

COVID-19 Lockdown Exit Analysis

25th Mar 2022

Lockdown Exit

Majority of GPs think England Covid restrictions removed too soon

The majority of GPs in England think Covid restrictions should still apply, a Pulse survey has revealed. Speaking to Pulse, GPs said removing restrictions meant difficulties keeping vulnerable people safe, and they expressed particular concern with regards to the scrapping of free Covid testing. More than two-thirds of GPs are also concerned about their own health in light of the lifting of restrictions. Since the end of last month (24 February), fully-vaccinated people and children have not been required to isolate if they develop symptoms of Covid-19 and, from next week (1 April) free testing will be scrapped altogether except for the most vulnerable. However, asked in a Pulse survey to what extent they agreed with the Government's decision to remove restrictions: Well over half (59%) of GPs said they disagreed and almost a quarter (24%) of GPs said they 'strongly' disagreed. Although another quarter (27%) of GPs did agree with scrapping restrictions, only 7.5% 'strongly' agreed. Of the respondents, more than two thirds (69%) felt concerned about their own health with the removal of restrictions - 23% of these felt very concerned. Just 31% felt unconcerned.

<https://www.pulsetoday.co.uk/news/coronavirus/majority-of-gps-think-england-covid-restrictions-removed-too-soon/>

COVID-19: More elderly people being admitted to hospital with coronavirus than at peak of Omicron wave, latest data shows

More elderly people are now being admitted to hospital with COVID than they were at the peak of the Omicron wave, according to the latest official data. The statistics from the UK Health Security Agency will add urgency to the new drive to vaccinate the over-75s with a "spring booster". Figures from the Weekly Flu and COVID Surveillance Report show that the admission rate in England for every 100,000 people over the age of 85 was 178.29 in the week to 20 March, compared with 158.43 at the turn of the year. The rate in people aged between 75 and 84 was 74.34 per 100,000 last week. At the beginning of January, it was 70.3. Although hospitalisation rates in younger patients are also rising, they are still below the level of the original Omicron surge.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-more-elderly-people-being-admitted-to-hospital-with-coronavirus-than-at-peak-of-omicron-wave-latest-data-shows-12574259>

Moderna says its low-dose COVID shots work for kids under 6

Moderna's COVID-19 vaccine works in babies, toddlers and preschoolers, the company announced Wednesday — a development that could pave the way for the littlest kids to be vaccinated by summer if regulators agree. Moderna said that in the coming weeks it would ask regulators in the U.S. and Europe to authorize two small-dose shots for youngsters under 6. The company also is seeking to have larger doses cleared for older children and teens in the U.S. The announcement is positive news for parents who have anxiously awaited protection for younger tots and been continuously disappointed by setbacks and confusion over which shots might work and when. The nation's 18 million children under 5 are the only age group not yet eligible for vaccination.

<https://apnews.com/article/moderna-low-dose-vaccine-children-c7702f93e863d74b712791b55e54bdc1>

Moderna Warns on Variants; Firms Leave Hong Kong: Virus Update

Chances are one in five that new Covid-19 variants will arise that are more dangerous than the current versions, Moderna Inc.'s chief executive officer said in an interview with Bloomberg Television. Meanwhile, nearly half of the European companies in Hong Kong plan to fully or partially

relocate operations and staff out of the city amid the travel and quarantine restrictions, a new survey suggests. After conquering Covid-19 for almost two years with a zero-tolerance approach, China is now in the midst of its worst wave since the initial outbreak in Wuhan. Shanghai reported a daily record of 1,609 cases, according to state television.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-03-24/moderna-warns-on-variants-firms-leave-hong-kong-virus-update>

Hong Kong's Completely Avoidable Covid Catastrophe

Around 8 p.m. one evening in late February, an elderly man in a Hong Kong nursing home began struggling to breathe. He wasn't the only one who was ill. An unprecedented outbreak of Covid-19 was gathering pace, and roughly half of the facility's 100 residents had already tested positive for the virus. Less than a third were fully vaccinated; even fewer had received a booster dose. Isolating the infected was impossible. Like most dwellings in the city of 7.4 million, the nursing home was cramped. Instead of a private room, each resident's dedicated space was only big enough for a 2½-foot-wide bed, separated from neighbors by thin wooden dividers. As the man's condition worsened, staff called an emergency hotline for help.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2022-03-23/hong-kong-omicron-cases-force-covid-zero-rethink>

Singapore extends quarantine-free entry as Asia shifts to "living with COVID"

Singapore said on Thursday it will lift quarantine requirements for all vaccinated travellers from next month, joining a string of countries in Asia moving more firmly toward a "living with the virus" approach. Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said the financial hub will also drop requirements to wear masks outdoors and allow larger groups to gather. "Our fight against COVID-19 has reached a major turning point," Lee said in a televised speech that was also streamed on Facebook. "We will be making a decisive move towards living with COVID-19."

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/singapore-relax-more-covid-curbs-including-overseas-arrivals-2022-03-24/>

Shanghai's daily COVID caseload at nearly 1,000, but containment in sight

New daily COVID-19 cases in the Chinese commercial hub of Shanghai remained close to 1,000 on Thursday as authorities scrambled to identify and isolate asymptomatic infections, though a leading expert said the outbreak was being contained. Though the number of cases in Shanghai remains small by global standards, the densely populated city has become a testing ground for China's "zero-COVID" strategy as it tries to bring the highly infectious Omicron variant under control. In a meeting on Wednesday, Shanghai's Communist Party leaders emphasised the need to continue testing, implementing "closed loops" and cutting off transmission chains in order to bring new infections to zero as soon as possible.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/china-reports-2054-new-covid-cases-march-23-vs-2667-day-earlier-2022-03-24/>

COVID booster provides protection for over-65s after 15 weeks -UK data

A booster dose of vaccine against COVID-19 continues to provide robust protection against hospitalisation for older people nearly four months after getting the third dose, new data from the UK's Health Security Agency on Thursday showed. Vaccine effectiveness against hospitalisation for people aged over 65, 15 weeks after a booster, was 85%, down from 91% two weeks after getting the third dose, the latest vaccine surveillance report from the agency estimated. The data is the first released by the UK on the longer term durability of boosters. The UK is administering fourth doses to vulnerable age groups, joining a number of other countries including Israel as the world fights the more infectious Omicron variant of the coronavirus.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/covid-booster-provides-protection-over-65s-after-15-weeks-uk-data-2022-03-24/>

South Africa drops Covid test for vaccinated travellers

South Africa is the latest country to ease rules for inbound travellers. With immediate effect, fully vaccinated arrivals no longer need to present a Covid test to enter the country, the country's president Cyril Ramaphosa has announced. Visitors who are partially vaccinated or unvaccinated are permitted entry, but must present a negative PCR result from a test taken within the 72 hours prior to arrival. Unlike some European countries, South Africa currently classes anyone with two or more doses of a recognised vaccine as "fully vaccinated". Children under five are exempt from testing requirements, regardless of vaccination status.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/travel/news-and-advice/south-africa-pcr-test-vaccinated-b2043007.html>

Poland scraps most mask, quarantine rules

Poland will lift the requirement to wear masks in confined spaces, except for health care facilities, and remove quarantine rules for travellers and roommates of infected people, Poland's Health Minister Adam Niedzielski said on Thursday. "I have decided to introduce two changes as of March 28 - an end to the obligation to wear masks, stipulating that it does not apply to health care facilities", Niedzielski said. "The second decision is to abolish home isolation and home quarantine for roommates (of infected people) and all quarantines for people entering Poland."

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/poland-scraps-most-mask-quarantine-rules-2022-03-24/>

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Singapore said on Thursday it will lift quarantine requirements for all vaccinated travellers from next month, joining a string of countries in Asia moving more firmly toward a "living with the virus" approach. Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said the financial hub will also drop requirements to wear masks outdoors and allow larger groups to gather. "Our fight against COVID-19 has reached a major turning point," Lee said in a televised speech that was also streamed on Facebook. "We will be making a decisive move towards living with COVID-19."

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/singapore-relax-more-covid-curbs-including-overseas-arrivals-2022-03-24/>

Australia to roll out fourth COVID vaccine shot ahead of winter

Australia will roll out a fourth dose of COVID-19 vaccines to its most vulnerable population starting next month, authorities said on Friday, as the country looks to limit fresh outbreaks ahead of winter. The decision comes amid a steady rise in cases fuelled by the highly contagious BA.2 sub-variant of the Omicron strain and concerns of co-circulation of COVID-19 and flu viruses during colder months as most social distancing restrictions end. A second booster shot will be offered from April 4 to people who had their previous booster shot at least four months ago and are over 65 years, Indigenous Australians over 50, people with disability or severely immunocompromised, Health Minister Greg Hunt said during a media briefing.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/australia-roll-out-fourth-covid-vaccine-shot-ahead-winter-2022-03-24/>

Exit Strategies

We've found one factor that predicts which countries best survive Covid

In 2019, the Global Health Security Index published a report ranking countries on their preparedness for pandemics. The US scored highest, followed by the UK. Two years later, both countries rank among those with the greatest loss of life from Covid. How could this be? A large part of the answer is trust. Countries that looked good on paper in 2019, such as the US, UK, Spain and Slovenia, found they lacked this intangible but critical layer of defence. And this figure from our research over the past two years at the Oxford Covid-19 Government Response Tracker shows it in stark terms. On the left (see below) you can see that a higher global health security score in 2019 is not correlated with fewer deaths during the pandemic, at least among the countries whose health systems have a minimum threshold of capacity.

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/mar/24/countries-covid-trust-damage-pandemic>

Japan to Start Preparations for 4th COVID-19 Vaccine Shots

The Japanese health ministry on Thursday decided to start preparations for administering fourth shots of novel coronavirus vaccines. The ministry plans to administer the fourth shots as "temporary vaccinations," like the first, second and third shots. It assumes the use of Pfizer Inc.'s or Moderna Inc.'s vaccine for the fourth shots. The timing to start giving the fourth shots and the interval between the third and fourth shots will continue to be discussed.

<https://www.nippon.com/en/news/yjj2022032400510/japan-to-start-preparations-for-4th-covid-19-vaccine-shots.html>

One million Scots have not had a booster vaccine amid warnings over waning immunity

Figures from Public Health Scotland (PHS) show 983,875 adults have not received a third dose or booster, six months after the programme began. More than 500,000 of these are at least 12 weeks on from their second dose. The Scottish Government admitted fewer appointments had taken place than expected, after PHS reported that 21,000 vaccine doses were thrown away in February after reaching their expiry dates.

<https://www.scotsman.com/health/covid-scotland-one-million-scottish-adults-have-not-had-a-booster-vaccine-amid-warnings-over-waning-immunity-3624069>

Rich countries getting new COVID vaccine before poorer ones

The company behind a COVID-19 vaccine touted as a key tool for the developing world has sent tens of millions of doses to wealthy nations but provided none yet to the U.N.-backed effort to supply poorer countries, a sign that inequity persists in the global response to the pandemic. COVAX had planned to make available 250 million doses from Novavax by March, but the U.N. agency in charge of deliveries says the first shipments now likely won't be made until April or May.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/ap-covid-new-delhi-tedros-adhanom-ghebreyesus-public-citizen-b2042824.html>

Covid-19: Free PCR tests to end for most in April

In Northern Ireland, most people will no longer be able to access a free PCR test from 22 April, the health minister has said. Lateral flow tests (LFTs) will continue to be free, but only for people displaying Covid-19 symptoms and this policy continues to be reviewed. Routine contact tracing is also set to be phased out between the middle of April and the end of June. Health Minister Robin Swann said the changes reflected the "new realities of the pandemic".

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-60858803>

With 4th COVID-19 vaccine doses looming, experts say not so fast

Even as most eligible Americans have yet to receive their first COVID-19 vaccine boosters, Pfizer and Moderna have now asked the FDA to authorize yet another booster dose -- especially for elderly Americans, a group that tends to have weaker immune protection. Pfizer asked the FDA to authorize fourth doses for people older than 65, while Moderna asked for authorization for everyone 18 and older (though company executives said the greatest need would be among older adults).

<https://abcnews.go.com/Health/4th-covid-19-vaccine-doses-looming-experts-fast/story?id=83578268>

It is not too late to achieve global covid-19 vaccine equity

Gavin Yamey and colleagues say that a new, urgent push for global vaccine equity could help avert suffering and deaths, protect economies, and prevent new virus variants

<https://www.bmj.com/content/376/bmj-2022-070650>

Covid-19: Less than 2% of young kids in NI vaccinated as health professor warns of 'serious' long Covid risk

Only 2,483 doses of Covid-19 vaccine have been administered to children in Northern Ireland between the ages of five and 11. Less than 2% of the cohort has received a dose despite the fact that the vaccine was made available to all children in the age group over a month ago.

<https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/health/coronavirus/covid-19-less-than-2-of-young-kids-in-ni-vaccinated-as-h>

[ealth-professor-warns-of-serious-long-covid-risk-41480995.html](https://www.bbc.com/health-professor-warns-of-serious-long-covid-risk-41480995.html)

COVID-19: Pandemic can't be beaten without easy access to testing, warns WHO envoy Dr David Nabarro

People must continue to have "easy access" to testing with "still an awful lot of people getting sick and dying" from COVID, the World Health Organisation has told Sky News. Speaking on the second anniversary of the first UK national lockdown, Dr David Nabarro, the WHO's special envoy on the virus, appealed for people to remember it is "still nasty" - and that without mass testing it is difficult to monitor "where the virus is". From 1 April, lateral flow tests will no longer be freely available, the government has said.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-pandemic-cant-be-beaten-without-easy-access-to-testing-warns-who-envoy-dr-david-nabarro-12573354>

U.S. airline CEOs urge Biden to lift COVID mask mandate -letter

The chief executives of American Airlines, United Airlines, Delta Air Lines and other carriers have urged U.S. President Joe Biden to end a federal mask mandate on airplanes and international pre-departure testing requirements. The airline executives, including the chairman of Southwest Airlines and JetBlue's CEO, said in a letter the restrictions "are no longer aligned with the realities of the current epidemiological environment."

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-airline-ceos-urge-biden-lift-covid-mask-mandate-letter-2022-03-23/>

Zimbabwe renews COVID vaccination drive, targets schoolkids

Zimbabwe has launched a new COVID-19 vaccination campaign that includes jabbing children aged 12 and above to rescue a drive faltering due to vaccine hesitancy and complacency. This week schools in the southern African country have become vaccination zones with children in school uniforms lining up to get the injections. Many parents say they support the vaccination drive to prevent schools from becoming centers of infection, although others remain skeptical.

<https://apnews.com/article/covid-health-zimbabwe-africa-united-nations-d51e25860a6606464aeae8013ecd9551>

Partisan Exits

Government 'fast and loose' over Covid contracts

The Government failed to fully document processes on the way to awarding Covid testing contracts worth hundreds of millions of pounds, a report has found. However, the National Audit Office (NAO) said it found no evidence Department of Health contracts had been awarded improperly. And it accepted ministers were acting quickly in exceptional circumstances. But the probe criticised "gaps in the audit trail", with Labour accusing the Government of acting "fast and loose". Former health secretary Matt Hancock said the report "confirms a total clean bill of health on ministers' work". When Covid hit, ministers had to scale up testing capacity, working with the private sector to secure both services and supplies, the NAO said.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-60860699>

A fourth COVID-19 vaccine dose is on the horizon, but Victoria's booster rate remains stubbornly low

Experts have raised concerns about the "disappointing" rate at which Victorians are getting their booster COVID-19 vaccine doses, as the possibility of a fourth dose is considered. More than 93.7 per cent of eligible Victorians have had two doses of the vaccine, but the latest figures from the health department show 64 per cent of people aged 18 and up have now received three vaccine doses. That figure has risen by less than seven percentage points in a month — it stood at 57.1 per cent on February 23.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-03-24/victoria-booster-vaccination-rate-stubbornly-low/100932468>

Vaccine hesitancy is complicating physicians' obligation to respect patient autonomy

during the COVID-19 pandemic

Exposure in health care settings has accounted for a large number of infections. Early on in the pandemic, health care workers and their household members accounted for 1 in 6 patients ages 18 to 65 admitted to the hospital with COVID-19. Vaccines reduced that risk considerably, and by August 2021, the risk of infection to health care workers had been cut by two-thirds. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, less than 70% of the vaccine-eligible U.S. population is fully vaccinated, not accounting for the booster, although these numbers are changing. When a patient refuses to get the vaccine, a health care worker usually gets involved to counsel that patient. This may take a considerable amount of time, and unfortunately, the results may not always be favorable. Many in the medical community believe that the onus is on the patient to get vaccinated, and if they do not do so, they should be seen as culpable for contracting COVID-19. One such example is the case being made to give lower priority for organ transplants to those willfully unvaccinated.

<https://theconversation.com/vaccine-hesitancy-is-complicating-physicians-obligation-to-respect-patient-autonomy-during-the-covid-19-pandemic-176442>

Covid-19: Government left “inadequate” paper trail when awarding testing contracts, says watchdog

The UK government failed to keep proper records when awarding almost £780m (€937m; \$1.03bn) worth of covid-19 testing contracts to the diagnostics company Randox, the UK’s public spending watchdog has found. Last year the Conservative MP and former minister Owen Paterson resigned from his parliamentary seat after being heavily criticised for lobbying the government on behalf of Randox while acting as a paid consultant to the company. In a report published on 24 March the National Audit Office (NAO) acknowledged that the government had had to act quickly to build testing capacity at the start of the pandemic, but it said that the Department of Health and Social Care “did not document key decisions adequately, disclose ministerial meetings with Randox fully or keep full records of ministerial discussions involving Randox.”

<https://www.bmj.com/content/376/bmj.o789>

Scientific Viewpoint

Sinovac Booster Gives Elderly Stronger Protection Against Omicron, Study Finds

Two doses of China’s Sinovac vaccine offered older people only a moderately high level of protection against severe disease and death from Covid-19, but a third dose significantly bolstered their defenses, according to a new study by scientists in Hong Kong. The study, based on patients infected during the current devastating Omicron wave in Hong Kong, serves as a cautionary note for mainland China, where Sinovac is a pillar of the country’s vaccination program. Many older people there have yet to receive booster shots. For people 60 and older, two Sinovac doses were 72 percent effective against severe or fatal Covid-19 and 77 percent effective against Covid-related death, the study found.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/23/health/sinovac-coronavirus-booster-hong-kong.html>

Moderna to Seek Authorization of Its Coronavirus Vaccine for Young Children

Moderna said on Wednesday that it would seek emergency authorization of its coronavirus vaccine for children younger than 6, after interim results from its clinical trial showed that volunteers in that age group had a similar immune response to young adults when given a dose one-fourth as strong. But the company said the vaccine proved only about 44 percent effective in preventing symptomatic illness among children 6 months to 2 years old, and 37 percent effective in children 2 through 5. Dr. Jacqueline Miller, the firm’s senior vice president for infectious diseases, said the relatively low level of protection demonstrated the ability of the Omicron variant to evade the vaccine’s shield. Nonetheless, she said in an interview, “what we have seen is a successful trial.”

<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/23/us/politics/moderna-coronavirus-vaccine-young-children.html>

Virtusa Delivers COVID-19 Vaccine Tracker

Virtusa Corporation today announced that its Virtusa Vax Manager is available to provide businesses with an easy way to track employee vaccination status. The COVID-19 vaccine tracker and return to office capabilities of Virtusa Vax Manager can be built rapidly, and is easily configurable on technology from Pegasystems, the software company that crushes business complexity, to help companies stay compliant with emerging regulations, while ensuring the wellbeing of all employees and easing the burden on HR staff.

<http://koreabizwire.com/virtusa-delivers-covid-19-vaccine-tracker/214465>

No fall in Covid-19 antibody levels among elderly, figures suggest

Covid-19 antibody levels among UK adults remain at a record high, with no evidence of a drop among older age groups whose most recent dose of vaccine was likely to be several months ago, analysis suggests. Some 99.3% of people aged 80 and over in England were likely to have antibodies at the start of March, along with 98.2% in Wales and 98.3% in Scotland - the highest for each nation since estimates began at the end of 2020. The figures, which have been calculated by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), also estimate 99.2% of over-70s in Northern Ireland had antibodies at the beginning of this month - again, the highest level so far.

<https://www.standard.co.uk/news/uk/ons-england-scotland-wales-northern-ireland-b990249.html>

AstraZeneca's preventative COVID shot set to win EU clearance this week-sources

Europe's drug regulator is expected to give the go-ahead this week for AstraZeneca's antibody-based injection for preventing COVID-19 infections, two people familiar with the review said, following U.S. and UK approvals. The treatment is meant for adults whose immune system is too weak to respond to vaccines and offers a new tool to ease the pandemic burden on healthcare systems. Infections in Europe are on a sharp rise again this month, with the adult vaccination rate stagnating at a little over 83%. The expected recommendation by the European Medicines Agency (EMA) is set to be confirmed swiftly by the European Commission, which has the final word on market access.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/astrazenecas-preventative-covid-shot-set-win-eu-clearance-this-week-sources-2022-03-23/>

COVID pandemic fuelled 2021 population drop in 73% of U.S. counties

The toll of the COVID-19 pandemic was reflected in a natural decrease last year in the population of nearly three-quarters of U.S. counties versus the two previous years, the census bureau said on Thursday. More than 73% of U.S. counties experienced natural decrease, or an excess of deaths over births, up from 55.5% in 2020 and 45.5% in 2019, bureau data showed. "In 2021, fewer births, an aging population and increased mortality - intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic - contributed to a rise in natural decrease," the U.S. Census Bureau said in a statement.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/covid-pandemic-fuelled-2021-population-drop-73-us-counties-2022-03-24/>

Moderna raises full-year COVID vaccine sales forecast to \$21 billion

Moderna Inc raised its full-year forecast for sales of its COVID-19 vaccine to roughly \$21 billion from \$19 billion. The company in February forecast sales of \$19 billion from its signed contracts, and option for \$3 billion in additional purchases. Moderna on Thursday forecast additional purchases of roughly \$500 million.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/moderna-raises-full-year-covid-vaccine-sales-forecast-21-billion-2022-03-24/>

Simple home oxygen monitors signal when to seek COVID care

COVID-19 patients can safely use inexpensive pulse oximeters at home to watch for a drop in blood oxygen that signals they need to seek advanced care, according to a systematic review published yesterday in The Lancet Digital Health. Pulse oximeters are small devices that shine light through a

patient's finger to measure his or her blood oxygen saturation. They can be used alone or as part of a remote patient monitoring (RPM) package. Imperial College London researchers analyzed 13 observational studies involving 2,908 participants in five countries using pulse oximetry to monitor their blood oxygen levels from when the COVID-19 pandemic began in 2020 to Apr 15, 2021. Some RPM programs had participants monitor their own oxygen levels, while others developed a mobile app or website for patients to report their readings. Participants included older people with more than one underlying illness, young people, and pregnant and postpartum women. All participants had COVID-19 except for 12 controls in one study.

<https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2022/03/simple-home-oxygen-monitors-signal-when-seek-covid-care>

Coronavirus Resurgence

Two years on from UK's first Covid lockdown, cases may be rising but deaths remain low

Two years on from the start of the UK's first Covid lockdown, when cases were rising rapidly and there was no timeline for a vaccine, the threat of the virus has changed significantly in the UK. Prime Minister Boris Johnson marked the milestone by paying tribute to the "heroic efforts" of the NHS on Wednesday, while giving sympathies to the families of those who died from Covid, and said Britain's 187,000 coronavirus casualties "will never be out of our hearts and minds". The UK is now one of the few places globally with nearly zero Covid restrictions in place despite a recent rise in cases driven by the Omicron variant, but Health Secretary Sajid Javid has insisted there is "no particular cause for concern", with the "wall of defence" from vaccines keeping the situation stable.

<https://inews.co.uk/news/two-years-uk-first-covid-lockdown-cases-rising-deaths-remain-low-1532873>

South Australia records 4,742 new COVID-19 cases and another two deaths

South Australia has recorded 4,742 COVID-19 cases, its second highest daily caseload on record since the start of the pandemic. Another two people with COVID-19 have died, both of them men, one of whom is aged in his 60s and the other in his 70s. There are 157 people in hospital with COVID-19, four fewer than yesterday. The hospitalisation number includes 10 cases in intensive care and one person on a ventilator.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-03-24/sa-records-4742-covid-cases-and-two-deaths/100936690>

HSE 'really struggling' amid latest Covid-19 surge

The Department of Health has been notified of 8,910 PCR-confirmed cases of Covid-19, as well as 14,215 positive antigen tests logged through the HSE portal. As of 8am, there were 1,425 Covid patients in hospital, up 30 on the same time yesterday morning. Of them, 53 patients were being treated in ICU, a decrease of 2 from Wednesday. Meanwhile, Taoiseach Micheál Martin said people should continue to be cautious and to wear masks in crowded situations, but that the current Covid wave was less "impactful" and virulent than earlier variants, so no new economic restrictions were warranted.

<https://www.rte.ie/news/coronavirus/2022/0324/1288150-covid-ireland/>

Shanghai's daily COVID caseload at nearly 1000, but containment in sight

New daily COVID-19 cases in the Chinese commercial hub of Shanghai remained close to 1,000 on Thursday as authorities scrambled to identify and isolate asymptomatic infections, though a leading expert said the outbreak was being contained. Though the number of cases in Shanghai remains small by global standards, the densely populated city has become a testing ground for China's "zero-COVID" strategy as it tries to bring the highly infectious Omicron variant under control. In a meeting on Wednesday, Shanghai's Communist Party leaders emphasised the need to continue testing, implementing "closed loops" and cutting off transmission chains in order to bring new infections to zero as soon as possible.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/china-reports-2054-new-covid-cases-march-23-vs-2667-day-earlier-2022-03-24/>

Global COVID-19 cases climb for second week in a row

Last week marked a turnaround in a 5-week decline in cases. In the continued rise this week, cases were up 7% compared to the week before, the WHO said. Cases were up 21% in the Western Pacific region, an area that includes locations experiencing surges, including South Korea, Vietnam, and Hong Kong. The European region's cases remained steady, while levels declined in the Eastern Mediterranean, Africa, South East Asia, and Americas regions. Deaths overall declined 23% compared to the week before, though they were up 5% in the Western Pacific region. The WHO received reports of 12 million cases last week. Countries reporting the most cases were South Korea, Vietnam, Germany, France, and Australia. Also, there were 33,000 deaths across the globe, with Russia nudging ahead of the United States in reporting the most weekly fatalities.

<https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2022/03/global-covid-19-cases-climb-second-week-row>

New Lockdown

Chinese steelmaking hub Tangshan enters lockdown as COVID cases rise

China's top steelmaking city Tangshan implemented a temporary lockdown on Tuesday to avoid further cases of COVID-19 as infections surged, the local government said in a statement. Residents should not leave their houses or buildings except for tests or emergencies pending further announcement, the government said. Tangshan reported 15 confirmed locally transmitted cases from March 19-22, and 79 asymptomatic cases, while Hebei province, where Tangshan is located, had 331 confirmed cases and 2,454 asymptomatic cases as of March 22, data from the provincial health authority showed.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/chinese-steelmaking-hub-tangshan-enters-lockdown-covid-cases-rise-2022-03-23/>