

COVID-19 Lockdown Exit Analysis

21st Feb 2022

Lockdown Exit

Germany Spent \$48 Billion to Protect Jobs From Covid Fallout

Germany spent about 42 billion euros (\$48 billion) on a program to secure jobs threatened by the coronavirus pandemic. A government program to pay most of an employee's wages when they can't work because of operational issues like lockdowns was worth the cost, Germany's Labor Minister Hubertus Heil said in an interview with Tagespiegel on Sunday. "The alternative -- namely allowing mass unemployment to return -- would have been much, much more expensive for Germany, socially and economically," he said. The program was just one of the measures the government in Berlin implemented to shield its economy from the crisis. Since the beginning of the pandemic, Germany has also paid out around 78 billion euros in aid to companies and extended 55.2 billion euros in loans.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-02-20/germany-spent-48-billion-to-protect-jobs-from-covid-fallout>

Israel to allow in all tourists regardless of COVID vaccination status

Israel will begin allowing entry to all tourists, regardless of whether they have been vaccinated against COVID-19, from March 1, a statement from the prime minister's office said on Sunday. Entry into Israel will still require two PCR tests, one before flying in and one upon landing in Israel, the statement said. Currently only COVID-19 vaccinated foreigners are allowed into Israel. "We are seeing a consistent decline in morbidity numbers, so this is the time to gradually open up what we were the first in the world to close," Prime Minister Naftali Bennett said.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/israel-allow-all-tourists-regardless-covid-vaccination-status-2022-02-20/>

Growing number of states, major cities lift Covid-19 restrictions

As the number of new Covid-19 cases and hospitalizations slowly falls, cities and states are loosening vaccine and mask requirements. Boston lifted the city's proof of vaccine policy which required patrons and staff of indoor spaces to show proof of vaccination, Mayor Michelle Wu announced Friday. "As of today, our public health data show that Boston is officially below the 3 critical thresholds for heightened Covid protections, so we are lifting the proof of vaccination requirement," Wu said in a tweet. "This news highlights the progress we've made in our fight against Covid-19 thanks to vaccines & boosters -- which have always been our most effective weapon against the pandemic. It's a win for every Bostonian doing our part to keep our communities safe, and we have to keep going," Wu said

<https://edition.cnn.com/2022/02/19/us/covid-mandates-vaccine-indoor-dining/index.html>

Dropping COVID isolation requirement in England could lead to epidemic growth - advisers

Scrapping COVID tests and isolation periods in England could lead to rapid epidemic growth as people's behaviour changes more swiftly than at previous times in the coronavirus pandemic, government advisers said in a document published on Friday. Prime Minister Boris Johnson will outline his plans for living with COVID on Monday, and has said that he aims to scrap the legal requirement to self-isolate for people who test positive for the coronavirus. Health leaders have urged him not to be too gung-ho, with a survey showing most believed he should not scrap the requirement to self-isolate or end free testing

<https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/dropping-isolation-requirement-england-could-lead-epidemic-growth-advisers-2022>

[-02-18/](#)

'No light at the end': How Hong Kong's Covid response went so wrong

The beds pile up outside Hong Kong's Caritas hospital. In the cold night, elderly patients lie on gurneys covered with blankets and thermal foil sheets. A woman in pink folds her arms against the chill, while another reaches across her bed in an apparent gesture of comfort to a neighbour. Nearby, others crowd into yellow and blue spillover tents lining the car park edges. The hospital staff attend people calling out when they can, but they are outnumbered. Wails from patients carry through the air. There are similar scenes across the city, where 11 public hospitals were operating at or beyond capacity as of Friday. Private hospitals refuse to take Covid patients. Photos supplied to the Guardian show a treatment room inside one hospital earlier this week (88% capacity) with gurneys three deep across the thoroughfare, on a floor strewn with garbage. Bathrooms that no one has had time to clean were soiled with faeces, dirt and discarded biohazard bags.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/18/no-light-at-the-end-how-hong-kongs-covid-response-went-so-wrong>

Six African countries to kick off mRNA vaccines production

The World Health Organization (WHO) has announced the first six countries that will receive the technology needed to produce mRNA vaccines in Africa, in the latest effort to boost production on the continent. WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said on Friday that Egypt, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa and Tunisia have been selected to ramp up jabs production on the continent. "No other event like the COVID-19 pandemic has shown that reliance on a few companies to supply global public goods is limiting, and dangerous," said Tedros during a ceremony hosted by the European Council, France, South Africa and the WHO. "In the mid-to-long term, the best way to address health emergencies and reach universal health coverage is to significantly increase the capacity of all regions to manufacture the health products they need, with equitable access as their primary endpoint," he added.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/2/18/six-african-countries-to-kick-production-of-mrna-vaccines>

"What's the point?" Hong Kong resident questions quarantine ordeal

Hong Kong accountant May Ng says her family made huge sacrifices last month to comply with the city's COVID-19 policies, but now thinks these were in vain as she does not expect the latest outbreak to be contained. The global financial hub follows mainland China in deploying a "dynamic zero-COVID" strategy aimed at ending any outbreaks as soon as possible after they occur, but the highly-transmissible Omicron variant has proven hard to keep under control. Despite extensive contact tracing and draconian isolation policies, daily infections have risen 60-fold since Feb. 1 to several thousands, pushing the city further and further away from its goals.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/whats-point-hong-kong-resident-questions-quarantine-ordeal-2022-02-18/>

Long COVID a global issue for patients and healthcare systems, UK review finds

British researchers led by Oxford University said on Friday that the current understanding of long COVID and options to treat it is emerging as a major long-term issue for global healthcare systems after reviewing the illness' effects on patients. The review, published in the European Heart Journal, looked at direct impacts of a coronavirus infection such as myocardial infarction or inflammatory myocarditis - severe heart conditions - and long-term effects such as fatigue and mental wellbeing. "Long COVID is, besides its huge impact for the affected individual, of great societal and economic importance as it leads to leave of absence from work, reduced work performance and hence unforeseen costs," said Thomas Lüscher from the Royal Brompton and Harefield Clinical Group.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/long-covid-global-issue-patients-healthcare-systems-uk-review-finds-2022-02-18/>

Hong Kong 'cannot afford to lose' fight against surging COVID

Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam said on Friday that it would take up to three months to stabilise a worsening COVID-19 pandemic that has overwhelmed health facilities and forced the postponement of an upcoming leadership election. "Our government needs to focus on the epidemic," Lam said at a news conference after a week that saw daily infections jump by 60% so far this month. It "cannot be diverted... we cannot afford to lose," she said. Quarantine facilities in Hong Kong have reached capacity and hospital beds are more than 95% full as cases spiral, with some patients, including elderly, left on beds outside in chilly, sometimes rainy weather.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/hong-kong-says-20000-hotel-rooms-earmarked-quarantine-covid-cases-surge-2022-02-18/>

A Reopening Australia Encourages Travelers to Come Take a Long Vacation

The Australian government's tourism department is attempting to lure visitors back for a longer stay in the country with a new ad campaign as the nation prepares to open its borders to vaccinated travelers on Feb. 21. The campaign, which bears the tagline "Don't Go Small. Go Australia," focuses on destinations found throughout the country, from the Avoca Caves in New South Wales to the Great Barrier Reef in Queensland. The strategy is to get travelers thinking beyond the weekend trips and weeklong stays that became common during the Covid-19 pandemic, said Susan Coghill, chief marketing officer of Tourism Australia.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/a-reopening-australia-encourages-travelers-to-come-take-a-long-vacation-11645009202>

Americans Are Emerging From the Pandemic Ready to Splurge on Events and Travel

More Americans are satisfying their wanderlust and spending big to do it, companies say. With daily new Covid-19 cases falling, restrictions easing and the strongest consumer finances in recent history, Americans are finally emerging from the pandemic eager to splurge on everything from travel and sports events to restaurants, cruises and theme parks, executives say. Companies including Marriott International Inc., Expedia Group Inc., Coca-Cola Co. and MGM Resorts International told analysts recently that business is already improving from an Omicron dip and indications point to an American public eager to live large. "Premium customers, who after being cooped up for 2020 and the first part of 2021, are traveling and spending again with a vengeance," Wynn Resorts Ltd. Chief Executive Craig Billings said Tuesday of the latest quarter.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/americans-want-to-travel-and-are-eager-to-splurge-companies-say-11645093981>

Washington State to Lift Mask Mandate in Schools, Most Indoor Locations March 21

Washington, one of just a handful of U.S. states with indoor mask mandates, will lift that requirement for most spaces, including schools, on March 21 as Covid cases decline and hospital crowding eases. "That's a very important step in our journey to normalcy," Governor Jay Inslee, a Democrat, said Thursday at a press conference. "This is both good for our health and our education of our children and the total reopening of our economy." Masks will still be mandatory in hospitals, medical offices, long-term care and correctional facilities. Federal law requires masks on public transportation.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-02-17/washington-state-to-lift-mask-mandate-in-schools-most-indoor-locations-march-21>

Oscars to require COVID tests for all, vaccines for most

The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences will require attendees of the 94th Oscars ceremony in March to show proof of COVID-19 vaccination and at least two negative results from PCR tests, a person with knowledge of the matter said on Thursday. Performers and presenters at the film industry's highest honors also must undergo polymerase chain reaction (PCR) testing, but will not need to show proof of vaccination, the source said. Face covering requirements will vary at the event on March 27 at the Dolby Theatre in Hollywood, according to the source.

<https://www.reuters.com/lifestyle/oscars-will-require-covid-tests-all-vaccines-most-nyt-2022-02-18/>

WHO calls for strengthened role as U.S. proposes new pandemic fund

Efforts to strengthen global health security will only succeed if the role of the World Health Organization (WHO) is enhanced, the agency's head said on Thursday, as its biggest donor, Washington, proposed a new global pandemic prevention fund. Speaking via video link at a G20 meeting of finance leaders, WHO director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus was responding to the idea of a separate global health fund tasked with delivering emergency funds, vaccines and other medical needs. "It's clear that at the centre of this architecture, the world needs a strong and sustainably financed WHO ... with its unique mandate, unique technical expertise and unique global legitimacy," Tedros told a panel in the Indonesian capital.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/who-must-be-bolstered-strengthen-global-health-security-says-tedros-2022-02-17/>

Israel drops 'Green Passes' as Omicron infections wane

Israel on Thursday dropped a "Green Pass" policy requiring proof of vaccination, recovery from COVID-19 or a negative test to enter some public venues, further rolling back restrictions as a wave of infections recedes. The highly contagious Omicron variant of the coronavirus peaked in Israel towards the end of January with daily cases reaching record highs of some 85,000, but numbers have steadily declined since to around 21,000 by Wednesday. "The wave has broken," Prime Minister Naftali Bennett said at the start of a discussion with health officials on the state of the pandemic where he said Green Passes were being completely scrapped.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/israel-drops-green-passes-omicron-infections-wane-2022-02-17/>

Exit Strategies

'Fortress Australia' to welcome tourists for first time under COVID

Australia will welcome international tourists on Monday after nearly two years of sealing its borders, relying on high COVID-19 vaccination rates to live with the pandemic as infections decline. "The wait is over," Prime Minister Scott Morrison told a Sunday briefing at the Melbourne International Airport. Australia's opening to tourists is the clearest example yet of the government's shift from a strict zero-COVID approach to living with the virus and vaccinating the public to minimise deaths and severe illness.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/fortress-australia-welcome-tourists-first-time-under-covid-2022-02-20/>

Hong Kong 'risks losing' its status as leading Asian hub, Winters says

Hong Kong risks falling behind other Asian cities as the region's main financial hub if tough coronavirus restrictions are left in place for too long, the boss of Standard Chartered has said. Bill Winters warned that although the former British colony's status as an offshore financial centre for China had been reinforced in recent years, there was a question mark over its status as the leading Asian hub.

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/hong-kong-risks-losing-its-status-as-leading-asian-hub-winters-says-99bwgvyxq>

Shades of the early pandemic as Omicron tests Hong Kong

Bundled in a quilted jacket, covered with two thin blankets, Alice Yeung insisted she was not cold. Five hours before, she had tested positive for COVID-19. With no symptoms, but no vaccine, either, she was shipped from her nursing home to Caritas Medical Centre in the Kowloon region on Thursday. There, she and 50 or so strangers waited outside the emergency room on one of winter's coolest nights as medical staff inside drowned under a resurgent epidemic. "No problem!" said the 69-year-old Yeung, with the practised optimism of the kindergarten aide she had once been. Like tens of thousands of seniors, Yeung had ignored the government's fitful efforts to vaccinate them for most of the last two years. Local newspapers carried reports that people had died after getting jabs, or suffered paralysis. "Big headlines," she said. With the government pushing vaccines harder in

recent weeks, she had signed up to get her jab on February 25.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/2/19/hong-kong-covid-19>

South Korea extends business curfew as COVID-19 cases top 100,000

South Korea's daily COVID-19 cases topped 100,000 for the first time amid its Omicron outbreak, as authorities announced a slight easing of restrictions ahead of the March 9 presidential election. Authorities announced on Friday they would move a curfew on restaurants and cafés from 9 pm to 10 pm, amid a growing backlash from business owners.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2022/2/18/south-korea-extends-business-curfew-as-covid-19-cases-top-100000>

The UK promised to 'shield' us, but now we are being left behind

Last Wednesday, the British government announced plans to drop all remaining COVID-19 restrictions in England by the end of the month, including the legal requirement for infected people to self-isolate. Doing this, they said, would make England the "freest country in Europe". But millions of us who are immunosuppressed are not free. For the past six months, I have been living alone, separated from my family. I have an autoimmune condition called lupus and because of my illness and the immunosuppressing medication I'm on, I am extremely vulnerable to COVID. With infection rates continuing to soar, I am isolating in a rented flat across the street from our home, so my teenage daughter can attend school. This is an option we're lucky enough to be able to afford, and not one all people like me have available.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2022/2/17/britain-promised-to-protect-us-but-now-we-are-being-left-behind>

UK shoppers return to stores after Omicron knock

British shoppers began to return to stores last month after many stayed away during a wave of COVID-19 cases that peaked at the turn of the year, although fast-rising inflation is curbing their spending power. Retail sales volumes rose by 1.9% in January after a 4.0% decline in December, the Office for National Statistics said, the largest rise since lockdown rules for non-essential stores in England were relaxed in April 2021. The monthly increase was greater than the average 1.0% gain forecast in a Reuters poll, although December's drop in sales was slightly bigger than first estimated.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uk-retail-sales-grow-faster-than-expected-january-2022-02-18/>

Japan PM Kishida's border easing as COVID deaths spike draws ire online

Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's plan to relax the strictest COVID-19 border controls among wealthy nations has pleased nobody, with businesses and student groups worried it might not be enough while online critics blast his change of tack. Japan has largely been closed off to non-residents for almost two years, keeping out hundreds of thousands of students and foreign workers sorely needed to fill a labour gap left by the nation's shrinking, aging population. Kishida said on Thursday that from March the number of people allowed to enter Japan will increase to 5,000 a day from 3,500 now, while quarantine would be shortened or eliminated entirely.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/japan-pm-kishidas-border-easing-covid-deaths-spike-draws-ire-online-2022-02-18/>

China's 'dynamic' zero-COVID strategy will boost economy - watchdog

China's "dynamic clearance" strategy aimed at minimising COVID-19 infections is boosting the economy, not undermining it, the country's top anti-corruption body said on Friday in response to concerns about the prospects for growth this year. As other countries relax restrictions, China has maintained a zero-tolerance approach, shutting down transmission routes whenever they arise, ordering mass testing programmes and maintaining mask mandates. Some analysts have forecast a decline in economic growth this year, saying the challenge posed by the more infectious Omicron variant would significantly raise containment costs and further disrupt China's supply chains.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/china/chinas-dynamic-zero-covid-strategy-will-boost-economy-watchdog-2022-02-18/>

Polish PM says chances of deal on EU COVID cash have 'slightly improved'

Poland has made progress in talks with the European Commission on unblocking COVID-19 recovery funds, its prime minister said on Friday, adding that he believed a deal could be reached. Brussels has yet to approve Warsaw's National Recovery Plan, which is necessary to unblock the 36 billion euros (\$40.89 billion) in funding, due to a dispute over judicial reforms the bloc says undermine the independence of the courts. "The chances after today's talks have slightly improved," Mateusz Morawiecki told a news conference in Brussels broadcast by Polish television, while stressing that it remained to be seen if an agreement could be forged in coming weeks

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/polish-pm-says-chances-deal-eu-covid-cash-have-slightly-improved-2022-02-18/>

Hong Kong Considers Citywide Testing as Omicron Overwhelms Defenses

Officials are considering citywide coronavirus testing in Hong Kong, adopting a strategy used in mainland China after Beijing demanded more be done to control an Omicron surge that has quickly overrun the city's health system. Under the plan, all 7.4 million residents would be tested from early March with Chinese authorities sending health experts and medical workers to help carry out the mammoth task, people familiar with the matter said. Some tests would be sent across the border to Shenzhen for results to be processed quickly, one person said. A day after Chinese leader Xi Jinping called on the city to bring the outbreak to heel, mainland authorities have begun stepping up plans to send help to the city. Hong Kong has quickly become the center of the worst outbreak in Chinese territory since the coronavirus emerged in Wuhan more than two years ago, presenting a major test for the country's so-called dynamic clearing policy, which aims to eliminate clusters whenever they appear.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/hong-kong-considers-citywide-testing-as-omicron-overwhelms-defenses-11645096216>

How Omicron and Politics Punctured Hong Kong

Omicron has breached Hong Kong's defenses. The semiautonomous city, which until January had logged less than 13,000 cases since the beginning of the pandemic, is now discovering 6,000 a day. Given that vaccination rates are very low among the vulnerable elderly, a surge of deaths seems likely to be only a matter of time. Economists had begun marking down their growth expectations for 2022 even before the true severity of the outbreak became apparent. Fitch cut its Hong Kong growth estimate in half to 1.5% on Feb. 9. Natixis now expects zero growth in retail sales, down from 8.1% in 2021, assuming current social-distancing restrictions stick around and aren't tightened further—which they probably will be.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/how-omicron-and-politics-punctured-hong-kong-11645147070>

The End Game of China's Zero-Covid Policy Nightmare

On December 22, 2021, the entire western Chinese city of Xi'an was put into lockdown. "It was all of a sudden," says Fan, a Xi'an native and university student in his early twenties who didn't give his full name, due to privacy concerns. "The university wouldn't let us go outside of the dorms. Our freedom was restricted, and they stopped all our classes. I couldn't leave and I couldn't go home. We were stuck." Xi'an, a city of 13 million people, spent the end of December 2021 and much of January 2022 in one of China's most severe lockdowns. The trigger? A handful of cases of Covid-19. Since the start of the pandemic, China has clung to a zero-Covid strategy consisting of strict containment measures that have served the nation remarkably well. China's official death toll has remained under 5,000, and its total reported caseload of 124,900 is significantly lower than the 78 million cases in the United States or the 18.4 million in the United Kingdom. Aside from travel disruptions, life has been largely normal—and China's success at containing the virus has become a source of national pride.

https://www.wired.co.uk/article/china-zero-covid-vaccines?utm_social-type=earned

Australia reports 43 COVID deaths before expanded border reopening

Australia recorded 43 coronavirus-related deaths on Saturday, as it readies to welcome international tourists on Monday for the first time in nearly two years. The country, which shut its borders in March of 2020, has been gradually reopening since November, allowing first Australians to travel, then international students and workers, and now leisure travellers. Once a champion of a zero-COVID strategy, the country has moved to live with the coronavirus in the community, chiefly through high vaccination rates that have resulted in less severe cases and fewer hospitalisations.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/australia-reports-43-covid-deaths-before-expanded-border-reopening-2022-02-19/>

As Omicron Surged, Covid-19 Spread Through Patients in Hospitals

As the Omicron variant surged through communities across the U.S., it also spread inside hospitals and infected non-Covid-19 patients, reaching a record number, a Wall Street Journal analysis of U.S. government data found. The daily total of patients with Covid-19 that they caught in hospitals reached a record of about 4,700 during the Omicron wave in January, according to the analysis of U.S. Department of Health and Human Services data. The figure had peaked at around 1,100 patients with hospital-acquired infections during the Delta wave and 2,050 at the height of the pandemic's first winter surge, the analysis found, among the first looks at how commonly the coronavirus spread inside the facilities during surges. The numbers dropped as the surges retreated.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/as-omicron-surged-covid-19-spread-through-patients-in-hospitals-11645180201>

Hong Kong's Lam Says Mass Testing Details Still Being Worked Out

Hong Kong's Chief Executive Carrie Lam said the city is planning to make it mandatory for all residents to get tested for Covid-19, deploying a tactic widely used to curtail the virus on China's mainland as the financial hub struggles to contain an escalating outbreak. The city will also delay the chief executive's election by more than a month, Lam said at a press conference Friday, where she described plans for universal testing that might need to be linked to residents' government identity cards.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-02-17/hong-kong-s-lam-says-mass-testing-details-still-being-worked-out>

Partisan Exits

UK must cut spending on COVID testing, Johnson says

Britain wants to retain the capability to spot new coronavirus variants but it must stop spending so heavily on free testing as cases and fatalities fall, Prime Minister Boris Johnson said on Sunday. Johnson will set out plans this week for the country to "live with COVID" amid suggestions that free coronavirus testing could be stopped, and some health studies halted. Asked by the BBC how the country would spot the arrival of new variants, Johnson said: "I want to make sure that we have capability to spot stuff and to snap back up as fast as we need to," he said.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uk-must-cut-spending-covid-testing-johnson-says-2022-02-20/>

Freedom Convoy Leaves Town and Quiet Returns to Ottawa

For the first time in over three weeks, downtown Ottawa on Sunday was largely deserted, with the heavy-duty trucks and thousands of protesters demanding an end to Covid-19 vaccine mandates replaced by police vehicles, officers, and crews trying to clean up after a 23-day demonstration. Officials in the capital and across Canada remained on high alert. While police in Ottawa cleared out Freedom Convoy protesters there, authorities in some of Canada's biggest cities, such as Toronto and Vancouver, dealt Saturday with either the threat of a trucker-led demonstration or protesters that disrupted traffic. "It's still clear that while police have made significant progress, the job is not yet done," Bill Blair, a former Toronto police chief and Canada's emergency-preparedness minister, told CTV News on Sunday. "The threat, the risks, the reasons we had to invoke emergency powers,

they still exist.”

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/freedom-convoy-leaves-town-and-quiet-returns-to-ottawa-11645385184>

Canadian Covid-19 protesters and police face off in Ottawa amid freezing conditions

Police say they have made 47 arrests in Ottawa Saturday as they cleared downtown, a day after a weeks-long protest turned violent. City, provincial and federal law enforcement officers began an unprecedented operation Friday morning to remove demonstrators, their trucks and cars, that have been blockading the streets. On Friday, more than 100 people were arrested and 21 vehicles were towed. Another 38 vehicles have been towed since Friday, police say. Wellington Street in front of Parliament has been cleared. Police say they will continue restoring the streets to normal order over the coming days. Tensions between Canadian authorities and protesters have been simmering for weeks as crowds and idling trucks filled the capital, demanding the elimination of Covid-19 preventative measures including mask and vaccination requirements.

<https://www.cnn.com/2022/02/19/americas/canada-trucker-protest-covid-saturday/index.html>

Police close in on protesters blockading Canada's capital

Police, some on horseback, pushed into crowds of demonstrators to clear them from the streets of downtown Ottawa on Friday, arresting more than 100 and hauling away vehicles that had been blocking the capital's core for over three weeks in a protest against pandemic restrictions. Fearing escalation or violence, Ottawa police had sought to disperse protesters with fines and threats of arrest, but on Friday hundreds of officers moved in despite frigid temperatures and freshly fallen snow, slowly clearing one part of the city

<https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/canada-police-set-end-siege-capital-by-protesters-fighting-covid-measures-2022-02-18/>

Canadian Police Begin Freedom Convoy Arrests

Police began arrests of people protesting against Covid-19 mandates on Thursday evening, including two organizers, after promising imminent action to remove a weekslong encampment from the streets of Canada's capital city. The arrests came after multiple warnings from police to those involved in the blockade—known as the Freedom Convoy and now in its third week—that they would face severe penalties if they didn't leave the area voluntarily. Two of the protest group's organizers, Chris Barber and Tamara Lich, were among those arrested on Thursday evening. A lawyer for the group, Keith Wilson, said Mr. Barber was arrested on allegations that included counseling to commit mischief and obstruction of justice. Ms. Lich was charged with counseling mischief, he added. Mr. Barber and Ms. Lich were two of the high-profile public faces of the protest group. They often posted video messages on social media, urging protesters in Ottawa to keep their resolve.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/trudeau-says-emergency-powers-necessary-to-counter-freedom-convoy-protests-in-canada-11645118737>

Analysis: Pandemic fatigue a challenge for Canada's Trudeau amid protests

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's support of vaccine mandates in fighting COVID-19 helped him win re-election five months ago, but now he looks increasingly isolated as restrictions are being lifted around the world. Denmark, the Netherlands, Ireland, Sweden, Norway, Israel, Britain and Spain and most of the United States are easing or lifting COVID restrictions, and most of Canada's provincial governments are rolling them back, too. But Trudeau has doubled down on federal vaccine mandates and this week invoked emergency powers to seek an end to weeks of protests against his government's pandemic restrictions

<https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/pandemic-fatigue-challenge-canadas-trudeau-amid-protests-2022-02-17/>

Covid-19 Pill Access at Risk as Pharmacies Push for Bigger Payments

The rollout of new Covid-19 pills has exposed a potentially costly hole in how the government and healthcare companies are managing the pandemic drug response. Pharmacies that dispense the

pills are pushing back and some are threatening to halt supplies if they don't get more funds to cover the gap. The government paid billions of dollars for the pills, Paxlovid from Pfizer Inc. and molnupiravir from Merck & Co. and Ridgeback Biotherapeutics LP. Yet it left the details of how much pharmacists should be paid for filling prescriptions to health insurers and prescription-processing middlemen known as pharmacy-benefit managers. The commercial firms are paying pharmacies as low as a penny to about \$10 for filling each prescription, according to pharmacists and pharmacy-transaction records reviewed by The Wall Street Journal.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/covid-19-pill-access-at-risk-as-pharmacies-push-for-bigger-payments-11645365601>

Continued Lockdown

Hong Kong ramps up isolation facility plans as COVID infections climb

Hong Kong reported 6,063 new COVID-19 cases on Saturday, as the the city's government made more plans for isolation facilities to take some strain off a healthcare system as infections have risen by more than 60 times since the month began. City leader Carrie Lam said on Saturday the government will build 10,000 isolation units in two new community facilities, with the help of China. Some 114 Chinese medical personnel arrived in Hong Kong on Saturday - the second batch that has been sent from the mainland.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/china/hong-kong-report-least-7000-new-covid-cases-saturday-tvb-2022-02-19/>

Scientific Viewpoint

Ending ALL Covid restrictions is 'premature' and 'not based on evidence' BMA warns

The end of Covid-19 restrictions in England is premature and 'not based on current evidence', according to the British Medical Association. Experts have warned an absence of testing and self-isolation will lead to a surge in cases in the country. Prime Minister Boris Johnson said he will present his plan for 'living with Covid' when Parliament returns from a short recess on February 21, with an aim of lifting the requirement to self-isolate by February 24. Dr Chaand Nagpaul, chair of the BMA council, told the Guardian the decision was 'not based on current evidence and is premature,' adding: 'It clearly hasn't been guided by data or done in consultation with the healthcare profession.' He said case rates remained exceptionally high, with one in 20 infected last week, according to the latest Office for National Statistics survey.

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10529961/Ending-Covid-restrictions-premature-not-based-evidence-BMA-warns.html>

Covid-19 Vaccines Were Deadly in Rare Cases. Governments Are Now Weighing Compensation.

Vikki Spit's partner of two decades received his first Covid-19 shot in early May. Two weeks later, he died from a condition doctors for the 48-year-old former punk rock musician attributed to a rare vaccine side effect. Ms. Spit now lives alone in a north England farmhouse, home to the couple's rescue pets. Finances are tight. She struggles to maintain the online art-resale business her partner, who went by a single legal name, Zion, had started. She's learning to drive—a task that had always fallen to him. "Sometimes putting a kettle on seems more than I can manage," she says. Ms. Spit is now among hundreds in the U.K. and elsewhere applying for government compensation for suspected injury caused by Covid-19 vaccines.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/covid-19-vaccines-were-deadly-in-rare-cases-governments-are-now-weighing-compensation-11645266603>

US FDA considers approving second Covid-19 booster shot - report

US health regulators are looking at authorizing a potential fourth dose of a Covid-19 vaccine in the fall, the Wall Street Journal reported on Saturday, citing sources familiar with the matter. California Surgeon General Dr. Nadine Burke Harris, wearing a light blue blazer and red and yellow patterned blouse, speaks into a microphone at a news conference. California's first surgeon general on Covid:

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has been reviewing data to authorize a second booster dose of vaccines from Pfizer and BioNTech and Moderna, the report added. The FDA did not immediately comment. The agency last month cut the interval to get a booster dose of Covid-19 vaccines from Pfizer and BioNTech as well as from Moderna, in a bid to provide better protection sooner against the Omicron variant.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/19/us-fda-considers-second-covid-19-booster-shot-wall-street-journal>

FDA to allow export of AstraZeneca COVID vaccine lots made at Emergent plant

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration said on Friday it had found four batches of AstraZeneca Plc's (AZN.L) COVID-19 vaccine manufactured at the troubled Emergent BioSolutions facility that were fit to be shipped outside the United States. The health agency said it does not, however, expect to make any more decisions on the remaining lots of the vaccine manufactured at Emergent's Baltimore facility. Last year, the FDA halted operations at the plant, which was producing vaccines for AstraZeneca and Johnson & Johnson (JNJ.N), following a discovery that one vaccine was contaminated with material used in the other. There have been concerns over the shelf life of AstraZeneca's vaccines reaching the world's poorest nations for distribution, Reuters reported on Wednesday.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/fda-allow-export-astrazeneca-covid-vaccine-lots-made-emergent-plant-2022-02-18/>

Analysis: Hong Kong's 'zero-COVID' success now worsens strains of Omicron spike

Hong Kong until recently had an enviable record battling COVID-19, but as an Omicron wave now overwhelms the city, the steps that saved lives are making life unbearable for many of its 7.4 million people. Like an immune system overreacting and harming the person it is meant to protect, the "dynamic zero-COVID" policies that had crushed the virus in Hong Kong have contributed to current woes, experts say. Patients lie in beds in cold, wet parking lots outside overflowing hospitals, isolation facilities are filling up and thousands queue for hours outside testing venues. A 60-fold spike in daily infections this month prompted the government recently to modify its COVID-eradication policies, but the authorities continue aiming to wipe out the virus. The impact of zero tolerance will remain for some time, epidemiologists say.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/china/hong-kongs-zero-covid-success-now-worsens-strains-omicron-spike-2022-02-19/>

Pfizer's Covid-19 Vaccine for Kids Isn't Working Well Against Omicron So Far, Delaying FDA Review

U.S. health regulators delayed their review of Pfizer Inc.'s Covid-19 vaccine in children under 5 years old because the initial two-dose series so far wasn't working well against the Omicron variant during testing, people familiar with the decision said. An early look at data showed the vaccine to be effective against the Delta variant during testing while that was the dominant strain, but some vaccinated children developed Covid-19 after Omicron emerged, the people said. So few study subjects, whether vaccinated or unvaccinated, developed Covid-19 during testing thus far that the small number of Omicron cases made the vaccine appear less effective in an early statistical analysis, the people said. As more cases emerge, Pfizer's shot might wind up providing stronger protection against Omicron, the people said, if the bulk of infections are in unvaccinated subjects.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/lower-omicron-efficacy-delayed-fda-review-on-pfizer-shot-in-kids-under-5-11645192800>

African countries to get mRNA vaccine technology in WHO project

The World Health Organization said on Friday six African countries - Egypt, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa and Tunisia - would be the first on the continent to receive the technology needed to produce mRNA vaccines. The technology transfer project, launched last year in Cape Town, aims to help low- and middle-income countries manufacture mRNA vaccines at scale and according to international standards. mRNA is the advanced technology used by companies such as Pfizer-

BioNTech and Moderna for their COVID-19 shots.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/six-african-countries-receive-mrna-vaccine-technology-who-project-2022-02-18/>

Why China Doesn't Have an mRNA Vaccine for Covid

China has done everything in its power to keep the virus outside its borders and protect its people — almost. It has kept cases and deaths remarkably low through a “zero-Covid” strategy that has involved tracking and tracing every case, closed its borders and locked down cities of millions of people. It fostered domestic vaccines that allowed the country to carry out a massive inoculation effort. But two years into the pandemic, China’s 1.4 billion people still don’t have access to one of the most effective coronavirus vaccines the world has to offer. Those vaccines use the breakthrough mRNA technology that was developed and approved in the West, and they have been embraced by dozens of countries.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/18/business/china-coronavirus-vaccines.html>

China allows COVID boosters of different technologies than primary shots

China is giving COVID-19 booster vaccines using technologies different from the initial injections, in an effort to improve immunisation strategies amid concerns that its most-used jabs appeared to be weaker against variants such as Omicron. Boosting population immunity could be crucial to preparing China to eventually reopen its borders and pivot from its "dynamic zero" strategy, which involves travel curbs and mass testing following dozens of local infections. Experts are watching whether combined Chinese doses would lead to higher effectiveness.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/china/china-allows-covid-boosters-different-technologies-than-primary-shots-2022-02-19/>

Charities say Moderna patents could hit Africa COVID vaccine hub

Moderna Inc has applied for patents in South Africa relating to its COVID-19 vaccine, prompting fears among charities that the company could eventually seek to prevent a new African vaccine manufacturing hub from making its own version of the mRNA shot, although a Moderna spokeswoman said it did not plan to do so. Moderna spokeswoman Colleen Hussey confirmed it had filed for patents "related to both the COVID-19 vaccine and Moderna's platform technology" in South Africa and elsewhere, after a group of 60 Africa-based charities raised concerns about them. But she reiterated Moderna's October 2020 pledge not to enforce its COVID-19 related patents during the coronavirus pandemic. South Africa's Afrigen Biologics has already used the publicly available sequence of Moderna's vaccine to make its own version of the vaccine, and plans to start human clinical trials in November

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/charities-say-moderna-patents-could-hit-africa-covid-vaccine-hub-2022-02-17/>

Coronavirus Resurgence

'God Save The Queen': messages pour in after Elizabeth catches COVID

News that Britain's Queen Elizabeth had tested positive for COVID-19 drew shock, concern and messages of goodwill from across the country on Sunday, with politicians and the public willing the 95-year-old to recover. On a wet and blustery day, a few sightseers gathered at the gates of Windsor Castle where the queen is receiving medical treatment for mild symptoms. Others went online to express support and message boards in the London Underground urged the monarch to "take it easy".

<https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/god-save-queen-messages-pour-after-elizabeth-catches-covid-2022-02-20/>

S.Korea daily COVID-19 cases top 100000, curfew eased ahead of election

South Korea's new daily COVID-19 cases topped 100,000 for the first time amid its Omicron outbreak, with authorities saying social distancing measures would be only slightly eased ahead of

the March 9 presidential election. Authorities announced on Friday they would move a curfew on restaurants and cafes from 9 p.m. to 10 p.m., a nod to increasing criticism from business owners. "The situation for small business owners and the self-employed is desperate," President Moon Jae-in told a meeting of aides on Friday, when calling for the parliament to quickly pass a supplemental budget with measures for "resolving the difficulties of the people's livelihood."

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/skorea-daily-covid-19-cases-top-100000-first-time-kdca-2022-02-18/>