

COVID-19 Lockdown Exit Analysis

25th Jan 2021

News Highlights

Ongoing controversy over vaccine delivery in Europe

Drugmakers AstraZeneca and [Pfizer/BioNTech have told EU officials that fewer vaccine doses will be shipped in the initial phase than first thought](#). The companies are seeking to scale up manufacturing capacity to supply vaccines to member states. The Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna mRNA vaccines have secured approval in the bloc. [AstraZeneca is expected to achieve it soon. Italy is to pursue legal action over delays in vaccine delivery](#) and secure the agreed volume of doses.

Health ministry claims pricing disparity between South Africa and EU for AstraZeneca vaccine

South Africa will have to pay almost 2.5 times more for doses of the Oxford University/AstraZeneca vaccine compared to the EU, its health ministry has claimed. [Doses will cost \\$5.25 each in South Africa, the ministry said, versus \\$2.16 for EU member states](#). 'The explanation we were given for why other high-income countries have a lower price is that they have invested in the (research and development), hence the discount on the price,' said the deputy director of general health.

Continued debate about timing of doses

There continues to be debate over the efficacy of spacing out the first and second doses. [The UK became the first country to adopt this strategy to maximise availability of doses per person](#). However, the British Medical Association has appealed for the gap to be capped at six weeks compared to twelve weeks at present. [In Israel, however, data suggested that a single dose could offer 'a robust antibody response'](#) and therefore, protection, which could lend credence to the delayed-dose strategy.

Mexico's death toll mounts due to Covid-19, approaching 150,000

Mexico is within striking distance of surpassing 150,000 fatalities due to Covid-19. It is behind only India, [Brazil and the United States in terms of the number of deaths due to the disease. Infections with the novel coronavirus exceed 1.75 million, according to officials, and the current death toll stood at 149,084 on Saturday](#). However, health officials warned the actual number of cases and deaths is likely to be higher.

Lockdown Exit

Sorry, Europe: AstraZeneca follows Pfizer/BioNTech in cutting back EU vaccine delivery plans

As AstraZeneca nears European authorization for its highly anticipated COVID-19 vaccine, the drugmaker has notified officials that initial shipments will come in lighter than originally expected. Two German-language publications, Bild and oe24, report that AZ notified EU officials this week that its first-quarter deliveries will come in lower than originally expected. An AstraZeneca spokesperson attributed the dip to "reduced yields at a manufacturing site within our European supply chain." "We will be supplying tens of millions of doses in February and March to the European Union, as we continue to ramp up production volumes," she said.

<https://www.fiercepharma.com/pharma/astrazeneca-covid-19-vaccine-deliveries-europe>

Why did the world's pandemic warning system fail when COVID hit?

The World Health Organization (WHO) sounded its highest alarm on 30 January 2020 — a declaration called a 'public health emergency of international concern', or PHEIC, signalling that a pandemic might be imminent. Few countries heeded the WHO's call for testing, tracing and social distancing to curb the coronavirus. By mid-March, it had spread around the world. Now, health officials and researchers are evaluating why the organization's warning system failed and how to overhaul it. Many say the organization should have declared a PHEIC about a week earlier than it did. But the largest failing, researchers agree, is that so many countries ignored it. "The biggest issue to me is that for six to eight weeks after the PHEIC declaration, countries, except for in Asia, sat on their hands," says Joanne Liu, a former president of Médecins Sans Frontières (also known as Doctors without Borders), who serves on an independent panel tasked with assessing and improving the WHO's alarm system. World health officials are evaluating potential improvements to the system during the WHO's executive board meeting, being held 18–26 January. Talks will continue in advance of the annual World Health Assembly in May, when any changes would occur. Some of the proposals include modifying the PHEIC alarm to have colour-coded warning levels, and having countries sign on to a new treaty on preparing for pandemics.

<https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-021-00162-4>

Covid: Vaccinated people may spread virus, says Van-Tam

People who have received a Covid-19 vaccine could still pass the virus on to others and should continue following lockdown rules, England's deputy chief medical officer has warned. Writing in the Sunday Telegraph, Prof Jonathan Van-Tam stressed that scientists "do not yet know the impact of the vaccine on transmission". He said vaccines offer "hope" but infection rates must come down quickly. A further 32 vaccine sites are set to open across England this week. Prof Van-Tam said "no vaccine has ever been" 100% effective, so there is no guaranteed protection. It is possible to contract the virus in the two- to three-week period after receiving a jab, he said - and it is "better" to allow "at least three weeks" for an immune response to fully develop in older people.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-55784199>

Belgium sees large initial shortfall of AstraZeneca vaccine

Belgium will receive less than half the number of COVID-19 vaccines it had expected from AstraZeneca in the first quarter, the country's vaccine taskforce said on Saturday. Belgium had been expecting 1.5 million doses of the vaccine, which has still to be approved, by March, but would instead get around 650,000 doses. Reuters reported on Friday that AstraZeneca had informed European Union officials it would cut deliveries of the vaccine by 60% to a total 31 million doses in the first quarter due to production problems. Belgium had been expecting 1.5 million doses of the vaccine, which has still to be approved, by March, but would instead get around 650,000 doses. Reuters reported on Friday that AstraZeneca had informed European Union officials it would cut deliveries of the vaccine by 60% to a total 31 million doses in the first quarter due to production problems. The EU has a deal to purchase at least 300 million doses from AstraZeneca, with an option for an additional 100 million. The EU drug regulator is due to decide on approving the vaccine on Jan. 29.

https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-vaccine-belgium-idINKBN29S0OU?taid=600ceaece8fa030001a3d398&utm_campaign=trueAnthem:+Trending+Content&utm_medium=trueAnthem&utm_source=twitter

India's female health workers on rural front line get COVID shot

Jyoti Bhambure is usually the one dispensing medicine - this week she was at the receiving end, among the first in India's million-strong force of women health workers to win a COVID-19 vaccine. Dressed in a bright green sari with a gold border, Bhambure visited the small, rural hospital in western India at the time allotted and said the jab had lifted a weight off her shoulders. "I no longer fear the coronavirus," said Bhambure, after getting her initial dose on Tuesday, one of the first

tranche of front line workers to win protection in the pandemic. “We handle children and interact with mothers,” she said. “So I am glad I am vaccinated. I have no fear left in my mind.” India has suffered 152,000 deaths due to the virus and has prioritised about 30 million front-line workers in the first phase of an inoculation drive that began on January 16.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/1/22/tables-turn-as-indias-female-health-workers-get-covid-vaccine>

Covid vaccine: 'Over my dead body are we wasting a drop of this'

There was nervous anticipation at Saxonbury House surgery as doctors and staff prepared for their first coronavirus vaccination clinic last weekend. The seven surgeries that combined for the vaccination programme on the Sussex High Weald had been cautious, waiting for the national roll-out to be well under way before joining “wave six”. Then last Friday afternoon, the eve of their local V Day, months of careful planning were thrown up in the air. The white refrigerated van carrying their vaccines arrived as scheduled at Saxonbury House, Crowborough, around 2pm. The driver carefully unloaded the consignment and drove off. Mistakenly, however, he left two boxes of Pfizer vaccine rather than the one that had been promised and planned for.

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/covid-vaccine-over-my-dead-body-are-we-wasting-a-drop-of-this-gqrn5qc80>

West Virginia touts COVID-19 vaccination success story as national rollout sputters

Even as President Joe Biden laments the nation’s sluggish COVID-19 immunization launch for a pace he calls “dismal,” West Virginia is touting its relative success in making the most of vaccine supplies it has received so far. Fewer than half of the nearly 38 million vaccine doses shipped to date by the federal government have actually made it into the arms of Americans, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported on Thursday. Some individual states have lagged behind with just a third or 40% of their vaccine allotments being administered as of Thursday, marking the one-year anniversary of the first locally transmitted COVID-19 case documented in the United States.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-usa/west-virginia-touts-covid-19-vaccination-success-story-as-national-rollout-sputters-idUSKBN29Q320>

'Heroic hymn of the people': Chinese government film marks year since Wuhan lockdown

China premiered a patriotic documentary film on Friday to mark the one-year anniversary of Wuhan’s coronavirus lockdown, part of a broader effort by authorities to cast the government’s early response to COVID-19 in a positive light. Small numbers of viewers gathered in Beijing to watch the film “Wuhan Days and Nights” as it opened to the public exactly a year after Wuhan went into a surprise 76-day lockdown in the early hours of Jan. 23, 2020. Wuhan, in the central province of Hubei, is believed to be the epicentre of the global pandemic that has infected nearly 100 million people and killed over two million so far. China managed to quash the virus months later with strict control measures and life in Wuhan has largely returned to normal, but the government’s early response drew widespread public criticism.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-wuhan-documentary-idUSKBN29R1FY>

Phnom Penh yoga fans return to mat after lockdown - with a beer

For some, a post-lockdown group activity that combines exercise with alcohol may seem like the ideal coronavirus stress-buster - though yoga purists should probably avoid Phnom Penh’s TwoBirds Craft Beer brewery while it’s taking place. The brewery’s yoga classes, resumed after a six-week lockdown across Cambodia - which has officially recorded not a single COVID death - was lifted on Jan. 1, combine holding a pose with clutching a beer, and they’re attracting devotees. “I have more fun with beer yoga. It’s not as serious as traditional yoga,” said Sreyline Bacha, 25, as she reached for a beer glass, wobbling just a little to maintain her balance in a pose.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-cambodia-beer-yoga-idUSKBN29R06J>

Exit Strategies

AstraZeneca warns EU countries it will cut deliveries of Covid-19 vaccine by 60% in first quarter

AstraZeneca has warned EU countries it will cut deliveries of its Covid-19 vaccine by 60 per cent to 31 million doses in the first quarter due to production problems. The decrease deals another blow to Europe's Covid-19 vaccination drive after Pfizer Inc and partner BioNTech SE slowed supplies of their vaccine to the bloc this week, saying the move was needed because of work to ramp up production. AstraZeneca was expected to deliver about 80 million doses to the 27 EU countries by the end of March, a senior official who was involved in the talks said. The official said AstraZeneca planned to begin deliveries to the EU from February 15, in line with original plans.

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-9178293/AstraZeneca-warns-EU-countries-cut-deliveries-Covid-19-vaccine-60-quarter.html>

Italy to take legal action on COVID vaccine delays to get doses

Italy will take legal action and step up pressure in Brussels against Pfizer Inc and AstraZeneca over delays in deliveries of COVID-19 vaccines with a view to securing agreed supplies, Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio said on Sunday. The aim was to get the companies to meet the vaccine volumes they had promised and not to seek compensation, Di Maio said on RAI state television. "This is a European contract that Pfizer and AstraZeneca are not respecting and so for this reason we will take legal action... We are working so our vaccine plan programme does not change," he said.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-italy/italy-to-take-legal-action-on-covid-vaccine-delays-to-get-doses-idUSKBN29TOGO>

Help With Vaccination Push Comes From Unexpected Businesses

Amazon wrote to President Biden on Thursday offering to assist with communication and technology. Microsoft is opening up its largely empty office campus as a vaccination center as part of a broader partnership with the State of Washington. Starbucks is assigning workers from its operations and analytics departments to help design vaccination sites, donating the labor to the same state while continuing to pay employees. While some retailers and pharmacy chains have been directly involved in the rollout of coronavirus vaccinations, more surprising is the number of companies that have offered help despite having little to do with health care. What these companies do have are vast national footprints, significant manpower, huge distribution warehouses and, in some cases, empty office buildings. And they have the money to spare for a public service effort that could boost both their public image and their bottom line.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/23/business/vaccines-microsoft-amazon-starbucks.html>

Behind Africa's Delayed Coronavirus Vaccine Access

NPR's Steve Inskeep speaks with Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, former president of Liberia and co-chair of a WHO review panel, on what could be a years-long COVID-19 delay in Africa.

<https://www.npr.org/2021/01/22/959529638/behind-africas-delayed-coronavirus-vaccine-access>

Coronavirus vaccine delays halt Pfizer jabs in parts of Europe

Vaccinations in parts of Europe are being held up and in some cases halted because of a cut in deliveries of the Pfizer-Biontech vaccine. Germany's most populous state and several regions in Italy have suspended first jabs, while vaccinations for medics in Madrid have been stopped too. The US pharmaceutical firm has had to cut deliveries temporarily while cases in many European countries surge. Germany has reached 50,000 Covid deaths and Spain has seen record infections. Italy and Poland have threatened to take legal action in response to the reduction in vaccines. Pfizer said last week it was delaying shipments for the next few weeks because of work to increase capacity at its Belgian processing plant. The EU has ordered 600 million doses from Pfizer and has also authorised the Moderna vaccine.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-55765556>

Germany expects AstraZeneca to deliver 3 million COVID-19 vaccine doses in February

AstraZeneca informed European Union officials on Friday it would cut deliveries of its COVID-19 vaccine to the bloc by 60% to 31 million doses in the first quarter of the year due to production problems, a senior official told Reuters. The decrease deals another blow to Europe's COVID-19 vaccination drive after Pfizer Inc and German partner BioNTech slowed supplies of their vaccine to the bloc this week, saying the move was needed because of work to ramp up production. "The good news is that if the AstraZeneca vaccine is approved at the end of January, we expect at least 3 million vaccine doses for Germany in February," Spahn told Bild am Sonntag in an interview.

<https://www.msn.com/en-au/lifestyle/wellbeing/germany-expects-astrazeneca-to-deliver-3-million-covid-19-vaccine-doses-in-february/ar-BB1d1yO4>

COVID-19: Three hospitals criticised for not vaccinating vulnerable inpatients

Vulnerable inpatients who are eligible for a COVID-19 jab are not being vaccinated in at least three hospitals in England. Sky News has seen evidence of hospitals telling the families of elderly non-COVID patients that they are only vaccinating outpatients, and not those staying overnight. Some 17.5% of COVID-19 patients caught the virus in hospital, according to analysis from the Daily Telegraph. Maria Thompson's 80-year-old mother has been in Merseyside's Whiston Hospital with an autoimmune disease for more than a week.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-three-hospitals-criticised-for-not-vaccinating-vulnerable-inpatients-12196479>

German minister warns against relaxing COVID-19 measures too soon

Germany's coronavirus infection numbers are encouraging but remain too high, Health Minister Jens Spahn said on Friday, dampening expectations that restrictions to curb the spread of the virus could be lifted. Spahn told a news conference that new, more transmissible strains of the virus made it imperative to reduce case numbers further. "It's like an antibiotic: if you stop too early, stop too soon, resistance can develop," he said. "We don't want to be accused of having relaxed too soon." Germany, in lockdown since early November, reported over 800 deaths and almost 18,000 new infections on Friday. The 7-day incidence fell to 115 cases per 100,000, its lowest since Nov. 1.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-germany-spahn/update-1-german-minister-warns-against-relaxing-covid-19-measures-too-soon-idUSL8N2JX2AU>

Greece lifts more lockdown curbs, to open highschoools on Feb. 1

Greece will loosen some lockdown restrictions on Feb. 1, letting high schools reopen for the first time in more than two months after signs that the spread of COVID-19 infections has stabilised, officials said on Friday. The country, in lockdown since early November due to a spike in infections, has seen pressure on its public health system ease with infections receding. It reopened primary schools and kindergartens earlier this month.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-greece/greece-lifts-more-lockdown-curbs-to-open-highschools-on-feb-1-idUSS8N2CG07U>

COVID-19: Crowds at Heathrow Airport spark social distancing concerns

Crowds at Heathrow Airport have sparked "super spreader" concerns after pictures emerged of a packed departures hall with limited social distancing. Former British ambassador Sir Peter Westmacott posted a photo of Terminal 2 on Friday with the caption: "T2 Heathrow Friday afternoon. No ventilation. Long delays. Super spreading." Pictures and videos of huge queues for passport control have appeared on social media in recent days, despite international travel being largely banned. Britons are only allowed to go abroad for a small number of "legally permitted reasons" during lockdown, with arrivals requiring a negative coronavirus test from the past 72 hours before they are allowed entry.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-crowds-at-heathrow-airport-spark-social-distancing-concerns-12196069>

South Africa paying more than double EU price for Oxford vaccine

South Africa will have to buy doses of Oxford-AstraZeneca's Covid-19 vaccine at a price nearly 2.5 times higher than most European countries, the country's health ministry has said. The African continent's worst virus-hit country has ordered at least 1.5m shots of the vaccine from the Serum Institute of India (SII), expected in January and February. A senior health official on Thursday told AFP those doses would cost \$5.25 (€4.32) each – nearly two and a half times the amount paid by most European countries. European Union members will pay \$2.16 (€1.78) for AstraZeneca's shots, according to information leaked by a Belgian minister on Twitter.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jan/22/south-africa-paying-more-than-double-eu-price-for-oxford-astrazene-ca-vaccine>

Canada considering quarantining travellers in hotels

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau warned Friday his government could impose stricter restrictions on travellers at any moment in response to new, likely more contagious variants of the coronavirus – possibly making it mandatory to quarantine in a hotel at their own expense when they arrive in Canada. Trudeau said at a news conference that such measures could be imposed suddenly and bluntly warned against nonessential trips abroad. “No one should be taking a vacation abroad right now. If you've still got one planned, cancel it. And don't book a trip for spring break,” Trudeau said. Canada already required those entering the country to self-isolate for 14 days and to present a negative COVID-19 test taken within three days before arrival. The suggested measure would require isolating at a hotel rather than at home.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/1/22/canada-considering-quarantining-travelers-in-hotels>

Sinovac COVID-19 vaccine unit struggles to add new hires as holiday nears

A Beijing unit of Sinovac Biotech manufacturing a COVID-19 vaccine said it is facing difficulties in finding staff to expand production because of surging local infections and the imminent Lunar New Year holiday. Eleven people living in the Daxing district of the capital, Beijing, where Sinovac Life Science is based, were confirmed as COVID-19 patients between Sunday and Wednesday, forcing authorities to seal up some residential compounds and launch a mass testing scheme. “Many people dare not go to Daxing district to apply for jobs, nor do people outside Beijing dare to come to the city to work,” said Ma Hongbo, recruitment manager of Sinovac Life Science, in an article published by the Beijing Talent Market News, backed by the city's human resources authority.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-vaccine-sinovac-idUSKBN29Q25E>

Europe's growing mask ask: Ditch the cloth ones for medical-grade coverings

Faced with new, more contagious, strains of the coronavirus and a winter surge in cases, European nations have begun to tighten mask regulations in the hope that they can slow the spread of the virus. Germany on Tuesday night made it mandatory for people riding on public transport or in supermarkets to wear medical style masks: either N95s, the Chinese or European equivalent KN95 or FFP2s, or a surgical mask. It follows a stricter regulation from the German state of Bavaria this week that required N95 equivalents in stores and on public transport. Austria will introduce the same measures from Monday.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/europe-coronavirus-masks-regulations/2021/01/20/23463c08-5a74-11eb-a849-6f9423a75ffd_story.html

Partisan Exits

UK to quarantine visitors from nations with high COVID-19 risk, Daily Mail says

Prime Minister Boris Johnson's government is preparing to force travelers from countries where there is a high risk of COVID-19 to go into quarantine for 10 days after arriving in Britain, the Daily Mail reported on Saturday. Travelers from Brazil and South Africa, and neighbouring countries, will be met on arrival and escorted to hotels to quarantine, under plans being discussed by UK ministers, the Daily Mail said

<https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/uk-to-quarantine-visitors-from-nations-with-high-covid-19-risk-daily-mail-says/ar-BB1d2sc0>

Police detain 100 in Amsterdam after protest over lockdown, curfew

Rioters looted stores, set fires and clashed with police in several Dutch cities on Sunday, resulting in more than 240 arrests, police and Dutch media reported. The unrest came on the second day of new, tougher coronavirus restrictions, including a night curfew, which had prompted demonstrations. Police used water cannon, dogs and mounted officers to disperse a protest in central Amsterdam on Sunday afternoon, witnesses said. Nearly 200 people, some of them throwing stones and fireworks, were detained in the city, police said.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-netherlands-protest/police-detain-100-in-amsterdam-after-protest-over-lockdown-curfew-idUSKBN29T0B2>

Coronavirus: Vaccine rationed to north amid national supply issues, reports say

Vaccine supplies sent to the North East and Yorkshire are to be rationed because the region is ahead of others in getting the coronavirus jab out, it has been reported. Deliveries to GP practices in the area – one of seven English NHS regions – will be halved from 200,000 doses to 100,000 next week, according to the Health Service Journal. It comes amid growing controversy that many over 80s in the south have still not been called for their inoculation, while GPs in the North East and Yorkshire are already starting to move onto lower age brackets. It is not clear if supplies will also be slashed to the patch's hospitals and mass vaccination hubs – such as the Centre for Life in Newcastle – but, given it is GP practices that administer the majority of jabs, the known reduction will come as a major blow.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/coronavirus-vaccine-supplies-yorkshire-north-east-b1790773.html>

Nurses call for higher-grade face masks to protect against new coronavirus strains

Nurse leaders calling for all NHS staff to be given the higher grade of PPE Royal College of Nursing wrote a letter to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) College said was aware that some NHS trusts are using higher grade face masks

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-9178839/Nurses-call-higher-grade-face-masks-protect-against-new-coronavirus-strains.html>

Some frontline health and social care staff are refusing the vaccine and leaders across the UK are worried

Some frontline health and care staff are refusing to have the coronavirus vaccine and UK leaders are so worried that they are meeting to discuss the problem. First Minister Mark Drakeford said he did not have specific figures for how many in Wales have declined vaccination offered but said he was meeting Whitehall ministers and other First Ministers next week to look at the issue. He urged all staff working in health and social care to have the vaccine saying it would protect them and "more importantly" those they care for. Asked how much of a problem health and care staff turning down the vaccine was at Friday's Welsh Government briefing the First Minister said: "I did discuss this with other First Ministers and the UK Government.

<https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/health/covid-vaccine-refused-health-workers-19680715>

Hancock rebuked for suggesting coronavirus vaccine won't combat new strain

Fears coronavirus vaccine may be less likely to work against South African variantDaily RecordNew Covid variant could reduce vaccine efficacy by 50 per cent, Matt Hancock warnsBirmingham LiveCovid vaccine less likely to work on mutant South African coronavirus strainMirror OnlineMatt Hancock warns South African variant 'could cut vaccine efficacy'Evening StandardView Full coverage on Google News

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/hancock-rebuked-for-suggesting-coronavirus-vaccine-wont-combat-new-strain-08g>

[lv6wbd](#)

Anti-mask protesters are stopped from entering a Sydney Westfield by a wall of police officers - as packed beaches over Australia Day weekend spark fears of another Covid-19

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Anti-mask protesters tried to enter a Sydney Westfield on Saturday but had their efforts blocked by a wall of police officers. The defiant protest came as authorities fear the hot Australia Day long weekend weather may spark another Covid-19 outbreak. Police blocked about two dozen anti-maskers from entering the Parramatta Westfield shopping centre. Officers turned them away as they marched through Centenary Square on Saturday, waving home-made placards and shouting that the coronavirus was a 'scam'. It was the second week in a row that the group, which co-ordinates its protests on social media, has tried to storm the mall.

<https://www.msn.com/en-au/news/australia/anti-mask-protesters-packed-beaches-spark-sydney-covid-outbreak-fears/ar-BB1d1MGG>

No cases? No chance. The truth about North Korea and Covid-19

Kim Jong-un acted quickly. On January 22, 2020, North Korea closed its borders with China and Russia to stop a new, mysterious virus from spreading into the country. At the time, what we now know as Covid-19, had killed just nine people and infected 400 others. More than a year later, the hermit kingdom's border remains sealed tight shut. North Korea's response to the pandemic has been one of the most extreme and paranoid in the world, experts say. The lockdowns and quarantines it has imposed have been strict, while border restrictions have put a halt to fishing and the smuggling of goods into the country. At the same time the nation's state media and propaganda apparatus has pumped out messages warning its citizens of the dangers of Covid-19 and praising the country's "flawless" approach to the pandemic.

<https://www.wired.co.uk/article/north-korea-covid-news>

How does fake news of 5G and COVID-19 spread worldwide?

A recent study finds misinformation on the new coronavirus spreads differently across various countries. However, there was a consistent misunderstanding of 5G technology. Among the search topics examined, the myth around 5G having links to COVID-19 was the one that spread fastest. Dispelling myths and encouraging people to fact-check sources could help build trust with the public.

<https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/5g-doesnt-cause-covid-19-but-the-rumor-it-does-spread-like-a-virus>

They claimed the Covid-19 vaccine made them ill. Then they went viral

The Facebook videos were short but unsettling. One, posted on the profile of Indiana resident Shawn Skelton, shows her shuddering on what looks like a hospital bed, an exhausted look on her face. In another, Skelton spends over a minute sticking her tongue out as it writhes oddly. Three other videos - all just a few seconds long - were posted by Louisiana-based Brant Griner, and feature his mother Angelia Gipson Desselle violently trembling and struggling to walk in a dimly-lit hospital room.

<https://www.wired.co.uk/article/covid-vaccine-misinformation-facebook>

Covid-19: No plans for universal £500 self-isolation payment, No 10 says

There are no plans to pay everyone in England who tests positive for Covid £500 to self-isolate, No 10 has said. The PM's official spokesman said there was already a £500 payment available for those on low incomes who could not work from home and had to isolate. A universal £500 payment was among suggestions in a leaked Department of Health document. There are fears the current financial support is not working because low paid workers cannot afford to self-isolate. But a senior government source said the idea of extending the £500 payments to everyone who tests positive had been drawn up by officials and had not been considered by the prime minister.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-55760467>

Stop complaining about slow vaccine roll-out, Merkel urges Germans

Chancellor Angela Merkel urged Germans on Thursday to stop complaining about the slow roll-out of a vaccine against COVID-19 and defended a decision to extend a lockdown as necessary to stem a more aggressive variant of the coronavirus. Speaking at a news conference, Merkel said it would be a mistake to ease curbs now given the mutation first identified in England had been found in Germany, Europe's most populous country and largest economy. "Our efforts face a threat and this threat is clearer now than at the start of the year and this is the mutation of the virus," said Merkel, adding that the new variant was not yet dominant in Germany.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-germany-merkel/update-1-extended-lockdown-needed-to-slow-spread-of-covid-mutation-merkel-idUSL8N2JW2N1>

UK police break up COVID rule-breaching wedding with 400 guests

British police said on Friday they had broken up a wedding with about 150 guests in violation of COVID-19 lockdown rules, which only allow six people to attend. Weddings are currently supposed to take place only under "exceptional circumstances". However, officers found a large gathering in Stamford Hill, in north London, with the windows covered to stop people seeing inside. The organiser of the wedding could be fined up to 10,000 pounds (\$13,700), and five others were issued 200-pound penalties. The police had initially reported that some 400 people had attended the wedding. An investigation has been launched to identify further offences.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-britain-arrests-idUSKBN29R1JG>

Boris Johnson: New fast-spreading Covid-19 variant may be more deadly | ITV News

The new fast-spreading variant of Covid-19 may also be more deadly than the original strain of the virus, Boris Johnson has warned. The prime minister told a Downing Street press conference: "In addition to spreading more quickly it also now appears that there is some evidence that the new variant, the variant that was first identified in London and the South East, may be associated with a higher degree of mortality." He said the NHS is under "intense pressure" due largely to the impact of the new variant, but reassured that both vaccines being used in the UK - Pfizer and AstraZeneca - "remain effective" against both the older strain and the new one.

<https://www.itv.com/news/2021-01-22/boris-johnson-new-fast-spreading-covid-19-variant-may-be-more-deadly>

Brits 'jumping Covid vaccine queue as NHS appointment links shared on WhatsApp'

Britons are jumping Covid-19 vaccine queues by signing up through NHS appointment links shared on WhatsApp and social media, it is reported. It means ineligible people are being given jabs which should go to the UK's most vulnerable residents and health workers thanks to an IT loophole. The links are part of Swiftqueue's online booking system which is being used by some NHS trusts, an investigation by the Evening Standard found. It said there is evidence that people who are not on a priority list have used the portal to get Covid-19 jabs in east London and parts of the north.

<https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/brits-jumping-covid-vaccine-queue-23358088>

Huge fire breaks out at Indian Covid vaccine maker contracted to produce Oxford jab

A huge fire has broken out at a plant being built in the world's biggest vaccine maker, but it will not affect production of coronavirus vaccines, a source close to the firm said. The Serum Institute of India (SII), has been contracted to manufacture one billion vaccine doses developed by Oxford University and AstraZeneca for India and many other low- and middle-income countries.

<https://www.standard.co.uk/news/world/vaccine-fire-india-oxford-b900591.html>

Vaccines Turn Into Geopolitics in Europe's Most Volatile Region

The coronavirus exposed lingering divisions in the Balkans, and now Europe's most volatile region is once again cleaving along geopolitical and ethnic lines over efforts to get people vaccinated. The

European Union has pledged to give six prospective members 70 million euros (\$85 million) to buy Covid shots, but deliveries are facing delays. That's empowered Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic to leverage his links with China and traditional ally Russia into pledging vaccine donations to North Macedonia and to the ethnic Serbs in Kosovo and Bosnia-Herzegovina. The 18 million people who live in the western Balkans have been severely hit by coronavirus, with parts of former Yugoslavia recording among the world's highest per-capita death rates. The fallout is threatening efforts to resolve lingering border disputes and risks pushing the region further away from the EU's orbit as Russia and China extend their reach. Western Europe was already failing a place that's synonymous with hardship and war, according to Zijad Becirovic, director of the International Institute for Middle East and Balkan Studies in Ljubljana. The U.S., meanwhile, has gradually loosened political ties with the region since intervening in Bosnia and Kosovo conflicts in the 1990s

<https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/vaccines-turn-into-geopolitics-in-europes-most-volatile-region/ar-BB1cZ0ik>

Brazil's most vulnerable communities face COVID food crisis

Coronavirus is spreading and the death toll is mounting — but what most worries the leaders of Brazil's isolated and vulnerable communities is how on earth to feed people now that the government has pulled their main emergency aid. Ivone Rocha is cofounder of Semeando Amor (Sowing Love), a non-profit that distributes basic staples to some of the very poorest people in Rio das Pedras, one of Rio de Janeiro's many favelas. For most of last year, they had received a decent government stipend to survive the pandemic, but that all ended with 2020, unleashing a frenzy of favela requests for food. "People here have no jobs," Rocha told Thomson Reuters Foundation by phone. "Now the aid has ended. My God, what will happen?" It was April when Congress first passed a bill that established the monthly \$600 real (\$112) stipend — a little over half the country's minimum wage — pledging to tide people over for three months during the pandemic.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2021/1/21/coronavirus-hits-brazils-isolated-poor-hardest>

UK imams, influencers counter COVID vaccine misinformation

Imams across the United Kingdom are helping a drive to dispel coronavirus misinformation, using Friday sermons and their influential standing within Muslim communities to argue that COVID-19 vaccines are safe. Qari Asim, chairman of the Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board (MINAB) which is leading a campaign to reassure its faithful, is among those publicly advocating that the inoculations are compatible with Islamic practices. "We are confident that the two vaccines that have been used in the UK, Oxford Astra-Zeneca and Pfizer, are permissible from an Islamic perspective," he told the AFP news agency. "The hesitancy, the anxiety (and) concern is driven by misinformation, conspiracy theories, fake news and rumours."

<https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/uk-imams-influencers-counter-covid-vaccine-misinformation/ar-BB1d0gTJ>

Continued Lockdown

Northern Ireland extends COVID-19 lockdown to March 5

The British region of Northern Ireland on Thursday extended its COVID-19 lockdown for an additional four weeks to March 5 and its deputy first minister said the measures might have to be extended again. Northern Ireland introduced a six-week lockdown on Dec. 26, closing schools, non-essential shops, bars and restaurants. "It's an additional four weeks and there may well be something beyond that," Deputy First Minister Michelle O'Neill told a press briefing.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-britain-nireland/northern-ireland-extends-covid-19-lockdown-to-march-5-idUSKBN29Q2F4>

Renewed lockdown sends UK economy tumbling again: PMI

Britain's relapse into a third national COVID-19 lockdown has sparked the sharpest drop in business activity since May, with services companies hit hardest, a survey showed on Friday. A preliminary "flash" IHS Markit/CIPS UK Composite Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) fell to 40.6 in January, down

from 50.4 in December. The drop below the 50 threshold for growth was bigger than any economist forecast in a Reuters poll, which had pointed to a reading of 45.5. In addition to the latest lockdown, data company IHS Markit said Britain's post-Brexit shift to a more bureaucratic trading arrangement with the European Union had contributed to the decline. "Services have once again been especially hard hit, but manufacturing has seen growth almost stall, blamed on a cocktail of COVID-19 and Brexit, which has led to increasingly widespread supply delays, rising costs and falling exports," Chris Williamson, chief business economist at IHS Markit, said. The pace of job losses accelerated, after easing in December.

<https://www.theguardian.pe.ca/business/reuters/renewed-lockdown-sends-uk-economy-tumbling-again-pmi-543779/>

UK cannot consider easing lockdown while rates are so high - PM

British Prime Minister said the government could not consider easing lockdown restrictions with infection rates at their current high levels, and until it is confident that the vaccination programme is working. "You can't unlock whilst rates of infection are so very high," he told a press briefing on Friday. "We really can't begin to consider unlocking until we're confident that the vaccination programme is working."

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-britain-lockdown/uk-cannot-consider-easing-lockdown-while-rates-are-so-high-pm-idUSKBN29R2AP?il=0>

Norway's capital tightens lockdown to combat more contagious virus variant

Norway's capital Oslo and nine neighboring municipalities imposed some of their toughest lockdown measures yet on Saturday after an outbreak of a more contagious coronavirus variant, first identified in Britain. Shopping centres and other non-essential stores will be closed from noon, for the first time in the pandemic, and will not reopen until Feb. 1 at the earliest, the government announced. Shops selling food will remain open, along with pharmacies and petrol stations. Organised sports activities will be halted, restaurants must close and schools must rely more on remote learning, while households have been asked not to have any visitors at home.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-norway-idUKKBN29S079>

Covid-19 long-haulers want you to know that they're still not okay

Ten months have passed since Suzanne Hughes first fell ill. Before March 2020, the 56-year-old would go for long walks along the Welsh coast and spend hours tending to her garden. Now she feels lucky if she manages to walk more than a couple of minutes from her front door. "I can only do 30 per cent of what I'd like to do," Hughes says. Even small exertions require a trade-off between what she wants to achieve now and how she'll be feeling hours later. "Everything I do, I have to think, 'What is this going to do to me? What's the payback?'" Although we are still deep within the darkest days of the pandemic, with almost six per cent of the UK population already vaccinated against Covid-19 it is becoming possible to imagine life beyond the pandemic. In the coming months many of us will return to lives no longer dominated by a virus that has already taken so much from us. Covid-19 long haulers may never get that luxury.

<https://www.wired.co.uk/article/covid-19-long-haulers>

Scientific Viewpoint

Australia regulator approves Pfizer/BioNTech COVID-19 for use

Australia's medical regulator has approved the Pfizer/BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine for use under a formal process, one of the first countries to complete a comprehensive approval, Prime Minister Scott Morrison said on Monday. The vaccine had been provisionally approved by the Therapeutic Goods Administration's (TGA) for Australians aged 16 years and over, Morrison told reporters, noting it was a year since the first coronavirus case was detected in the country. Vaccination of priority groups is expected to begin in late February, at 80,000 doses per week, Health Minister Greg Hunt told reporters. Two doses will be required - at least 21 days apart, a government statement said.

Australia will administer both doses of the vaccine at the recommended time.

<https://www.msn.com/en-au/lifestyle/wellbeing/australia-regulator-approves-pfizerbiontech-covid-19-for-use/ar-BB1d3tbj>

South Africa Health Regulatory Body Approves Serum Institute of India's Covid-19 Vaccine

South Africa Health Minister Zweli Mkhize on Friday announced that the South African Health Products Regulatory Authority (SAHPRA) has granted approval to Serum Institute of India (SII) to supply COVID-19 vaccine to the country. The approval by the health regulatory body comes amidst growing public concern that the 1.5 million vaccine doses to be shipped to South Africa in the next few weeks have not been approved yet. "We will, in the next coming days, engage with the public in order to give an update on the progress of the first batch of the vaccines that we committed would be received in the first quarter," Mkhize said.

<https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/world-news-south-africa-health-regulatory-body-approves-serum-institute-of-indias-covid-19-vaccine/371615>

AstraZeneca warns EU countries it will cut deliveries of Covid-19 vaccine by 60% in first quarter

AstraZeneca has warned EU countries it will cut deliveries of its Covid-19 vaccine by 60 per cent to 31 million doses in the first quarter due to production problems. The decrease deals another blow to Europe's Covid-19 vaccination drive after Pfizer Inc and partner BioNTech SE slowed supplies of their vaccine to the bloc this week, saying the move was needed because of work to ramp up production.

<https://www.msn.com/en-gb/finance/other/astrazeneca-warns-eu-countries-it-will-cut-deliveries-of-vaccine/ar-BB1d0FR5>

The Coronavirus Kills Mink. They May Get a Vaccine.

At least two American companies, as well as Russian researchers, are working on coronavirus vaccines for mink. The animals have grown sick and died in large numbers from the virus, which they have also passed back to people in mutated form. Zoetis, a large veterinary pharmaceutical company in New Jersey with more than \$6 billion in annual revenue in 2019, and Medgene Labs, a small company with about 35 employees that is based in South Dakota, are both testing vaccines in mink. They are seeking licensing of their products from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Both companies said their vaccine technologies are generally similar to the one used by Novovax for a human vaccine, which is in late-stage trials. That system involves making insect cells produce the spike protein on the coronavirus, which is then attached to a harmless virus that enters into the body's cells and trains the immune system to be ready for the real thing.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/22/science/covid-mink-vaccine.html>

Dr. Fauci says one-shot Johnson & Johnson vaccine will be approved in two weeks

Latest data shows case counts fall in 43 states and District of Columbia, according to COVID Tracking Project. Hospitalizations also on the decline in 24 states as experts say lockdowns and behavior are yielding fruit. But public health officials warn that case counts may surge as new variant of COVID-19 circulates in the US There were nearly 189,000 new cases of COVID-19 on Friday nationwide; 116,264 Americans are hospitalized. The COVID-19 death count remains high as the number of fatalities recorded on Friday was 3,655. Since the start of the pandemic, 414,117 Americans have died of COVID-19 with 24.8 million people infected Dr. Anthony Fauci said on Friday he believes a new coronavirus vaccine is two weeks away from FDA approval. Single-dose shot developed by Johnson & Johnson is in final phases of clinical trials with data expected soon

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-9178525/Dr-Fauci-says-one-shot-Johnson-Johnson-vaccine-approved-two-weeks.html>

CDC says 2nd coronavirus vaccine shot may be scheduled up to 6 weeks later

People who have received their first dose of a coronavirus vaccine can schedule their second shot up to six weeks later if they are not able to get one in the recommended time frame, according to updated guidance this week from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The agency also said that in "exceptional situations," patients may switch from one of the authorized vaccines to the other between the first and second doses. The recommended interval between doses is three weeks for the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine and four weeks for Moderna's.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2021/01/22/cdc-says-2nd-coronavirus-vaccine-shot-may-be-scheduled-up-6-weeks-later/>

China and Russia find markets for their Covid-19 vaccines despite safety doubts

Russia and China are carving out global influence with their Covid-19 vaccines, despite lingering concerns about insufficient testing of the jabs. Hungary this week became the first European Union state to give preliminary approval to the Russian vaccine, Sputnik V, which has been touted as a symbol of Moscow's scientific prowess despite its patchy healthcare system. Many Russians are expressing scepticism about receiving the jab, with a recent opinion poll indicating that only 16 per cent of respondents would definitely get it, while another 24 per cent said they were likely to do so. However, the partially tested Sputnik vaccine is establishing footholds abroad, including in South America, where Argentina, Venezuela and Bolivia have signed up to receive it.

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/china-and-russia-find-markets-for-their-covid-19-vaccines-despite-safety-doubts-q3mqf5sj?shareToken=ac456e989bac23aed3542a9b6152a062>

Moderna And Pfizer Behind On Supplying COVID-19 Vaccine : Shots - Health News

With a spotlight on COVID-19 vaccine distribution shortcomings, there's another bottleneck that could prevent inoculations from significantly speeding up in the near future: Pfizer's and Moderna's ability to scale up manufacturing and deliver doses to the U.S. government. The companies promised to deliver 100 million doses apiece to the United States by the end of March. But they'll need to make huge leaps in a short time to meet that goal. In the last few weeks, they've each been steadily delivering about 4.3 million doses a week, according to an NPR examination of vaccine allocation data. But to hit their targets of 100 million doses on time, they each need to deliver 7.5 million doses a week for the next nine weeks. "I think it is going to be a real challenge for them to hit that contracted target. There's just no question about that," said consultant John Avellanet, who's advised pharmaceutical companies since the 1990s on manufacturing and compliance issues.

<https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2021/01/22/959732433/moderna-and-pfizer-need-to-nearly-double-covid-19-vaccine-deliveries-to-meet-goal>

Covid-19: Scientists challenge 'flawed' lateral flow tests report

A group of experienced scientists has issued a statement supporting the use of lateral flow tests in the battle against Covid. They say the rapid devices have identified 27,000 infected people in the UK who would not otherwise have had to self-isolate. The findings of a recent report suggested the tests were inaccurate and potentially harmful. But the scientists say that report was flawed and confused. Signatories to the statement include Prof Calum Semple, professor of outbreak medicine and child health, from the University of Liverpool, Prof Sir John Bell, regius professor of medicine at the University of Oxford, and Dr Susan Hopkins, interim chief medical adviser from Public Health England.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-55751874>

Covid-19: Senior doctors urge medical chiefs to halve the wait between doses of Covid-19 vaccine

The British Medical Association has written to chief medical officer for England Professor Chris Whitty calling for the gap between vaccine doses to be reduced to six weeks, it has been revealed. The private letter, seen by the BBC, said the current plans of people waiting up to 12 weeks for a second

dose - which Health Secretary Matt Hancock said is supported by data from an Israeli study - are "difficult to justify". It said: "The absence of any international support for the UK's approach is a cause of deep concern and risks undermining public and the profession's trust in the vaccination programme."

<https://www.standard.co.uk/news/uk/bma-gap-vaccine-doses-halved-pfizer-b900878.html>

Covid-19: UK variant 'may be more deadly' but nation's R number drops

We already knew that the Covid-19 variant first discovered in south-east England was more transmissible, but now - speaking at a Downing Street briefing - Prime Minister Boris Johnson has revealed it may also "be associated with a higher degree of mortality". On how much more deadly the UK strain might be, the UK's chief scientific adviser, Sir Patrick Vallance, said if the old variant might lead to the deaths of 10 in 1,000 men in their 60s who caught the virus, the new variant might kill 13 or 14 in 1,000. However, he added: "There's a lot of uncertainty around these numbers and we need more work to get a precise handle on it."

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-55770350>

'Too early to say': scientists unsure if UK Covid variant is more deadly

Scientists have warned against alarmism over the new variant of coronavirus, after Boris Johnson announced there was evidence it was more deadly. Speaking at the daily coronavirus news briefing on Friday, Johnson said scientists had found the new variant may be associated with "a higher degree of mortality". Sir Patrick Vallance, the UK government's chief scientific adviser, said that for every thousand people in their 60s infected with the original strain of coronavirus, 10 would be expected to die. With the new variant, this figure is thought to rise

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jan/23/too-early-to-say-scientists-unsure-if-uk-covid-variant-is-more-deadly>

Israel finds single dose gives high resistance

A single shot of the BioNTech/Pfizer vaccine produces a robust antibody response within weeks, according to Israeli data that could help inform whether scarce global supplies can be stretched by delaying second doses. At the Rambam Health Care Campus in northern Israel, 91 per cent of the 1,800 doctors and nurses that received the two dose vaccine showed a major presence of antibodies 21 days after their first shot, before receiving the second dose, according to Michael Halberthal, chief executive of the hospital. A further 2 per cent showed a moderate presence of antibodies. "If 93 per cent had a major response three weeks after the first injection, this raises a good question, that you might rather be using the first injection on more people" said Dr Halberthal. At the Sheba Medical Center, similar serological tests at different intervals showed at least 50 per cent of staff with a level of antibodies "above the cut-off point" two weeks after the first jab, said Arnon Afek, the associate director-general of the hospital chain.

<https://www.ft.com/content/4d9fe80d-e604-4bbe-b0f8-fd4b8df9b7f1>

EU hit by delay to Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine delivery

AstraZeneca has warned EU countries to expect significant shortfalls to early deliveries of its coronavirus vaccine, in a fresh blow to the rollout of the bloc's immunisation programme, European officials have said. The EU was expecting 100m doses of the jab in the first quarter of the year. But people with knowledge of the discussions said the company may fail to deliver even half that amount, although they stressed that final figures had not been established. AstraZeneca insisted there was no "scheduled delay" to the start of shipments of its vaccines, but said "initial volumes" would "be lower than originally anticipated due to reduced yields at a manufacturing site within our European supply chain". "We will be supplying tens of millions of doses in February and March to the EU, as we continue to ramp up production volumes," the company said, adding that the change in expected volumes did not affect the UK

<https://www.ft.com/content/3dbfe495-5947-4dd0-9f43-5edc5e6d6dc7>

Exclusive: AstraZeneca to cut EU's COVID vaccine deliveries by 60% in Q1- EU source

AstraZeneca told European Union officials on Friday it would cut deliveries of its COVID-19 vaccine to the bloc by 60% to 31 million doses in the first quarter of the year due to production problems, a senior official told Reuters. The company was expected to deliver to the 27 EU countries about 80 million doses by the end of March, the official who was involved in the talks said. The company had also agreed to deliver more than 80 million doses in the second quarter, but on Friday was not able to indicate delivery targets for the April-June period due to the production issues, the official said.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-eu-astrazeneca/exclusive-astrazeneca-to-cut-eus-covid-19-vaccine-deliveries-by-60-in-q1-eu-source-idUSB5N2B301S>

British Medical Association says 12-week Pfizer vaccine dose gap is 'difficult to justify'

The British Medical Association (BMA) has called on England's Chief Medical Officer to reduce the gap between the first and second doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech Covid-19 vaccination, stating that it is "difficult to justify". Health officials increased the time between jabs from three to 12 weeks to allow as many people as possible to receive a first dose. But the BMA has since written to Professor Chris Whitty calling for an urgent review and a reduction in time between jabs to six weeks.

<https://inews.co.uk/news/health/covid-19-gap-vaccines-pfizer-british-medical-association-chris-whitty-842075>

COVID-19: Halve the gap between vaccine doses, senior doctors urge

Public Health England (PHE) officials are resisting senior doctors' calls to halve the gap between the first and second doses of the Pfizer coronavirus vaccine. The British Medical Association (BMA) has said the gap between doses being given to patients should be cut from 12 weeks to six. But officials at PHE have said it is essential to protect as many people as possible to prevent the coronavirus getting "the upper hand" over the healthcare service. The World Health Organisation has recommended that the gap should be a maximum of six weeks - but the UK's Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) has opted to delay a second Pfizer dose for up to 12 weeks, to ensure more people get the first jab sooner.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-halve-the-gap-between-vaccine-doses-senior-doctors-urge-12196068>

Coronavirus: Children do NOT play a key role in spread, study says

German researchers enrolled nearly 2,500 parents and their children in a study. Found three times as many adults had coronavirus antibodies than children. Data also shows a previously infected adult and an uninfected child was 4.3 times more common than a previously infected child and an uninfected parent.

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-9176751/Children-NOT-play-key-role-spreading-coronavirus.html>

Despite reactions, California says virus vaccine can be used

California said it's safe to immediately begin using a batch of coronavirus vaccine doses after health officials urged a halt to injections and held a review because several people had reactions. Wednesday's decision frees up more than 300,000 doses to counties, cities and hospitals struggling to obtain supplies. With the largest U.S. population at 40 million people, California has the second-highest COVID-19 death toll in the country behind New York.

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-01-illnesses-california-virus-vaccine.html>

Israeli Covid chief's claim single vaccine dose less effective 'inaccurate'

Israel's health ministry has moved to row back on comments by the country's coronavirus tsar, who suggested single doses of the Pfizer Covid-19 vaccine had not given as much protection against the disease as had been hoped. The remarks by Nachman Ash, reported first in the Israeli media earlier this week, drew widespread attention for appearing to suggest that the vaccine was less effective than expected after a single dose had been administered as the country recorded record cases and extended its lockdown earlier this week. As experts in the UK questioned whether it was too soon to make such a judgement, the Israeli health ministry pushed back, saying that the comments were

inaccurate and had been taken out of context.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jan/22/israeli-covid-chiefs-remarks-on-vaccine-inaccurate-say-officials>

Covid: Delaying second dose of vaccine increases risk of new resistant strain, Sage papers reveal

Delaying doses of coronavirus inoculations will increase the chances of a vaccine-resistant strain of Covid-19 emerging, government scientists have warned. In new reports, released by the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (Sage), experts also warned that resistant new variants were a “realistic possibility” driven by the virus reacting to increasing levels of natural immunity among the population. The government’s decision to delay the second dose of vaccines to 12 weeks rather than three, to try and give more people some protection from the virus, has sparked anger among frontline health workers who fear they are being left at increased risk from infections. There have also been suggestions from Israel, that have yet to be fully validated, that the protection from a first dose could be far less than originally thought.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/health/covid-vaccine-uk-new-strain-sage-b1791438.html>

UK COVID-19 variant may carry higher risk of death but data limited - journalist cites advisory group

The COVID-19 variant identified in England last month could carry a higher risk of causing death although data is limited, according to one of the government's scientific advisory groups, ITV political editor Robert Peston said on Twitter on Friday.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-britain-variant-idUSKBN29R24R>

Senior doctors attack decision to make people wait 12 weeks for second dose of Pfizer Covid vaccine

Senior doctors have criticised the decision to make people wait 12 weeks for a second dose of the Pfizer vaccine, calling for the wait to be halved. The UK is the only country to have introduced such a long gap, flouting a World Health Organisation recommendation, the British Medical Association (BMA) said. “What we're saying is that the UK should adopt this best practice based on international professional opinion,” said Dr Chaand Nagpaul, its council chairman “If the vaccine's efficacy is reduced....then of course the risk is that we will see those who are exposed maximally to the virus may get infected.”

https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/coronavirus-pfizer-vaccine-second-dose-time-b1791622.html?utm_content=Echobox&utm_medium=Social&utm_source=Twitter#Echobox=1611394166

California virus variant driving surge around LA; smell training advised for lingering problem

The following is a roundup of some of the latest scientific studies on the novel coronavirus and efforts to find treatments and vaccines for COVID-19, the illness caused by the virus. Virus variant found in California drives SoCal surge. A new variant of the coronavirus appears to account for the recent surge of cases in southern California, researchers say. The variant, called CAL.20C, accounted for fewer than one in every 1,000 COVID-19 cases in Los Angeles county in July. It was not detected again until October, but by December accounted for 36% of cases, researchers from Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles reported on Wednesday on medRxiv ahead of peer review.

https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-science-idUSKBN29R2K9?taid=600b6f385a2f6200019309f8&utm_campaign=trueAnthem:+Trending+Content&utm_medium=trueAnthem&utm_source=twitter

At least 54 Brits have been infected with super-infectious South African Covid variant and it has been spreading in the UK since October, official report reveals

Dozens of cases of the South African coronavirus variant have already been spotted in Britain, it was revealed today. The Covid-19 Genomics Consortium UK (COG-UK) said 54 Brits have tested positive for the variant so far, with the first case spotted in October last year. It's likely that there have been

far more than the number reported because COG-UK only analyses 10 per cent of random positive coronavirus samples.

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-9160313/54-cases-South-African-variant-spotted-Britain.html>

SARS-CoV-2 needs cholesterol to invade cells and form mega cells

People taking cholesterol-lowering drugs may fare better than others if they catch the novel coronavirus. A new study hints at why: the virus relies on the fatty molecule to get past the cell's protective membrane. To cause COVID-19, the SARS-CoV-2 virus must force its way into people's cells—and it needs an accomplice. Cholesterol, the waxy compound better known for clogging arteries, helps the virus open cells up and slip inside, Howard Hughes Medical Institute Investigator Clifford Brangwynne's lab reports.

<https://phys.org/news/2021-01-sars-cov-cholesterol-invade-cells-mega.html>

Denmark is sequencing all coronavirus samples and has an alarming view of the U.K. variant

Like a speeding car whose brake lines have been cut, the coronavirus variant first spotted in Britain is spreading at an alarming rate and isn't responding to established ways of slowing the pandemic, according to Danish scientists who have one of the world's best views into the new, more contagious strain. Cases involving the variant are increasing 70 percent a week in Denmark, despite a strict lockdown, according to Denmark's State Serum Institute, a government agency that tracks diseases and advises health policy. "We're losing some of the tools that we have to control the epidemic," said Tyra Grove Krause, scientific director of the institute, which this past week began sequencing every positive coronavirus test to check for mutations.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/uk-variant-covid-denmark/2021/01/22/ddfaf420-5453-11eb-acc5-92d2819a1ccb_story.html

Covid-19 news: UK variant may be 30 per cent more deadly

Preliminary evidence indicates the more transmissible B.1.1.7 variant of the coronavirus first identified in the UK may additionally be more deadly, UK prime minister Boris Johnson told a press briefing on Friday. The government was briefed by researchers in the New and Emerging Respiratory Virus Threats Advisory Group, who are assessing the data on the variant, which appears to be about 30 per cent more deadly. Researchers at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and at Imperial College London who analysed data on the new variant concluded it is between 29 and 36 per cent more lethal, whereas researchers at the University of Exeter put the figure at 91 per cent. The UK's chief scientific adviser, Patrick Vallance, said the evidence on lethality "is not yet strong", adding: "but it is obviously a concern".

<https://www.newscientist.com/article/2237475-covid-19-news-major-incident-declared-in-london-as-virus-cases-surge/>

"I Am Quite Apprehensive about What Might Otherwise Happen in Spring and Summer"

In an interview with Christian Drosten, the German virologist looks back on the mistakes he has made in the coronavirus pandemic – and ahead to the dangers that the pandemic still has in store for us.

<https://www.spiegel.de/consent-a?targetUrl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.spiegel.de%2Finternational%2Fgermany%2Finterview-with-virologist-christian-drosten-i-am-quite-apprehensive-about-what-might-otherwise-happen-in-spring-and-summer-a-f22c0495-5257-426e-bddc-c6082d6434d5&ref=https%3A%2F%2Ft.co%2FhtSVFHD6CD%3Famp%3D1>

ConserV Bioscience to develop 'broad-spectrum' coronavirus vaccine

UK biotech company ConserV Bioscience will collaborate on the development of a broad-spectrum coronavirus vaccine with Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory (LLNL). The vaccine has been designed to enable broad-spectrum protection against coronavirus pathogens originating from humans and animals, including MERS, SARS and SARS-CoV-2. The vaccine candidate consists of conserved immunoreactive regions from external and internal coronavirus proteins encoded in

messenger RNA (mRNA). LLNL will use its proprietary nanolipoprotein particle (NLP) technology to formulate the mRNA constructs prior to injections.

http://www.pharmatimes.com/news/conserv_bioscience_to_develop_broad-spectrum_coronavirus_vaccine_1361587

Coronavirus Resurgence

UK detects 77 cases of South African COVID variant, nine of Brazilian

Britain has detected 77 cases of the South African variant of COVID-19, the health minister said on Sunday, also urging people to strictly follow lockdown rules as the best precaution against Britain's own potentially more deadly variant. Matt Hancock said all 77 cases were connected to travel from South Africa and were under close observation, as were nine identified cases of a Brazilian variant. "They are under very close observation, and we have enhanced contact tracing to do everything we possibly can to stop them from spreading," he said during an interview on BBC television. Oxford professor Anthony Harnden, deputy chair of a scientific committee on vaccination that advises the government, said the South African and Brazilian variants were of concern because COVID-19 vaccines may not be effective against them.

https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-health-coronavirus-britain-variants-idUSKBN29T07E?taid=600d8ca55a2f620001931117&utm_campaign=trueAnthem:+Trending+Content&utm_medium=trueAnthem&utm_source=twitter

Mexico's death toll from COVID-19 set to pass grim milestone of 150,000

Crying outside a Mexico City cemetery, a family embraced the box that contained the ashes of their beloved grandmother. The grandmother had fallen ill a few days after they met to celebrate New Year's, and died shortly after, family members said. She was not even 60 years old. Mexico is set to surpass 150,000 deaths from COVID-19, one of the world's highest death tolls, a Reuters tally shows. Its death count is closing the gap with that of India, a country with a population several times larger. Only the United States and Brazil have reported higher numbers. "You feel so powerless when you see your relative slipping away, when you have no way to do anything for them, to save them," said Lesly Garcia. "It hurt me not to see her again."

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-mexico/mexicos-death-toll-from-covid-19-set-to-pass-grim-milestone-of-150000-idUSKBN29T0NQ>

COVID-19: UK records another 1,348 coronavirus-related deaths and 33,552 cases

The UK has recorded another 1,348 coronavirus-related deaths and 33,552 cases, according to the latest government figures. A total of 5,861,351 people have also had a first dose of a vaccine, with another 468,617 people so far receiving their second inoculation against the virus. It comes after the UK reported 1,401 coronavirus deaths and an additional 40,261 infections on Friday. The total number of deaths in the UK is now 97,329.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-uk-records-another-1-348-coronavirus-related-deaths-and-33-552-cases-12196504>

COVID-19: China orders millions in Beijing to get tested after three new cases

Millions of people in Beijing are being tested for COVID-19 after the Chinese capital recorded three new cases on Friday. Provinces around the country have also been ordered to prepare mass quarantine facilities. Mainland China has a current total of 1,960 officially confirmed cases, but the government is going to extraordinary lengths to stop limited outbreaks turning into a second wave.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-china-orders-millions-in-beijing-to-get-tested-after-three-new-cases-12195301>

Coronavirus: NI health staff braced for expected Covid-19 surge

Senior medics have issued a stark Covid-19 warning as health staff brace themselves for a predicted surge in coronavirus cases this weekend. On Saturday, 12 further deaths with Covid-19 were recorded by the Department of Health, taking its death toll to 1,716. Another 670 people tested positive for the virus. There are 810 people in hospital with Covid-19, of which 66 are in intensive

care. Dr Thelma Craig, a respiratory consultant at Belfast's Mater Hospital, said that more patients are being hospitalised in this wave of the virus. It is affecting younger people too. "We are seeing people coming in with very little past medical history - coming in, in respiratory failure, desperately unwell," Dr Craig told BBC News NI.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-55759346>

Covid-19: Is NI in the toughest period of the pandemic?

Medics have been warning that we are now at the peak of the second wave of the coronavirus pandemic in Northern Ireland. While the numbers and statistics used to measure the pandemic can never portray the suffering and individual cost of the virus, they do give us an insight into how we're coping with the outbreak. In short, we are now going through the toughest period since Covid-19 became a part of our lives. More people are in our hospitals suffering from the virus. More people are dying with Covid.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-55773107>

Covid-19: Nurses call for better masks to protect all staff

Nurses are calling for all UK staff to be given a higher grade of face mask to protect them against new variants of coronavirus. The Royal College of Nursing warns that inadequate PPE may be putting the lives of nursing staff at risk. It has written to the workplace safety watchdog detailing its concerns, soon after a similar appeal from doctors. England's Department of Health says there is no reason to change current guidance. It follows a comprehensive review of all the evidence around the new variants and the impact on PPE.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-55766409>

A year after Wuhan lockdown, China sees small rise in COVID-19 cases

China on Saturday reported more new cases of COVID-19 and the financial hub of Shanghai imposed new restrictions, as the country marked the anniversary of the world's first coronavirus lockdown in Wuhan city, where the disease emerged in late 2019. The National Health Commission said 107 new COVID-19 cases had been identified in the mainland on Saturday, up from 103 cases the day before. The commission said in a statement that 90 of the new cases were local infections. The northeastern province of Heilongjiang recorded 56 new cases and neighbouring Jilin province had 13. Beijing and Shanghai recorded three new cases each, and the province of Hebei, which surrounds Beijing, recorded 15 new cases.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-china-idINKBN29S07K?edition-redirect=in>

France had 23,292 new COVID-19 cases and 649 more deaths in last 24 hours

France registered a further 23,292 new confirmed COVID-19 cases and 649 more deaths from the virus in the last 24 hours as President Emmanuel Macron's government fought against the possibility of a third national lockdown. Health ministry data published on Friday showed that France's overall COVID-19 death toll stood at 72,647 - the seventh biggest in the world. The number of confirmed COVID cases stood at just over 3 million. Pressure is also building on France's hospital system, with 2,912 COVID-19 patients currently in intensive care units, although France is stepping up its COVID-19 vaccination programme.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-france/france-had-23292-new-covid-19-cases-and-649-more-deaths-in-last-24-hours-idUSKBN29R2FX>

Three cases linked to Australia Open carry highly virulent COVID-19 variant

Three people in hotel quarantine associated with the Australian Open tennis tournament have tested positive for the highly transmissible coronavirus variant linked to the United Kingdom, officials said on Saturday. The three quarantined in Melbourne are not players, said the state agency responsible for quarantining overseas travellers. All have been in hard lockdown since their Jan. 15 arrival. "Three quarantine residents associated with the Australian Open who tested positive for coronavirus

have been found to have the UK variant of the virus," COVID-19 Quarantine Victoria said in a statement.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-australia-idUSKBN29S034>

Portugal holds presidential election as COVID-19 cases spiral

Portuguese voters - largely confined to their homes due to a strict COVID-19 lockdown - will pick a new president on Sunday, but many fear going to the polls could worsen a surge in coronavirus cases and low turnout is expected. The country of 10 million people, which fared better than others in the first wave of the pandemic, now has the world's highest seven-day rolling average of new cases and deaths per capita. Authorities reported a record daily toll of 274 deaths and more than 15,300 new cases on Saturday. "It wouldn't have been a problem to wait another month. Exceptional times call for exceptional measures," said Lisbon resident Miguel Goncalves, 55.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-portugal-election-idUSKBN29S0BU>

Britain to discuss tighter travel restrictions

British ministers are to discuss on Monday further tightening travel restrictions, the BBC reported on Saturday, adding that people arriving in the country could be required to quarantine in hotels. Prime Minister Boris Johnson told a news conference on Friday that the UK may need to implement further measures to protect its borders from new variants of COVID-19. Britain's current restrictions ban most international travel while new rules introduced earlier in January require a negative coronavirus test before departure for most people arriving, as well as a period of quarantine.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-health-coronavirus-britain-travel-idUSKBN29S08H>

Israel begins to give Covid jabs to teenagers

Over 2.5 million of Israel's nine-million-population have had first vaccine dose. The country's campaign is currently leading the global vaccination drive. Teenagers aged 16-18 are now being given the first dose, starting on Saturday Wednesday saw the country recorded its highest number of Covid-19 cases and deaths in a single day, with 10,213 cases and 101 deaths

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-9179413/Israel-begins-Covid-jabs-TEENAGERS.html>

Panama detects first case of South Africa COVID-19 variant - health ministry

Panama has registered its first case of a COVID-19 variant matching a strain of the virus detected in South Africa, the Central American country's health ministry said on Friday. The variant was detected in a 40-year-old native of Zimbabwe who entered Panama on Jan. 5 from South Africa. The person did not show symptoms and has been isolated, the ministry said in a statement.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-panama-idUSKBN29R2R1>

New Lockdown

Hong Kong orders thousands to stay home in 2-day COVID-19 lockdown

Thousands of Hong Kong residents were locked down Saturday (Jan 23) in an unprecedented move to contain a worsening outbreak in the city, authorities said. The order bans anyone inside multiple housing blocks within the neighbourhood of Jordan in Kowloon from leaving their apartment unless they can show a negative test. Officials said they planned to test everyone inside the designated zone within 48 hours "in order to achieve the goal of zero cases in the district". The government said in a statement there are 70 buildings in the "restricted area".

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asia/hong-kong-orders-2-day-covid-19-lockdown-jordan-kowloon-14025376>