

COVID-19 Lockdown Exit Analysis

28th Jan 2022

Lockdown Exit

Hong Kong to cut quarantine for arrivals to 14 days from next month

Hong Kong will cut quarantine for arriving travellers to 14 days from 21 starting Feb. 5, leader Carrie Lam said on Thursday, a move that follows intense lobbying from finance executives and diplomats who said the measure was hurting competitiveness. Tough coronavirus rules have made Hong Kong one of the world's most isolated cities, with flights down as much as 90%. Residents returning from more than 160 countries have been required to quarantine for 21 days in designated hotels will now have to spend 14 days in a hotel, followed by seven days of self-monitoring, with further details to be announced.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/china/hong-kong-shorten-21-day-quarantine-requirement-arrivals-2022-01-27/>

Despite U.S. cases decline, the country doesn't have 'control' of virus, Fauci says

On Wednesday, infections declined to an average of 601,302 in the seven-day average, and current hospitalization have leveled off to 148,710, according to data compiled by The Washington Post. These numbers do not indicate the country has "sufficient control," a critical point the nation must reach so the virus doesn't "dominate" our lives, Anthony S. Fauci said at a briefing by the White House covid-19 task force. Fauci said the nation can still reach some level of normalcy with effective tools, referring to vaccinations, boosters and antivirals. "That is not where we are at this point," he said. "So we still have a way to go."

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2022/01/26/covid-omicron-variant-live-updates/>

COVID-19: Sainsbury's and Waitrose advise shoppers and staff to keep wearing face coverings

Supermarket chains Sainsbury's and Waitrose will be asking people to continue to wear a face covering in their stores when restrictions ease in England on Thursday. Mandatory wearing of face masks is being scrapped as part of the lifting of Plan B measures - with work from home guidance and COVID passports also being dropped. Sainsbury's told Sky News it will continue to have a number of safety measures in its stores in an effort to keep customers and staff safe. Its guidance will also apply to Argos and Habitat stores, which are part of the Sainsbury's business group. A spokesperson for Sainsbury's said: "Safety remains our highest priority.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-sainsburys-and-waitrose-advise-shoppers-and-staff-to-keep-wearing-face-coverings-12525916>

COVID-19: North Korea set to reopen borders and resume trading with China

North Korea is poised to reopen its borders amid fears its fragile economy is on the brink of collapse following a strict two-year lockdown. Pyongyang has shown signs it will finally ease tough restrictions as it resumed freight train traffic into neighbouring China last week. Trade between the two nations - crucial to North Korea - is said to have slumped by 80% in 2020. And it plunged again by two-thirds between January and September last year after North Korea sealed off its borders, according to South Korean estimates.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-north-korea-set-to-reopen-borders-and-resume-trading-with-china-12526484>

Denmark becomes first EU country to scrap all COVID-19 restrictions

Denmark is to lift all remaining COVID-19 restrictions, with Omicron hospital admissions and deaths remaining stable and high rates of vaccination. "Tonight we can ... find the smile again. We have

incredibly good news, we can now remove the last coronavirus restrictions in Denmark," Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen said at a press conference, following recommendations from the Epidemic Commission and with all the main political parties' support. The last restrictions will be dropped on February 1. The announcement comes as a new subvariant of Omicron, BA.2, is gaining a foothold in Denmark and driving infections up, with 46,000 new COVID-19 cases recorded on Wednesday.

<https://www.politico.eu/article/denmark-becomes-first-eu-country-to-scrap-all-covid-19-restrictions/>

Virus-ravaged Iran finds brief respite with mass vaccination

As much of the world sees vaccination slowing and infections soaring with the spread of omicron, Iran has found a rare, if fleeting, respite from the anxiety and trauma of the pandemic. After successive virus waves pummeled the country for nearly two years, belated mass vaccination under a new, hard-line president has, for a brief moment, left the stricken nation with a feeling of apparent safety. Now, the specter of an omicron-fueled surge looms large. Hospitals are preparing for the worst as infections tick upward after a monthslong lull. But so far, the variant has not battered the Islamic Republic as it has many Western countries where most adults got jabs a year ago.

<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-health-middle-east-coronavirus-vaccine-tehran-f4c1a4134ff3e3afa42d6dc3d21ee0c0>

Expats head for the exit as 'easy' Singapore's COVID controls bite

Atar Sandler arrived in Singapore in 2019, seizing the opportunity to live in a buzzing global city that is also a convenient base to jet off to more exotic locales nearby. But after two years of mask-wearing, socialising in small groups and travel restrictions to combat the COVID-19 pandemic, the Israeli human resources professional packed her bags for New York with her husband and children this month. "It's been like this for so long. And it doesn't feel like anything's going to change here," said Sandler.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/the-great-reboot/singapore-shrinks-covid-takes-shine-off-expatriate-life-2022-01-27/>

Finland moves up planned easing of COVID restrictions

Finland will begin gradually easing COVID-19 restrictions from Feb. 1 instead of mid-February as initially planned as the burden on its hospitals eases, the government said late on Thursday. On Jan. 18, Prime Minister Sanna Marin said Finland would begin scaling back restrictions from mid-February, but signs of stabilization in the infection rate caused by the Omicron variant of the virus led the government to alter its plan. "The burden on intensive care units has taken a turn in a better direction," Finland's minister for health and social affairs Hanna Sarkkinen told reporters.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/finland-moves-up-planned-easing-covid-restrictions-2022-01-27/>

Anti-vaccine Canada truckers roll toward Ottawa, praised by Tesla's Musk

Canadian truck drivers determined to shut down central Ottawa over a federal government vaccine mandate rolled across the country toward the capital on Thursday, boosted by praise from Tesla Chief Executive Elon Musk. The protesters are unhappy that Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's Liberal government has imposed a COVID-19 vaccine mandate for cross-border truck drivers. Industry officials say 90% of drivers traversing the U.S. frontier are inoculated but a minority have refused, saying the mandate contravenes personal freedom.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/anti-vaccine-canada-truckers-roll-toward-ottawa-praised-by-teslas-musk-2022-01-27/>

Exit Strategies

Covid vaccines for 5 to 11-year-olds set to start by next Monday but parents criticise lack of guidance

The official roll-out of Covid jabs for vulnerable five to 11-year-olds is set to start by next Monday but

parents have complained about a lack of information. NHS England told i that the roll-out would begin by the end of the month but refused to specify a date. Paediatric doses are still unavailable across England, despite the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) recommending them for vulnerable five to 11-year-olds or those living with someone who is immunosuppressed.

<https://inews.co.uk/news/health/covid-vaccine-5-to-11-year-old-children-start-end-january-parents-information-1424909>

U.S. has sent 400 mln COVID vaccine doses to 112 nations -White House

The United States has shipped 400 million COVID-19 vaccine doses as part of its earlier pledge to donate about 1.2 billion doses to low-income countries, the White House said on Wednesday. "Today, we will hit a major milestone in our global effort: 400 million vaccine doses shipped to 112 countries ... for free, no strings attached," White House COVID-19 Coordinator Jeff Zients told reporters at a briefing. The latest batch includes 3.2 million doses of the Pfizer Inc and BioNTech SE vaccine to Bangladesh and 4.7 million doses to Pakistan, CNN reported earlier on Wednesday, citing a White House official.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-has-shipped-400-mln-covid-vaccine-doses-worldwide-white-house-2022-01-26/>

Sweden decides against recommending COVID vaccines for kids aged 5-12

Sweden has decided against recommending COVID vaccines for kids aged 5-11, the Health Agency said on Thursday, arguing that the benefits did not outweigh the risks. "With the knowledge we have today, with a low risk for serious disease for kids, we don't see any clear benefit with vaccinating them," Health Agency official Britta Bjorkholm told a news conference. She added that the decision could be revisited if the research changed or if a new variant changed the pandemic. Kids in high-risk groups can already get the vaccine.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/sweden-decides-against-recommending-covid-vaccines-kids-aged-5-12-2022-01-27/>

Parts of Beijing curb movements to fight COVID ahead of Olympics

Beijing has limited the movement of people in more parts of the city, even as it reported fewer COVID-19 cases on Thursday, to lower virus risks just over a week before the Winter Olympic Games begin in the Chinese capital. Beijing's Fengtai district said late on Wednesday residents in more areas should not leave their residential compounds for unnecessary reasons and must have a daily COVID test. The district, which has reported more local virus cases than others in the current outbreak in Beijing, had already locked down some compounds that house tens of thousands of people. Several other city districts have imposed mobility restrictions in certain areas.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/china/beijing-city-limits-movement-more-areas-curb-covid-cases-before-olympics-2022-01-27/>

Vaccine mandate to kick in for first wave of health workers

Health care workers in about half the states face a Thursday deadline to get their first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine under a Biden administration mandate that will be rolled out across the rest of the country in the coming weeks. While the requirement is welcomed by some, others fear it will worsen already serious staff shortages if employees quit rather than comply. And in some Republican-led states that have taken a stand against vaccine mandates, hospitals and nursing homes could find themselves caught between conflicting state and federal demands. "We would like to see staff vaccinated. We think that it's the safest option for residents, which is our biggest concern," said Marjorie Moore, executive director of VOYCE, a St. Louis County, Missouri, nonprofit that works on behalf of nursing home residents.

<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-business-health-missouri-nursing-homes-23607093639bbb1862c3a49052379bc>

Will virus be 'over'? Most Americans think not: AP-NORC poll

And, like many, Wilson has come to believe COVID-19 is probably never fully going away. "It'll become endemic and we'll be stuck with it forever," he says. "It's frustrating, but what can you do about it?" Many Americans agree that they're going to "be stuck with it forever" — or, at the least, for a long time. A poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research shows that few — just 15% — say they'll consider the pandemic over only when COVID-19 is largely eliminated. By contrast, 83% say they'll feel the pandemic is over when it's largely a mild illness.

<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-health-florida-pandemics-3eae1f01412794b152934501f4b2c30f>

No exit from zero-COVID: China struggles to find policy off-ramp

China's "zero-COVID" stance has put it at odds with the rest of the world and is exacting a mounting economic toll, but an exit strategy remains elusive as authorities worry about the ability of the healthcare system to cope and adapt to new strains. Chinese medical experts believed last year that higher vaccination rates would eventually allow China to relax tough rules on movement and testing as infection rates slow elsewhere. The emergence of the highly transmissible Omicron variant dashed those hopes.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/china/no-exit-zero-covid-china-struggles-find-policy-off-ramp-2022-01-27/>

Beijing city limits movement in more areas to curb COVID cases before Olympics

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<https://www.reuters.com/world/china/beijing-city-limits-movement-more-areas-curb-covid-cases-before-olympics-2022-01-27/>

Virus-ravaged Iran finds brief respite with mass vaccination

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<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-health-middle-east-coronavirus-vaccine-tehran-f4c1a4134ff3e3afa42d6dc3d21ee0c0>

Hospitals are denying transplants for patients who aren't vaccinated against Covid, with backing from ethicists

Boston hospital's denial of a heart transplant to a man who is unvaccinated for Covid-19 has generated national attention, but experts say mandating vaccines is in keeping with other long-standing requirements that patients have to meet to receive an organ — including getting other shots. In this case, Brigham and Women's Hospital dropped a 31-year-old man named DJ Ferguson from its transplant waitlist, his family said. Ferguson was concerned about side effects and the speed with which the vaccines were developed, his mother told WCVB. This is not the first such case to make headlines. Last year, both the Cleveland Clinic and University of Colorado Hospital refused

to perform organ transplants for recipients who hadn't been vaccinated.

<https://www.statnews.com/2022/01/26/hospitals-are-denying-transplants-for-patients-who-arent-vaccinated-against-covid-with-backing-from-ethicists/>

Partisan Exits

Canada's Trudeau in isolation after COVID exposure; says test negative

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said on Thursday he had gone into isolation for five days after being exposed to someone with COVID-19, adding a rapid test result had come back negative.

<https://www.msn.com/en-ca/news/canada/canadas-trudeau-in-isolation-after-covid-exposure-says-test-negative/ar-AA Tcvk8>

Holocaust survivor decries 'abuse' of yellow star at COVID protests

Centenarian Holocaust survivor Margot Friedlaender urged the young generation on Thursday to always remember the Nazi genocide and denounced the use by some anti-COVID vaccination protesters of the yellow star Jews were forced to wear. "Today, I see the memory of what happened being abused for political reasons, sometimes even derided and trampled all over," she told EU lawmakers in Brussels at a ceremony marking the 77th anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz concentration camp in Poland. "Incredulous, I had to watch at the age of 100 years how symbols of our exclusion by the Nazis, such as the so-called 'Judenstern', are shamelessly used on the open street by the new enemies of democracy, to present themselves - whilst living in the middle of a democracy - as victims," Friedlaender added.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/holocaust-survivor-decries-abuse-yellow-star-covid-protests-2022-01-27/>

COVID-19: Antisemitism 'on the rise' as anti-vaxxers blamed for helping to fuel hatred

Holocaust survivors and politicians have warned antisemitism is on the rise as the world reflects on the atrocities committed by the Nazis on the 77th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz.. People across the globe are paying their respects to the millions of Jews persecuted at the hands of Hitler's regime on Thursday, the annual Holocaust Memorial Day. Followers of all faiths will this evening light a candle to remember all the victims of the genocide, as part of many events taking place, with some held online due to the pandemic.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-antisemitism-on-the-rise-as-anti-vaxxers-blamed-for-helping-to-fuel-hatred-12526564>

Israel says some protesters against COVID measures are fuelling anti-Semitism

Protesters against COVID-19 measures who liken themselves to Jews under Nazi persecution are stoking global anti-Semitism, the Israeli government said in a report marking International Holocaust Remembrance Day. Such Holocaust tropes have become "widespread" and, along with violent demonstrations linked to Israel's May war in Gaza, were main factors behind physical or online attacks on Jews in Europe and North America last year, said the 152-page report by the Diaspora Affairs Ministry. Several U.S. and British politicians have in recent months apologised after suggesting vaccine or lockdown policies recalled Hitler's regime.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/israel-sees-holocaust-tropes-covid-protests-fuelling-anti-semitism-2022-01-27/>

As Omicron ebbs, England revives Plan A: living with COVID

After an uncomfortable but relatively brief return to coronavirus restrictions triggered by the Omicron variant, England is going back to "Plan A" - learning to live with a disease that is probably here to stay. The bet is that booster jabs, antiviral pills and Omicron's lower severity will enable the government to manage outbreaks of a virus that cannot be shut out. Other countries equally keen to unshackle business and personal freedom will be watching. Work-from-home guidance ended last week, and measures such as mask mandates and COVID passes, also introduced in England last

month, lapsed on Thursday, returning the rules to where they were last July.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/omicron-ebbs-england-revives-plan-living-with-covid-2022-01-27/>

WHO staff complaint, email allege racism and abuse in Asia

Current and former staffers have accused the top director of the World Health Organization in the Western Pacific of racist, unethical and abusive behavior that has undermined the U.N. health agency's efforts to curb the coronavirus pandemic. The allegations were laid out in an internal complaint filed in October and again in an email last week, sent by unidentified "concerned WHO staff" to senior leadership and the executive board and obtained by the Associated Press. Two of the authors said more than 30 staffers were involved in writing it, and that it reflected the experiences of more than 50 people. The internal complaint and the email describe a "toxic atmosphere" with "a culture of systemic bullying and public ridiculing" at WHO's Western Pacific headquarters in Manila, led by Dr. Takeshi Kasai, director of a vast region that includes China and his home country of Japan.

<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-health-japan-pandemics-asia-69fe09e70b39e9ee9325778315bd5932>

Hospital patient without COVID shot denied heart transplant

A Boston hospital is defending itself after a man's family claimed he was denied a new heart for refusing to be vaccinated against COVID-19, saying most transplant programs around the country set similar requirements to improve patients' chances of survival. The family of D.J. Ferguson said in a crowdfunding appeal this week that officials at Brigham and Women's Hospital told the 31-year-old father of two that he was ineligible for the procedure because he hasn't been vaccinated against the coronavirus. "We are literally in a corner right now. This is extremely time sensitive," the family said in its fundraising appeal, which has raised tens of thousands of dollars. "This is not just a political issue. People need to have a choice!" D.J.'s mother, Tracey Ferguson, insists that her son isn't against vaccinations, noting he's had other immunizations in the past. But the trained nurse said Wednesday that he's been diagnosed with atrial fibrillation — an irregular and often rapid heart rhythm — and that he has concerns about the side effects of the COVID-19 vaccine.

<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-health-boston-immunizations-heart-transplants-cb0e145c98c8e017f080198d0d15e39c>

Scientific Viewpoint

EU drug regulator OKs Pfizer COVID pill for high-risk patients

The European Union's drug regulator on Thursday gave the green light to Pfizer Inc's antiviral COVID-19 pill for treating adults at risk of severe illness, as the region scrambles to boost its arsenal to fight the Omicron variant. The endorsement by the European Medicines Agency (EMA) for a conditional approval, if followed as usual by the European Commission, allows EU member states to deploy the drug after the regulator gave guidance for its emergency use late last year. Italy, Germany and Belgium are among a handful of EU countries that have bought the drug, branded as Paxlovid.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ema-green-lights-pfizers-covid-19-pill-2022-01-27/>

Data reassuring on menstrual changes after Covid-19 vaccine, researchers find

Any menstrual changes after Covid-19 vaccination are short-lived and small compared with natural variation in normal cycles, according to an assessment of the latest evidence published by the British Medical Journal (BMJ). Many women have reported changes to their periods after vaccination. Two new observational studies on the issue provide reassuring data, said Dr Victoria Male, a reproductive specialist at Imperial College London. The first study drew on data from 3,959 Americans who logged at least six consecutive cycles on a tracking app. Of these, 2,403 were vaccinated while the remainder acted as a control group.

<https://www.irishtimes.com/news/health/data-reassuring-on-menstrual-changes-after-covid-19-vaccine-researchers-fi>

[nd-1.4786510](#)

Vaccination, infection may lower long Covid-19 symptoms: Study

People who have both been vaccinated and had Covid-19 are less likely to report fatigue and other health problems seen post Covid, than unvaccinated people, according to a study based in Israel. The study, not yet peer reviewed, showed that vaccinated people were no more likely to report symptoms than people who have never caught SARS-CoV-2, Nature reported.

https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/vaccination-infection-may-lower-long-covid-19-symptoms-study-122012701464_1.html

Canadian university races former Chinese partner to make a COVID-19 booster

The federal government has trumpeted previous vaccine partnerships with a China-based company as one of the reasons why Canada was pinning its hopes on a COVID-19 vaccine candidate from China early in the pandemic. But The Fifth Estate has reviewed those partnerships and found that a collaboration with McMaster University in Hamilton stalled years ago and never resulted in an approved vaccine anywhere in the world. That collaboration has been of little benefit to the university or Canada. Instead, both the company, CanSino Biologics, and McMaster are now independently racing to develop similar COVID-19 booster vaccines.

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/cansino-mcmaster-vaccine-partnership-1.6327254>

Covid-19: Cuba will request WHO approval for homegrown vaccine

Cuban health officials have said that they will apply for World Health Organization approval for one of the country's homegrown covid-19 vaccines, as they announced that they had secured funding to produce 200 million vaccine doses for low income countries. Cuba's health regulator (CECMED) has approved the use of three of the country's homegrown vaccines, which are exported to four countries, but none has been yet been approved by WHO.¹ That should change this year, said Rolando Pérez Rodríguez, director of science and innovation at Cuba's state run pharmaceutical conglomerate, BioCubaFarma. "We have formally requested the prequalification of one vaccine: Abdala," Rodríguez told a press conference in Havana on 25 January. "We are in the final review of the documents, and it should be sent in the following days to the WHO." The application for WHO approval of a second Cuban vaccine, Soberana 2, should be sent in the coming weeks and is also expected to gain authorisation for use this year, said Dagmar García Rivera at the Finlay Institute of Vaccines in Havana.

<https://www.bmj.com/content/376/bmj.o230>

Covid-19: Lower vaccination rates partly explain higher death rates among minority ethnic groups

Death rates from covid-19 remain higher for most minority ethnic groups compared with people identifying as white British, and some of that disparity is because of their lower uptake of vaccinations, show data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS). Throughout the pandemic covid-19 mortality has been higher in most minority ethnic groups compared with white British people. Vahé Nafilyan, senior statistician at the ONS, said, "As already highlighted in our analyses of earlier periods, these differences in mortality are largely explained by sociodemographic and economic factors and health. For the first time, we show that the lower vaccination coverage in some ethnic groups also contributes to the elevated risk of covid-19 death, particularly in the black African and black Caribbean groups."

<https://www.bmj.com/content/376/bmj.o233>

Pfizer pushes to intervene in lawsuit seeking COVID vaccine information from FDA

Pfizer Inc wants to intervene in a Texas federal lawsuit seeking information from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration used in licensing the company's COVID-19 vaccine, a litigation move that plaintiffs who are suing for the data say is premature. Pfizer's lawyers at DLA Piper told U.S. District

Judge Mark Pittman on Jan. 21 it wanted a role in the proceedings to help the FDA avoid "inappropriately" disclosing trade secret and confidential commercial information.

<https://www.reuters.com/legal/government/pfizer-pushes-intervene-lawsuit-seeking-covid-vaccine-information-fda-2022-01-26/>

Booster shots could cut Europe's COVID hospitalisations by up to 800000 -EU

Booster shots could reduce future hospitalisations in Europe by at least half a million, the European Union's public health agency said on Thursday, even as the Omicron variant spreads at an unprecedented pace. "The current uptake of a booster dose achieved by early January may reduce future Omicron hospital admissions by 500,000 - 800,000" in Europe, the European Centre for Disease prevention and Control (ECDC) said. The figures cover the 27-nation EU plus Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/booster-shots-could-cut-europes-covid-hospitalisations-by-up-800000-eu-2022-01-27/>

Can COVID-19 vaccines help prevent long COVID?

Although most people make a full recovery from a COVID-19 infection, for some the symptoms can last weeks or even months, a condition known as long COVID. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), long COVID is defined as a condition that occurs in "individuals with a history of probable or confirmed SARS CoV-2 infection, usually three months from the onset of COVID-19 with symptoms that last for at least two months and cannot be explained by an alternative diagnosis". It is estimated that up to one in 10 people who get infected with SARS-Cov-2 will suffer symptoms of long COVID which may vary from mild to severe. A study carried out by the University of Washington put the incidence of long COVID even higher, showing up to 30 percent of those who tested positive for COVID-19 had symptoms months later

<https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2022/1/27/can-covid-19-vaccines-help-prevent-long-covid>

Pfizer, Moderna shots safe during in vitro fertilization; healthy gut bacteria may help prevent long COVID

The following is a summary of some recent studies on COVID-19. They include research that warrants further study to corroborate the findings and that has yet to be certified by peer review. mRNA vaccines safe during in vitro fertilization. COVID-19 vaccines using mRNA technology do not affect fertility outcomes during in-vitro fertilization (IVF), researchers have found. They compared rates of fertilization, pregnancy, and early miscarriage in IVF patients who had received two doses of the vaccines from Pfizer with BioNTech or Moderna or with those in unvaccinated patients

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/pfizer-moderna-shots-safe-during-vitro-fertilization-healthy-gut-bacteria-may-2022-01-26/>

Moderna starts trial for Omicron-specific booster shot

Moderna Inc said it had started a mid-stage study, testing a booster dose of its COVID-19 vaccine specifically designed to target the Omicron coronavirus variant, a day after rival Pfizer Inc launched a similar trial. The company said while a third shot of its original coronavirus vaccine increased neutralizing antibodies against the variant at the lower dose, their levels declined six months after the booster dose was administered. However, neutralizing antibodies remained detectable in all participants, Moderna said.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/moderna-starts-trial-testing-omicron-specific-booster-shot-2022-01-26/>

Omicron subvariant appears more contagious, but not more severe, Denmark says

The BA.2 subvariant of the Omicron coronavirus variant, which is dominant in Denmark, appears more contagious than the more common BA.1 sub-lineage, Danish Health Minister Magnus Heunicke said on Wednesday in a national address. "There is no evidence that the BA.2 variant causes more

disease, but it must be more contagious," Heunicke told a news conference. The BA.1 lineage currently accounts for 98% of all cases globally but in Denmark has been pushed aside by BA.2, which became the dominant strain in the second week of January.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ba2-subvariant-omicron-appears-more-contagious-than-ba1-denmark-says-2022-01-26/>

Review: No role for convalescent plasma in most COVID hospital patients

A prospective meta-analysis of international randomized clinical trials (RCTs) of convalescent plasma for the treatment of hospitalized COVID-19 patients finds no clinical benefit in most cases. Convalescent plasma, considered an experimental treatment by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA), is donated by COVID-19 survivors in the hope that recipients with current infections benefit from the anti-SARS-CoV-2 antibodies. On Dec 28, 2021, the FDA restricted the use of convalescent plasma to patients with impaired immune systems.

<https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2022/01/review-no-role-convalescent-plasma-most-covid-hospital-patients>

S. Korea expert defends use of rapid tests as omicron surges

South Korea's top infectious disease expert defended the move to expand the use of rapid testing despite accuracy concerns, as the country broke its daily coronavirus record for the third straight day. The 14,518 confirmed new cases Thursday were 1,500 more than Wednesday and about double the cases reported on Monday, illustrating a tidal wave of infections driven by the highly contagious omicron variant. The surge, which could continue for weeks, has left health authorities scrambling to reshape the country's pandemic response, such as treating a larger number of mild cases at home and shortening quarantine periods. Officials are also pushing ahead with a more controversial plan to rewire the testing regime that had been centered around gold standard PCR tests and expand the use of rapid antigen kits that will be made available at public health offices, testing stations and pharmacies

<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-health-infectious-diseases-seoul-south-korea-a75cf7e50841db9c2d8e43512533ede0>

Coronavirus Resurgence

Germany reports new daily record for COVID-19 infections

Germany reported another record number of daily new COVID-19 infections on Thursday, crossing the 200,000 threshold for the first time, as the country debates whether to impose compulsory vaccinations. The Robert Koch Institute for infectious diseases reported 203,136 positive tests in the last 24 hours, 69,600 cases more than the same day a week ago. The seven-day incidence per 100,000 people rose to 1,017 from 941 the previous day, while another 188 people died, bringing the death toll since the start of the pandemic to 117,314.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/germany-reports-new-daily-record-covid-19-infections-2022-01-27/>

Greece allows music in bars and restaurants again as COVID cases ease

Greece will allow music in restaurants and bars again and extend their operating hours as it lifts some of the restrictions imposed last month now that coronavirus infections and the pressure on hospitals are easing, authorities said on Thursday. The country last month forced bars, nightclubs and restaurants to close at midnight, with no standing customers and no music, following a surge of cases over the Christmas holidays due to the fast-spreading Omicron variant. "We have decided to scale back the restrictions, taking into consideration the course of the pandemic in terms of cases which have been declining in recent weeks," Health Minister Thanos Plevris said in a televised statement.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/greece-allows-music-bars-restaurants-again-covid-cases-ease-2022-01-27/>

German daily COVID cases rise above 200000, causing staff shortages

The number of new COVID-19 infections in Germany exceeded 200,000 in a day for the first time on Thursday, hitting staffing at companies including Lufthansa Cargo. The Robert Koch Institute for infectious diseases reported 203,136 positive tests in the last 24 hours, 69,600 cases more than the same day a week ago. The seven-day incidence per 100,000 people rose to 1,017 from 941 the previous day, while another 188 people died, bringing the death toll since the start of the pandemic in early 2020 to 117,314.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/german-daily-covid-cases-rise-above-200000-causing-staff-shortages-2022-01-27/>

Australia reports fewer COVID-19 deaths, hospitalisations steady

Australia reported fewer COVID-19 deaths on Thursday, a day after recording a pandemic high, while hospital cases remained steady, raising hopes the country's worst outbreak may have peaked. Officials reported a total of 59 deaths, down from a pandemic peak of 87 on Wednesday, with just two states still to report figures. Hospitalisations have remained steady at around 5,000 for the last few days, peaking at just under 5,400 on Tuesday, with admissions falling for the second straight day in New South Wales, the worst-affected state.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/australia-reports-fewer-covid-19-deaths-hospitalisations-steady-2022-01-27/>