

COVID-19 Lockdown Exit Analysis

26th Aug 2022

Lockdown Exit

Free asymptomatic Covid-19 testing for nurses to end in England next week

Nurses and other health workers will no longer be tested for Covid-19 unless they have symptoms, the government has announced. From 31 August, routine asymptomatic testing in England will be paused across health and care settings.

<https://www.nursingtimes.net/news/coronavirus/free-asymptomatic-covid-19-testing-for-nurses-to-end-in-england-next-week-25-08-2022/>

Covid-19 booster vaccine now available for over-50s in Ireland

The second Covid-19 booster jab is now available for all people aged over 50 in Ireland. The HSE confirmed that appointments can now be made by anyone within the age bracket online. The jabs are provided at participating pharmacies,

<https://www.msn.com/en-ie/health/familyhealth/covid-19-booster-vaccine-now-available-for-over-50s-in-ireland/ar-AA115ka0>

China drops some COVID reporting rules for cross-border travellers at customs

Chinese customs said on Thursday it no longer required cross-border travellers to report certain COVID-related information, such as tests and previous infections, when clearing customs. Mainland China, which still has some of the world's most stringent COVID policies for international travellers, has taken steps to make cross-border travel less onerous, such as shortening the quarantine period and removing some testing and self-isolation requirements for inbound travellers.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/china-drops-some-covid-reporting-rules-cross-border-travellers-customs-2022-08-25/>

China reopens to Japanese students after long COVID break

The Chinese government will soon start accepting Japanese international students after a two-and-a-half year pause caused by the coronavirus pandemic. The Chinese embassy in Japan has made visas for long-term overseas study in China available for applications as of Tuesday. Prospective students are expected to be allowed to sit in university classes after undergoing 10 days of isolation and health observation upon entry. This change, which would encourage exchange among the younger generation, appears to be a move to ease bilateral tensions ahead of next month's 50th anniversary of the two countries normalizing diplomatic relations.

<https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/China-reopens-to-japanese-students-after-long-covid-break>

Covid: Qantas says pandemic 'existential crisis' is over

The national carriers of Australia and New Zealand say that the worst of the coronavirus crisis is now behind them, even as they posted annual losses for a third year in a row. Qantas says it is seeing demand increase "with the existential crisis posed by the pandemic now over". Air New Zealand says it has also experienced "a very strong recovery in bookings and revenues" since March.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/business-62655455.amp>

Hong Kong Could Tighten Social Distancing Restrictions If Covid Cases Worsen

Hong Kong health officials said tighter social distancing restrictions could be considered if rising Covid-19 cases increase the pressure on the city's medical system. The financial hub reported 7,884 new Covid cases Wednesday, the highest number since the end of March and up from fewer than

5,000 a month ago. Increasing hospitalizations have put pressure on the health-care system, prompting hospitals to scale back non-emergency services and spurring the reopening of community isolation facilities. Expanding virus-related restrictions would be seen as a step back for the international city, which has struggled to balance reopening its borders with mainland China's conservative approach to the virus, known as Covid Zero.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-08-24/hong-kong-could-consider-tighter-curbs-as-covid-cases-rise>

New York State Led US Life-Expectancy Drop in 2020, CDC Says

Life expectancy in New York plummeted by three years in 2020, the biggest decline among all states in the first year of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said. Residents of the state are expected to live to just under 78, the 15th-highest life expectancy in the country and a steep drop from 2019, when they had the third-highest ranking, the health authority said in state-level data published Tuesday.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-08-23/new-york-state-led-us-life-expectancy-drop-in-2020-cdc-says>

Exit Strategies

Paraguayans skipping booster doses of COVID-19 vaccine

Paraguayan health authorities have expressed their concern over a slowdown in vaccination against COVID-19, with very few booster doses applied. According to official data released Saturday, 47% of the population still lacked the first doses since the start of the campaign in March 2021, while 53% were yet to take the third injection, although they have been available since October last year.

<https://en.mercopress.com/2022/08/22/paraguayans-skipping-booster-doses-of-covid-19-vaccine>

Autumn Covid booster jabs: Who is eligible in Wales and how to book?

The autumn coronavirus booster vaccination programme is starting in Wales, with the first jabs being administered on September 1. The roll-out is designed to give extra protection to those who are at increased risk of serious illness if they contract the disease. The Welsh Government says it will also help protect the NHS over winter 2022-23, by easing pressure on the service.

<https://www.itv.com/news/wales/2022-08-25/autumn-covid-booster-jabs-who-is-eligible-and-how-to-book>

Covid-19 testing for people without symptoms to be 'paused'

Covid-19 testing among NHS and care home staff with no symptoms in England is to be "paused" at the end of August, officials have announced. The Department of Health and Social Care said the decision to stop all "asymptomatic testing" comes as cases of the virus continue to fall. But the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) said nurses "must continue to have access to free testing and high-quality personal protective equipment".

<https://www.msn.com/en-gb/news/uknews/covid-19-testing-for-people-without-symptoms-to-be-e2-80-98paused-e2-80-99/ar-AA113q61>

Taxi and private-hire drivers surprised at change in mask-wearing rule, worried about Covid-19 transmission

In Singapore, in an advisory on its Facebook page, the Land Transport Authority encouraged drivers and passengers to continue wearing masks to protect one another. Ride-hailing operators Gojek and Grab echoed this call, saying drivers and passengers should mask up if they feel unwell. Grab also advised its drivers to wind down windows to improve ventilation if passengers are agreeable. However, drivers interviewed felt that many passengers will not heed this call.

<https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/taxi-and-private-hire-drivers-surprised-at-change-in-mask-wearing-rule-worried-about-covid-19-transmission>

3 possible Covid-19 scenarios for Singapore in the months ahead

Singapore needs to be prepared for a possible Covid-19 wave at the year end, said Health Minister Ong Ye Kung on Wednesday (Aug 24). A few scenarios were outlined by the Covid-19 multi-ministry

task force on Wednesday at a press conference.

<https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/3-possible-covid-19-scenarios-for-singapore-in-the-months-ahead>

Chinese city 'stretched to the limit' as millions wait in line for Covid tests in extreme heat

The Chinese metropolis of Chongqing has rolled out mass Covid testing in its central area amid a record heat wave, leaving millions of residents standing under the sun for hours as they struggle with extreme temperatures and power shortages. Stringent zero-Covid measures enacted by the southwestern mega city to contain an emerging outbreak are the latest hardship for residents already reeling from a crippling heat wave, a severe drought and blazing wildfires. Chongqing reported 40 Covid-19 infections Wednesday, bringing the total to 146 cases since mid-August.

<https://www.cnn.com/2022/08/25/china/china-chongqing-mass-covid-test-heat-wave-intl-hnk/index.html>

Chinese State Media Defend Covid Zero, Warn Against 'Lying Flat'

China's state media defended the country's increasingly costly zero tolerance approach to Covid-19, saying inactivity from "lying flat" would be disastrous, as outbreaks in its tourism hotspots abate. The dynamic Covid Zero method created a safe and stable environment for China's development and brings greater certainty to the world economy, the State Council-affiliated newspaper Economic Daily said in a column on Thursday. The recent damage to the country's growth stems from Covid itself, not measures to contain it, the paper said.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-08-25/chinese-state-media-defend-covid-zero-warn-against-lying-flat>

Explainer: Updated COVID-19 vaccines are coming in the U.S., should you get one?

The United States plans to roll out an updated COVID-19 booster vaccine to include Omicron subvariants of the coronavirus. Regulators are reviewing the shots and could give the go-ahead as soon as next week.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/updated-covid-19-vaccines-are-coming-us-should-you-get-one-2022-08-25/>

Partisan Exits

Novak Djokovic Will Miss U.S. Open Due to Federal Vaccination Policy

Novak Djokovic spent his summer closely monitoring news about restrictions related to the U.S. border. His hope was that the country might relax certain rules about admitting non-citizens unvaccinated against Covid-19 in time for him to play at the U.S. Open. But on Thursday, Djokovic's time ran out. Three days before play is due to start, he said that he would not be flying to New York. Though the 21-time Grand Slam champion skipping the U.S. Open will change the complexion of the tournament, Djokovic's withdrawal hardly came as a surprise. Even he had been pessimistic about his chances.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/novak-djokovic-us-open-vaccination-11661440850>

House panel: Trump sought to pressure FDA on covid vaccines, treatment

Trump officials repeatedly stalled the Food and Drug Administration's plan to extend safety studies of coronavirus vaccines in fall 2020, as President Donald Trump pressed the agency for a faster timeline so the vaccines could be authorized before Election Day, according to emails, text messages and interviews by a congressional panel probing the pandemic response. White House officials such as trade adviser Peter Navarro and outside allies such as TV host and physician Mehmet Oz also pressed federal officials in 2020 to authorize the antimalarial drug hydroxychloroquine as a coronavirus treatment, with Navarro and a deputy working behind the scenes to have a hospital craft a request to the FDA for widespread access to the debunked therapy touted by Trump, the House select subcommittee on the coronavirus crisis concluded in a report released Wednesday.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2022/08/24/trump-fda-pressure-covid-vaccines-treatment/>

Novak Djokovic confirms he will miss US Open due to Covid vaccine status

Novak Djokovic has announced that he will not play at the US Open due to his vaccine status. The world No 6, who has not been vaccinated against Covid-19, said last month that he was hoping "for some good news from USA" with the country requiring non-citizens to be fully vaccinated against coronavirus to enter. However, a recent update on the US Centers for Disease Control website confirmed the rule will remain in effect for the immediate future. On Thursday, the Serb confirmed he will not play in the tournament.

<https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2022/aug/25/novak-djokovic-misses-us-open-after-deciding-against-travelling-to-new-york-covid-vaccine>

Twitter labeled factual information about covid-19 as misinformation

Over the past week, Twitter has flagged dozens of tweets with factual information about covid-19 as misinformation and in some cases has suspended the accounts of doctors, scientists, and patient advocates in response to their posts warning people about the illness's dangers. Many of the tweets have since had the misinformation labels removed, and the suspended accounts have been restored. But the episode has shaken many scientific and medical professionals, who say Twitter is a key way they try to publicize the continuing risk of covid to a population that has grown weary of more than two years of shifting claims about the illness. In interviews with The Post, Twitter acknowledged the problem. The company removed the labels and restored the accounts after queries about 10 specific tweets and accounts.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2022/08/25/twitter-factual-covid-info-labeled-misinformation/>

Rishi Sunak: Covid Scientists Get Too Much Say on Lockdowns Leaving Us 'Screwed'

Scientists on the Government's Sage advisory committee were given too much influence over decisions on coronavirus lockdowns and not enough consideration was given to the social and economic impact, Rishi Sunak has claimed. The former chancellor said he "wasn't allowed to talk about the trade-off" during the early phases of the pandemic and suggested the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies edited its minutes to hide dissenting opinions. Mr Sunak said "we shouldn't have empowered the scientists in the way we did" and suggested he had been left "furious" during a meeting because colleagues refused to acknowledge the wider impact lockdowns was having.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-08-25/empowering-sage-scientists-over-covid-lockdown-left-us-screwed-claims-sunak>

UK leadership candidate Sunak attacks COVID lockdown response

Former finance minister Rishi Sunak, one of two candidates vying to be Britain's next premier, criticised the way outgoing Prime Minister Boris Johnson handled the COVID-19 pandemic, saying it had been a mistake to "empower" scientists and that the downsides of lockdowns were suppressed.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uk-leadership-candidate-sunak-attacks-covid-lockdown-response-2022-08-25/>

Scientific Viewpoint

Pfizer COVID-19 Vaccines 73 Percent Protective in Under 5s

The Pfizer modified COVID-19 vaccine for use in children younger than 5 years was 73 percent effective in shielding them from infection during the omicron surge this spring, company data released Tuesday show. The specially formulated doses for America's youngest children were approved for distribution in June, although the American Academy of Pediatrics says uptake has been low. Just 6 percent of children younger than 5 years had gotten immunized by mid-August, the group said. At the time of approval, the only studies supporting their use in small children were based on levels of antibodies triggered by the shots. The new data show that the Pfizer vaccine does appear to protect young children well against symptomatic COVID-19.

<https://www.physiciansweekly.com/pfizer-covid-19-vaccines-73-percent-protective-in-under-5s/>

Wait for Bharat's COVID-19 vaccine data continues

India's Bharat Biotech has recently completed the Phase III trials of its COVID-19 intranasal vaccine BBV154 and submitted the data to the Drug Controller General of India (DCGI) for approval both as a primary two-dose vaccine, and a heterologous booster dose. However, the company has not yet made clinical trial results publicly available.

<https://www.thepharmaletter.com/article/clinical-data-disclosure-critical-for-bharat-biotech-covid-19-intranasal-vaccine-success-in-india-says-globaldata>

COVID Has Set Back Childhood Immunizations Worldwide

Thanks to COVID vaccines, more people were immunized in 2021 than in any other year in history. Yet that same year, with tragic irony, more children ended up at risk of highly preventable infectious diseases than before the pandemic began. This is because of what the World Health Organization and UNICEF have described as the largest backslide in childhood vaccinations in three decades. It means that, for the second year in a row after 2019, at a time when the COVID pandemic has focused the world's attention on the need for vaccination, the number of children missing out on basic vaccines has increased. This is particularly the case in lower-income countries. Given the enormous toll COVID is having on the world's poorest economies, an overall decline in childhood vaccinations is not unexpected. But we can't let these numbers slip further.

<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/covid-has-set-back-childhood-immunizations-worldwide/>

Paxlovid reduces risk of COVID-19 death by 81%, Clalit study shows

A study by Clalit Health Services on the success of treating at-risk COVID-19 patients with the anti-viral drug Paxlovid has shown an impressive 81% reduction in the risk of death from complications of the virus and a 73% decrease in hospitalizations among those aged 65 and older, compared to a control group who did not want to take the medication. Generically known as nirmatrelvir/ritonavir, the oral protease inhibitor was granted emergency use authorization by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in December 2021. It was authorized for treatment of mild-to-moderate COVID-19 in people aged 12 years of age and older weighing at least 40 kilograms with positive results of direct SARS-CoV-2 testing, and who are at high risk for progression to severe COVID-19, including hospitalization or death. It should be taken within five days of the onset of symptoms.

<https://www.jpost.com/health-and-wellness/coronavirus/article-715572>

Nirmatrelvir Use and Severe Covid-19 Outcomes during the Omicron Surge | NEJM

A total of 109,254 patients met the eligibility criteria, of whom 3902 (4%) received nirmatrelvir during the study period. Among patients 65 years of age or older, the rate of hospitalization due to Covid-19 was 14.7 cases per 100,000 person-days among treated patients as compared with 58.9 cases per 100,000 person-days among untreated patients (adjusted hazard ratio, 0.27; 95% confidence interval [CI], 0.15 to 0.49). The adjusted hazard ratio for death due to Covid-19 was 0.21 (95% CI, 0.05 to 0.82). Among patients 40 to 64 years of age, the rate of hospitalization due to Covid-19 was 15.2 cases per 100,000 person-days among treated patients and 15.8 cases per 100,000 person-days among untreated patients (adjusted hazard ratio, 0.74; 95% CI, 0.35 to 1.58). The adjusted hazard ratio for death due to Covid-19 was 1.32 (95% CI, 0.16 to 10.75).

<https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMoa2204919>

What is the link between influenza vaccination and the severity of COVID-19 infection?

In a recent study published in Scientific Reports, researchers performed a systematic review and meta-analysis to investigate whether influenza vaccinations could reduce coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) severity outcomes. However, results on the potential protection against COVID-19 severity by influenza vaccines have been contradictory.

<https://www.news-medical.net/news/20220825/What-is-the-link-between-influenza-vaccination-and-the-severity-of-COVID-19-infection.aspx>

Severe COVID-19 increases risk of future cardiovascular events

To date, the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), which is the virus responsible for the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), has infected over 603 million individuals and claimed more than 6.4 million lives worldwide. About 30% of COVID-19 survivors continue to experience a wide range of persistent symptoms for several weeks since their initial diagnosis. This condition is commonly referred to as post-acute sequelae of SARS-CoV-2 infection (PASC) or “long COVID.”

<https://www.news-medical.net/news/20220824/Severe-COVID-19-increases-risk-of-future-cardiovascular-events.aspx>

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<https://www.msn.com/en-ca/health/medical/paxlovid-reduces-risk-of-covid-19-death-by-81-clalit-study-shows/ar-AA11530R>

Thai FDA approves Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine for children aged 6 months -5 years

COVID-19 vaccine in vials with maroon caps, developed by Pfizer, are now approved for use in children aged 6 months to 5 years, with 3 injections of 3µg per dose. The vaccine is 80.3% effective at preventing COVID-19. Secretary-General of Thailand's Food and Drug Administration (TFDA) Dr. Paisarn Dunkum said yesterday (Wednesday) that, on August 23rd, the TFDA subcommittee considering the registration of modern pharmacopoeia for humans, as a vaccine against the virus which causes COVID-19, approved the expansion of the use of Pfizer's Comirnaty vaccine to include children aged 6 months to 5 years.

<https://www.thaipbsworld.com/thai-fda-approves-pfizer-covid-19-vaccine-for-children-aged-6-months-5-years/>

Thai king's medical firm reports record profit after vaccine deal with AstraZeneca

Thai drugmaker Siam Bioscience, owned by the country's king, reported a near 50-fold increase in annual profit in 2021, when it began producing AstraZeneca Plc's COVID-19 vaccine, government data shows. The company is part of King Maha Vajiralongkorn's vast fortune, which includes land and property estimated at between \$30 billion and \$60 billion. Founded in 2009 by the late King Bhumibol Adulyadej to produce biopharmaceuticals and improve public health, the company had since been loss-making and reported its first profit only in 2020 of 35.7 million baht (\$995,000).

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/thai-kings-medical-firm-reports-record-profit-after-vaccine-deal-with-2022-08-25/>

Coronavirus Resurgence

Covid-19 death registrations fall for second week in a row

Deaths involving Covid-19 registered in England and Wales have fallen for the second week in a row, suggesting they are now on a downward trend. Some 592 deaths registered in the seven days to August 12 mentioned coronavirus on the death certificate, according to the Office for National Statistics (ONS) – down 18% on the previous week. Deaths had risen during June and July due to the wave of infections caused by the BA.4 and BA.5 Omicron subvariants of Covid-19. But the latest figures confirm this wave peaked at 810 deaths in the week to July 29.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/office-for-national-statistics-wales-england-omicron-b2150762.html>

N. Korea sees suspected COVID-19 cases after victory claim

North Korea on Thursday said it found four new fever cases in its border region with China that may have been caused by coronavirus infections, two weeks after leader Kim Jong Un declared a widely disputed victory over COVID-19

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/seoul-ap-kim-jong-un-south-korea-china-b2152154.html>

N.Korea reports unknown fever cases near China border, denies COVID

North Korea's state media said on Thursday that a fever outbreak of unknown origin has emerged in a region bordering China, but it was not the novel coronavirus over which the country declared victory this month. Four fever cases "suspected of being infected with malignant epidemic" were reported from Ryanggang Province near the border with China on Tuesday, prompting authorities to immediately lock down the area and mobilise medical teams, the official KCNA news agency said, citing the State Emergency Epidemic Prevention Headquarters.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/nkorea-reports-unknown-fever-cases-near-china-border-denies-covid-2022-08-25/>

Why have there been excess deaths this summer?

The first two years of the pandemic brought a tragic loss of life, with over 120,000 excess deaths, almost all of which were a direct result of COVID-19. Early in 2022 there were fewer deaths than normal for the time of year. The picture worsened as we moved into spring and summer, with the Office for National Statistics reporting 11,600 more deaths than average in the last eight weeks, only a small fraction of which arose during the heatwave. Excess deaths, typically a niche interest for actuaries and demographers, have made front page news. Speculation is rife as to the underlying causes with suggestions such as 'lockdown effects feared to be killing more people than COVID'.

<https://ukandeu.ac.uk/why-have-there-been-excess-deaths-this-summer/>

Malaysia continues to record two-digit Covid-19 fatalities, slight dip in cases

The country continued to record two-digit Covid-19 fatalities while new daily cases showed a slight dip with 2,636 infections on Wednesday (Aug 24). Health Ministry's CovidNow portal today reported that five of the new cases were imported while 2,631 were locally transmitted cases. On Aug 24, the country reported 2,722 daily Covid-19 infections and 11 deaths.

<https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2022/08/825429/malaysia-continues-record-two-digit-covid-19-fatalities-slight-dip-cases>

Singapore must prepare for year-end Covid-19 wave possibly caused by variant of concern

With around seven in 10 people here having been infected with Covid-19, the next big wave will likely be a wave of reinfections. While Singapore is more resilient now given that its current wave has just subsided, the Republic needs to be prepared for a year-end wave that may be caused by a variant of concern that dodges immunity from past infection, said Health Minister Ong Ye Kung on Wednesday morning (Aug 24). Mr Ong noted at a multi-ministry task force (MTF) on Covid-19 press conference that reinfection cases have climbed to about 5.5 per cent of infections here this month, compared with about 3 per cent of cases the last time he updated Parliament.

<https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/next-covid-19-wave-will-be-one-of-reinfections-about-70-of-spore-population-has-already-been-infected>

Twice as many people died with Covid in UK this summer compared with 2021

Twice as many deaths involving Covid occurred this summer compared with last summer, according to analysis of new data – though rates have fallen in recent weeks as the latest wave decreases in severity in the UK. Although the overall number of deaths of people with Covid in 2022 remains far below last year, the summer months have bucked that trend. More than 5,700 Covid deaths have been registered since 8 June when two Omicron subvariants became dominant. This is 95% higher than in the same period last year when there were 2,936 deaths involving Covid across the UK. However, the latest figures from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) also indicate that deaths caused by the latest Covid wave – fuelled by the two more transmissible Omicron subvariants, BA.4 and BA.5, which became dominant in early June – are on the wane.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/aug/23/twice-as-many-people-died-with-covid-in-uk-this-summer-compared-with-2021>