

COVID-19 Lockdown Exit Analysis

10th Mar 2022

Lockdown Exit

U.S. leaning toward ending COVID-era expulsions of migrants at Mexico border - sources

President Joe Biden's administration is leaning toward ending a COVID-era order that has blocked more than a million migrants at the U.S.-Mexico border, according to two U.S. officials familiar with the matter, a major policy shift that would restore the U.S. asylum system but could provoke backlash from Republicans. A third official said the policy was being actively debated and a decision could come within weeks, though the outcome was not yet clear. All three requested anonymity to provide details on internal conversations. The discussions, which have not been previously reported, were prompted by recent U.S. court decisions that complicate the implementation of the so-called "Title 42" border order coupled with major moves by U.S. public health officials to loosen pandemic restrictions across the United States, the officials said

<https://www.reuters.com/legal/litigation/us-leaning-toward-ending-covid-era-expulsions-migrants-mexico-border-sources-2022-03-09/>

Americans can now order four more free at-home Covid-19 tests

Americans can now order a second set of free at-home Covid-19 rapid antigen tests from the federal government. Covidtests.gov, the website to sign up for the free tests, launched in January, when people could order a maximum of four tests per household. Households that took part in that first round can now order an additional four.

<https://www.cnn.com/2022/03/08/health/second-round-free-covid-tests/index.html>

Austria says it is putting its COVID-19 vaccine mandate on ice

Austria is suspending its COVID-19 vaccine mandate, its ministers for health and constitutional affairs said on Wednesday, six days before fines for breaches were due to start being imposed. The measure, the most sweeping in the European Union as it applied to all adults with few exceptions, has been in effect since Feb. 5, but enforcement was only due to begin on March 15.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/austria-says-it-is-putting-its-covid-19-vaccine-mandate-ice-2022-03-09/>

Architect of Sweden's light-touch COVID response gets job at WHO

The man who became the face of Sweden's no-lockdown pandemic policy, Anders Tegnell, is stepping down as chief epidemiologist to take up a role at the World Health Organization (WHO), the Swedish Health Agency said. Tegnell, whose almost daily news conferences had Swedes glued to their screens for much of the pandemic, will become a senior expert at a WHO group tasked with coordinating the COVID vaccine response between health and vaccine organisations.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/architect-swedens-light-touch-covid-response-gets-job-who-2022-03-09/>

Austria suspends mandatory Covid vaccination law

Austria is suspending a law making Covid-19 vaccinations mandatory for all adults, just a month after the legislation took effect in an EU first. The country of 9 million people was among few in the world to make coronavirus jabs compulsory for all adults. The law took effect in February and called for fines of up to €3,600 (£3,000) from mid-March for those who did not comply. But the minister Karoline Edtstadler said the law's "encroachment of fundamental rights" could no longer be justified by the danger posed. "After consultations with the health minister, we have decided that we will of course follow what the [expert] commission has said," Edtstadler said after a cabinet meeting. "We

see no need to actually implement this compulsory vaccination due to the [Omicron] variant that we are predominantly experiencing here." The highly contagious variant is widely believed to be less severe than previous forms of the virus, and so far Austrian hospitals have been able to cope with a surge in cases.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/09/austria-suspends-mandatory-covid-vaccination-law>

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

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

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

Dems set for House approval of Ukraine aid, drop COVID funds

The House approved a massive spending bill Wednesday night that would rush \$13.6 billion in U.S. aid to battered Ukraine and its European allies, after top Democrats were forced to abruptly drop their plan to include fresh funds to battle COVID-19. Passage of the Ukraine aid and the \$1.5 trillion government-wide legislation that carried it let both parties lay claim to election-year victories for their priorities. Democrats won treasured domestic initiatives, Republicans achieved defense boosts, and both got their imprint on funds to counter Russia's brutal invasion of its western neighbor. Senate approval was assured by week's end or perhaps slightly longer. Hours earlier, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., had to abandon the bill's \$15.6 billion for combating the pandemic, a decision she called "heartbreaking" and that spelled defeat for a top priority of President Joe Biden and party leaders.

<https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-war-us-aid-package-41cc2e66c7714b37eca9d2bb8add53aa>

Covid hospital admissions rising across the UK 'likely due to waning immunity among older people'

Waning immunity from booster shots among the elderly and vulnerable is likely to be behind a sudden uptick in hospital admissions of people with Covid over the past week, public health officials believe. Hospitalisations are rising in all seven English NHS regions, Scotland and Wales, after a period of decline since the start of January. In south west England, admissions are higher than they were at the peak of the Omicron wave in January. Other areas that are seeing an increase are still well below their January peak, however.

<https://inews.co.uk/news/politics/covid-hospital-admissions-rising-across-uk-waning-immunity-older-people-1505560>

Covid UK: Cases rise 50 PER CENT in a week as hospitalisations and deaths creep up

Government dashboard data shows there were 67,159 new positive tests recorded over the last 24 hours. Deaths within 28 days of a confirmed coronavirus case also increased to 123, up 66.2 per cent in a week. Covid hospital admissions increased to 1,192 on March 5, the latest date UK-wide data is available for

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10594871/UKs-daily-Covid-cases-jump-50-CENT-week-hospitalisations-deaths-creep-up.html>

German govt produces new legal framework for pandemic rules

The German government introduced a legal framework for pandemic regulations and rules Wednesday. Most of the country's current coronavirus restrictions are set to end by March 20. The country's health and justice ministers said if German lawmakers pass the framework, the country's 16 state legislatures could adopt the new "hot spot" measures if virus cases rise again in certain regions, if hospitals are at risk of becoming overwhelmed by COVID-19 patients, or if new virus variants start spreading. The regulations cover matters such as mask requirements, social distancing, and requiring proof of vaccination, recovery of the illness or negative tests to be able to participate in certain parts of public life.

<https://apnews.com/article/covid-health-europe-pandemics-5d9c500abdfcfeba57f88501c83c31d8>

Ignoring behavioral and social sciences undermines the U.S. response to Covid-19

The U.S. has bungled many of its efforts to rein in the Covid-19 pandemic. Francis S. Collins, the former director of the National Institutes of Health, perfectly captured the country's fundamental flaw: "Maybe we underinvested in research on human behavior," he said on PBS NewsHour. "I never imagined a year ago, when those vaccines were just proving to be fantastically safe and effective, that we would still have 60 million people who had not taken advantage of them because of misinformation and disinformation that somehow dominated all of the ways in which people were getting their answers." In just 60 words, Collins captured the limitations of the nation's biomedicine-centric coronavirus response strategy, which has grossly underutilized insights and expertise from the behavioral and social sciences that might have bolstered the likelihood that the country's single best tool — effective vaccines — would achieve their potential to stop a highly contagious, rapidly evolving respiratory virus in its tracks.

<https://www.statnews.com/2022/03/09/ignoring-behavioral-social-sciences-undermines-us-covid-19-response/>

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

The following is a summary of some recent studies on COVID-19. They include research that warrants further study to corroborate the findings and that has yet to be certified by peer review. "Deltacron" with genes of Delta and Omicron found Hybrid versions of the coronavirus that combine genes from the Delta and Omicron variants - dubbed "Deltacron" - have been identified in at least 17 patients in the United States and Europe, researchers said. Because there have been so few confirmed cases, it is too soon to know whether Deltacron infections will be very transmissible or cause severe disease, said Philippe Colson of IHU Mediterranee Infection in Marseille, France, lead author of a report posted on Tuesday on medRxiv ahead of peer review. His team described three patients in France infected with a version of SARS-CoV-2 that combines the spike protein from an Omicron variant with the "body" of a Delta variant.

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

Exit Strategies

Hong Kong races to build isolation facilities as COVID cases surge

Hong Kong is rushing to build facilities for COVID-19 patients, with Reuters drone footage showing construction work in full swing after a temporary bridge linking the southern Chinese city of Shenzhen to the Asian financial hub opened at the weekend.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/hong-kong-races-build-isolation-facilities-covid-cases-surge-2022-03-09/>

PH gets more than 1 million doses of Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine

The Philippines received another shipment of Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine – more than 1 million doses – on Wednesday, the National Task Force (NTF) Against COVID-19 said. The delivery is composed of 128,700 Pfizer vaccine doses for 12 years old and above, and 1,056,000 doses of reformulated Pfizer vaccine for minors aged 5 to 11. All in all, 1,184,700 doses of Pfizer's anti-coronavirus vaccine were

delivered to the Philippines on Wednesday night.

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1566021/ph-gets-more-than-1-million-doses-of-pfizer-covid-19-vaccine>

Hong Kong leader urges suitable timing for mass testing effort

Compulsory mass testing for coronavirus would be useful but needs to be done at a suitable time, Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam said on Wednesday, following anxiety among the 7.4 million residents of the financial hub bracing for a citywide lockdown.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/hong-kong-leader-urges-suitable-timing-mass-testing-effort-2022-03-09/>

Hong Kong to focus COVID resources on elderly, no date set for mass tests

Hong Kong announced plans to devote more medical resources to elderly people on Wednesday as COVID-19 infections swept through care homes and deaths climbed rapidly among the mainly unvaccinated seniors. The government will strengthen medical treatment and resources and set up more isolation and temporary care facilities for elderly coronavirus patients, Chief Executive Carrie Lam told a media briefing.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/hong-kong-leader-says-covid-resources-be-focused-elderly-deaths-climb-2022-03-09/>

WHO Africa's 1st woman leader helps continent fight COVID

People stand when Dr. Matshidiso Moeti enters a room at the World Health Organization's Africa headquarters in Republic of Congo. Small in stature, big in presence, Moeti is the first woman to lead WHO's regional Africa office, the capstone of her trailblazing career in which she has overcome discrimination in apartheid South Africa to become one of the world's top health administrators. Moeti is facing her toughest challenge: helping Africa respond to the coronavirus pandemic as the continent trails the rest of the world in testing and vaccination efforts. She has become one of the world's most compelling voices urging better consideration of Africa's people — especially women, who've in many ways been hit hardest by COVID.

<https://apnews.com/article/covid-health-business-discrimination-pandemics-c2a80422029960f1c0e2d783e85c1385>

Hawaii to lift last US state mask mandate by March 26

The last statewide mask mandate in the U.S. will be lifted by March 26, Hawaii Gov. David Ige announced Tuesday. No states will require masks indoors after 11:59 p.m. March 25. Hawaii is the last to drop the pandemic safety measure, with indoor mask mandates in Oregon and Washington state expiring at 11:59 p.m. Friday. Ige said Hawaii's COVID-19 case counts and hospitalizations are decreasing.

<https://apnews.com/article/covid-health-hawaii-david-ige-1d41dba1b322af8f7458fbb98c22549c>

Congress looks to cut \$2 billion from COVID aviation jobs fund

A proposed bill to fund the U.S. government's operations through September would cut \$2 billion from a COVID-19 program to boost aviation manufacturing and repair businesses. The U.S. House of Representatives is set to vote on the bill on Wednesday that redirects \$15.6 billion in COVID-19 relief programs to other COVID programs. In total, the U.S. Transportation Department has offered \$673 million nationwide in three rounds of awards in the \$3 billion program. The aviation manufacturing payroll subsidy program created in 2021 covers up to half of eligible companies' compensation costs for up to six months. Some major aerospace firms like Boeing and General Electric opted not to participate.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/congress-looks-cut-2-billion-covid-aviation-jobs-fund-2022-03-09/>

Partisan Exits

Florida vaccine plan for children denounced as 'irresponsible and reckless'

In a pronouncement which stunned experts on Monday, Florida's controversial surgeon general Dr Joseph Ladapo said the state would be the first to "recommend against" Covid-19 vaccination for "healthy children". The move followed two recent Covid-19 surges in which pediatric hospitalization was believed to be higher because of low vaccination rates among children. "It's very generous to call it a recommendation, because recommendations come with supporting evidence and transparency," said Saad B Omer, director of the Yale Institute of Global Health and professor of medicine in infectious diseases.

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/mar/08/florida-children-vaccination-coronavirus>

In Somaliland, COVID brings 'cutters' door to door for girls

Safia Ibrahim's business was in trouble. COVID-19 had taken hold in Somaliland, in the Horn of Africa. The 50-year-old widow with 10 children to support set out door to door on the capital's outskirts, a razor at hand, taking advantage of the lockdown to seek work with a question: Have your daughters been cut? Her business is female circumcision, learned at the age of 15, performed hundreds of times and now being passed along to her daughters. She congratulates young girls upon completing the procedure: "Pray for me, I've made you a woman now." She believes her work keeps girls pure for marriage. "This is our Somali culture. Our great-grandmothers, grandfathers — all of them used to practice," she said, even though she now knows there's no medical or even religious reason for the removal of external genitalia, which can cause excessive bleeding, problems with urination and childbirth, infections and even death. But it remains legal in Somaliland, so Ibrahim will continue until authorities tell her to stop.

<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-health-lifestyle-religion-africa-e382d9893b7b8c02901c3a3177634c46>

Novak Djokovic: Unvaccinated tennis star withdraws from two US competitions as COVID rules prevent him from entering America

Novak Djokovic has withdrawn from two prestigious tennis competitions in the US as coronavirus rules prevent him from entering America. The unvaccinated Serbian has pulled out of the BNP Paribas Open in Indian Wells and the Miami Open after the CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) confirmed he needed to be jabbed to enter the country. The 20-time grand slam winner revealed last month he had not received any coronavirus vaccinations, insisting he would forego big tournaments "because the principles of decision-making on my body are more important than any title or anything else".

<https://news.sky.com/story/novak-djokovic-unvaccinated-tennis-star-withdraws-from-two-us-competitions-as-covid-rules-prevent-him-from-entering-america-12562012>

United Airlines to let unvaccinated workers return

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

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

Continued Lockdown

Hong Kong races to build isolation facilities as COVID cases surge

Hong Kong is rushing to build facilities for COVID-19 patients, with Reuters drone footage showing construction work in full swing after a temporary bridge linking the southern Chinese city of Shenzhen to the Asian financial hub opened at the weekend. As a surge in COVID-19 cases

overwhelms Hong Kong's healthcare facilities, authorities have deployed mainland medical and construction workers, as well as building materials, to speed up efforts to contain an outbreak of the virus

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/hong-kong-races-build-isolation-facilities-covid-cases-surge-2022-03-09/>

Hong Kong's zero-COVID fight takes mental toll on society, experts say

Hong Kong resident Yeung waited for 13 hours outside a hospital in the city's eastern district in cold, rainy weather with his 3-year-old daughter, who had a high fever, before they could be admitted for COVID-19 treatment. By the time they could enter, her fever had gone down and she didn't require medical attention. Yet the 42-year-old utilities worker had to stay in the hospital for four nights without a bed, because he and his daughter were not allowed to leave. They were then sent to a government isolation centre for nine more days.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/hong-kongs-zero-covid-fight-takes-mental-toll-society-experts-say-2022-03-09/>

Scientific Viewpoint

WHO lays out plan for COVID vaccines to tackle new variants

The World Health Organization (WHO) technical advisory group on COVID-19 vaccines today weighed in on potential updates to COVID-19 vaccines in light of emerging variants such as Omicron, outlining different options and what data are needed to guide new strategies. In other developments, countries experiencing later Omicron surges—especially in Asia—continue to report cases at or near record daily highs. And, in the United States, weekly pediatric COVID-19 cases dropped below 100,000, part of a 6-week decline from the Omicron peak in children.

<https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2022/03/who-lays-out-plan-covid-vaccines-tackle-new-variants>

'Variant-proof' Covid vaccine created in UK

A British “variant-proof” vaccine has received tens of millions of pounds of funding in the hope it may provide more durable protection against Sars-Cov2 — and against coronaviruses that don't even exist yet. Boris Johnson hailed the technology as part of the “next generation of vaccines” as he opened a conference in London held by the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations.

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/variant-proof-covid-vaccine-created-in-uk-trcq3jmkx>

Altamira Therapeutics Receives Approval to Commence Clinical Trial Evaluating Bentrion in the Treatment of COVID-19

Altamira Therapeutics Ltd. a company dedicated to developing therapeutics that address important unmet medical needs, today announced that its affiliate, Altamira Medica, has received the necessary approvals to initiate a clinical investigation of Bentrion™ in COVID-19 patients (the “COVAMID” study). COVAMID is a randomized, placebo controlled clinical trial to evaluate the ability of Bentrion™ nasal spray to reduce the SARS-CoV-2 viral load in the nose, alleviate COVID-19 signs and symptoms, and decrease the frequency of COVID-19 related hospital admissions.

<https://apnews.com/press-release/accesswire/covid-business-health-bermuda-clinical-trials-2f249f6c906dc4a5d77c0b166791fd7d>

Pfizer Starts Testing Its Covid-19 Pill in Children

Pfizer Inc. has begun studying its Covid-19 pill in children under 18 years old who are at high risk of developing severe disease. The study will evaluate whether the five-day treatment Paxlovid, which is in use among people 12 years and older, can also keep children who are newly infected by the coronavirus out of the hospital, Pfizer said Wednesday. The first child enrolled in the study on Monday. Pfizer expects results by the end of the year, said Annaliesa Anderson, who leads the company's Paxlovid research. Should results from the pediatric study prove positive, the antiviral would be the first Covid-19 pill for children under 12 years and an especially important remedy for

those with underlying health conditions who cannot be vaccinated or whose parents don't want them to get shots.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/pfizer-starts-testing-its-covid-19-pill-in-children-11646826300>

Janssen and Aspen enter deal to manufacture Covid-19 vaccine in Africa

Janssen Pharmaceuticals of Johnson & Johnson (J&J) has concluded an agreement with South Africa based company Aspen to manufacture and distribute Covid-19 vaccines in Africa. The companies intend to boost Covid-19 inoculation rates in Africa through this alliance. Under the deal, J&J will provide Covid-19 vaccine drug substance to Aspen, which will manufacture and make the finished vaccines available under its own brand name Aspenovax. The vaccines will be provided to all 55 Member States of the African Union (AU), as well as crucial multilateral entities that back the Covid-19 inoculation campaign in Africa, including the African Vaccine Acquisition Trust (AVAT) and the COVAX Facility.

<https://www.pharmaceutical-technology.com/news/janssen-aspen-vaccine-africa/>

Having Covid-19 linked to risk of economic hardship, study suggests

People living in the UK's most deprived areas are more likely to be infected with Covid-19, but research suggests this relationship is a two-way street: becoming infected also increases people's risk of economic hardship, particularly if they develop long Covid. "We've shown that Covid has an impact on people's ability to meet their basic household requirements – something that is only going to be exacerbated by the cost of living crisis which is happening at the same time," said Adrian Martineau, a professor of respiratory infection and immunity at Queen Mary University of London (QMUL), who supervised the research. The findings have boosted calls for ministers to do more to support the growing number of working-age adults affected by the condition, which is also known as post-acute Covid syndrome (Pacs).

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2022/mar/09/covid-19-risk-economic-hardship-poverty-study-suggests>

South Africa's Aspen signs deal to package and sell J&J COVID vaccine

South African drugmaker Aspen Pharmacare concluded an agreement with Johnson & Johnson to package, sell and distribute the American group's COVID-19 vaccines under its own brand in Africa. In November Aspen entered into talks with J&J for a licensing deal that would give it freedom to sell and distribute the vaccine under its own brand. The agreement also allows Aspen to "discuss the expansion of the agreement to include any new versions of the drug substance, such as those developed for new variants or a different formulation for administration as a booster", Aspen said in a statement.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/safricas-aspen-signs-deal-package-sell-jj-covid-vaccine-2022-03-08/>

Pfizer begins COVID pill study in high-risk children aged 6-17

Pfizer said on Wednesday it has begun a mid-to-late-stage study of its antiviral COVID-19 pill for non-hospitalized children aged 6-17 years who are at high risk of developing severe illness. Pfizer's Paxlovid pill is authorized for emergency use in the United States for kids 12 years or older and high-risk adults. But there are no oral antiviral treatments for COVID-19 authorized in the United States for younger children. The drugmaker plans to enroll 140 children in the study across two groups of 6- to 17-year-olds, with one group including those at least 40 kilograms in weight and the other weighing between 20 kgs and 40 kgs.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/pfizer-begins-covid-pill-study-high-risk-children-aged-6-17-2022-03-09/>

Study reveals some brain changes, even in mild COVID-19

Adult COVID-19 survivors—even those with mild illness—who underwent scans showed changes in brain structure beyond that expected from normal aging, including in areas tied to smell and

memory, according to a UK study published yesterday in Nature. University of Oxford investigators administered cognitive tests to and scanned the brains of 785 visitors to the UK Biobank imaging centers two times an average of 38 months apart. Of the 785 participants, 401 (51%) were diagnosed as having COVID-19 between their scans, from March 2020 to April 2021. The remaining 384 participants were age- and sex-matched controls. Patients were aged 51 to 81 years.

<https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2022/03/study-reveals-some-brain-changes-even-mild-covid-19>

Most mRNA COVID vaccine adverse events mild, transient

The vast majority of adverse events (92%) recorded after people received the Pfizer/BioNTech or Moderna mRNA COVID-19 vaccines during the first 6 months of the US vaccine rollout were mild and transient, according to an observational study published yesterday in The Lancet Infectious Diseases.

<https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2022/03/most-mrna-covid-vaccine-adverse-events-mild-transient>

Coronavirus Resurgence

First Covid-19 case arrives in Aitutaki

The case is an Aitutaki resident, and the person is isolating at home. Household contacts are currently being identified and are asked to quarantine. Like Rarotonga, the population on Aitutaki is highly vaccinated and Prime Minister Mark Brown said they are prepared for this. Over the weekend 24 new cases were confirmed, bringing the total number to 130. R-A-T tests will be used to diagnose new cases in the Cook islands as is occurring in New Zealand. No additional PCR test will be required except for clinical reasons.

<https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/462973/first-covid-19-case-arrives-in-aiutaki>

Hong Kong's Covid-19 Death Rate Is the World's Highest Because of Unvaccinated Elderly

Almost a year ago, Rio Ling decided to hold off on vaccinating his 86-year-old father against the coronavirus because he was more worried about possible side effects than the virus itself, given that Hong Kong had kept cases low under its "Zero-Covid" policy. By the time he gave the go-ahead in January, after the Omicron variant had broken through the city's defenses, it was too late. A few hours after finally receiving the inoculation in late February, Mr. Ling's dad, who has high blood pressure and dementia, tested positive for Covid-19. Half a million people over 70 weren't vaccinated when Omicron began surging through the city. Like other places, Hong Kong gave its elderly priority to get their shots, but persistent fears about vaccine safety, fueled by local media reports about deaths following vaccinations, and Hong Kong's low case count led many to delay.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/unvaccinated-elderly-send-hong-kongs-covid-19-death-rate-to-worlds-highest-11646748091>

Covid-19 news: Deaths and new infections are declining, say WHO

The number of global recorded covid deaths between 28 February and 6 March declined by 8 per cent compared to the previous week. In its weekly update, the WHO reported the number of recorded new SARS-CoV-2 infections also decreased by 5 per cent week-on-week. In the week starting 28 February, more than 10 million new covid cases and 52,000 deaths were reported across the WHO's six regions. Case numbers only increased in the Western Pacific Region, rising by 46 per cent. Covid deaths rose in the Western Pacific and Eastern Mediterranean regions, by 29 per cent and 2 per cent, respectively, with fatalities falling elsewhere. The surge in infection caused by the omicron variant appears to have peaked in February. But the WHO has stressed that countries vary in their testing strategies and therefore any trends should be interpreted with caution.

<https://www.newscientist.com/article/2237475-covid-19-news-deaths-and-new-infections-are-declining-say-who/>

Shanghai steps up defences against wave of asymptomatic COVID cases

The Chinese financial hub of Shanghai is moving quickly to halt the spread of COVID-19 amid a rising

wave of local symptomless cases, testing tens of thousands of people, delaying dozens of concerts and exhibitions and shutting some public venues. Shanghai reported 62 domestically transmitted asymptomatic infections for Tuesday, the seventh consecutive day of increases in such cases, official data showed on Wednesday. That was the highest daily count for the city since China started in late March 2020 to classify symptomless infections separately from confirmed cases.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/shanghai-steps-up-defences-against-wave-asymptomatic-covid-cases-2022-03-09/>

Hong Kong reports 58767 new COVID cases on Wednesday

Hong Kong health authorities reported on Wednesday 25,991 new COVID-19 cases confirmed with nucleic acid tests and an additional 32,776 confirmed via rapid antigen tests (RATs). Some of the cases confirmed with RATs were older than 24 hours.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/hong-kong-reports-58767-new-covid-cases-wednesday-2022-03-09/>

France's new COVID-19 infections start creeping up again

French health authorities reported 93,050 new COVID-19 infections on Tuesday, the highest daily total since Feb 22, and an increase of 16.6% versus a week ago. The number of new daily infections has now shown a week-on-week rise for the fourth consecutive day, reversing a declining trend that started end January. The daily COVID-19 death toll increased by 167, to 139,618, versus a rise of 176 on Monday. The number of people hospitalised with the disease fell by 309, to 21,899, a low point since early January.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/frances-new-covid-19-infections-start-creeping-up-again-2022-03-08/>

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

The Hong Kong nursing home where Amy's 78-year-old mother lives battened down the hatches when the COVID-19 pandemic hit. Elderly residents were confined within the walls of their rooms. Families were not allowed to visit. As the Chinese territory battled its biggest outbreak of coronavirus cases, staff at the private facility camped out in the office for weeks to avoid bringing the virus with them from outside. Even so, the inevitable happened. In February, Amy's mother was among the residents sent to a public hospital's emergency ward after developing a fever. "This elderly home has some of the strictest standards in the industry," Amy, who asked to only be referred to by her first name, told Al Jazeera. "If 80 percent of its residents can be infected, then no other nursing home in Hong Kong can remain unscathed." As Hong Kong reports tens of thousands of coronavirus cases each day, the city's large population of unvaccinated elderly residents has resulted in the highest official death rate per capita of any jurisdiction during the pandemic. Only about 30 per cent of Hong Kong residents over 80 have been double vaccinated despite vaccines being freely available for more than a year, amid widespread vaccine hesitancy among the elderly.

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