

COVID-19 Lockdown Exit Analysis

11th Mar 2022

Lockdown Exit

Australia leaders to meet amid Omicron sub-variant concerns, flood damage

Australia's national cabinet will meet on Friday against a backdrop of concerns about the spread of the new sub-variant of the Omicron strain of the coronavirus, while eastern states battle to clear tonnes of debris after devastating floods.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/australia-leaders-meet-amid-omicron-sub-variant-concerns-flood-damage-2022-03-11/>

As Omicron surges, New Zealand's businesses want COVID bubble burst

New Zealand's tight COVID-19 bubble was once globally lauded but for local business, the strict border controls increasingly feel like a straitjacket as a lack on foreign workers and tourists squeezes the island nation's economy. Meat processors have cut production, grapes are withering on vines and a dearth of international visitors has some tourism operators worried they will have to close shop by the time borders reopen later this year. New Zealand's swift response to the pandemic, including the strict border controls, kept the country largely COVID-19 free until the end of last year, winning Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern's government strong praise at home and abroad.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/omicron-surges-new-zealands-businesses-want-covid-bubble-burst-2022-03-10/>

98% of U.S. population can ditch masks as COVID eases -CDC

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) late on Thursday said some 98% of the U.S. population live in locations where COVID-19 levels are low enough that people do not need to wear masks indoors. The CDC on Feb. 25 dramatically eased its COVID-19 guidelines for when Americans should wear masks indoors, saying they could drop them in counties experiencing what it described as low or medium COVID-19 levels. Last month, the CDC initially said 70% of counties covering 72% of Americans could drop masks. The latest update says 98% of Americans who live in 94% of U.S. counties can ditch masks.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/98-us-population-can-ditch-masks-covid-eases-cdc-2022-03-10/>

How has the COVID-19 pandemic changed after two years?

How has the COVID-19 pandemic changed after two years? More countries are shifting toward a return to normal and learning to live with the virus. Safe, effective vaccines have been developed and there's better understanding of how to treat people sickened by the virus. Two years after the pandemic began, questions remain about the coronavirus. But experts know a lot more about how to keep it under control.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/covid-pfizer-merck-studies-world-health-organization-b2032640.html>

United Airlines to let unvaccinated workers return - WSJ

United Airlines will allow workers who have not been vaccinated against COVID-19 for religious or medical reasons to return at the end of this month, the Wall Street Journal reported. The move permits staffers with exemptions from the carrier's vaccination requirement for its U.S. employees to return from unpaid leave or from the non-customer-facing roles they were allowed to apply for as an alternative to their regular jobs, the report said.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/united-airlines-let-unvaccinated-workers-return-wsj-2022-03-10/>

Seniors, freed from COVID isolation, sashay in New York dance class

Seniors sway hips and stomp feet as they salsa, cha-cha, merengue and bachata in a New York dance class to get moving again after two years of COVID-19 pandemic isolation. Despite stiff joints - or even the loss of a limb - the students stick it out in the free class taught by Walter Perez at the YM & YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood in upper Manhattan.

<https://www.reuters.com/lifestyle/seniors-freed-covid-isolation-sashay-new-york-dance-class-2022-03-10/>

Britain outlines terms of COVID-19 inquiry

Britain on Thursday outlined the terms of reference of its planned inquiry into the COVID-19 pandemic, looking into the preparedness of the country as well as the public health and economic response to the coronavirus. Britain has recorded 19.3 million COVID-19 infections and 162,000 deaths - the seventh highest fatality total globally - and Prime Minister Boris Johnson has been criticised for mishandling England's three national lockdowns.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/britain-outlines-terms-covid-19-inquiry-2022-03-10/>

'Lost generation' feared as COVID school closures fuel inequality

Around 1.6 billion children globally - more than 90% of all school students - have been affected by pandemic school closures, which threaten to widen wealth inequalities both within and between countries. "We're running the risk of a lost generation," U.N. education expert Robert Jenkins told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. "It's a now-or-never moment to turn things around." Without urgent action, many countries could end up without the skilled workers they need for their future development, said Jenkins, head of education at UNICEF.

<https://news.trust.org/item/20220304145031-8pnt9>

How will COVID end? Experts look to past epidemics for clues

Two years into the COVID-19 pandemic, most of the world has seen a dramatic improvement in infections, hospitalizations and death rates in recent weeks, signaling the crisis appears to be winding down. But how will it end? Past epidemics may provide clues. The ends of epidemics are not as thoroughly researched as their beginnings. But there are recurring themes that could offer lessons for the months ahead, said Erica Charters of the University of Oxford, who studies the issue. "One thing we have learned is it's a long, drawn-out process" that includes different types of endings that may not all occur at the same time, she said. That includes a "medical end," when disease recedes, the "political end," when government prevention measures cease, and the "social end," when people move on.

<https://apnews.com/article/covid-science-health-covid-19-pandemic-death-rates-2423873745c89f6a887cb117d8a0d7f2>

China's daily local symptomatic COVID cases nearly double to 402

Mainland China reported 402 locally transmitted COVID-19 infections with confirmed symptoms for March. 9, official data showed on Thursday, nearly doubling from the daily count a day earlier. Of those, 165 were in the northeastern province of Jilin, the National Health Commission said in a statement. That marks the highest daily count for the province since China contained its first national outbreak in early 2020. The number of new domestically-transmitted asymptomatic cases, which China does not classify as confirmed cases, was 435, a near two-year high.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/chinas-daily-local-symptomatic-covid-cases-nearly-double-402-2022-03-10/>

Exit Strategies

China Covid Infections Top 1000 for the First Time in Two Years

China's daily Covid-19 caseload exceeded 1,000 for the first time in two years, as the highly infectious omicron variant spawns outbreaks at a scale only seen at the peak of the start of the

pandemic in Wuhan. The country reported 1,100 domestic infections on Friday, data from the National Health Commission showed. The tally has ballooned from just over 300 cases a day in less than a week, presenting a significant challenge to China's ongoing, zero-tolerance approach to the virus. The Covid Zero strategy that helped keep China largely virus-free for much of the pandemic now appears to be buckling as omicron repeatedly breaks through one of the the world's most stringent remaining containment regimes. Covid's spread in the nation's biggest cities, including financial hub Shanghai, also makes it difficult to deploy the aggressive but disruptive restrictions officials are increasingly turning to, chief among them lockdowns.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-03-11/china-covid-infections-top-1-000-for-the-first-time-in-two-years>

Covid Study Finds 18 Million Deaths, Three Times Official Tally

The pandemic's death toll may be three times higher than official Covid-19 records suggest, according to a study that found stark differences across countries and regions. As many as 18.2 million people probably died from Covid in the first two years of the pandemic, researchers found in the first peer-reviewed global estimate of excess deaths. They pointed to a lack of testing and unreliable mortality data to explain the discrepancy with official estimates of roughly 5.9 million deaths. "At the global level, this is quite the biggest mortality shock since the Spanish flu," said Christopher J.L. Murray, director of the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation at the University of Washington, where the study was conducted.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-03-10/pandemic-drives-biggest-surge-in-global-deaths-since-spanish-flu>

U.S. to extend airplane, transit mask mandate through April 18

President Joe Biden's administration will extend requirements for travelers to wear masks on airplanes, trains and in transit hubs through April 18 as public health authorities review when mask requirements should be dropped, the White House confirmed. The move extends the current requirements that were set to expire March 18 by a month.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-extend-airplane-transit-mask-mandate-through-april-18-official-2022-03-10/>

Changes to South African Covid-19 Vaccine Rollout Planned

Just under a third of South Africa's remaining Covid-19 vaccines from Pfizer are set to expire by July 2022. After that, any unused doses will have to be destroyed. Until then the health department is trying to increase uptake of the doses and donate spare shots. South Africa has received all the 30 million Pfizer Covid jabs it has procured from the drug manufacturer and the last batch that was delivered - a consignment of 4,831,560 shots that arrived between October and December 2021 - expires at the end of July, health department data shows. After that date, Pfizer jabs not used or redistributed to other countries will have to be destroyed and more doses are unlikely to be procured directly from the company.

<https://allafrica.com/view/group/main/main/id/00081436.html>

Coronavirus: Hungary to Donate 523,000 Doses of Vaccine to Cambodia

Hungary is sending 523,000 doses of the AstraZeneca coronavirus vaccine to Cambodia in an effort to further aid the worldwide fight against the pandemic, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said on Thursday. Although the war in Ukraine overshadows it, the fight against the pandemic is not over, and many countries lack the vaccines to ease their struggle, Szijjártó said.

<https://hungarytoday.hu/coronavirus-hungary-donate-523000-doses-vaccine-cambodia/>

Health Workers Plan for Years of Covid-19 Vaccine Outreach to Black People

Community health workers are redoubling their efforts to sustain Covid-19 vaccine coverage among Black people, saying that gaps remain between willingness to get the shots and the ability of some people to find them conveniently. Early in the U.S. vaccination drive, some Black people said they doubted the safety of the shots or couldn't get to inoculation sites easily, and their coverage rate

lagged that of the general population. Outreach and public-information campaigns helped close the gap by September, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation, which found in a survey of 1,519 adults that month that the share of Black adults who said they had gotten an initial vaccination matched the rate for white adults.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/health-workers-plan-for-years-of-covid-19-vaccine-outreach-to-black-people-11646917200>

Canada's Ontario to drop COVID curbs, including mask mandate

Ontario, Canada's most populous province, said on Wednesday it would end masking requirements for most indoor spaces later this month, and scrap virtually all COVID-19-related public health measures by end-April, citing the reduced threat of the pandemic. The province also said it would end strict inoculation rules on hospitals, colleges and universities next week. The broad mask mandate ends on March 21, though masks will still be required in healthcare settings and on public transit until April 27.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/canadas-ontario-drop-covid-curbs-including-mask-mandate-2022-03-09/>

Hong Kong leader plans to reopen city only after controlling latest COVID outbreak

Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam said on Thursday it was not the time to lift a ban on flights from nine countries including the United States and Britain, with plans to reopen the city only after the government controls a deepening coronavirus outbreak. The global financial hub has some of the most draconian restrictions in place to combat a surge in coronavirus cases that has seen the city suffer the most deaths globally per million people in the week to March 7, according to the Our World in Data publication. Total infections have surged to about 600,000, including about 3,000 deaths - most in the past two weeks.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/hong-kong-leader-plans-reopen-city-after-controlling-latest-covid-outbreak-2022-03-10/>

U.S. Travel Mask Mandate Extended by One Month to April 18

Travelers in the U.S. will have to continue wearing masks on airplanes, buses and other forms of transit through April 18 under a federal mandate that the Biden administration is extending, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Transportation Security Administration said Thursday. The TSA's directive requiring masks on public transit was set to expire after March 18, but it will remain in effect for another month at the CDC's recommendation—a move industry officials had widely expected. During that time, the CDC will work to revise its framework around when masks should be required on forms of transportation, basing its assessment on Covid-19 case levels, new variant risks and other data, the agencies said.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-to-extend-travel-mask-mandate-by-another-month-11646933141>

Partisan Exits

People Are Getting COVID Shots Despite Hesitation

It is easy to assume that most people who get the COVID-19 vaccine do so without a shred of trepidation, while those who are hesitant about it choose never to get vaccinated. But a recent set of findings blows up this binary and provides insights that could make vaccination campaigns more successful. The studies cut through toxic public discourse about the vaccine and focus on a significant group that is often overlooked by researchers, policy makers and the media: so-called hesitant adopters. Such people get vaccinated and report afterward that they felt some degree of hesitation about doing so. To look into this group, scientists at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences Northwest (UAMS Northwest) and their colleagues surveyed 1,475 adults at more than 30 COVID-19 vaccination sites in the state as they sat out their 15-minute wait time after receiving the shot.

<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/people-are-getting-covid-shots-despite-hesitation/>

Unvaccinated Djokovic says he is out of Indian Wells, Miami

Novak Djokovic said that he will not be able to compete at the hard-court tennis tournaments in Indian Wells, California, or Miami because he is unvaccinated and can't travel to the United States. The 20-time Grand Slam champion tweeted Wednesday that the Centers for Disease Control "confirmed the regulations won't be changing so I won't be able to play in the U.S." Djokovic, who recently dropped to No. 2 in the ATP rankings, has played in only one tournament so far in 2022 because he has not received any shots to protect against COVID-19. He was deported from Australia in January and was not allowed to try to defend his title at Melbourne Park. Rafael Nadal wound up winning the Australian Open for his 21st major trophy, breaking a tie with Djokovic and Roger Federer for the most claimed by a man in the history of tennis.

<https://apnews.com/article/rafael-nadal-novak-djokovic-covid-health-sports-a4588f2489df34574578320ae74ad5bd>

Scientific Viewpoint

COH04S1 COVID-19 vaccine shown to produce robust antibodies and T cells against SARS-CoV-2

A COVID-19 investigational vaccine, developed by City of Hope scientists and now licensed to GeoVax Labs Inc produced a robust neutralizing antibody and T cell (an immune cell) response against SARS-CoV-2 with no significant side effects in a Phase 1 clinical trial led by John Zaia, M.D., Aaron D. Miller and Edith Miller Chair for Gene Therapy, according to a study published today in The Lancet Microbe. COH04S1 is uniquely different than the many vaccines that have been developed because it targets both the spike and nucleocapsid proteins, in contrast to the current U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA)-approved COVID-19 vaccines, which only target the spike protein.

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2022-03-coh04s1-covid-vaccine-shown-robust.html>

J&J inks vaccine licensing deal with Aspen, paving the way for Africa's first local COVID-19 shot

South Africa's Aspen has clinched its COVID-19 vaccine licensing deal with Johnson & Johnson in a move the company last year said could be a "game-changer" on the path to Africa's vaccine sovereignty. Under the deal, Aspen will be able to manufacture and distribute J&J's COVID shot in Africa, with the goal to boost COVID-19 vaccination rates across the continent, J&J said in a release. Specifically, the South African manufacturer will receive drug substances from J&J, which it will use to produce finished, Aspen-branded vaccines for the African public sector. Aspen will make the shots available to all 55 African Union member states, plus multilateral organizations supporting Africa's COVID-19 vaccination efforts, such as the African Vaccine Acquisition Trust and the COVAX Facility.

<https://www.fiercepharma.com/pharma/johnson-johnson-locks-vaccine-licensing-deal-aspen-teeing-africas-first-local-covid-19-shot>

Incidence of myocarditis and pericarditis following COVID-19 vaccination

Several vaccine candidates have been developed following the onset of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. Most countries throughout the world have rolled out extensive vaccination programs to vaccinate and protect individuals from severe infections and deaths associated with COVID-19. However, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported mild to moderate myocarditis/pericarditis cases post the second dose of mRNA vaccination on 17th May 2021. Most of the patients who were found less than 50 years of age were reported to be presented with chest pain, fever, raised cardiac-specific troponin many days after vaccination followed by full recovery.

<https://www.news-medical.net/news/20220310/Incidence-of-myocarditis-and-pericarditis-following-COVID-19-vaccination.aspx>

Vaccines and Omicron mean Covid now less deadly than flu in England

A combination of high levels of immunity and the reduced severity of the Omicron variant has

rendered Covid-19 less lethal than influenza for the vast majority of people in England, according to a Financial Times analysis of official data. But the speed with which Omicron infects people still pushed the total number of deaths this winter whose underlying cause was a main respiratory disease to 9,641 since the first week of January, 50 per cent higher than in a typical flu season despite lower levels of social mixing, the Office for National Statistics figures revealed.

<https://www.ft.com/content/e26c93a0-90e7-4dec-a796-3e25e94bc59b>

Pfizer launches clinical trial testing its COVID-19 pill in children aged 6 and older

Pfizer announced Wednesday it is launching a clinical trial to study the effectiveness of its COVID-19 antiviral pill in young children. The treatment, Paxlovid, was authorized in December 2020 by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration for emergency use in patients aged 12 and older who have mild-to-moderate symptoms and are at increased risk of severe illness.

<https://abcnews.go.com/Health/pfizer-launches-clinical-trial-testing-covid-19-pill/story?id=83341330>

Masking In K-12 Schools Significantly Reduces Covid-19 Among Staff And Students

The US is breathing a collective sigh of relief as the Covid-19 Omicron wave has largely subsided. The latest CDC data show most of the country to be experiencing either “low” (green) or “medium” (yellow) levels of transmission — levels at which CDC’s new recommendations don’t require most people to wear face masks most of the time. Even though I am hopeful that we are witnessing Covid-19’s final denouement, it is important to remain vigilant about the possibility of future waves of transmission. If another high transmission variant does appear, we should remember that the protective benefits of wearing face masks are now well documented. A new study from Arkansas adds to this evidence. The new data enabled epidemiologists to measure the effectiveness of mask requirements in K-12 schools during the Delta wave of Covid-19 from August to October, 2021.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/johndrake/2022/03/09/masking-in-k-12-schools-significantly-reduces-covid-19-among-staff-and-students/>

Covid treatment sotrovimab can cause drug-resistant mutation, study finds

Australian virologists have uncovered a drug-resistant mutation in the Covid-19 virus associated with the drug sotrovimab and say without the monitoring of patients given the treatment the mutated virus could spread in the community. The world-first findings, published in the New England Journal of Medicine on Thursday, are the result of an analysis of the first 100 patients in western Sydney during the Delta outbreak in 2021 to be given sotrovimab. Sotrovimab is a monoclonal antibody that is available in many countries to treat vulnerable patients who are at risk of severe disease and death due to Covid-19 infection. Sotrovimab must be administered via infusion within the first five days of Covid-19 infection, and prevents Covid-19 symptoms from becoming severe. It is one of the few human-engineered monoclonal antibodies that can target Omicron.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/10/covid-treatment-sotrovimab-can-cause-drug-resistant-mutation-study-finds>

S.Africa's Aspen to supply its own branded COVID-19 vaccine by June

South Africa's Aspen Pharmacare will start supplying its branded COVID-19 vaccine to African nations by June, its chief executive told Reuters on Wednesday, after the drugmaker reported a 37% rise in profit for the half-year to Dec. 31. Its shares were up 5% by 1315 GMT, outpacing a 0.6% rise in the broader market index. Aspen said on Tuesday it had struck a deal with Johnson & Johnson to package, sell and distribute the American group's COVID vaccines under the Aspenovax brand in Africa. The agreement paves the way for Aspen to supply the COVID-19 vaccine across Africa, which has by far the lowest vaccination rate in the world.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/safricas-aspen-supply-its-own-branded-covid-19-vaccine-by-june-2022-03-09/>

Variant that combines Delta and Omicron identified; dogs sniff out virus with high

accuracy

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. "Deltacron" with genes of Delta and Omicron found Hybrid versions of the coronavirus that combine genes from the Delta and Omicron variants - dubbed "Deltacron" - have been identified in at least 17 patients in the United States and Europe, researchers said. Because there have been so few confirmed cases, it is too soon to know whether Deltacron infections will be very transmissible or cause severe disease, said Philippe Colson of IHU Mediterranee Infection in Marseille, France, lead author of a report posted on Tuesday on medRxiv ahead of peer review.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/variant-that-combines-delta-omicron-identified-dogs-sniff-out-virus-with-high-2022-03-09/>

Africa CDC has MOU with Pfizer for supplies of COVID-19 pill

Africa's top public health agency has agreed a memorandum of understanding with Pfizer to bring supplies of the pharmaceutical firm's Paxlovid antiviral COVID-19 pills to the continent, its director said on Thursday. Data from a mid-to-late stage study in November showed Paxlovid was nearly 90% effective in preventing hospitalisations and deaths compared to placebo, in adults at high risk of severe illness. John Nkengasong, head of the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), also said it was still talking to Merck about obtaining supplies of its molnupiravir COVID pill and a call was scheduled for this week about that.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/africa-cdc-has-mou-with-pfizer-supplies-covid-19-pill-2022-03-10/>

Novavax, eyeing the COVID 'vaccine hesitant' and kids, unveils new education campaigns as Nuvaxovid nears US finish line

Pfizer, Moderna and Johnson & Johnson were quickest off the mark in getting COVID vaccines into American arms, but Novavax is hoping to add another pandemic vaccine to the U.S. mix soon—and it's pushing new campaigns to get the word out. The biopharma, which has approvals and authorizations in Europe and around the world, is now on the cusp of a potential green light in the U.S. And with a market comes the need for marketing. But because it still has no U.S. approval—and it cannot under law advertise to consumers in Europe—Novavax is launching two new global, unbranded vaccine education programs: "We Do Vaccines" and "Know Our Vax." They're designed to offer up vaccine information and "explain Novavax' commitment to vaccine development and innovation," the company told Fierce Pharma Marketing.

<https://www.fiercepharma.com/marketing/novavax-eyeing-covid-vaccine-hesitant-and-kids-unveils-new-education-campaigns-nuvaxovid>

Ukraine Covid Pill Development Project Disrupted by Russian Invasion

The night before Russia invaded Ukraine, chemist Tetiana Matviyuk worked late into the night at her Kyiv office. By 10:30 p.m., she had wrapped up after a Zoom meeting with a global team of scientists working on a new, experimental Covid-19 treatment. The day before, she had shipped crucial compounds to colleagues in the U.K. Her team was closing in on the project's finish line and their moment of Champagne celebration. But instead of euphoria, Matviyuk was filled with dread. She called her husband on her drive home. "I said, 'I'm feeling that something bad can happen,'" says Matviyuk, 35, principal scientist in medicinal chemistry and computer drug design at contract research group Enamine Ltd. "He was just laughing at me, that I'm crazy and too nervous, and keep calm, everything will be fine."

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-03-10/putin-s-war-hobbles-work-on-covid-pill-in-lab-near-front-lines>

Mental decline seen in older COVID patients 1 year later

Cognitive impairment was more common among COVID-19 patients 60 years and older—particularly those with severe illness—released from hospitals in Wuhan, China, than among their uninfected

peers, according to a 1-year follow-up study yesterday in JAMA Neurology. A team led by researchers at Daping Hospital in Chongqing, China, followed 1,438 COVID-19 survivors aged 60 and older released from one of three dedicated COVID-19 hospitals in Wuhan from Feb 10 to Apr 10, 2020, and compared them with 438 of their uninfected spouses. Because pre-COVID cognitive status wasn't available, family members provided their perceptions of cognitive changes using the Chinese version of the short form of the Informant Questionnaire on Cognitive Decline in the Elderly (IQCODE).

<https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2022/03/mental-decline-seen-older-covid-patients-1-year-later>

Coronavirus Resurgence

UK Covid cases rising among those aged 55 and over

Covid cases appear to be rising in older people as increased socialising, waning immunity and a more transmissible version of the Omicron variant threaten to fuel a resurgence of the virus. Tests on nearly 100,000 swabs from homes across England reveal that, while infections have fallen overall since the January peak, one in 35 people tested positive between 8 February and 1 March, with cases either level or rising in those aged 55 and over. Scientists on Imperial College's React-1 study said the R value - the average number of people an infected person passes the virus to - remained below 1 for those aged 54 and under, meaning cases were in decline. But for those aged 55 and over, R stood at 1.04. The suspected uptick has raised concerns as older people are more prone to severe Covid and have had more time for their immunity to wane, as many had their booster vaccines several months ago.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/10/uk-covid-cases-rising-among-those-aged-55-and-over>

Brad Hazzard says NSW COVID-19 figures could double as Omicron sub-variant BA.2 emerges

Authorities are concerned at the spread of an Omicron sub-variant of COVID-19, which is believed to be driving rising case numbers in NSW. Health Minister Brad Hazzard on Thursday told a NSW budget estimates hearing the BA.2 sub-variant, thought to be more infectious than the BA.1 lineage, was becoming the dominant Omicron offshoot. Mr Hazzard said preliminary data from the University of NSW indicated cases could "more than double" within six weeks. "It's very preliminary and we need to do a lot more digging ... but we are concerned at this point that BA.2 is amongst us and overtaking BA1," he said.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-03-10/nsw-covid-concern-at-rise-of-ba2-sub-variant/100898154>

China fights new COVID-19 spike with more selective approach

China is tackling a COVID-19 spike with selective lockdowns and other measures that appear to slightly ease its draconian "zero tolerance" strategy. In Hong Kong, which recorded more than 58,000 new cases on Thursday, barber shops and hair salons were reopening. Many are seeing that as an example of mixed messages from the government of the semi-autonomous Chinese territory that has been ordered to follow the "zero tolerance" approach used on the mainland. The 402 cases of local transmission recorded on the mainland Thursday were quadruple the number of cases a week ago. Of those, 165 were in the northeastern province of Jilin, mainly in the cities of Changchun and Jilin, where city authorities locked down 160 residential communities where multiple cases have been detected.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/china-hong-kong-beijing-li-keqiang-jilin-b2032661.html>

COVID cases, deaths falling in Americas, but too soon to lower guard -PAHO

The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) on Wednesday said COVID-19 cases fell by 26% across the Americas last week while deaths from the virus dropped by nearly 19%, but cautioned that some effective measures to curb infections should be maintained. The region recorded 1.1 million new infections during the period with 18,000 COVID-related deaths. "We all want the

pandemic to be over, but optimism alone cannot control the virus. It is too soon to lower our guard," PAHO director Carissa Etienne said. Etienne also noted that the number of reported cases in countries may not reflect the actual figure due to a possible reduction in testing.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/paho-says-covid-cases-deaths-falling-americas-warns-too-soon-lower-guard-2022-03-09/>

COVID prevalence rising among over-55s in England - study

COVID-19 cases were rising among the over-55s in England, a study found on Thursday, with increased social contact, waning of booster protection and a more contagious subvariant of Omicron possibly driving an increase in hospitalisations. Prime Minister Boris Johnson in February lifted the last coronavirus restrictions in England and abolished a legal requirement to self-isolate after testing positive for the virus. Johnson took those steps after Omicron peaked at the start of the year without causing a wave of hospitalisations and deaths to overwhelm the health service, which he attributed to the booster programme and Omicron's lower severity.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/covid-prevalence-rising-among-over-55s-england-study-2022-03-10/>

China's local symptomatic COVID cases nearly double; curbs start to bite

Mainland China reported 402 locally transmitted COVID-19 infections with confirmed symptoms for March 9, official data showed on Thursday, nearly doubling from the daily count a day earlier. Of those, 165 were in the northeastern province of Jilin, the National Health Commission said in a statement. That marks the highest daily count for the province since China contained its first national outbreak in early 2020. The number of new domestically-transmitted asymptomatic cases, which China does not classify as confirmed cases, was 435, a near two-year high.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/chinas-daily-local-symptomatic-covid-cases-nearly-double-402-2022-03-10/>

In 'zero COVID' Hong Kong, deaths smash global records

The Hong Kong nursing home where Amy's 78-year-old mother lives battened down the hatches when the COVID-19 pandemic hit. Elderly residents were confined within the walls of their rooms. Families were not allowed to visit. As the Chinese territory battled its biggest outbreak of coronavirus cases, staff at the private facility camped out in the office for weeks to avoid bringing the virus with them from outside. Even so, the inevitable happened. In February, Amy's mother was among the residents sent to a public hospital's emergency ward after developing a fever. "This elderly home has some of the strictest standards in the industry," Amy, who asked to only be referred to by her first name, told Al Jazeera. "If 80 percent of its residents can be infected, then no other nursing home in Hong Kong can remain unscathed."

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/3/9/in-zero-covid-hong-kong-deaths-smash-global-records>

New Lockdown

Shanghai residents bristle as authorities turn COVID screws

An uncompromising response to a spike in local COVID-19 cases in the Chinese financial hub of Shanghai is testing the resolve of residents, with a wave of school closures and other draconian measures causing disruptions throughout the city. China's health authority said another 76 asymptomatic local infections were found in Shanghai on Wednesday, and authorities have been sealing off schools, residential compounds and office blocks as part of a "dynamic clearance" approach aimed at shutting down each new transmission route as soon as it arises. China has insisted its "zero-COVID" strategy is cost-effective and saves lives, even as other countries seek to coexist with a virus that has killed 6 million people worldwide.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/china/shanghai-residents-bristle-authorities-turn-covid-screws-2022-03-10/>