - well before his five-month hot season of selling that kicks off in October. Instead, they came from China the first week of January, delayed by supply-chain failures.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/upside-down-again-omicron-surge-roils-us-small-businesses-2022-01-16/>

Exit Strategies

Omicron Fuels Fresh Surge, Threatening India's Hospitals Anew

With less than half of India's population fully vaccinated against Covid-19 and Omicron-variant infections rising rapidly, public-health experts warn that the healthcare system is again vulnerable—months after being overwhelmed by a surge of cases. India reported 141,986 new cases on Saturday, more than six times the number a week earlier. That official Covid-19 case count, like the government's death tally—which stands at about 480,000—is a vast undercounting, many health experts say. The reproduction rate of the virus—the number of new infections caused by a single contagious person—recently hit 2.69, exceeding last year's peak of 1.69, a government adviser said Wednesday. The official case count is expected surpass its daily record of 414,000, set in May, before the surge peaks in February.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/omicron-fuels-fresh-surge-threatening-indias-hospitals-anew-11641649808>

Apple makes Covid-19 booster shots mandatory for all employees

Amid the surge in Omicron cases in the US, Apple is making booster vaccines mandatory for all its employees. Apple employees must submit proof of Covid-19 boosters or be required to take tests to enter stores and offices from February 15. 'Due to waning efficacy of the primary series of Covid-19 vaccines and the emergence of highly transmissible variants such as Omicron, a booster shot is now part of staying up to date with your Covid-19 vaccination to protect against severe disease,' according to an internal memo

<https://metro.co.uk/2022/01/17/apple-makes-covid-19-booster-shots-mandatory-for-all-employees-15929863/>

Omicron Variant Encourages Some to Move Past Covid-19 Precautions, Despite Risks

Omicron's ubiquity and reduced severity are encouraging some people to drop pandemic precautions, decisions that public-health experts say present new risks for people at risk of severe Covid-19 outcomes. People, including those who got vaccinated and boosted and curtailed their activities for months, are letting their guard down in the face of a variant that appears to be infecting everyone but causing largely mild illness.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/omicron-variant-encourages-some-to-move-past-covid-19-precautions-despite-risks-11642424401>

COVID-19: Self-isolation period in England cut to five days as 16 and 17-year-olds invited for booster jabs

The time people must spend in isolation for contracting COVID has been reduced to five days in England, as 16 and 17-year-olds have been invited to receive their COVID-19 vaccine booster. People in England can now leave quarantine after five full days providing they test negative on days five and six. Ministers reduced the isolation period from seven days to five to help address staff shortages by allowing people to return to work sooner.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-self-isolation-period-in-england-cut-to-five-days-as-16-and-17-year-olds-invited-for-booster-jabs-12518083>

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<https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/covid-review-england-could-come-this-week-early-next-source-2022-01-17/>

Omicron Surge Spurs New Covid-19 Relief Push in Congress

Hotels, fitness clubs, tour bus companies and minor league ball clubs are part of a long line of businesses seeking billions of dollars in new Covid-19 relief aid—if they can overcome opposition from many Republicans who say Congress has already given enough. Lobbyists for the businesses say their campaign has taken on new urgency as the Omicron variant sweeps across the country, forcing many companies to scale back or shut down operations as employees call in sick and customers cancel orders and reservations.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/omicron-surge-spurs-new-covid-19-relief-push-in-congress-11642329002>

China urges local govts to minimize impact from COVID-19 curbs over Lunar New Year

China's state planner has urged local governments to minimise the impact from COVID-19 restrictions over the upcoming Lunar New Year holiday to help a rebound in consumption, as rising cases of the Omicron variant threaten economic growth. "Local governments should avoid simplified, one-size-fits-all ... COVID-19 epidemic and control measures (over the holiday) and

minimise the impact on the people's life," the National Development and Reform Commission said. It said low-risk places in China meet the reasonable demand for short trips from urban and rural residents, and step up the supply of everyday products over the holiday period.

<https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/china-urges-local-govts-to-minimize-impact-from-covid-19-curbs-over-lunar-new-year/ar-AASOQ4j>

1st kids' Omicron ward opens with classes, clowns, and doctors bracing for 'war'

Preparing themselves for an influx of kids battling COVID-19, Israeli doctors have opened the country's first pediatric Omicron unit. With Omicron spreading fast in schools and other places where kids mix, significant hospitalizations are inevitable, according to Dr. Moshe Ashkenazi, director of the new ward at Sheba Medical Center. "Omicron appears to be less virulent than other variants, but the sheer numbers being infected will mean children being hospitalized," Ashkenazi told The Times of Israel, adding that the current spiraling numbers bring back vivid memories of the first wave in early 2020. "We have a sense of deja vu from the first wave, and we're preparing ourselves for a war, just as we did in the first wave," he said.

<https://www.timesofisrael.com/1st-kids-omicron-ward-opens-with-classes-clowns-and-doctors-bracing-for-war/>

Fighting Covid-19 in Kibera, one of Africa's largest informal settlements

Nearly 10 months after a grandmother in England became the first person in the world to get vaccinated against Covid-19 outside of a clinical trial, we were finally able to start vaccinating residents of Kibera, one of Africa's largest informal settlements. That first jab was a long time coming. In March 2021, the Kenyan government prioritized vaccination as one of the key measures to contain the spread of Covid-19, reduce community transmission, severe illness, hospitalizations, and deaths. The informal employment sector had significantly closed, four out of five residents of Kibera and other informal settlements had lost their income, and a majority of households were facing hunger

<https://www.statnews.com/2022/01/17/fighting-covid-in-kibera-large-informal-settlement-in-africa/>

COVID program delivers 1 billion doses to poorer countries

The World Health Organization said that a U.N.-backed program shipping coronavirus vaccines to many poor countries has now delivered 1 billion doses, but that milestone "is only a reminder of the work that remains" after hoarding and stockpiling in rich countries. A shipment of 1.1 million COVID-19 vaccine doses to Rwanda on Saturday included the billionth dose supplied via the COVAX program, the U.N. health agency said. WHO has long criticized unequal distribution of vaccines and called for manufacturers and other countries to prioritize COVAX. It said that, as of Thursday, 36 of its 194 member countries had vaccinated less than 10% of their population and 88 had vaccinated less than 40%.

<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-technology-health-business-europe-7335a42a23db0386c24aa2141bd33dd8>

Partisan Exits

Don't demonise those who refuse the Covid vaccine

I read David Green's letter on anti-vaxxers (12 January) and empathised with the letter written in response (13 January). The week before Christmas my dad died of Covid. The intensive care consultant couldn't have been clearer that, in her opinion, if he had been vaccinated he would not have developed Covid pneumonia to the severity that he did. He died very frightened and asking his family to come and be with him, and we couldn't. The experience traumatised my sister so badly that she was hospitalised with psychosis three days after his passing. The reason he wasn't vaccinated is because his mind was poisoned with conspiracy theories and misinformation exacerbated by two years of lockdown and reduced social contact. While I am angry that he would not get vaccinated, I don't think any good would ever come from criminalising his choice. Is it not

anti-vaxxers who should be demonised and prosecuted. It is the people, organisations and companies who perpetuate lies and make money from the fear felt by vulnerable people.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/16/dont-demonise-those-who-refuse-the-covid-vaccine>

COVID-19: Credit Suisse chairman Antonio Horta-Osorio resigns nine months into role after bank probe finds he breached quarantine rules

The departure of Mr Horta-Osorio, a former CEO of Lloyds Banking Group, was announced by Switzerland-based Credit Suisse on Monday in an abrupt move that comes less than a year after the Portuguese banker was brought in to clean up the company's corporate culture.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-credit-suisse-chairman-antonio-horta-osorio-resigns-nine-months-into-role-after-bank-probe-finds-he-breached-quarantine-rules-12518096>

Anti-vaccine far-right rally attracts hundreds in Hungary

Over a thousand people marched in Budapest protesting against COVID-19 inoculation at a rally organised by the far-right Our Homeland Movement, which has been campaigning on a fierce anti-vaccine and anti-immigration message ahead of April 3 elections. "Vaccines should not be mandatory! We don't tolerate blackmail," said the slogan of the rally where people held up banners saying: "I am unvaccinated, not a criminal" and "Enough of COVID dictatorship."

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/anti-vaccine-far-right-rally-attracts-hundreds-hungary-2022-01-16/>

British PM Johnson wishes he had not attended boozy lockdown gathering

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson wishes he had not attended a "bring your own booze" gathering in Downing Street during Britain's first coronavirus lockdown and understands the public's anger, Education Secretary Nadhim Zahawi said. "The prime minister understands the level of hurt in the country," Zahawi told Sky News on Monday. Zahawi said Johnson attended the event to support and encourage his staff but "he now wishes he hadn't done that, he wishes he'd said: 'Look get back to your desk because this is wrong.'"

<https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/british-pm-johnson-wishes-he-had-not-attended-boozy-lockdown-gathering-2022-01-17/>

Vaccines Aren't Done Shaping Djokovic's Tennis Legacy

When Novak Djokovic boarded a flight from Melbourne, Australia to Dubai on Sunday night, he put an end to the strangest trip of his nearly two decades as a professional tennis player. But the past 10 days have made it clear that the cost of remaining unvaccinated is still rising for Djokovic's career and legacy—and could undercut his effort to wind up with more major titles to his name than any man in history. Djokovic had flown halfway across the world and not played a single match, all because he believed he had secured an exemption to Australian rules requiring travelers to be vaccinated. Instead, he spent an entire night explaining himself to border officials who canceled his visa, moved into government detention for almost a week, and twice had lawyers plead his case to remain in Australia.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/novak-djokovic-deported-australia-vaccination-tennis-11642356108>

Credit Suisse chief, architect of new strategy, quits over COVID-19 breaches

Credit Suisse will stick to its strategic overhaul despite the abrupt departure of its mastermind Antonio Horta-Osorio following an internal probe into his personal conduct, including breaches of COVID-19 rules, the bank's new chairman said on Monday. Horta-Osorio leaves less than nine months after he joined the bank to help it deal with the implosion of investment firm Archegos and the insolvency of British supply chain finance company Greensill Capital, while it was still reeling from the 2020 exit of CEO Tidjane Thiam over a spying scandal.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/finance/credit-suisse-group-appoints-axel-lehmann-new-chairman-2022-01-16/>

Australia has decided to 'let Covid rip.' Is that a good idea?

As 2021 drew to a close, many Australians were cautiously optimistic that the worst of the Covid-19 pandemic was behind them. The country had surpassed ambitious vaccine targets, meaning its rolling lockdowns could cease, both internal and international borders would reopen, and as Prime Minister Scott Morrison declared, it was now possible to "live with this virus." But as Australia moved to change course on its pandemic strategy, the highly transmissible omicron variant hit. In just over a month, cases have risen from around 1,000 a day to more than 100,000 a day. Hallmarks of the pandemic that Australia mostly avoided began to emerge. The health system is buckling. Many supermarket shelves are bare as sick workers stay home.

<https://www.nbcnews.com/science/science-news/australia-decided-let-covid-rip-good-idea-rcna11509#anchor-strong>
[Shouldwebedoingthisstrong](#)

Protest in Netherlands against coronavirus measures

Thousands of protesters packed Amsterdam's streets on Sunday in opposition to the government-imposed COVID-19 measures and vaccination campaign as virus infections hit a new record. Authorities were granted stop and search powers at several locations across the city and scores of riot police vans patrolled neighbourhoods where the demonstrators marched with banners and yellow umbrellas. Regular anti-coronavirus protests are held across the country and Sunday's large gathering was joined by farmers who drove to the capital and parked tractors along the central Museum Square.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/protest-netherlands-against-coronavirus-measures-2022-01-16/>

Malta sees biggest protest yet against COVID measures

Malta saw its biggest protest yet against COVID rules on Sunday, with hundreds of people marching in the capital Valletta against new measures requiring production of a COVID certificate for entry to most venues including restaurants, gyms and bars. Malta has seen one of the biggest take-ups of COVID vaccination jabs in the European Union, and almost three-quarters of adults would have taken the additional booster jab by Sunday, according to Health Ministry data.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/malta-sees-biggest-protest-yet-against-covid-measures-2022-01-16/>

Scientific Viewpoint

India's Gennova developing Omicron-specific COVID-19 vaccine

India's Gennova Biopharmaceuticals is working on an Omicron-specific mRNA COVID-19 vaccine candidate, it told Reuters on Monday, after a person with direct knowledge of the matter said the product could be ready in a month or two. "The Omicron-specific variant of the vaccine is under development and will be ready for human clinical trials, subject to regulatory approvals," a company spokesperson said in a text message. "We will keep you posted."

<https://www.reuters.com/world/india/indias-gennova-working-omicron-specific-covid-19-vaccine-source-2022-01-17/>

Study evaluates acute and long-term adverse events following immunization with COVID-19 Moderna vaccine

In a recent study posted to the medRxiv* pre-print server, a team of researchers conducted a case-control study at a mass vaccination center in Japan to evaluate acute and long-term adverse events following immunization (AEFI) with coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) Moderna vaccine. There were 3,014 incidences of AEFI in 2,913 Moderna vaccine recipients, of which 101 recipients showed AEFI twice, first at the time of receiving the first dose and next on receiving the second vaccine dose. Except for anaphylaxis, the incidence rate of AEFI at the first dose was significantly higher than at the time of the second dose. Among the 1,201,688 vaccine recipients, the incidence rate of IHSR was 266, ISRR was 2129, anaphylaxis was two, and vasovagal syncope was 72. Among the 611,238 vaccine recipients without AEFI, 1,208 recipients were selected as matched controls 1 for Cases 1 and 9,940 recipients as control 2 for Cases 2.

<https://www.news-medical.net/news/20220117/Study-evaluates-acute-and-long-term-adverse-events-following-immu>

[nization-with-COVID-19-Moderna-vaccine.aspx](#)

A Thai start-up is working on a Covid vaccine — using tobacco leaves

Thailand's Baiya Phytopharm wants to develop the country's first plant-based Covid vaccine. The start-up completed phase one human trials of the shot in December. Baiya says it's still too early to ascertain its efficacy, but the goal is to use available vaccines as a benchmark.

<https://www.cnbc.com/2022/01/17/thailands-baiya-phytopharm-working-on-plant-based-covid-vaccine.html>

Covid-19: Severe complications during pregnancy are more common in unvaccinated women, study finds

Unvaccinated women accounted for 77% of SARS-CoV-2 infections that have occurred during pregnancy in Scotland and 98% of infections that led to a critical care admission, a study has found. Researchers looked at 4950 confirmed infections in pregnant women from 1 December 2020—when routine SARS-CoV-2 testing of maternity admissions began—which were spread relatively evenly throughout pregnancy (1543 in the first trimester, 1850 in the second, and 1557 in the third). They found that “severe complications,” such as critical care admission, stillbirths, and early neonatal deaths, were more common in those who were unvaccinated compared with those who were vaccinated. Commenting on the study, Asma Khalil, professor of obstetrics and maternal fetal medicine at St George's University of London, said, “The study shows that the overwhelming majority of pregnant women and babies becoming unwell or dying as a result of covid-19 were unvaccinated. The pandemic is far from over and with tens of thousands of covid-19 cases still being reported in the UK every day, it is paramount that pregnant women continue to take up the offer of a vaccine.”

<https://www.bmj.com/content/376/bmj.o117>

Covid-19: Focus should be on new vaccines rather than boosters, says WHO

Giving repeated booster doses of existing covid-19 vaccines in developed countries is not a sustainable global strategy for tackling the pandemic, the World Health Organization has said. Instead, WHO argues that the focus should shift towards producing new vaccines that work better against transmission of emerging variants. In a statement¹ published on 11 January, the WHO Technical Advisory Group on Covid-19 Vaccine Composition said, “A vaccination strategy based on repeated booster doses of the original vaccine composition is unlikely to be appropriate or sustainable.” The expert group, which is assessing the performance of covid-19 vaccines, said that to deal with emerging variants such as omicron, new vaccines needed to be developed that not only protect people against serious illness but against infection. “Covid-19 vaccines that have high impact on prevention of infection and transmission, in addition to the prevention of severe disease and death, are needed and should be developed,” the group said.

<https://www.bmj.com/content/376/bmj.o108>

Pfizer to boost COVID-19 pill production with French deal

Pfizer will add a production facility for its antiviral COVID-19 pill in France as part of a plan to invest 520 million euros (\$594 million) in the country over the next five years, the U.S. drugmaker said on Monday. The decision is part of Pfizer's strategy to boost global production of the pill, paxlovid, which was found to be nearly 90% effective in preventing hospitalizations and deaths in patients at high risk of severe illness, according to clinical trial data. The investment will initially involve the production of active pharmaceutical ingredient (API) for paxlovid at a plant run by French pharmaceutical group Novasep, Pfizer said, noting that additional Novasep facilities will be added next year.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/pfizer-boost-covid-19-pill-production-with-french-deal-2022-01-17/>

Pakistan says trial of Chinese traditional medicine for COVID-19 successful

Pakistani health authorities on Monday announced the completion of a successful clinical trial of Chinese traditional herbal medicine for treating COVID-19, as the South Asian nation enters a fifth wave of the pandemic driven by the Omicron variant. The Chinese medicine, Jinhua Qinggan Granules (JHQG) manufactured by Juxiechang (Beijing) pharmaceutical Co Ltd, is already being used in treatment of COVID-19 patients in China. "Since it was tried on patients with different variants of COVID-19, we expect it to be effective on Omicron as on other variants," Professor Iqbal Chaudhry, director of the International Center for Chemical and Biological Science (ICCBS) where trials were conducted, told reporters.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/pakistan-says-trial-chinese-traditional-medicine-covid-19-successful-2022-01-17/>

Which Mask Is Best for Covid N95, KN95 or Cloth? Understanding 2022 Guidance

Advice from U.S. authorities on the need for face masks has flipped back and forth since Covid-19 took hold in 2020. In May, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said immunized Americans could ditch their masks in most settings. It reversed course in July amid a rise in cases caused by the more transmissible delta variant. Now, with the quickly spreading omicron variant causing a surge in infections, the agency is urging wider use of medical-grade masks in the general public. It revised earlier guidelines that had discouraged the use of gold-standard N95 masks in order to reserve them for medical workers.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-12/should-i-be-wearing-an-n95-mask-the-evolving-advice-quicktake>

What do we know about the 175,000 people who died of Covid in the UK?

Two startlingly different figures for what is ostensibly the same count have been released within days of each other: the government reported 150,000 Covid-19 deaths days before the UK's lead statistical agency reported a death toll of more than 175,000. The difference between the two figures is stark but easily explained: the government's figures count only those deaths that are known to have occurred within 28 days of a positive coronavirus test. The Office for National Statistics, on the other hand, counts all deaths where the virus was mentioned on the death certificate. But regardless of the counting method, the numbers represent individual human tragedies. So, what do we know about the 175,000 people whose deaths have been recorded to date?

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/16/what-do-we-know-about-people-who-died-covid-uk>

Australia regulator flags 'significant concerns' of price hike in COVID-19 antigen tests

Australia's competition regulator on Monday said it had "significant concerns" about reports of price gouging of COVID-19 rapid antigen tests and sought information from suppliers, retailers and pharmacy chains about rising costs. Australia is facing a shortage of at-home rapid antigen test kits after authorities urged asymptomatic close contacts to bypass government-funded testing hubs, where high volumes delayed results, and take their own tests. "In the middle of a significant outbreak of COVID-19 in a pandemic, the excessive pricing of rapid antigen tests required to diagnose the illness and protect other members of the public, is of significant concern," the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) Chair Rod Sims said.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/australia-regulator-flags-significant-concerns-price-hike-covid-19-antigen-tests-2022-01-16/>

At Davos, a 'good news, bad news' message emerges about Covid-19

As the coronavirus continues to wreak havoc, an expert panel at the World Economic Forum delivered a mix of good news and bad news on Monday: More variants will emerge, but vaccine production is accelerating and research is progressing toward a combined shot that may be able to attack these different variants. On one hand, the world needs to prepare for newer strains that could

be more vexing, or the “worst case scenario,” said Annelies Wilder-Smith, a professor of emerging infectious diseases at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. “Omicron will not be the last variant. There’s a high probability we will have another variant coming up. The question is when and will it be less dangerous?”

<https://www.statnews.com/pharmalot/2022/01/17/at-davos-a-good-news-bad-news-message-emerges-about-covid-19/>

Covid-19: Pregnant women urged to get vaccine after new study

Pregnant women have been urged to get vaccinated after a new study found an increased risk of birth-related complications after getting Covid-19. Northern Ireland's chief medical officer said Covid in the later stages "can have serious consequences for both mother and baby". Sir Michael McBride said having Covid-19 during pregnancy "carries a far higher risk than having the vaccine". It comes as the Omicron variant continues to spread in communities. A University of Edinburgh study found that pre-term births, stillbirths and new-born deaths are more common among women who have Covid-19 28 days, or less, before their delivery date. The study's authors said that "addressing low vaccine uptake in pregnant women is imperative to protect the health of women and babies"

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-60023039>

WHO recommends two new drugs to treat COVID-19

WHO has recommended two new drugs for COVID-19, providing yet more options for treating the disease. The extent to which these medicines will save lives depends on how widely available and affordable they will be. The first drug, baricitinib, is strongly recommended for patients with severe or critical COVID-19. It is part of a class of drugs called Janus kinase (JAK) inhibitors that suppress the overstimulation of the immune system. WHO recommends that it is given with corticosteroids. Baricitinib is an oral drug, used in the treatment of rheumatoid arthritis. It provides an alternative to other arthritis drugs called Interleukin-6 receptor blockers, recommended by WHO in July 2021.

<https://www.who.int/news/item/14-01-2022-who-recommends-two-new-drugs-to-treat-covid-19>

Coronavirus Resurgence

US Covid-19 hospitalizations expected to substantially increase from an already record-high over the coming weeks, expert says

Areas that were among the first to get hit hard by the Omicron variant are starting to see their Covid-19 numbers level off or even improve. But that's not the case for much of the country, US Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy said. "There are parts of the country -- New York, in particular, and other parts of the Northeast -- where we are starting to see a plateau, and in some cases, an early decline in cases," Murthy told CNN on Sunday.

<https://www.cnn.com/2022/01/17/health/us-coronavirus-monday/index.html>

The poor die from COVID while the rich get richer, Oxfam warns

The wealth of the 10 richest men has doubled during the coronavirus pandemic, stoking inequality that contributes to the deaths of at least 21,300 people each day, according to a report released on Monday by Oxfam International. “We enter 2022 with unprecedented concern,” Oxfam’s Inequality Kills report warns, arguing that the current global state of extreme inequality is a form of “economic violence” against the world’s poorest people and nations. In this deeply unequal world, structural and systemic policy and political choices are skewed in favour of the richest and most powerful, resulting in harm to the majority of ordinary people around the world, said the report, which highlighted the COVID-19 vaccine divide as a prime example. “Millions of people would still be alive today if they had had a vaccine — but they are dead, denied a chance while big pharmaceutical corporations continue to hold monopoly control of these technologies,” said Oxfam. The report calculates that 252 men have more wealth than all one billion women and girls in Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean combined. And 10 of the world’s richest men own more than the least

affluent 3.1 billion people.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2022/1/17/hdlthe-poor-die-from-covid-while-the-rich-get-richer-oxfam-warns>

Covid-19 news: Falling cases in UK suggests omicron wave has peaked

A fall in coronavirus cases and plateau in hospital admissions across the UK is 'cautiously good news'. A fall in new coronavirus cases in the UK suggests the wave triggered by the highly-transmissible omicron variant may have passed its peak. On Sunday, 70,924 people in the UK tested positive for coronavirus, according to UK government data. Within the past seven days, 754,054 new cases have been reported – a decrease of 463,043 on the previous seven days. "It does look like across the whole of the country cases do seem to be falling," Mike Tildesley of the University of Warwick told BBC Breakfast today. "We have had... very, very high case numbers throughout late December and early January – we peaked above 200,000 at one point. We do now seem to be a little bit beyond that," he said.

<https://www.newscientist.com/article/2237475-covid-19-news-falling-cases-in-uk-suggests-omicron-wave-has-peaked/>

India's main cities record sharp fall in COVID-19 infections

India's capital Delhi and financial hub Mumbai have reported a big fall in COVID-19 infections in the past two days and most of those who contracted the virus have recovered at home, authorities said on Monday. Mumbai's daily new infections fell below 10,000 on Sunday for the first time since early this month, after touching an all-time high of 20,971 on Jan. 7. It reported 7,895 infections late on Sunday, Mumbai's municipal corporation said.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/india/india-reports-258089-new-daily-covid-19-infections-2022-01-17/>

Analysis: China's 'zero-COVID' campaign under strain as Omicron surges

China is doubling down on its "zero-COVID" strategy, saying the spread of the potentially milder Omicron variant is no reason to lower its guard amid warnings of economic disruptions and even public unrest as lockdowns drag into a third year. As other countries talk about a transition from "pandemic" to "endemic", China has stepped up policies to stamp out any new outbreak as soon as it arises, sealing off cities, shutting transport links and launching mass testing programmes. The approach has kept infections at a minimum, but some experts warn that China could become the victim of its own success as a lack of exposure to COVID-19 over the last two years leaves it vulnerable to the more infectious Omicron.

<https://www.reuters.com/markets/europe/chinas-zero-covid-campaign-under-strain-omicron-surges-2022-01-17/>

Iran reports its first three deaths from Omicron coronavirus variant

Iran's health ministry reported the country's first three deaths from the highly contagious Omicron coronavirus variant on Saturday, reported Reuters. "The number of patients with Omicron in the country has reached 1,162 and ... one death has been reported due to Omicron in each of the cities of Tabriz, Yazd and Shahrekord, and one critically ill patient is hospitalised in Ahvaz," ministry spokesman Mohammad Hashemi told state broadcaster IRIB. Iran this week lifted restrictions on land travel to and from neighbouring countries and some European states but maintained a ban on arrivals from Britain, France and eight countries in Southern Africa over Omicron fears, Iranian media reported.

<https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20220116-iran-reports-its-first-three-deaths-from-omicron-coronavirus-variant/>

Omicron Surge Pressures U.S. Hospitals

Americans shouldn't expect the Omicron variant to peak nationwide in coming days, the U.S. surgeon general warned Sunday, as Covid-19 cases continue to rise and put more pressure on hospitals. "The next few weeks will be tough," Dr. Vivek Murthy said during an appearance on CNN's "State of the Union." The seven-day average for confirmed and suspected Covid-19 hospitalizations is at the highest recorded level, with about 155,958 reported Sunday, after topping old records last week, data from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services show. The seven-day average

for newly reported cases also reached nearly 808,000 a day on Saturday, the first time it has topped 800,000, data from Johns Hopkins University show. The latest data are inflated by a surge in Texas cases reported at the same time after the state cleaned up and added to its 2020 case total. At the same time, the rise in at-home testing that is often not captured in state data reports has added to an incomplete picture of the true level of infections, health and data experts said.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/france-prepares-to-vote-on-stricter-covid-laws-for-unvaccinated-people-11642333051>

New Zealand Bracing for Imminent Arrival of Omicron, Ardern Says

New Zealand is bracing for the arrival of omicron, with the highly infectious Covid-19 variant expected to breach the nation's closed border at any time. "We know that with omicron it is a case of when, not if," Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern told a news conference Monday in Auckland. "We're doing what we can, but I think it would be wrong for us to assume that those border measures will be sufficient. At some point, we will see omicron in the community." The government has delayed a phased reopening of the border to keep omicron out while it rushes to administer booster vaccination shots and begin inoculating children. While 93% of adults are now fully vaccinated, the evidence from neighboring Australia shows that omicron will still lead to a surge in infections.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-17/new-zealand-bracing-for-imminent-arrival-of-omicron-ardern-says>

Masks reintroduced as WA records five new local COVID-19 cases amid Omicron spread in Perth

Western Australia has reintroduced a mask mandate for all indoor public areas in Perth and Peel after Premier Mark McGowan revealed three new local COVID-19 cases had been recorded in addition to two earlier-announced cases, bringing the total number to five. Masks will be required from 6:00pm Sunday in all indoor public places in Perth and the Peel region, but will not be required to be worn in homes. Anyone who has been in Perth or the Peel region from January 6 will be required to wear a mask indoors if they have travelled to another region.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-01-16/wa-covid-19-omicron-spread-mcgowan-mask-mandate/100760044>

Hospital admissions climb as virus spreads - Cayman Islands

Public Health officials said that there are now nine patients in hospital as a result of COVID-19 after three more people were admitted over the last day, reflecting the anticipated knock-on effect from the continued uncontrolled spread of the virus through the community. Another 357 positive tests emerged during the latest results, and officials said that over 5% of the population is now infected with SARS-CoV-2. Interim Chief Medical Officer Dr Autilia Newton reported that eleven of the latest positive cases were among travellers and of the 346 community cases, 19 were in the Sister Islands. Rumours circulated on social media Wednesday of an islandwide lockdown for Cayman Brac because of the recent spike in cases, but officials said these were false.

<https://caymannewsservice.com/2022/01/hospital-admissions-climb-as-virus-spreads/>

COVID deaths and cases are rising again at US nursing homes

COVID-19 infections are soaring again at U.S. nursing homes because of the omicron wave, and deaths are climbing too, leading to new restrictions on family visits and a renewed push to get more residents and staff members vaccinated and boosted. Nursing homes were the lethal epicenter of the pandemic early on, before the vaccine allowed many of them to reopen to visitors last year. But the wildly contagious variant has dealt them a setback. Nursing homes reported a near-record of about 32,000 COVID-19 cases among residents in the week ending Jan. 9, an almost sevenfold increase from a month earlier, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-health-pandemics-nursing-homes-centers-for-disease-control-and-prevention-31685a926b0ee4e97e1b314a52b1f41c>