

COVID-19 Lockdown Exit Analysis

13th Jan 2022

What we want to achieve

- **A reliable news source** -- We search for stories that come from reliable sources. We're trying to create a disinformation bulwark, a wall built from a range of stories and perspectives that can help users see what is being written about Covid-19 around the world each day.
- **A trustworthy source** -- By hand-picking stories a range of stories from reliable sources we aim to support COVID health literacy and decision making and not dictate what organizations or individuals should think or do in any fashion.
- **A logical presentation** -- Our search tool scoops up news via APIs, expert analysts read the text and editors organise the stories in accessible and logical categories each day.
- **A useful compendium of stories** -- We aim to maintain independence, integrity and accuracy - in the hope of creating a database of stories and information journalists and decision makers on all levels can use to help themselves better understand action options, advocate for smarter policies and communicate useful information.
- **A crowd-resourced platform** -- after two years and more than 560 newsletters we are looking for contributors, donors and/or amplifiers to 'freshen-up' this platform and expand its reach and impact.

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Lockdown Exit

Omicron Is Dominant US Variant, Hospitals Face Dark Days as Covid Cases Soar

The highly infectious omicron variant has flushed out the delta strain across the U.S., but the ascendance of the purportedly milder form of Covid-19 has done nothing so far to ease the burden on stretched hospitals. The omicron variant represents about 98% of cases, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Director Rochelle Walensky said Tuesday. That number is based on data for the week ending Jan. 8 and is a significant increase from just two weeks prior, when omicron accounted for 71.3% of cases. Omicron's heightened transmissibility coupled with the immunity some have built to combat the delta through vaccination and exposure, have made conditions favor the "more mild" variant, said David Wohl, a professor at the Institute of Global Health and Infectious Diseases at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill. But experts warn that for those who remain unvaccinated or who suffer from other health concerns, infection from any Covid-19 variant is a major concern.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-12/omicron-is-dominant-u-s-variant-hospitals-face-dark-days-as-covid-cases-soar>

Colorado's Covid-19 Test Positivity Is Highest of Pandemic at 30%

Thirty-percent of people tested for Covid-19 in Colorado are receiving positive results, the highest of the pandemic, as the omicron variant rages, officials said Wednesday. The data imply a high level of community spread with the number of Covid-19 hospitalizations surpassing an autumn peak, according to the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment. There are more hospital beds available in Colorado than during the delta variant peak in late 2021, Scott Bookman, the state's Covid-19 incident commander, said during an online briefing.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-12/colorado-covid-19-test-positivity-highest-of-pandemic-at-30>

Almost All Teens Needing ICU Care for Covid Are Unvaccinated

The vaccine prevented 98% of ICU visits and 94% of Covid-related hospitalizations in the real-world study of more than 1,000 adolescents ages 12 to 18 in 23 states published Wednesday in the New England Journal of Medicine. While adolescents can develop severe Covid complications, it's relatively rare that they do, making it harder to study vaccine efficacy than among older adults, and leading to some controversy about the use of the shots in younger people. For example, the trial data Pfizer submitted for authorization of its shot for 12- to 15-year-olds didn't include enough cases to assess efficacy in preventing severe Covid. The research from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and a network of 31 hospitals is one of the most detailed yet showing that vaccines can prevent severe Covid complications in teenagers.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-12/almost-all-teens-needing-icu-care-for-covid-are-unvaccinated>

France Records More Than 360000 New Covid Cases for Second Day

France on Wednesday registered more than 360,000 new Covid-19 infections, just shy of Tuesday's record, highlighting the omicron variant's fast-paced spread across the country. New cases totaled 361,719 on Wednesday after 368,149 on Tuesday, according to data from the public health office. The death toll rose by 246 to 126,305, while the number of Covid patients in emergency care climbed by 16 to 3,985, the highest level since mid-May last year. More than half of Europe's population may be infected with omicron within weeks at current transmission rates, a World Health Organization official said Tuesday.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-12/france-records-more-than-360-000-new-covid-cases-for-second-day>

China Faces Mounting Economic Damage From Its Covid-Zero Policy

As Goldman Sachs noted in a Jan. 5 report, the economic costs of Beijing's Covid-zero stance "appear to be increasing over time as each new variant is more transmissible than the previous ones." Omicron is a threat of a different magnitude, even for a population that's 87% vaccinated, because the China-made shots appear to provide inadequate protection against it. Expect more citywide lockdowns like the one instituted in Xi'an, a metropolis of 13 million residents.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-12/china-faces-mounting-economic-damage-from-its-covid-zero-policy>

U.S. Orders 500000 More Doses of AstraZeneca Covid Cocktail

The U.S. government is in talks with AstraZeneca Plc to order 500,000 doses of its coronavirus antibody drug, used by vulnerable people before exposure to the virus to prevent severe illness. Jeff Zients, Biden's Covid-19 response coordinator, said Wednesday that the administration and AstraZeneca are "in the process of ordering" the doses, which are aimed at immunocompromised people. The new order will push the total U.S. purchase to 1.2 million doses, all due by the end of March, AstraZeneca said in a statement. "The federal government was instrumental in the research and development of this product," Zients said. "Bottom line, we've acted aggressively to support and secure a diverse portfolio of Covid treatments."

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-12/u-s-orders-500-000-more-doses-of-astrazeneca-covid-cocktail>

Denmark to offer fourth coronavirus jab while easing curbs

Not enough Canadian children are being vaccinated against COVID-19 at a time when the Omicron variant threatens to swamp healthcare systems, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said on Wednesday. As of Jan. 1, 87.6% of Canadians above the age of 12 had received two shots. But among those aged from 5 to 12, that number dipped to just 2%, with 45.6% having received one dose. "Almost half of kids across this country have gotten their vaccine. ... We need to get more, so please ask your parents if you can get vaccinated," Trudeau said, addressing children directly during a regular

briefing.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/denmark-ease-coronavirus-restrictions-despite-omicron-surge-2022-01-12/>

Not enough Canadian children are getting COVID-19 jabs, health systems at risk - Trudeau

Not enough Canadian children are being vaccinated against COVID-19 at a time when the Omicron variant threatens to swamp healthcare systems, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said on Wednesday. As of Jan. 1, 87.6% of Canadians above the age of 12 had received two shots. But among those aged from 5 to 12, that number dipped to just 2%, with 45.6% having received one dose. "Almost half of kids across this country have gotten their vaccine. ... We need to get more, so please ask your parents if you can get vaccinated," Trudeau said, addressing children directly during a regular briefing.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/not-enough-children-canada-are-getting-covid-19-jabs-pm-trudeau-2022-01-12/>

WHO's Ryan counters Brazil's Bolsonaro and says no virus is welcome

World Health Organization Emergency Director Mike Ryan on Wednesday refuted statements made by Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro that the Omicron variant of the coronavirus would be welcome and that it could even bring about the end of the pandemic. In an interview earlier, Bolsonaro played down the advance of the new variant in Brazil. During a news conference in Geneva, when asked about the statements made by the Brazilian president, Ryan affirmed that while Omicron is "less severe as a viral infection in an individual, that doesn't mean it's a mild disease." There are many people around the world in hospitals, in ICUs, gasping for breath, which "obviously makes very clear that this is not a mild disease," he added.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/whos-ryan-counters-brazils-bolsonaro-says-no-virus-is-welcome-2022-01-12/>

UK acted unlawfully with 'VIP' COVID contract lane, court rules

The British government acted unlawfully by setting up a fast-track "VIP lane" to allow ministers and officials to recommend suppliers of personal protective equipment (PPE) during the coronavirus pandemic, a London court ruled on Wednesday. Opposition politicians have accused the government of running a "chumocracy", awarding deals to those with family or business links to people in power, including for what turned out to be unusable PPE in some cases. The campaign groups, the Good Law Project and EveryDoctor, brought legal action claiming some suppliers were given an unfair advantage in obtaining contracts worth hundreds of millions of pounds.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uk-acted-unlawfully-with-vip-covid-contract-lane-court-rules-2022-01-12/>

Omicron Has Workers on Edge About Returning to the Office: Poll

Workers grew more uncomfortable about heading back to the office in the first week of the year and were much more likely to consider quitting if their employer demanded they return, a sign that companies' efforts to get people back amid rising Covid caseloads face stiff resistance. The share of remote workers who would consider leaving their job if they were asked back to the office before they felt safe rose to 55% as of Jan. 6, up from 45% just a week earlier, according to pollster Morning Consult. More than 4 in 10 workers felt unsure about returning to the office, compared with 35% who said so on Dec. 30. People were also less likely to want to attend indoor sporting events, go to the movies and dine out, Morning Consult's weekly U.S. survey found.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-12/omicron-has-workers-on-edge-about-returning-to-the-office-poll>

Europe Slowly Starts to Consider Treating Covid Like the Flu

Spain is calling for Covid-19 to be treated as an endemic disease, like the flu, becoming the first major European nation to explicitly suggest that people live with it. The idea has gradually been gaining traction and could prompt a re-evaluation of government strategies on dealing with the

virus. British Education Secretary Nadhim Zahawi on Sunday told the BBC that the U.K. is “on a path towards transitioning from pandemic to endemic.” The omicron variant’s lower hospitalization and death rates despite record infections prompted Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez to hold out the tantalizing prospect of Europe moving beyond pandemic-style restrictions on normal life.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-11/omicron-has-spain-looking-past-pandemic-as-europe-surge-persists>

Work Anywhere and Commute by Plane, Yahoo Tells Japan Employees

Yahoo Japan is telling its 8,000 employees they can work anywhere in the country -- and even be flown into work when the job requires it -- bucking the trend of companies looking to return workers to offices in the third year of the coronavirus pandemic. The program takes effect April 1 and allows employees to commute by plane, which wasn’t previously an option, the company said in a statement Wednesday. While Yahoo is best known for its internet portal in Japan, it’s a unit of SoftBank Group Corp.’s Z Holdings Corp., which also owns the Line messaging app and PayPay mobile payments service.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-12/work-anywhere-and-commute-by-plane-yahoo-tells-japan-employees?srd=premium-europe>

Omicron wave prompts media to rethink which data to report

For two years, coronavirus case counts and hospitalizations have been widely used barometers of the pandemic’s march across the world. But the omicron wave is making a mess of the usual statistics, forcing news organizations to rethink the way they report such figures. “It’s just a data disaster,” said Katherine Wu, staff writer who covers COVID-19 for The Atlantic magazine. The number of case counts soared over the holidays, an expected development given the emergence of a variant more transmissible than its predecessors. Yet these counts only reflect what is reported by health authorities. They do not include most people who test themselves at home, or are infected without even knowing about it. Holidays and weekends also lead to lags in reported cases.

<https://apnews.com/article/omicron-changing-news-outlets-covid-data-da9272f7c4c8a109c3bfb56bed9e9c76>

Exit Strategies

N95 Mask Prices Hit ‘Ridiculous’ Highs on Speculation Over CDC Guidance

The potential for a new recommendation from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is unleashing a scramble for N95 masks and boosting their prices. The agency is considering changing its guidance to advise that people wear higher-quality masks, according to a Washington Post report. That’s contributing to a surge in prices for gold-standard N95 and KN95 face coverings on sites like Amazon.com.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-12/n95-kg95-or-cloth-masks-prices-surge-as-cdc-weighs-new-recommendations>

Omicron a ‘Welcome’ Variant, Says Bolsonaro Amid Surge

Brazil’s President Jair Bolsonaro said the omicron strain that’s causing a surge in Covid cases at home and abroad could be called a “vaccine virus” and is a “welcome” variant. “Some studious and serious people -- and not linked to pharmaceutical companies -- say that omicron is welcome and can in fact signal the end of the pandemic,” Bolsonaro said Wednesday in an interview with Gazeta Brasil website. Bolsonaro has stood out globally for his defiant stance in the face of the pandemic, repeatedly dubbing it “a little flu” despite the more than 600,000 Brazilians who have died from the virus in the past two years.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-12/omicron-a-welcome-variant-says-brazil-s-bolsonaro-amid-surge>

‘Community Champions’ are key to increasing Covid vaccine uptake says minister

As areas of Newcastle city centre continue to see low vaccine uptake, the Government minister in

charge of the Covid-19 jabs programme has said she hopes investing in "community champions" can help reach people who've previously been hesitant. Speaking to ChronicleLive, Maggie Throup MP - vaccines minister at the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) - said the Government was aware of "disparities" in vaccine uptake. She said: "We know there are areas of huge disparity across the country - and also in local geographical areas as well. This is why we have been investing in community champions to go out into their communities and give people advice from someone they can relate to.

<https://www.chroniclive.co.uk/news/health/covid-vaccines-minister-newcastle-elswick-22718025>

The US agrees to buy additional doses of GSK-Vir's Covid-19 antibody

The US Government has entered an agreement to procure 600,000 additional doses of GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) and Vir Biotechnology's antibody sotrovimab for early Covid-19 treatment, according to an announcement. An investigational monoclonal antibody, sotrovimab attaches to an epitope on SARS-CoV-2, which is shared with SARS-CoV-1. In May last year, the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) granted Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) to single intravenous (IV) dose of sotrovimab for mild to moderate Covid-19 treatment. The SARS-CoV-2 neutralising antibody is indicated under EUA for use in adult and paediatric Covid-19 patients aged 12 years and above who are at great disease progression risk, including hospital admission or mortality. GSK noted that the additional doses will be supplied throughout the first quarter of this year.

<https://www.pharmaceutical-technology.com/news/us-gsk-vir-antibody-doses/>

Central American bank funds Cuban COVID-19 vaccine drive

The Central American Bank for Economic Integration said it would give Cuba a loan of 46.7 million euros (\$53.1 million) to help bolster the communist-run country's COVID-19 vaccine program as it seeks to ramp up production for both domestic use and export. The fresh funds will underwrite the production of 200 million additional shots, according to a statement from the bank on Monday. Cuba, a poor Caribbean island nation hard hit by the pandemic, has nonetheless already vaccinated more of its citizens against COVID-19 than most of the world's largest and richest nations.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/central-american-bank-funds-cuban-covid-19-vaccine-drive-2022-01-11/>

Mexico expecting nearly 27 mln COVID-19 vaccines in coming weeks

Mexico is expecting delivery of nearly 27 million additional COVID-19 vaccine doses in the coming weeks, Foreign Minister Marcelo Ebrard said on Tuesday, as the Omicron variant fuels a sharp increase in cases. "We're going to receive 11.7 million more doses soon ... and before March, a further 15 million, with which we estimate that the numbers needed by the health ministry will be met," Ebrard said during a regular news conference. He did not say what kind of vaccines they would be.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/mexico-expecting-nearly-27-mln-covid-19-vaccines-coming-weeks-2022-01-11/>

Germany's Scholz urges compulsory COVID-19 jabs for all adults

Germany should make COVID-19 vaccinations mandatory for all adults, Chancellor Olaf Scholz told parliament on Wednesday. The leader of Scholz's Social Democrats (SPD) in the legislature had said on Tuesday that he expected a bill on making COVID-19 vaccination mandatory to be voted on by parliament in March. Lawmakers from the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) heckled Scholz on Wednesday over his government's plans, saying they say were splitting German society, and held up signs reading "freedom instead of division."

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/germanys-scholz-urges-compulsory-covid-19-jabs-all-adults-2022-01-12/>

Swiss halve quarantine period to five days to cope with Omicron surge

Switzerland will halve its quarantine time to five days to help cope with a wave of coronavirus infections that threatens to hamstring the economy, the government said on Wednesday. Health

authorities had given their blessing on Tuesday for the move, which comes as tens of thousands more people get infected every day due to the highly transmissible Omicron variant of the virus. Officials worry that the wave could overwhelm the health care system in a country where only two-thirds of the population has got two jabs and just 30% has had a booster shot.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/swiss-halve-quarantine-period-five-days-tackle-omicron-wave-2022-01-12/>

We Used to Clap for Nurses, Now We Let Them Burn Out

If mask-wearing is an indicator of pandemic alertness, Europe is in a state of fatigue. YouGov surveys indicate face coverings have dropped across the continent as vaccinations and booster shots pick up. In Paris, where new rules require masks even in the street, noses and mouths are regularly on display as a small act of rebellion. Behind the fading fear of Covid is the sense that omicron is not delta, and that 2022 is not 2020. Indeed, there are signs the latest virus surge is plateauing in some countries, and deaths have decoupled from cases thanks to jabs and treatments. The old continent wants to move on. French Health Minister Olivier Veran even reckons this could be Covid's "last wave."

<https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2022-01-12/fighting-omicron-we-used-to-clap-for-nurses-now-we-let-the-m-burn-out-and-quit>

Germany's SPD expects vote on general vaccine mandate in March

The ruling Social Democrats (SPD) expect a bill on making COVID-19 vaccination mandatory in Germany to be voted on by parliament in March, the party's leader in the legislature said on Tuesday. Parliament passed a law in December making coronavirus vaccinations compulsory for certain professions from mid-March onwards. The country is now facing a fourth wave of infections and its rate of vaccination remains relatively low compared with some other parts of Europe.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/germanys-spd-expects-vote-general-vaccine-mandate-march-2022-01-11/>

U.S. govt to increase COVID-19 tests for schools by 10 mln per month

The Biden administration on Wednesday announced a new set of measures to keep classes open, including doubling COVID-19 testing capacity in schools with 10 million more tests, as the Omicron variant spreads rapidly through the United States. The United States reported 1.35 million new coronavirus infections on Monday, shattering the global record for daily cases in any one country. Omicron is now estimated to account for 98.3% of total new cases circulating in the country, the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) says.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-govt-increase-covid-19-tests-schools-by-10-mln-per-month-2022-01-12/>

Irish minister confident of easing COVID curbs from February

Ireland should be in a position to start easing restrictions to slow the spread of COVID-19 from next month once the number of people requiring critical care remains stable, a senior minister said on Wednesday. Ireland has the second highest incidence rate of COVID-19 in Europe but also one of the continent's highest uptake of booster vaccines, helping keep the number of patients in intensive care stable and well below the peak of previous waves of the disease.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/irish-minister-confident-easing-covid-curbs-february-2022-01-12/>

VW Widens Staff Vaccination Drive to Counter Omicron Risks

Volkswagen AG is rolling out Covid-19 inoculations to relatives of its German employees, a sign of heightened alert as companies join government efforts to head off the fast-spreading omicron variant. Vaccinations for workers' family members are starting Tuesday, according to a spokeswoman. Since June, the German auto giant has administered about 100,000 doses -- including first, second and booster shots -- at sites in its home country.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-11/vw-widens-staff-vaccination-drive-to-counter-omicron-risks>

Philippines Bars Unvaccinated From Public Transport in Metro Manila

The Philippines has banned unvaccinated individuals from public transport in the capital following President Rodrigo Duterte's order to restrict their movement as Covid-19 infections surge. Commuters are required to show proofs of vaccination before riding buses, jeepneys, trains and other public transport in Metro Manila, the transportation department said Wednesday. The "no vaccination, no ride" policy will be in effect while the capital is under Alert Level 3, the third-highest in a five-step scale.

https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-12/philippines-bars-unvaccinated-from-public-transport-in-capital?utm_source=google&utm_medium=bd&cmpid=google

Democrats try to stamp out school closures as virus surges

When Chicago teachers went on strike last week to protest COVID-19 safety protections in the nation's third-largest school district, Democratic Party officials leapt into action. Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker pushed for a quick end to the job action and helped secure rapid tests to entice teachers back to work. Mayor Lori Lightfoot said the strikers "abandoned their posts" in "an illegal walkout." White House press secretary Jen Psaki stressed that students should be in school. The standoff ended with a tentative agreement late Monday. Nearly two years into a pandemic that shows no signs of waning, Democrats are speaking out more forcefully against COVID-19 school closures, recognizing a rising anger among parents worried that their kids are falling behind. But in doing so, Democrats risk angering some teachers unions, which are advocating for more protections for educators as the omicron variant takes hold and whose support helped get Democrats elected.

<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-health-chicago-jen-psaki-illinois-0972717a6783074840c52805796bbfd>

United Airlines Reports No Covid-19 Deaths Among Vaccinated Employees in Past Eight Weeks

About 3,000 employees with United Airlines Holdings Inc. UAL -0.77% have tested positive for Covid-19, but no vaccinated staffer has died from the disease over the past eight weeks, the company's top executive said. United, the first major airline to implement a Covid-19 vaccine requirement, was reporting about one Covid-19 death per week among staffers prior to the mandate's implementation, Scott Kirby, chief executive of United, wrote in a letter to employees on Tuesday. The company's vaccine mandate, which was announced in August and went into effect this past fall, has likely saved the lives of eight to 10 employees, he said. "I know that some people still disagree with our policy," Mr. Kirby said, while adding: "United is proving that requiring the vaccine is the right thing to do because it saves lives."

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/united-airlines-reports-no-covid-19-deaths-among-vaccinated-employees-in-past-eight-weeks-11641936765>

Partisan Exits

Tunisian Ennahda official says party will defy COVID rules for protest

A senior official in Tunisia's main opposition Ennahda party told Reuters it planned to go ahead with a protest against President Kais Saied on Friday in defiance of a new COVID-19 ban on gatherings. The government said earlier it was re-imposing a night curfew, banning all gatherings for two weeks and discouraging people from travelling abroad to stop the rapid spread of COVID-19 cases. Ennahda and other parties accuse the government of using the rules to stop protests against Saied, who in July sacked the prime minister, suspended parliament and assumed broad powers in moves they call a coup.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/tunisian-annahda-official-says-party-will-defy-covid-rules-protest-2022-01-12/>

Spain doctors win suit for lack of protection from COVID-19

Spain's medical community has scored a victory after a court ordered that a regional government must compensate doctors with up to 49,000 euros (\$56,000) for having to work without personal

protection suits during the devastating early months of the pandemic. The lawsuit brought by a doctor's union is the first of its kind to be won in Spain, whose health care system was pushed to the brink when COVID-19 first struck. "This ruling is groundbreaking in Spain," doctor Víctor Pedrera, secretary general of the Doctors' Union of Valencia CESH-CV that filed the suit, told The Associated Press by phone on Wednesday. Pedrera, a family doctor, said that he got ill with the coronavirus shortly after it hit Spain in March 2020 and spent two months at home "quite badly off and with no idea of what was being done for treatment."

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/spain-covid-barcelona-valencia-alicante-b1991528.html>

Will Boris Johnson Resign? UK PM Urged to Stand Down Over Lockdown Party Claim

Boris Johnson is facing opposition calls for his resignation, as his office confirmed officials are talking to U.K. police over an alleged drinks party at his Downing Street office while pandemic curbs were in place in 2020. The British premier's hopes of a reset after a turbulent end to 2021 were ruined after it emerged members of his team were invited to a drinks party in his office garden on May 20, 2020, according to an email seen by ITV News. Social gatherings were banned during the first wave of Covid-19 infections.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-11/boris-johnson-urged-to-quit-over-new-pandemic-drinks-party-claim>

Students at New York City's Largest High School Stage Walkout Over Covid Protocols

Students at Brooklyn Technical High School in New York City staged a walkout today in protest of the school's in-person teaching mandates during the omicron-fueled Covid surge. The walkout, which went viral on Twitter, happened at the largest in-person high school in the state. Brooklyn Tech had 6,043 students enrolled during the 2020-2021 school year.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-11/brooklyn-technical-high-school-students-stage-walkout-over-ny-c-covid-protocols>

Djokovic: Not isolating after COVID infection was 'error'

Novak Djokovic has acknowledged that his Australian travel declaration form contained incorrect information, as the government nears a decision on whether to deport the Serbian tennis star who is not vaccinated against COVID-19 on public interest grounds. The men's tennis No. 1 had his visa canceled on arrival in Melbourne last week when his vaccination exemption was questioned, but he won a legal battle on procedural grounds that allowed him to stay in the country. He still faces the prospect of deportation — a decision that is entirely at the discretion of Australia's Immigration Minister Alex Hawke if deemed to be in the public interest for health and safety reasons.

<https://apnews.com/article/immigration-coronavirus-pandemic-novak-djokovic-sports-health-591c103de643abc147b0fb7e2703afc2>

Scientific Viewpoint

Cannabis Compounds Prevented Covid Infection in Laboratory Study

Cannabis compounds prevented the virus that causes Covid-19 from penetrating healthy human cells, according to a laboratory study published in the Journal of Nature Products. The two compounds commonly found in hemp -- called cannabigerolic acid, or CBGA, and cannabidiolic acid, or CBDA -- were identified during a chemical screening effort as having potential to combat coronavirus, researchers from Oregon State University said. In the study, they bound to spike proteins found on the virus and blocked a step the pathogen uses to infect people. The researchers tested the compounds' effect against alpha and beta variants of the virus in a laboratory. The study didn't involve giving the supplements to people or comparing infection rates in those who use the compounds to those who don't.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-12/cannabis-compounds-prevented-covid-infection-in-laboratory-study>

Third dose of mRNA COVID vaccine induces strong immunity in older adults

The study results showed that two doses of an mRNA vaccine in older adults produced significantly lower levels of humoral response in terms of both binding and neutralizing antibodies as compared to younger people throughout the period of assessment. After a two-dose mRNA vaccine regimen, the predictors of weak binding antibody response included having more concomitant illnesses. Conversely, having a longer gap between the first and second doses was linked to a superior binding antibody response, confirming earlier reports. However, binding antibody levels fell faster in older adults, which is likely due to the more significant number of health conditions in this group.

<https://www.news-medical.net/news/20220111/Third-dose-of-mRNA-COVID-vaccine-induces-strong-immunity-in-older-adults.aspx>

Fauci warns of 'urgent need' for super vaccine as other variants emerge

Dr Anthony Fauci warned at a Senate committee hearing that the US faced an "urgent need" for a so-called super vaccine that would be more effective at preventing new variants of Covid-19 and other coronaviruses. "Looking ahead in the context of the inevitable continual emergence of new variants, the importance of developing a pan-coronavirus vaccine, namely one that would be effective against all SARS-COVID-2 variants, and ultimately against all coronaviruses, becomes even more apparent," he told the senators on Tuesday. He added that there was an "urgent need for such an effort", and added that NIAID was making significant progress on the issue.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/fauci-super-vaccine-covid-omicron-b1990899.html>

Novavax coronavirus vaccine authorized in South Korea

South Korea's drug regulator on Wednesday granted final authorization to Novavax's coronavirus vaccine for use in adults, health officials said in a news release, making it the fifth coronavirus vaccine available in the country. Although the authorization is conditioned on the Maryland-based company's submission of the final results of clinical studies regarding its vaccine, the Ministry of Food and Drug Safety said Novavax's coronavirus vaccine has received "final" approval in South Korea. The vaccine, which will be produced locally, is effective and safe, the regulator said.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/01/12/novavax-vaccine-south-korea-authorization-covid/>

Pfizer study shows COVID-19 booster can be given along with pneumonia shot

Pfizer Inc said on Wednesday booster doses of its COVID-19 vaccine can be administered along with its pneumonia vaccine and produced strong safety and immune responses in people aged 65 and above in a late-stage study. The study, initiated in May, tested the company's next-generation pneumococcal conjugate vaccine, PREVNAR 20, with a third dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 shot in 570 participants. The aim of the study was to test the safety of the combination and the immune response after adding the pneumonia vaccine to the existing COVID-19 vaccine.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/pfizer-study-shows-covid-19-booster-can-be-co-administered-with-pneumonia-shot-2022-01-12/>

S.Korea authorises Novavax COVID-19 vaccine, imports Pfizer pills

South Korea is turning to additional pharmaceutical tools as it looks to pre-empt a surge of COVID-19 omicron infections, authorising the use of Novavax Inc's vaccine on Wednesday and preparing to distribute the first of Pfizer's antiviral pills. At least 21,000 of Pfizer's antiviral pills, called Paxlovid, will arrive in South Korea on Thursday, with another 10,000 more expected to arrive by the end of the month, the health ministry said. The pills, which were authorised for emergency use in December, will begin being used in treatments for more than 1,000 people per day starting on Friday, the ministry added.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/skorea-authorises-use-novavax-covid-19-vaccine-2022-01-12/>

A Deceptive Covid Study, Unmasked

An honest summary of the study might have said: "There is a low transmission rate of the virus among students, even when unmasked at lunch or during sports." But a summary like that wouldn't have reinforced the politically acceptable message of public-health authorities today, and so unfounded points had to be fashioned to fit the narrative. This isn't a first for the ABC collaborative and the Duke press office. In July they made a series of bold claims about the efficacy of masking children in schools based on a study that didn't include an unmasked control group. Scientific communication should limit itself to the communication of science, rather than to the manipulation of human behavior.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/deceptive-covid-study-unmasked-abc-misleading-omicron-north-carolina-students-duke-mask-test-to-stay-11641933613>

Omicron Causes Fewer and Shorter Hospitalizations, Study Shows

A new study of nearly 70,000 Covid patients in California demonstrates that Omicron causes less severe disease than other coronavirus variants, results that align with similar findings from South Africa, Britain and Denmark, as well as a host of experiments on animals. Compared with Delta, Omicron infections were half as likely to send people to the hospital. Out of more than 52,000 Omicron patients identified from electronic medical records of Kaiser Permanente of Southern California, a large health system, the researchers found that not a single patient went on a ventilator during that time.

<https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/01/11/world/omicron-covid-testing-vaccines>

Repeat Booster Shots Spur European Warning on Immune-System Risks

European Union regulators warned that frequent Covid-19 booster shots could adversely affect the immune response and may not be feasible. Repeat booster doses every four months could eventually weaken the immune response and tire out people, according to the European Medicines Agency. Instead, countries should leave more time between booster programs and tie them to the onset of the cold season in each hemisphere, following the blueprint set out by influenza vaccination strategies, the agency said. The advice comes as some countries consider the possibility of offering people second booster shots in a bid to provide further protection against surging omicron infections. Earlier this month Israel became the first nation to start administering a second booster, or fourth shot, to those over 60.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-11/repeat-booster-shots-risk-overloading-immune-system-ema-says>

Covid Study to Assess Pfizer, J&J Suitability for HIV Infected

A South African Covid-19 vaccine trial will assess the safety and impact of varying doses of Johnson & Johnson and Pfizer Inc. shots as boosters for those infected with HIV as well as the wider population. The study being carried out by the Johannesburg-based Wits Reproductive Health and HIV Institute will recruit about 300 health workers, of which about a third will be HIV positive, said Lee Fairlie, head of child and maternal health at the institute. With about 8.2 million people in South Africa, or 13% of the population, infected with HIV, the effectiveness, or immunogenicity, of Covid-19 vaccines in generating an immune system response in immuno-compromised individuals has been a key concern. HIV causes AIDS, which weakens the immune system.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-12/covid-study-to-assess-pfizer-j-j-suitability-for-hiv-infected?srnd=premium-europe>

Coronavirus Resurgence

Bulgaria's daily coronavirus infections at record high

Daily coronavirus infections in Bulgaria reached a record high of 7,062 on Wednesday, largely fuelled by the highly contagious Omicron variant, official data showed. New cases, on the rise since the beginning of the year, surpassed a previous peak set in late October, when the European Union's

least vaccinated member state grappled with the Delta variant. The virus has killed 89 people in the past 24 hours in the Balkan country, according to official figures, bringing the total death toll to 31,761.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/bulgarias-daily-coronavirus-infections-record-high-2022-01-12/>

Russia prepares new measures as Omicron cases near 700

Russia has so far recorded 698 cases of the Omicron coronavirus variant and will prepare new measures by the end of the week to combat its spread, Deputy Prime Minister Tatiana Golikova said on Wednesday. Omicron has pushed COVID-19 case figures to record highs in parts of western Europe and the United States but the variant has been slower to hit Russia, where daily COVID cases have fallen from a peak of 41,335 registered in early November. Data compiled by the Reuters COVID-19 tracker show Russia's reported pandemic death toll stands at more than 666,000, the second highest in the world behind the United States.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/russias-omicron-cases-hit-nearly-700-govt-ponders-new-measures-2022-01-12/>

Tokyo, Osaka record most COVID-19 cases in 4 months as Omicron spreads

Japan recorded a surge in new coronavirus cases on Wednesday, with infections reaching four-month highs in the major metropolitan areas of Tokyo and Osaka as the Omicron variant spreads. New cases totalled 2,198 in the capital of Tokyo, while the western prefecture of Osaka recorded 1,711, nearly tripling from the day before. Those marked the highest levels since early September. COVID-19 cases across Japan will exceed 10,000 on Wednesday, according to a tally by broadcaster TBS. That tally would be the highest number of infections in Japan in a single day since Sept. 9.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/coronavirus-infections-japans-osaka-nearly-triple-1700-nhk-2022-01-12/>

COVID-19 cases jump in Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan as Omicron spreads

Central Asian neighbours Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan reported jumps in new COVID-19 cases on Wednesday as both countries said the Omicron variant of the virus was now spreading on their territories. Kyrgyzstan reported its first cases of the variant on Wednesday while Kazakhstan confirmed its first last week. The Kyrgyz healthcare ministry said on Wednesday it has registered 465 new COVID-19 cases, a five-month high. Kazakh Healthcare Minister Azhar Giniyat told a government meeting on the same day that the country has registered over 8,000 cases over the last seven days, almost three times more in the previous seven days.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/kyrgyzstan-reports-first-cases-omicron-covid-19-variant-2022-01-12/>

Germany's COVID-19 cases hit daily record of more than 80,000

Germany reported 80,430 new coronavirus infections on Wednesday, the highest recorded in a single day since the pandemic began, as the contagious Omicron variant rips through a population with lower vaccination rates than some other parts of Europe. The previous daily record, on Nov. 26, was more than 76,000.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/germanys-covid-19-cases-hit-daily-record-more-than-80000-2022-01-12/>

Austria's daily COVID-19 cases hit record in Omicron surge

Austria's daily coronavirus infections have hit a new record as cases continue to surge while the extremely contagious Omicron spreads, government data showed on Wednesday. Austria is bracing for infections to rise far above previous records, in line with what has happened elsewhere in Europe recently. The conservative-led government wants to avoid reintroducing a full lockdown like the one the country emerged from last month, its fourth of the pandemic. New daily coronavirus infections

rose above 17,000 for the first time on Wednesday, to 17,006, data from the interior and health ministries showed. The previous peak was 15,809 on Nov. 19, though figures vary by source - public health agency AGES lists the previous peak as 16,474 on Nov. 16.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/austrias-daily-covid-19-infections-hit-record-newspaper-says-2022-01-12/>

Covid-19 Cases Surge at Nursing Homes

The Covid-19 surge fueled by the Omicron variant is hitting nursing homes hard, with the highest number of cases ever documented among staffers and a near-record tally of residents also testing positive, according to new federal data. The increases among staff are posing an operational challenge for facilities that have been struggling with worker shortages for months, while a surge in patient cases threatens a return of serious illness and death among residents. In the week ending Jan. 9, there were 32,061 new confirmed Covid-19 cases among nursing-home residents, up from 18,186 a week earlier and 6,406 the week before that, according to new Centers for Disease Control and Prevention data.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/covid-19-cases-surge-at-nursing-homes-11641924320>

Omicron May Infect Half of Europeans Within Weeks, WHO Says

More than half of Europe's population may be infected with omicron within weeks at current transmission rates, a World Health Organization official said. The fast-spreading variant represents a "west-to-east tidal wave sweeping across the region," said Hans Kluge, the regional director of the WHO for Europe at a briefing Tuesday. He cited forecasts by the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation that the majority of Europeans could catch it in the next six to eight weeks. The latest Covid surge has so far resulted in fewer symptomatic cases and lower death rates than in previous waves, fueling optimism the pandemic may be easing. However, the WHO has repeatedly warned against underestimating the omicron strain as mild. Kluge said hospitalization rates are increasing in Europe, which is putting pressure on health systems.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-11/omicron-may-infect-half-of-europeans-within-weeks-who-says>

Australia Worker Shortage Worsens on Covid Omicron Spread

Australia was already facing a record shortfall of workers before spiraling omicron infections triggered the widespread absenteeism that is causing the country more acute pain from the variant than its global peers. Official data Wednesday showed job vacancies climbed to a record, up 18.5% to almost 400,000 in the three months through November. With the virus now raging, a key industry body is warning that firms in food and logistics are reporting 10%-50% of their workers are sick or in isolation, leaving supermarket shelves empty.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-12/australia-suffers-more-omicron-pain-as-worker-shortage-spirals>

New Lockdown

Three Million Britons Were Off Work Sick in the First Week of 2022

The rapid spread of the omicron variant drove a sharp increase in the number of people missing work in the U.K. during the first week of January, according to an analysis of workplace attendance data carried out for Bloomberg News. About 3 million workers were on sick leave from Jan. 3 through Jan. 9, according to GoodShape, which tracks work-related illness and wellbeing at U.K. employers. An estimated 1.6 million new cases of absence began during that period, an 18% jump on a year earlier. The snapshot of absences at the beginning of the year is one of the first indications of the impact the omicron surge is having on the U.K. economy.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-12/omicron-surge-meant-three-million-britons-off-work-sick-in-first-week-of-january>

Omicron may be headed for a rapid drop in Britain, US

Scientists are seeing signals that COVID-19's alarming omicron wave may have peaked in Britain and is about to do the same in the U.S., at which point cases may start dropping off dramatically. The reason: The variant has proved so wildly contagious that it may already be running out of people to infect, just a month and a half after it was first detected in South Africa. "It's going to come down as fast as it went up," said Ali Mokdad, a professor of health metrics sciences at the University of Washington in Seattle.

<https://apnews.com/article/omicron-wave-britain-us-160ded1ce8d82075057630e11b610358>

Tunisia to restore curfew and ban gatherings over COVID

Tunisia will re-impose a night curfew and ban all gatherings for two weeks starting from Thursday to counter the rapid spread of COVID-19, the government said on Wednesday in a move critics decried as aimed at stopping protests. The ban on gatherings and a request to avoid travel within the country except for emergencies comes two days before a planned demonstration against President Kais Saied called by major political parties.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/tunisia-restore-curfew-ban-gatherings-over-covid-2022-01-12/>