

COVID-19 Lockdown Exit Analysis

18th Mar 2022

Lockdown Exit

Chinese President Vows to Control Covid Outbreak With Smallest Cost

As other countries have moved away from lockdowns and social distancing, Beijing has touted the success of its draconian measures in keeping the number of cases low, despite a mounting toll on its people and economy. However, Chinese officials have scrambled to boost confidence in the Chinese economy as the more contagious Omicron variant of the coronavirus has prompted a surge in cases. The costs of fighting outbreaks add to recent headwinds, as Mr. Xi's campaign of regulatory tightening last year has slowed economic momentum more than expected. The geopolitical crisis over the war in Ukraine, and the potential costs to China of its recent alignment with Russia, have also rattled investors' nerves. In a Thursday meeting of the Politburo Standing Committee, the Communist Party's top decision-making body, Mr. Xi asked officials to minimize the impact on the Chinese economy and people's lives from Covid-19 control measures, according to the official Xinhua News Agency.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/chinese-president-vows-to-control-covid-outbreak-with-smallest-cost-11647523895>

New Zealand PM Jacinda Ardern Welcomes Australia Tourists in Reopening

New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern is making a play for Australian tourists as she prepares to open the border to foreigners for the first time in more than two years. Appearing on Australian breakfast shows on Friday, Ardern said New Zealanders will welcome back Australians with open arms when the border opens to them on April 13, despite the friendly rivalry between the two nations.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-03-17/ardern-woos-australians-as-new-zealand-welcomes-tourists-back>

Moderna Seeks FDA Approval for 2 Covid Boosters, 4 Vaccines in Total

Moderna Inc. has filed for U.S. Food and Drug Administration clearance of a second Covid-19 booster shot for all adults, covering significantly more people than Pfizer Inc. and BioNTech SE's earlier request for emergency authorization for those over 65. The application comes amid heated debate over how long vaccinations protect from infection and whether repeated shots are necessary to prevent severe disease and death. Several countries including Israel have started administering a fourth dose to adults, with data showing a fivefold increase in the production of infection-fighting antibodies.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-03-18/moderna-requests-fda-approval-for-fourth-covid-shot-for-adults>

Fauci Says US Covid Cases Could Rise as Congress Stalls on Pandemic Funding

The U.S. could soon see Covid-19 cases rise again and vulnerable people are likely to need a fourth vaccine dose, one of President Joe Biden's top health advisers warned as the White House calls for more money to fight the pandemic. Anthony Fauci, the longtime head of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases and a Biden adviser, said U.K. officials are already warning him of an increase there driven by the BA.2 sub-variant, easing restrictions and waning protection from vaccines, and that the U.S. tends to be a few weeks behind case curves in the U.K. "We have all three of those factors right now in this country," Fauci said in an interview Thursday.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-03-17/fauci-says-u-s-covid-cases-could-soon-rise-as-funding-runs-dry>

Thailand's Covid Cases Jump to Record Ahead of Review of Curbs

Thailand reported 27,071 new Covid-19 cases on Friday, a record daily count, ahead of a key government panel meeting to consider further easing of entry rules for vaccinated foreign visitors and lifting of some curbs on local businesses. Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-Ocha will chair a meeting of the Center for Covid-19 Situation Administration's later Friday and is set to consider a set of recommendations from the Health Ministry to loosen Covid restrictions. The panel is also set to discuss a road-map to classify the pandemic as endemic from July, according to officials. The Southeast Asian nation, battling an omicron-fueled Covid wave, also reported 80 new deaths, the highest daily fatalities since Nov. 5, official data showed.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-03-18/thailand-s-covid-cases-jump-to-record-ahead-of-review-of-curbs>

U.S. COVID chief Zients to be replaced by Brown University health expert Jha

U.S. President Joe Biden on Thursday named public health expert Dr. Ashish Jha to replace White House COVID-19 coordinator Jeff Zients, who will leave his post next month, as the administration prepares for new COVID-19 variants and infection surges that could hit the country. Jha, a highly respected internist who leads the Brown University School of Public Health, takes on the role as the United States shifts to a new phase of the pandemic two years after the coronavirus upended the nation, the White House said. "Americans are safely moving back to more normal routines, using the effective new tools we have to enable us to reduce severe COVID cases and make workplaces and schools safer," Biden said in a statement. "But our work in combating COVID is far from done

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/white-house-covid-chief-zients-exit-be-replaced-by-jha-2022-03-17/>

Germany to lift most COVID restrictions

Germany will lift most restrictions to contain the coronavirus despite infections hitting a record in the country on Thursday. Chancellor Olaf Scholz said after talks with leaders of Germany's 16 states that a record of almost 300,000 infections in one day was not good news, but the easing of restrictions was justified given intensive care units were not overwhelmed. As of March 20, requirements to wear a mask will be dropped in indoor places like schools and at supermarkets but will remain mandatory in medical clinics and care homes.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/germany-lift-most-covid-restrictions-2022-03-17/>

Countries Try to Win Support for Deal to Waive Patent Protections on Covid-19 Vaccines

After 18 months of fierce debate, a group of countries, including the U.S., has reached an agreement to waive patent protections on Covid-19 vaccines. Now they are racing to get other countries to support the deal at the World Trade Organization, officials involved in the discussions said. The U.S. and the European Union have reached a compromise with South Africa and India that would allow developing countries to manufacture Covid-19 vaccines without the permission of the holder of the intellectual-property rights. It also would set a precedent for future pandemics.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/countries-try-to-win-support-for-deal-to-waive-patent-protections-on-covid-19-vaccines-11647530740>

Doctors urge Boris Johnson to do better on global Covid-19 vaccine drive

More than 130 leading NHS clinicians and several medical bodies have called on the government to step up funding for the global Covid vaccine drive, saying Britain's failure to do so is condemning poorer nations to an "ongoing pandemic". In a letter to Boris Johnson, shared with The Independent, they say government must "play a bigger role in achieving the World Health Organisation's (WHO) 70 per cent global vaccination target by July 2022". Key signatories include the presidents of the Royal College of Surgeons and the Royal College of GPs.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/health/doctors-boris-johnson-vaccines-world-countries-b2037074.html>

Cambodia drops COVID testing requirements for overseas visitors

Cambodia on Thursday dispensed with a requirement for visitors from overseas to take COVID-19 tests, as the country moved ahead of most neighbours by relaxing most restrictions to spur more investment and tourism, officials said. The Southeast Asian country has vaccinated 92.31% of its population of 16 million against the coronavirus, one of the highest vaccination rates in the region, official data shows

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/cambodia-drops-covid-testing-requirements-overseas-visitors-2022-03-17/>

New Zealand returns to growth in Q4 as COVID restrictions ease

New Zealand's gross domestic product (GDP) returned to growth in the final quarter of 2021 as the economy emerged from COVID-19 lockdowns, and economists said the data supported expectations the central bank would raise interest rates further. Economic growth improved as New Zealand's largest city, Auckland, moved out of a lengthy lockdown that had hit retail, manufacturing, construction and recreational activities in the prior quarter.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/new-zealand-returns-growth-q4-covid-restrictions-ease-2022-03-17/>

Analysis: Clear roadmap needed for Hong Kong's revival as COVID sweeps through city - experts

In just under two months, Hong Kong went from being one of the best places in the world at controlling COVID-19 to one of the worst. Deaths have skyrocketed, the health system is swamped, morgues are overflowing and public confidence in the city government is at an all-time low. While the government sticks to a "zero-COVID" policy similar to that of mainland China, city leader Carrie Lam hinted on Thursday she could ease restrictions amid concerns over the city's status as a global financial hub.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/clear-roadmap-needed-hong-kongs-revival-covid-sweeps-through-city-experts-2022-03-17/>

Alnylam files patent infringement lawsuits against Pfizer, Moderna

Alnylam Pharmaceuticals Inc on Thursday filed lawsuits in Delaware federal court against Pfizer Inc and Moderna Inc, claiming their multibillion-dollar mRNA COVID-19 vaccines infringe one its patents. Alnylam said it was seeking damages over the use of lipid nanoparticle (LNP) technology used in the Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna vaccines to carry and deliver genetic material into the body. Representatives for Pfizer and Moderna did not immediately respond to requests for comment on the lawsuits.

<https://www.reuters.com/legal/government/alnylam-files-patent-infringement-lawsuits-against-pfizer-moderna-2022-03-17/>

Exit Strategies

U.S. COVID chief Zients to be replaced by Brown University health expert Jha

U.S. President Joe Biden on Thursday named public health expert Dr. Ashish Jha to replace White House COVID-19 coordinator Jeff Zients, who will leave his post next month, as the administration prepares for new COVID-19 variants and infection surges that could hit the country. Jha, a highly respected internist who leads the Brown University School of Public Health, takes on the role as the United States shifts to a new phase of the pandemic two years after the coronavirus upended the nation, the White House said. "Americans are safely moving back to more normal routines, using the effective new tools we have to enable us to reduce severe COVID cases and make workplaces and schools safer," Biden said in a statement. "But our work in combating COVID is far from done

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/white-house-covid-chief-zients-exit-be-replaced-by-jha-2022-03-17/>

Moderna to deliver 70 million Covid-19 booster vaccine doses to Japan

Moderna has signed an agreement with the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare of Japan for delivering an additional 70 million doses of its Covid-19 booster vaccine or an updated booster

vaccine candidate. The modified booster vaccine candidate will be supplied on obtaining authorisation in the region. The company intends to supply the vaccine doses to Japan in the second half of this year.

<https://www.pharmaceutical-technology.com/news/moderna-booster-vaccine-japan/>

Coronavirus: Hungary Sending 156,000 Vaccines to Vietnam

Hungary is donating 156,000 doses of AstraZeneca's coronavirus vaccine to Vietnam, according to its Foreign Minister. Hungary is grateful for the medical equipment it received from Vietnam during the first wave of the pandemic, he added, and in the spirit of partnership, Hungary freed up and sold 400,000 doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine to Vietnam before donating another 100,000 doses to the country.

<https://hungarytoday.hu/coronavirus-hungary-sending-156000-vaccines-astrazeneca-vietnam/>

Germany mulls COVID-19 vaccine mandate, easing restrictions

Lawmakers in Germany are debating a possible COVID-19 vaccine mandate as the country hit a new record for the number of newly confirmed cases Thursday. Still, some government officials are championing an easing of restrictions. The country's disease control agency reported 294,931 new cases in the past 24 hours. The Robert Koch Institute said there have been a further 278 COVID-related deaths, taking the toll since the start of the pandemic to 126,420. A final decision on an initial proposal to make vaccinations compulsory for all adults in Germany isn't expected for several weeks.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/germany-ap-covid-berlin-robert-koch-institute-b2037922.html>

Italy to announce plan to scrap COVID restrictions

The Italian government was set to announce a two-step plan on Thursday scrapping most of its coronavirus restrictions as the country nears the end of its state of emergency. Prime Minister Mario Draghi's government was to meet to approve a plan to soften the curbs, a cabinet statement said. Draghi and Health Minister Roberto Speranza will hold a news conference afterwards to detail the decisions.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/italy-announce-plan-scrap-covid-restrictions-2022-03-17/>

Analysis: Clear roadmap needed for Hong Kong's revival as COVID sweeps through city - experts

In just under two months, Hong Kong went from being one of the best places in the world at controlling COVID-19 to one of the worst. Deaths have skyrocketed, the health system is swamped, morgues are overflowing and public confidence in the city government is at an all-time low. While the government sticks to a "zero-COVID" policy similar to that of mainland China, city leader Carrie Lam hinted on Thursday she could ease restrictions amid concerns over the city's status as a global financial hub.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/clear-roadmap-needed-hong-kongs-revival-covid-sweeps-through-city-experts-2022-03-17/>

China's Shenzhen plans 'orderly' work resumption, COVID vigilance

China's technology hub of Shenzhen will allow firms to resume work in an "orderly" manner after the restriction of non-essential businesses in an effort to contain an outbreak of COVID-19, a city official said Thursday. Shenzhen, close to Hong Kong, reported 71 new local confirmed transmissions on Wednesday, up from 55 the previous day. While the outbreak is small by international standards, authorities are leaving nothing to chance.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/china/chinas-local-covid-cases-decline-2nd-day-jilin-outbreak-grows-slower-pace-2022-03-17/>

S.Korea looks to end COVID restrictions despite record surge in cases, deaths

South Korea recorded a record 621,328 new daily COVID-19 cases and a daily record 429 deaths, authorities said on Thursday, as the country which once took an aggressive anti-pandemic approach is set to end COVID restrictions. The Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency (KDCA) said the highly infectious Omicron variant was driving the record wave of infections and while a public survey revealed many expected to catch the virus, few feared serious health consequences.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/skorea-reports-record-new-daily-covid-cases-deaths-kdca-2022-03-17/>

China should take more effective COVID measures, minimise economic, social impact -Xi

Chinese President Xi Jinping has urged the country to take more effective COVID-19 measures and minimise the impact of the epidemic on economic development, state television said on Thursday, as the country battles a new wave of infections. China is fighting its biggest wave of locally transmitted COVID cases since it contained the initial outbreak centred on Wuhan in 2020. Even as much of the world has relaxed or ended coronavirus restrictions, millions of people in northeastern China are under lockdown and authorities have imposed restrictions on business activities and cargo transport in major cities such as Shenzhen.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/media-telecom/china-should-take-more-effective-covid-measures-minimise-economic-social-impact-2022-03-17/>

As Banks Get Fed Up, Hong Kong Reviews Covid Policies

Rising frustration from the public and financial institutions is driving a review of pandemic control measures in Hong Kong, where a suite of stark containment measures have been in place since January to fight the city's worst-ever Covid-19 outbreak. Chief Executive Carrie Lam pointed to the strain on residents and damage to the reputation of the once vibrant Asian financial hub for the review, asking for a few more days before she unveils what could be sweeping changes to the city's approach next week. "I have a very strong feeling that people's tolerance is fading," Lam told reporters at a briefing on Thursday. "I have a very good feeling that some of our financial institutions are losing patience about this isolated status of Hong Kong," she said. "Nobody attaches as much importance as myself to Hong Kong's international status."

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-03-17/as-banks-get-fed-up-lam-reviews-hong-kong-s-covid-policies>

China's Shenzhen to reopen, still trying to contain virus

Companies in Shenzhen, a major Chinese business center, will be allowed to reopen while efforts to contain coronavirus outbreaks progress, the government said Thursday, following a citywide shutdown that rattled financial markets. Testing of everyone in the city of 17.5 million people is "progressing smoothly," said a deputy mayor, Huang Qiang, at a news conference. He said 71 new cases were found in the 24 hours through midnight Wednesday. China's case numbers in its latest wave of outbreaks in areas throughout the country are relatively low. But authorities are enforcing a "zero tolerance" strategy that has temporarily shut down major cities to find isolate every infected person.

<https://apnews.com/article/covid-business-health-china-4e726ea9334ba2a920afc2d18259f9c9>

Partisan Exits

White House Names Next Covid-19 Response Chief as Jeff Zients Steps Down

Jeff Zients, who has led the White House's Covid-19 response for more than a year, will be leaving the job in April and be replaced by Dr. Ashish Jha as the Biden administration navigates a new strategy for the next phase of the pandemic. The change in leadership underscores that the administration sees its Covid-19 response as less a reaction to the virus and more of a continuing public-health situation. Dr. Jha, the dean of the Brown University School of Public Health and a well-known public-health leader, has championed many of the measures the administration has used to combat Covid-19. Mr. Zients, an investor and former Obama administration economic adviser, was brought in to lead the White House's pandemic response in part because of his reputation for fixing

or taking on challenging situation

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/white-house-covid-19-response-chief-to-leave-administration-11647519695>

On Kashmir's dangerous border, frontline healthworkers fight Covid vaccination battles

If medical teams carrying Covid-19 vaccines were ever to make it to her village high in the Himalayas in Indian-administered Kashmir, Safeera Begum had a plan. She would hide. The 35-year-old was expecting her seventh child when India's vaccination campaign began early last year. Misinformation and conspiracy theories echoing around the jab had made her fearful. "I never wanted to get vaccinated," says Begum, who - with no mobile connectivity or internet in her village of Dudran - was cut off from reliable sources of information during the pandemic. "All I had heard was that the vaccine is unsafe for young women and unmarried men," she says, although there is no evidence linking infertility to the Covid-19 vaccine.

<https://www.standard.co.uk/optimist/vaccine-world/kashmir-border-frontline-healthworkers-fight-covid-vaccination-battles-b988661.html>

Continued Lockdown

Hong Kong leader to review COVID restrictions in coming days

Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam said on Thursday she would review COVID restrictions in the coming days, as she understands people are increasingly impatient with rules that have isolated the international financial centre and hurt business. Restrictions, including a ban on flights from nine countries such as Britain and the United States, a quarantine of up to 14 days for people arriving in Hong Kong, a ban on face-to-face classes and the closings of gyms and most public venues, have frustrated many residents in the city of 7.4 million. Speaking at a regular COVID-19 media briefing, Lam said she would provide an update around March 20-21 rather than wait for the restrictions to expire on April 20.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/hong-kong-leader-review-covid-restrictions-coming-days-2022-03-17/>

Scientific Viewpoint

Alnylam sues Pfizer and Moderna for patent infringement in development of Covid-19 vaccines

Alnylam Pharmaceuticals has filed separate lawsuits alleging that Pfizer and Moderna infringed on its patents in developing their Covid-19 vaccines, the latest dispute over valuable intellectual property stemming from the pandemic. In each suit, Alnylam claims the companies used its lipid nanoparticles technology that carries and delivers RNA-based therapies or vaccines in the body. RNA plays a key role in turning the instructions held in the DNA of a person's genome into functional proteins in cells. Both Pfizer and Moderna developed and now market mRNA-based vaccines, and mRNA is a type of RNA. However, mRNA is easily degraded and the lipid technology provides protection for delivery.

<https://www.statnews.com/pharmalot/2022/03/17/covid19-vaccine-patents-alnylam-pfizer-moderna/>

COVID-19 Vaccine Produced by Yeast Could Increase Accessibility

In a new paper, the researchers report that the vaccine, which comprises fragments of the SARS-CoV-2 spike protein arrayed on a virus-like particle, elicited a strong immune response and protected animals against viral challenge. The vaccine was designed so that it can be produced by yeast, using fermentation facilities that already exist around the world. The Serum Institute of India, the world's largest manufacturer of vaccines, is now producing large quantities of the vaccine and plans to run a clinical trial in Africa. "There's still a very large population that does not have access to Covid vaccines. Protein-based subunit vaccines are a low-cost, well-established technology that can provide a consistent supply and is accepted in many parts of the world," says J. Christopher Love, the Raymond A. and Helen E. St. Laurent Professor of Chemical Engineering at MIT and a member of the Koch Institute for Integrative Cancer Research and the Ragon Institute of MGH, MIT,

and Harvard.

<https://www.technologynetworks.com/vaccines/news/covid-19-vaccine-produced-in-yeast-could-increase-accessibility-359656>

WHO postpones evaluation of Russia's Sputnik V coronavirus vaccine

The World Health Organization said Wednesday its evaluation of Russia's Sputnik V coronavirus vaccine has been postponed for the time being, due to the "uneven situation." WHO vaccines expert Dr. Mariangela Simao said at a press briefing that the UN health agency's officials had originally been scheduled to visit Russia on March 7 — just weeks after Russia invaded Ukraine — to assess the facilities where Sputnik V is produced. "These inspections were postponed for a later date," Simao said. "The assessment, along with inspections, have been affected because of the situation.

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/who-russia-sputnik-covid-vaccine-evaluation-1.6386874>

EMA expects data on Omicron-specific vaccine as early as April

The European Medicines Agency's (EMA) leading vaccine expert on Thursday said that data on COVID-19 vaccines tailored for the Omicron variant should be available between April and the start of July, potentially paving the way for approval this summer. Vaccine makers such as Moderna and Pfizer have begun testing COVID-19 vaccines designed to target Omicron after data showing that two initial COVID-19 vaccine doses provide only partial protection against the variant. Based on data for Omicron-specific vaccines, the agency will decide on a timeline for the potential granting of approval.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/ema-expects-data-omicron-specific-vaccine-early-april-2022-03-17/>

Fourth vaccine offers little protection against COVID-19 - study

The fourth coronavirus vaccine has shown to offer little protection against the coronavirus, a new study released by Sheba Medical Center has shown. The study, published by The New England Journal of Medicine, examines the efficacy of the fourth coronavirus vaccine from Pfizer and Moderna. The interim results released show that the vaccine offers little to no protection against contracting the virus when compared to young and healthy individuals vaccinated with three doses. However, the vaccine did prove to provide moderate protection against symptomatic infection among young and healthy individuals in comparison to those inoculated three times.

<https://www.jpost.com/health-and-wellness/coronavirus/article-701520>

Omicron BA.2 variant triggers COVID-19 surge in England

The new sub-variant, named Deltacron, combines mutations from both Omicron and Delta. The variant has been detected in multiple areas of France, and cases have doubled in China and tripled in parts of Australia. In England there has been a surge in COVID-19 infections, with case numbers rising by 49.2% in a week. There has also been a rise of 20.9% in patients admitted to hospital for COVID-19-related illness in the past week. However, there has also been a decrease in fatality rates of 4.4%. Currently only a small number of cases of the new variant have been identified and it is not yet known what level of protection vaccines will provide against this sub-variant.

https://www.pharmatimes.com/news/omicron_ba.2_variant_triggers_covid-19_surge_in_england_1389089

Altered immune cells in lungs may cause breathlessness after Covid-19

A study has found abnormal immune cells in the lungs of patients with persistent breathlessness months after a Covid-19 infection. The altered immune cells in the airways are thought to cause ongoing lung damage. The research was undertaken by scientists at Imperial College London and involved people who had been previously hospitalised with Covid-19. The findings, published in Immunity, suggest that recovery from Covid-19 infection might be accelerated by treatments that dampen the immune system and reduce inflammation. Professor Pallav Shah, a joint senior author of the study from Imperial College, said: 'These findings suggest that persistent breathlessness in our

group of Covid-19 patients is being caused by failure to turn off the immune response, which leads to airway inflammation and injury.'

<https://www.nursinginpractice.com/clinical/respiratory/altered-immune-cells-in-lungs-may-cause-breathlessness-after-covid-19/>

Alnylam sues Pfizer, Moderna over COVID-19 vaccines

Alnylam claims it is owed a slice of the massive revenues booked by Pfizer and Moderna for their mRNA-based COVID-19 vaccines, because they are both infringing patents it holds on a delivery technology. The US biotech has filed a pair of lawsuits in Delaware alleging infringement of US Patent No 11,246,933, which covers lipid nanoparticles (LNPs) made from cationic and PEG lipids that can be used to deliver active agents "such as a nucleic acid." In an SEC filing, Alnylam said it is seeking a judgment that Pfizer and Moderna have infringed the patent, along with compensation at least equal to "a reasonable royalty for the unlicensed uses made of Alnylam's patented lipids by Pfizer and Moderna, together with interest and costs as may be awarded by the court."

<https://pharmaphorum.com/news/alnylam-sues-pfizer-moderna-over-covid-19-vaccines/>

Covid-19: Pfizer asks US regulator to authorise fourth vaccine dose for over 65s

Pfizer and BioNTech have applied to the US Food and Drug Administration for emergency use authorisation for a fourth dose of its mRNA vaccine against covid-19 for adults aged 65 and older. The companies said that the additional dose reduced the rates of infection and severe illness in older adults. In a press release they said that they were seeking the new approval for adults over 65 who had received an initial booster of any of the authorised or approved covid-19 vaccines. Pfizer-BioNTech said that the request was based on "two real-world data sets from Israel analyzed at a time when the Omicron variant was widely circulating. These data showed evidence that an additional mRNA booster increases immunogenicity and lowers rates of confirmed infections and severe illness." The companies said that an analysis of Israeli Ministry of Health records was conducted on over 1.1 million adults aged 60 and over who had no known history of SARS-CoV-2 infection and were eligible for a fourth vaccine dose. They wrote, "These data showed rates of confirmed infections were two times lower and rates of severe illness were four times lower among individuals who received an additional booster dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech covid-19 vaccine administered at least four months after an initial booster (third) dose compared to those who received only one booster dose."

<https://www.bmj.com/content/376/bmj.o711>

Generic drugmakers sign on to make cheap version of Pfizer COVID pill

Thirty five generic drugmakers around the world will make cheap versions of Pfizer Inc's highly effective COVID-19 oral antiviral Paxlovid to supply the treatment in 95 poorer countries, the U.N.-backed Medicines Patent Pool (MPP) said on Thursday. Pfizer struck a deal last year with the group to allow generic drugmakers to make the pills for 95 low- and middle-income countries. They have been working since then to select the drugmakers they will license. Paxlovid is expected to be an important tool in the fight against COVID-19 after it reduced hospitalizations in high-risk patients by around 90% in a clinical trial. The results were significantly better than those for Merck & Co's rival antiviral pill molnupiravir in its clinical trial.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/generic-drugmakers-sign-make-cheap-version-pfizer-covid-pill-2022-03-17/>

UK approves AstraZeneca's antibody-based COVID treatment

Britain's medicines regulator has approved AstraZeneca's antibody-based COVID-19 treatment for preventing infections in adults with poor immune response, marking a major step in the fight against the pandemic as infections surge globally. The decision to grant approval for the treatment, Evusheld, was endorsed by the government's independent scientific advisory body, Britain's

Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) said on Thursday. Figures showing a global rise in COVID-19 cases could herald a much bigger problem, the World Health Organization said this week, warning nations to remain vigilant.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/uk-approves-astrazenecas-antibody-based-covid-treatment-2022-03-17/>

More than 30 companies to start making Pfizer's COVID pill

Nearly three dozen companies worldwide will soon start making generic versions of Pfizer's coronavirus pill, the U.N.-backed Medicines Patent Pool that negotiated the deal said Thursday. The Medicines Patent Pool said in a statement that agreements signed with 35 companies should help make Pfizer's antiviral nirmatrelvir, or Paxlovid, available to more than half of the world's population. Generic drugmakers across a dozen countries in Asia, the Caribbean, the Middle East and Eastern Europe will begin producing either the raw ingredients for the Pfizer drug or the pill itself. Among the companies offered a license was one in Ukraine, which has not yet been able to confirm it can participate. "This will make an enormous difference for countries," said Charles Gore, executive director of the Medicines Patent Pool. He said the availability of the Pfizer drug in some of the world's poorest countries is especially critical. "They have been at the back of the queue for vaccines, so having a treatment like this in the armory will be absolutely critical to prevent deaths."

<https://apnews.com/article/covid-business-health-europe-middle-east-dbe076d997dd5a690379ed0061d132a2>

Severe COVID-19 tied to long-term depression, anxiety

A new observational follow-up study in six European countries published in The Lancet Public Health links severe COVID-19 to long-term depression and anxiety. University of Iceland at Reykjavik researchers led the study, which analyzed symptoms of depression, anxiety, COVID-related stress, and poor sleep quality among 247,249 adults, 4% of whom were diagnosed as having COVID-19 from Mar 27, 2020, to Aug 13, 2021. Participants, who were followed up for as long as 16 months (average, 5.7), lived in Denmark, Estonia, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, or the United Kingdom. Most severely ill COVID-19 patients recuperated at home, but some spent time in a hospital.

<https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2022/03/severe-covid-19-tied-long-term-depression-anxiety>

Coronavirus Resurgence

Rising Covid cases mean we need to stay vigilant, but vaccines mean we don't need to panic

You'd think, now that there's a war on, that we've had enough of pestilence. One horseman of the apocalypse at a time, please. But, inconsiderately, it appears that Covid-19 cases in the UK are on the rise again. Not anywhere near the levels of the Omicron peak two months ago, when about 200,000 new cases were being detected a day, but we are seeing as many cases as we did during the second wave in January 2021, and numbers are still going up. It's reasonable to worry about it, and we should definitely keep an eye on it. But we don't need to panic.

<https://inews.co.uk/news/science/covid-cases-uk-stay-vigilant-but-vaccines-mean-we-dont-need-to-panic-1521167>

Scientists fear U.K. is easing coronavirus testing and monitoring too soon

After dropping nearly all coronavirus restrictions last month, Britain is now ending some of its most widespread testing and monitoring programs, a move some scientists fear will complicate efforts to track the virus and detect worrisome new variants. Officials have largely dismissed those concerns, despite a recent uptick in cases across Europe, insisting that high immunization rates will help dampen future waves of disease. Based on how quickly new variants have arisen, some experts suggest the next one could arrive as early as May. They warn that U.K. authorities should be using the time to prepare, rather than winding down their pandemic defenses. Mark Woolhouse, an epidemiologist at the University of Edinburgh, called it "an unfortunate pattern" that has been seen repeatedly throughout the outbreak.

<https://www.latimes.com/science/story/2022-03-16/uk-easing-coronavirus-testing-monitoring-despite-case-uptick-scientists-worried>

Covid-19: Hong Kong reports world's highest death rate as zero covid strategy fails

Coronavirus infections are surging in Hong Kong as the city has reported the highest number of covid-19 deaths for population size in the world. Previously a global model for covid containment, transmission of SARS-CoV-2 has soared as Hong Kong's zero covid strategy has failed to contain the more contagious omicron variant. The city's low vaccine coverage is also aiding transmission and leading to more fatalities, said epidemiologists. Hong Kong's isolation centres, hospitals, and morgues are overflowing, and some shops have empty shelves as residents are hoarding supplies in anticipation of a potential city-wide lockdown, the news agency Reuters has reported. The covid death rate in Hong Kong is now above 25 per 100 000 residents—higher than in the UK last December when the omicron variant first appeared. In Hong Kong's largely unvaccinated elderly population the death rate is comparable to that in the UK during the first wave of coronavirus infections before vaccines were rolled out, said Julian Tang, clinical virologist at the University of Leicester, UK.

<https://www.bmj.com/content/376/bmj.o707>

COVID-19 retreating in the Americas, says regional health agency

COVID-19 infections and deaths are declining in most of the Americas, the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) said on Wednesday, with the exception of the Caribbean and Atlantic Ocean Islands where cases increased by 56.6% in the past week. In Central America, COVID-19 deaths decreased 28%, it said. The regional health agency warned, however, transmission is not yet under control and cases are rising again in other parts of the world, such as the Western Pacific and Africa, while 21 countries and territories in the Americas have yet to vaccinate half of their population.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/covid-19-retreating-americas-says-regional-health-agency-2022-03-16/>

WHO says global rise in COVID cases is 'tip of the iceberg'

Figures showing a global rise in COVID-19 cases could herald a much bigger problem as some countries also report a drop in testing rates, the WHO said on Tuesday, warning nations to remain vigilant against the virus. After more than a month of decline, COVID cases started to increase around the world last week, the WHO said, with lockdowns in Asia and China's Jilin province battling to contain an outbreak. A combination of factors was causing the increases, including the highly transmissible Omicron variant and its BA.2 sublineage, and the lifting of public health and social measures, the WHO said.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/who-says-global-rise-covid-cases-is-tip-iceberg-2022-03-16/>

How One Country Is Beating Covid Despite 600000 New Cases a Day

South Korea has reached two seemingly contradictory pandemic milestones: It recorded more than 600,000 new Covid-19 infections on Thursday, the most of anywhere in the world. At the same time, the country has one of the lowest virus death rates globally. While anywhere else an infection surge of this size would signal an out-of-control outbreak soon to be followed by a spike in fatalities, in South Korea -- which is about the size of Indiana -- the picture is more complex. The sky-high caseload reflects the nation's consistent deployment of mass testing, largely abandoned by many places as Covid becomes endemic but a key reason behind Korea's sliding death rate, according to its virus fighters.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-03-17/how-south-korea-is-beating-covid-despite-600-000-new-cases-a-day>

South Korea's omicron deaths surge amid faltering response

Officials in South Korea tried to calm public fears amid concerns about a faltering pandemic

response as daily cases and deaths reached record highs Thursday. The 429 deaths reported in the latest 24 hours were nearly 140 more than the previous one-day record set on Tuesday. Fatalities may further rise in coming weeks considering the intervals between infections, hospitalizations and deaths. The 621,266 new coronavirus cases diagnosed by health workers were also a record daily jump, shattering Wednesday's previous high of 400,624. That pushed the national caseload to over 8.2 million, with more than 7.4 million cases added since the start of February.

<https://apnews.com/article/covid-health-south-korea-69167a1d864ba7aec5553e3f8181a509>

Global COVID cases rising again

After 5 weeks of declining cases, global COVID-19 cases rose last week, fueled by increasing cases in three regions, the World Health Organization (WHO) said yesterday in its latest weekly update. In the United States, levels of the more transmissible BA.2 subvariant showed more signs of rising, as the country grapples with funding the ongoing pandemic response.

<https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2022/03/global-covid-cases-rising-again>