

COVID-19 Lockdown Exit Analysis

15th Dec 2021

Lockdown Exit

Kroger to End Some Covid-19 Benefits for Unvaccinated Workers

Kroger Co. is eliminating some Covid-19 benefits for unvaccinated employees, a move to encourage inoculations as the Biden administration's vaccine mandate faces legal challenges. The Cincinnati-based grocery chain told employees last week that it will no longer provide two weeks of paid emergency leave for unvaccinated employees who contract Covid-19, unless local jurisdictions require otherwise. Kroger will also add a \$50 monthly surcharge to company health plans for unvaccinated managers and other nonunion employees, according to a memo viewed by The Wall Street Journal. Both policies are effective Jan. 1, the memo said.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/kroger-to-end-some-covid-19-benefits-for-unvaccinated-workers-11639477802>

When Two Nations Are Divided by a Common Pandemic

Covid is possibly even more political in the U.S. than it is in the U.K., and the federal system allows for far greater differences in response between states. But Covid fatigue is universal and a political tripwire at this point. So is the U.K. right to regard omicron as such a serious danger? Let's look at the evidence from South Africa, where the variant was first identified and provides the most data. Capital Economics Ltd. of London has produced these excellent charts.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2021-12-14/different-u-s-u-k-reaction-to-omicron-hints-at-central-bank-rate-policies>

U.K.'s 'Warp Speed' Booster Rollout Is Already Struggling

Boris Johnson's strategy for tackling a U.K. surge in omicron infections is already facing setbacks, as medics warn of bottlenecks and staffing shortages in the vaccine booster program. The British prime minister promised to ramp up delivery of boosters to "warp speed" to achieve its target of reaching all adults by the end of December, and late Monday announced that hundreds of new vaccine sites would open across the country, including at soccer stadiums and racecourses.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-12-13/vaccine-sites-to-open-in-u-k-stadiums-as-omicron-cases-surge>

Conservative revolt over COVID curbs deals stinging blow to UK PM Johnson

Almost 100 Conservative lawmakers voted on Tuesday against new coronavirus restrictions, dealing a major blow to British Prime Minister Boris Johnson's authority and raising questions about his leadership. After a day of frenzied failed lobbying, Johnson was handed the biggest rebellion against his government so far by his party over measures he said were necessary to curb the spread of the new Omicron variant. The new rules, which included ordering people to wear masks in public places and use COVID-19 passes for some venues, passed thanks largely to the main opposition Labour Party.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/british-pm-johnson-faces-rebellion-parliament-over-covid-measures-2021-12-14/>

Google says employees flouting vaccination rules will eventually be fired - CNBC

Alphabet Inc's Google told its employees they would lose pay and eventually be fired if they do not follow its COVID-19 vaccination rules, CNBC reported on Tuesday, citing internal documents. A memo circulated by Google's leadership said employees had until Dec. 3 to declare their vaccination status and upload documentation showing proof, or to apply for a medical or religious exemption, according to the report. After that date, Google said it would start contacting employees who had not uploaded their status or were unvaccinated and those whose exemption requests were not

approved, CNBC reported.

<https://www.reuters.com/technology/google-says-employees-will-eventually-be-fired-if-they-do-not-follow-vaccination-2021-12-14/>

Finland to Tighten Travel Restrictions to Slow Omicron Spread

Finland is considering tightening travel restrictions to stop passengers from bringing in the coronavirus, particularly the new omicron variant, said Krista Kiuru, the minister overseeing the pandemic response. The Nordic country will require travelers from outside the European Union and the Schengen area to present a negative test result from the prior 48 hours, Kiuru told broadcaster YLE on Tuesday. The government is still discussing when to begin enforcing the rule, she said. Finland will also recommend all travelers, including from the EU, take a test before arrival and a home test afterward. Arrivals from certain countries, such as Denmark, Norway and the U.K., are likely to be subject to compulsory health checks, Kiuru said.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-12-14/finland-to-tighten-travel-restrictions-to-slow-omicron-spread>

WHO Warns Against Underestimating the Omicron Threat

The World Health Organization is concerned that the omicron variant is being dismissed as mild, even as it spreads at a faster rate than any previous strain of Covid-19. The recently detected variant has been reported in some 77 nations, though it's probably in most countries already, said WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus. "We're concerned that people are jumping to a conclusion that this is a mild disease," Bruce Aylward, senior adviser at the WHO, told journalists at a briefing on Tuesday. "A more transmissible virus can do just as much damage -- or more -- than one which is more severe but less transmissible."

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-12-14/who-warns-against-underestimating-the-omicron-threat>

U.S. government may request more COVID-19 testing funds

President Joe Biden's administration may request additional funds from Congress for COVID-19 testing, depending on the severity of the Omicron variant, U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services Xavier Becerra said on Tuesday. The department has \$10 billion left in federal relief funds for testing from the \$50 billion made available by Congress back in March, but might need more, Becerra said at a meeting with reporters.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-government-likely-request-more-covid-19-testing-funds-2021-12-14/>

Apple makes masks mandatory at U.S. retail stores as COVID-19 cases rise

Apple Inc will require all customers and employees to wear masks at its U.S. retail stores, the iPhone maker said on Tuesday, as COVID-19 cases surge in the country. Last month, Apple had scrapped its mask mandate for customers at more than 100 of the company's about 270 stores across the United States, according to Bloomberg News, as coronavirus cases declined. "We regularly monitor conditions and we will adjust our health measures in stores to support the wellbeing of customers and employees," the company said on Tuesday.

<https://www.reuters.com/technology/apple-asks-customers-employees-wear-masks-us-retail-stores-2021-12-14/>

Exit Strategies

Pfizer Says Its Covid-19 Pill Likely Works Against Omicron

Preliminary laboratory tests gave encouraging signs that Pfizer Inc.'s PFE 0.62% experimental Covid-19 pill for the newly infected could work against Omicron, the company said. Pfizer also said Tuesday that a final analysis of late-stage study results confirmed the drug, named Paxlovid, was 89% effective at reducing the risk of hospitalization and death in adults at high risk of severe Covid-19. The positive results come as the Food and Drug Administration reviews whether to clear use of Paxlovid in high-risk adults, a decision that could come before the end of the year. "This was a real home run, gives tremendous hope for another highly effective intervention," Pfizer Chief

Scientific Officer Mikael Dolsten said in an interview.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/pfizer-says-its-covid-19-pill-likely-works-against-omicron-11639482302>

COVID-19: Children as young as 5-years-old could be offered vaccine with decision 'expected' before Christmas

A decision on whether to vaccinate children as young as five against COVID could be made before Christmas, one of the government's top advisers on vaccines has said. Professor Wei Shen Lim, chair of the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation's COVID-19 panel, said he would "expect" his team to offer their advice on jabs for those between the ages of five to 11-years-old before Christmas. COVID case rates have been consistently high in school-aged children since September, but vaccines have only been offered to 12 to 15-year-olds since November - later than in many other countries.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-children-as-young-as-5-years-old-could-be-offered-vaccine-with-decision-expected-before-christmas-12495493>

COVID-19: All countries on red list to be removed as 'less effective' in slowing Omicron - Javid

All 11 countries on the UK's travel red list will be removed as the system has become "less effective in slowing the incursion" of the Omicron variant, the health secretary has announced. Sajid Javid told the House of Commons that the nations will be removed from 4am on Wednesday, so arrivals will no longer have to isolate in a government-approved quarantine hotel for two weeks at the cost of £2,285. The 11 countries currently on the red list are: Angola, Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-all-countries-on-red-list-removed-as-less-effective-in-slowng-omicron-javid-12495628>

Walk-in booster jab: Huge queues form on second day of Covid vaccine drive - but some people turned away

Lengthy queues have already begun to form outside walk-in vaccination clinics for a the second day following the Government's pledge to offer one to all over-18s by the end of December. The queue for walk-in jabs at the Centre Court Shopping Centre in Wimbledon, south-west London, was snaking around the entire top floor and back to the entrance, while some people have already been turned away from a clinic in Swindon, Wiltshire. At St Thomas' Hospital near Parliament in central London, people began queuing before the clinic opened at 8am and the line was snaked across Westminster Bridge for a second day.

https://inews.co.uk/news/walk-in-booster-jab-covid-vaccine-drive-people-turned-away-clinics-queues-1351050?ito=social_itw_thepaper

Kroger to remove some COVID-19 benefits for unvaccinated employees

Kroger Co will stop some COVID-19 benefits for unvaccinated employees starting next year, as the supermarket chain pushes more workers to get inoculated amid growing concerns over the spread of the Omicron coronavirus variant. The company will no longer provide paid COVID-19 leave for unvaccinated employees and will apply a \$50 monthly health insurance surcharge to salaried non-union workers who are unvaccinated and enrolled in a company healthcare plan, a Kroger spokesperson said on Tuesday.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/retail-consumer/kroger-remove-some-covid-19-benefits-unvaccinated-employees-2021-12-14/>

California to reinstitute statewide mask mandate amid rise in COVID cases

California will impose a statewide mask mandate in all indoor public spaces as COVID-19 case rates soar, the state's senior government health official said on Monday as precautions ramp up against the Omicron variant. The mandate, which will take effect on Wednesday and last a month, is one of

several measures the most-populous U.S. state is taking to slow a wave of infections that is already straining hospitals in areas where vaccination rates are low. "We know people are tired, and hungry for normalcy," state Health and Human Services Secretary Mark Ghaly said in a conference call with reporters. "Frankly I am, too."

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/california-re-institute-statewide-mask-mandate-amid-rise-covid-cases-2021-12-13/>

Dutch schools to close early for Christmas to limit COVID-19 spread - report

The Netherlands will extend COVID-19 restrictions through the Christmas holidays, including the early closure of schools, Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte said on Tuesday. The rapid spread of the Omicron variant of the coronavirus, which is making up roughly 1% of new infections in the country, "is a reason to be concerned and to be cautious," Rutte said in a televised comments. Elementary schools will close a week early to try to prevent children from infecting older family members during Christmas as hospitals struggle with a wave of COVID-19 patients.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/dutch-consider-early-christmas-break-schools-limit-covid-19-spread-2021-12-14/>

Nigeria to destroy one million expired COVID-19 vaccines -official

Nigeria will destroy around one million expired COVID-19 vaccines, Faisal Shuaib, head of the National Primary Health Care Development Agency (NPHCDA), said on Monday, adding his agency was working with drug regulator NAFDAC to set a date for their destruction. Nigeria's health minister Osagie Ehanire said last week some COVID-19 doses donated by rich Western countries had a remaining shelf life of only weeks, adding to the country's challenges in vaccinating its people. read more Fewer than 4% of adults in Africa's most populous nation of over 200 million have been fully vaccinated.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/nigeria-destroy-around-1-million-expired-covid-19-vaccines-senior-official-2021-12-13/>

Singapore mulls COVID-19 boosters requirement to qualify as 'fully' vaccinated

Singapore is considering requiring its residents to get a booster shot to qualify as fully vaccinated against COVID-19, its health minister said on Tuesday, as it seeks to protect its population from the Omicron variant. The city-state of 5.5 million people currently allows only those counted as fully vaccinated - or recipients of two shots - to enter malls or dine in at restaurants or at hawker stalls. From Jan. 1 it will bar unvaccinated employees from entering workplaces, unless they undergo tests each time.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/singapore-let-more-workers-return-office-next-year-2021-12-14/>

Germany plans to ease testing for those with COVID-19 booster - draft

Germany will exempt people who have had a booster vaccination from having to take a coronavirus test before entering some leisure facilities, federal and regional health ministers agreed on Tuesday. The proposal, agreed by Health Minister Karl Lauterbach and ministers from Germany's 16 federal states, is aimed at encouraging people to get a booster shot and relieving testing capacity. However, a negative test result would still be required to enter hospitals and care homes to help protect more vulnerable people, according to the draft, reviewed by Reuters.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/germany-plans-ease-testing-those-with-covid-19-booster-draft-2021-12-14/>

We have enough Covid vaccines for most of the world. But rich countries are stockpiling more than they need for boosters

Even when booster shots for rich nations are taken into account, there's ample supply to meet global vaccination goals for the end of 2021, STAT's analysis of available data shows. The challenge is getting the vaccines to the right places. Around 11 billion Covid-19 vaccine doses will have been manufactured by the end of 2021, according to estimates from Duke's Global Health Innovation Center and the COVID Collaborative. The precise number is uncertain, said Krishna Udayakumar, the

Duke center's founding director, because both manufacturers and governments have failed to release details. His calculation is in line with the World Trade Organization-International Monetary Fund vaccine tracker, which showed a supply of 8.8 billion vaccines by the end of October.

<https://www.statnews.com/2021/12/13/we-have-enough-covid-vaccines-for-most-of-world-but-rich-countries-stockpiling-more-than-they-need/>

Partisan Exits

COVID-19: Tory backbenchers prepare to turn on Johnson over COVID restrictions as PM calls for a vaccine volunteer army

Boris Johnson is facing the biggest Tory rebellion since the 2019 general election in a bitter Commons showdown with many of his own MPs over his Plan B COVID rules. Nearly 80 Conservative backbenchers have signalled they are prepared to vote against new regulations on face masks, isolating, vaccine passports and compulsory vaccinations for NHS staff. Sir Keir Starmer has pledged Labour support for the measures, so there is no danger of a government defeat. But a huge backbench rebellion will be a humiliating blow to the prime minister's authority.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-tory-backbenchers-prepare-to-turn-on-johnson-over-covid-restrictions-as-pm-calls-for-a-vaccine-volunteer-army-12495295>

U.S. Air Force removes 27 service members for refusing COVID-19 vaccine

The U.S. Air Force on Monday said 27 service members had been discharged for refusing to receive a COVID-19 vaccine, the first active-duty troops believed to have been removed for declining the vaccine. The Pentagon made the vaccine mandatory for all service members in August and the vast majority of active-duty troops have received at least one dose. Ann Stefanek, a spokeswoman for the Air Force, said the troops were given a chance to explain why they had refused to get vaccinated, but none of them were given exemptions.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-air-force-removes-27-service-members-refusing-covid-19-vaccine-2021-12-13/>

British PM Johnson faces rebellion in parliament over COVID measures

Almost 100 Conservative lawmakers voted on Tuesday against new coronavirus restrictions, dealing a major blow to British Prime Minister Boris Johnson's authority and raising questions about his leadership. After a day of frenzied failed lobbying, Johnson was handed the biggest rebellion against his government so far by his party over measures he said were necessary to curb the spread of the new Omicron variant. The new rules, which included ordering people to wear masks in public places and use COVID-19 passes for some venues, passed thanks largely to the main opposition Labour Party.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/british-pm-johnson-faces-rebellion-parliament-over-covid-measures-2021-12-14/>

Scientific Viewpoint

Needle-free Covid-19 vaccine being trialled in the UK

A trial is being launched of a new needle-free Covid-19 vaccine that could give 'wide-ranging protection' against variants and future coronaviruses. The University of Southampton has developed the new vaccine which uses a jet of air to push it through the skin rather than a needle. Saul Faust, clinical chief investigator and director of the NIHR Southampton Clinical Research Facility, said: 'This isn't simply 'yet another' coronavirus vaccine as it has both Covid-19 variants and future coronaviruses in its sights. 'This technology could give wide-ranging protection to huge numbers of people worldwide.'

<https://metro.co.uk/2021/12/14/needle-free-covid-19-vaccine-being-trialled-in-the-uk-15766580/>

Covid-19 milestones: 800,000 deaths, 50 million infections, 1 year of vaccines

Tuesday marks precisely one year since the first coronavirus vaccine shots were going into arms in the US. Over the course of that year, an incredible 202 million people and counting -- more than

60% of the entire US population -- have been fully vaccinated; about 484 million vaccine doses have been delivered; and now the government is encouraging everyone 16 and older to get a booster shot. The number of people fully vaccinated is both incredible and not nearly enough. Fights over how to get the rest of the country to utilize the shots waiting for them have turned into a massive political and legal standoff over requirements.

<https://www.cnn.com/2021/12/13/politics/us-covid-19-milestones-what-matters/index.html>

Malaysia gives conditional approval for use of Ronapreve COVID-19 treatment

Malaysia's health ministry said on Tuesday it has given conditional approval for the use of the single-dose antibody cocktail Ronapreve, developed by Regeneron (REGN.O) and Roche (ROG.S), to treat COVID-19. It has also approved a request from Merck & Co (MRK.N) for a clinical trial import license for its COVID-19 pill Molnupiravir, to be used as part of studies being conducted in Malaysia, the ministry said in a statement.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/malaysia-gives-conditional-approval-use-ronapreve-covid-19-treatment-2021-12-14/>

Russia yet to hand over all data for COVID vaccine's WHO approval - Kremlin

Russia has still not handed over all the information needed for its flagship Sputnik V COVID-19 vaccine to be approved by the World Health Organisation because of differences in regulatory standards, the Kremlin said on Tuesday. Moscow rushed to approve the Sputnik V shot for domestic use last year, but it has still not been certified by either the WHO or the European Medicines Agency, the EU's drug regulator. Asked what was causing the delay, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters the certification process was under way.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-yet-hand-over-all-data-covid-vaccines-who-approval-kremlin-2021-12-14/>

India stuck with COVID-19 vaccines it can't export

India is struggling to export its surplus of COVID-19 vaccines as logistical hurdles delay their use in many countries despite low levels of inoculation, vaccine producer the Serum Institute of India (SII) and a government official said on Tuesday. The SII, the world's biggest vaccine maker that produces the AstraZeneca, Novavax and Sputnik COVID-19 shots, has already announced plans to temporarily halve output of the AstraZeneca drug until more orders came, including possibly through boosters.

read more
<https://www.reuters.com/world/india/india-stuck-with-covid-19-vaccines-it-cant-export-2021-12-14/>

Higher risk of heart complications from COVID-19 than vaccines -study

COVID-19 infections are more likely to trigger rare cardiovascular complications such as heart inflammation and irregular heartbeat than vaccines, a British study showed on Tuesday, after scientists parsed data of about 38 million vaccinated people. The study, published in the Nature Medicine journal, compared the risks of myocarditis, pericarditis and cardiac arrhythmia following a first and second dose of COVID-19 vaccines - from AstraZeneca-Oxford, Pfizer-BioNTech, and Moderna - with coronavirus infections.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/heart-condition-risk-higher-after-covid-19-illness-than-vaccines-uk-study-2021-12-14/>

Pfizer says COVID-19 pill near 90% effective in final analysis

Pfizer Inc on Tuesday said its antiviral COVID-19 pill showed near 90% efficacy in preventing hospitalizations and deaths in high-risk patients, and recent lab data suggests the drug retains its effectiveness against the fast spreading Omicron variant of the coronavirus. The U.S. drugmaker last month said the oral medicine was around 89% effective in preventing hospitalizations or deaths when compared to placebo, based on interim results in around 1,200 people. Data from its final analysis of the trial disclosed on Tuesday includes an additional 1,000 people. Nobody in the trial

who received the Pfizer treatment died, compared with 12 deaths among placebo recipients.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/pfizer-says-covid-19-pill-near-90-effective-final-analysis-2021-12-14/>

Moderna to produce millions of mRNA vaccines in Australia

U.S. drugmaker Moderna Inc will produce millions of mRNA vaccines a year in Australia after agreeing to set up one of its largest manufacturing facilities outside the United States and Europe. The deal, a second such commitment in Asia Pacific by a western mRNA vaccine developer, underscores efforts by governments around the world to build up local production and prepare for future pandemic threats after limited early access to shots led to slow COVID-19 vaccine rollouts.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/moderna-manufacture-mrna-vaccines-australia-2021-12-13/>

Pfizer Covid Pill Effective to Stop Hospitalization, New Study Shows

New study data showed Pfizer Inc.'s experimental Covid-19 pill was highly effective at keeping patients out of the hospital, but less adept at erasing milder symptoms often associated with breakthrough infections. Pfizer disclosed findings from two studies in a statement Tuesday. In one, its treatment, Paxlovid, failed to meet the primary goal of reducing self-reported symptoms in 673 adults at standard risk of developing Covid-19 complications. The drug showed a trend toward reducing hospitalizations in the group by 70%, however. In the other study, the treatment remained 89% effective in preventing hospitalizations in high-risk unvaccinated people when used within 3 days of the appearance of symptoms. That confirmed Pfizer's earlier analysis of results from a smaller number of patients.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-12-14/pfizer-covid-pill-stops-hospitalizations-not-milder-symptoms>

Data indicate omicron is milder, better at evading vaccines

The omicron variant is offering more hints about what it may have in store as it spreads around the globe: A highly transmissible virus that may cause less severe disease, and one that can be slowed — but not stopped — by today's vaccines. An analysis Tuesday of data from South Africa, where the new variant is driving a surge in infections, suggests the Pfizer vaccine offers less defense against infection from omicron and reduced, but still good, protection from hospitalization. The findings are preliminary and have not been peer-reviewed — the gold standard in scientific research — but they line up with other early data about omicron's behavior, including that it seems to be more easily spread from person to person.

<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-business-health-africa-south-africa-c8d09bed79be4a25f752237c0470961b>

New Australian plant could make 100 million vaccines a year

Australia's government said Tuesday it plans to start making mRNA vaccines at home with a new plant that could produce up to 100 million doses each year. The announcement came as coronavirus cases in Sydney and surrounding areas jumped, driven in part by the omicron variant. The new factory would be built in Victoria state in a partnership between vaccine manufacturer Moderna and the federal and state governments. It is expected to open by 2024. Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison said it was in the country's national interest to produce vaccines locally.

<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-health-business-pandemics-victoria-b96f8fcfa0678b7b384dbc2224c97520>

Pfizer jab protects against hospitalisation with Omicron: Study

Two doses of Pfizer-BioNTech's COVID-19 vaccine appear to provide 70 percent protection against hospitalisation from the Omicron coronavirus variant, according to an extensive real-world study in South Africa. The analysis released on Tuesday by South Africa's largest private health insurance administrator, Discovery Health, was based on more than 211,000 positive COVID-19 test results of

adults from November 15 to December 7, about 78,000 of which were attributed to Omicron.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/12/14/pfizer-jab-protecting-against-hospitalisation-during-omicron-wave>

Leading Covid-19 experts on the questions they want answered about Omicron

For some Covid experts, what's most unsettling about the Omicron variant is all the uncertainty surrounding it. That's what keeps John Moore, a professor of microbiology and immunology at Weill Cornell Medical College, up at night. "I've lost more sleep worrying about answering questions about Omicron than over Omicron itself," he said during a panel at STAT's "A Look Ahead at Biotech 2022" event last week. Moore, like many other experts, is waiting for more data before judging how the new variant is going to pan out. More time will tell us whether Omicron will fizzle out and be forgettable like Beta, or if it will be much more consequential and replace Delta, in much the same way Delta replaced Alpha.

<https://www.statnews.com/2021/12/14/covid19-omicron-coronavirus-questions-vaccinations/>

Pfizer shot less effective in South Africa after Omicron emerges, study shows

Pfizer-BioNTech's COVID-19 vaccine has been less effective in South Africa at keeping people infected with the virus out of hospital since the Omicron variant emerged last month, a real-world study published on Tuesday showed. Between Nov. 15 and Dec. 7, people who had received two doses of the shot had a 70% chance of avoiding hospitalisation, down from 93% during the previous wave of Delta infections, the study showed.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/pfizer-vaccine-protecting-against-hospitalisation-during-omicron-wave-study-2021-12-14/>

One year of vaccines: Many lives saved, many needlessly lost

One year ago, the biggest vaccination drive in American history began with a flush of excitement in an otherwise gloomy December. Trucks loaded with freezer-packed vials of a COVID-19 vaccine that had proved wildly successful in clinical trials fanned out across the land, bringing shots that many hoped would spell the end of the crisis. That hasn't happened. A year later, too many Americans remain unvaccinated and too many are dying. The nation's COVID-19 death toll stands at around 800,000 as the anniversary of the U.S. vaccine rollout arrives. A year ago it stood at 300,000.

<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-science-health-francis-collins-57ab6ae016accec5ee5ca268cc682879>

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Coronavirus Resurgence

China's southern Guangzhou city detects one COVID-19 infection of Omicron variant

Health authorities in the southern Chinese city of Guangzhou have detected one infection of the Omicron coronavirus variant, the state broadcaster CCTV said on Tuesday. The infected person, a 67-year-old man who entered China from overseas in November and flew to Guangzhou after quarantine last week, tested positive while he was isolated at home in the city, according to CCTV. The case follows China's first Omicron detection in the northern Tianjin city, a person who had also arrived from abroad

<https://www.reuters.com/world/china/chinas-southern-guangzhou-city-detects-one-covid-infection-omicron-variant-2021-12-14/>

Africa sees 83% surge in COVID-19 cases in past week

Africa is experiencing its fastest surge in COVID-19 cases this year, with the number up 83% in the past week, although deaths remain low, the World Health Organization (WHO) said on Tuesday. The spike in cases is driven by the Delta and Omicron variants, the WHO said in a statement. The number of new COVID-19 cases on the continent is currently doubling every five days, the shortest time frame reported this year.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/africa-sees-83-surge-covid-19-cases-past-week-2021-12-14/>

France might tighten entries from Britain due to COVID Omicron surge

France is contemplating tightening controls for travellers coming from Britain, where the new, more contagious, Omicron coronavirus variant seems to be rapidly spreading, said French government spokesman Gabriel Attal. "Regarding Britain, the current rule is to show a negative test less than 48 hours old in order to enter France," Attal told France Info radio on Tuesday.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/france-will-not-take-new-measures-now-over-covid-despite-omicron-variant-at-tal-2021-12-14/>

COVID toll nears 800,000 to close out year filled with death

Carolyn Burnett is bracing for her first Christmas without her son Chris, a beloved high school football coach whose outdoor memorial service drew a crowd of hundreds. The unvaccinated 34-year-old father of four died in September as a result of COVID-19 after nearly two weeks on a ventilator, and his loss has left a gaping hole for his mother, widow and family as the holidays approach. How, she thought, could they take a holiday photo without Chris? What would Christmas Day football be like without him offering up commentary? How could they play trivia games on Christmas Eve without him beating everyone with his movie expertise? The U.S. on Tuesday hit another depressing pandemic milestone — 800,000 deaths. It's a sad coda to a year that held so much promise with the arrival of vaccines but is ending in heartbreak for the many grieving families trying to navigate the holiday season.

<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-nfl-sports-health-football-f967f156fb205277266d2bb2483b858c>

S. Korea marks deadliest day of pandemic as hospitals buckle

South Korea on Tuesday marked its deadliest day of the pandemic as an unrelenting, delta-driven spread stretched thin hospitals and left people dying while waiting for beds. Health experts warn that the country's medical system is quickly approaching its limits and that fatalities could worsen if the government continues to be slow and hesitant in tightening social distancing. The Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency said 94 virus patients died in the past 24 hours while a record 906 were in serious or critical condition. The 5,567 new infections were the highest yet for a Tuesday — daily tallies are usually smaller at the start of the week because of fewer tests on weekends — indicating the virus has continued to gain speed after the government moderately tightened social distancing last week.

<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-business-health-pandemics-seoul-91acd6dbf13e16778262e3ec5798a7c3>

With a minority vaccinated in Romania, fears of fifth wave mount

At a temporary COVID-19 intensive care unit at the University Emergency Hospital in Bucharest, set up to cope with the strain of Romania's devastating fourth wave, a cardiac monitor beeps with a warning. An elderly, unvaccinated patient, bone-thin and too sick to breathe without the help of machines, is losing his battle with the deadly virus.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/12/14/with-a-minority-vaccinated-in-romania-fears-of-fifth-wave-mount>

CDC data indicate Omicron is starting to eat into Delta's U.S. dominance

The Omicron variant is starting to eat into Delta's dominance in the United States. The new variant accounted for 2.9% of sequenced Covid-19 cases in the United States in the week ending Dec. 11. The week before, 0% of cases were from Omicron. Delta accounted for essentially all of the other sequenced cases, according to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The new figures, updated Tuesday, indicate that Omicron started circulating before that week, given how long it can take for infections to be sequenced and reported. They show that Omicron's advantage over the highly transmissible Delta variant is becoming noticeable in this country.

<https://www.statnews.com/2021/12/14/cdc-data-indicate-omicron-is-starting-to-eat-into-deltas-u-s-dominance/>

New Lockdown

Norway in partial lockdown as Omicron 'changes the rules', PM says

Norway will further tighten restrictions and speed up vaccination in a bid to limit an expected surge of the Omicron variant of the coronavirus, Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Stoere said on Monday. Norway's new restrictions could cast doubt on the central bank's plan to raise interest rates later this week,

<https://uk.news.yahoo.com/norway-tighten-covid-regulations-pm-111604022.html>