

COVID-19 Lockdown Exit Analysis

26th Jan 2021

News Highlights

New case in New Zealand appears to be South Africa variant; new strains in many nations

A fresh Covid-19 case [detected in New Zealand appears to be that of the variant first detected in South Africa](#), yet another example of the new Covid-19 variants which are expanding their global footprint. Twenty-three countries have detected the South African variant (501Y.V2) while 55 have detected the UK variant (B.1.1.7). [Research suggests the new variants to be more transmissible, complicating pandemic responses and leading to question marks](#) about vaccine efficacy.

EU probes AstraZeneca over vaccine delays

The EU is pressing AstraZeneca for explanations over delays in vaccine shipments. [The drugmaker reduced the number of vaccines to be delivered in the first quarter](#) from 100 million to 31 million. The European Commission wants to know how many doses have been produced and to whom they have been sent. ['The EU wants the details on the ordered and prefinanced vaccines delivered as soon as possible and we want our contract to be fully fulfilled,'](#) said Health Commissioner Stella Kyriakides.

Johnson issuing new border controls, quarantine requirements for passengers

Prime Minister Boris Johnson is adopting a similar plan to that of Australia's regarding border control. [Arrivals from Brazil and South Africa will be required to quarantine in airport hotels for ten days](#). International arrivals could soon all be forced to quarantine in this way - a move with grave implications for the travel sector according to Heathrow. However, Johnson maintains it is necessary for 'maximum possible protection against reinfection from abroad.'

Mexican president tests positive for Covid-19

In a reminder of the dire situation in Mexico, its president, Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador has tested positive for Covid-19. [The country has just witnessed its deadliest week of the pandemic and Lopez Obrador's government has faced criticism for his handling of the virus](#), although his personal popularity has risen. Lopez Obrador is in a stable condition with mild symptoms and intends to continue working, but he is retreating from his public schedule.

Lockdown Exit

Foreign workers flee UK as pandemic and Brexit bite

An estimated 1.3m have gone home, with hospitality and retail the sectors most heavily affected. Lorenzo di Cretico, a manager at the central London restaurant and club 100 Wardour Street, moved to the UK 12 years ago with high hopes. He had been a manager at a trattoria in Rome but wanted to learn English and said London "had always been my dream". He found a waiting job within a week. Now, however, Mr di Cretico is returning home. He has only worked for four months of the past year because of restaurant closures during the pandemic and, with little hope of venues reopening soon, decided to start his own delicatessen in Rome.

<https://www.ft.com/content/6629df23-c668-49c0-8097-7f2604ef6652>

Australia approves Pfizer vaccine amid concerns over global supply of Oxford jab

Australia became one of the first countries in the world to complete a comprehensive process to approve the rollout of Pfizer-BioNTech's coronavirus vaccine after AstraZeneca announced a delay in its initial global supply. The inoculation drive is expected to start in late February with a target of 80,000 doses per week initially, health minister Greg Hunt told reporters. The vaccine has been approved for people aged 16 years and above and would be given in two doses to each recipient. The country approved Pfizer-BioNTech's COVID-19 vaccine after AstraZeneca suggested to the Australian government that it is experiencing a significant "supply shock".

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/australasia/australia-covid-vaccine-pfizer-oxford-b1792193.html>

What life is like in Wuhan 1 year after the lockdown

One year after China imposed a harsh lockdown in Wuhan, CNN returns to the original epicenter of the coronavirus outbreak. The city of 11 million has emerged from a crippling lockdown attempting to portray a renewed, vibrant image, but there are deep wounds yet to heal.

<https://www.cnn.com/videos/world/2021/01/25/china-wuhan-one-year-on-coronavirus-covid-19-culver-pkg-intl-hnk-vp.x.cnn>

'I can't save money for potential emergencies': COVID lockdowns drove older Australians into energy poverty

Many of us who endured lockdowns in Australia are familiar with the surge in energy bills at home. But for older Australians who depend on the Age Pension for income, lockdowns drove many deeper into "energy poverty". Some faced up to 50% higher bills than in 2019, as a result of COVID. Energy poverty involves low-income households restricting their energy consumption by avoiding certain activities like showering, spending high proportions of their income on energy and, sometimes, being unable to pay bills.

<https://theconversation.com/i-cant-save-money-for-potential-emergencies-covid-lockdowns-drove-older-australians-in-to-energy-poverty-153096>

New Zealand probes first 'probable' community COVID-19 case in months

New Zealand health officials said on Sunday they were investigating what they said was probably the country's first community coronavirus case, in months in a woman who recently returned from overseas. The 56-year-old, who returned to New Zealand on Dec. 30, tested positive for the virus that causes COVID-19 days after leaving a two-week mandatory quarantine at the border where she had twice tested negative. "We are working under the assumptions that this is a positive case and that it is a more transmissible variant, either the one identified first in South Africa or the UK, or potentially Brazil - or another transmissible variant," Director-General of Health Ashley Bloomfield told a news conference.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-newzealand-idUSL1N2JZ00B>

New Zealand Covid case appears to be South African variant, officials say

New Zealand authorities have said a new case of Covid-19 that emerged outside quarantine appeared to be the South African variant. Health officials said on Monday that they believed the infected woman, aged 56, contracted the virus from an infected person on the same floor of the Pullman hotel in Auckland where they were both quarantining. She had left the hotel isolation regime after producing two negative tests, as is standard, but then developed muscle aches and reported her symptoms to health workers in follow-up interviews. While surface or airborne infection was still a possibility, person-to-person infection looked the most likely, said the director general of health, Dr Ashley Bloomfield.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jan/25/new-zealand-covid-case-appears-to-be-south-african-variant-officials-say>

Australia halts New Zealand travel bubble amid fears of South African coronavirus strain

The Federal Government has suspended quarantine-free travel for New Zealanders arriving in Australia for 72 hours amid fears of a South African strain of COVID-19 across the Tasman. A New Zealand woman infected with the highly infectious variant of COVID-19 first detected in South Africa visited around 30 sites before her case was detected. Travellers coming from New Zealand to Australia in the next 72 hours will have to go into mandatory hotel quarantine. "This will be done out of an abundance of caution whilst more is learnt about the event and the case," Mr Hunt said.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-01-25/greg-hunt-australia-new-zealand-travel-bubble-coronavirus/13089832>

The daily grind never felt sweeter: New Zealanders should enjoy their Covid-free liberties

Most working New Zealanders are back to the grind after the Christmas and New Year's holidays. Schools start next week. Parliament resumes on 7 February. Business as usual, but there's something light-hearted about it in 2021. The tedium and drab necessity of returning to work is tempered by the knowledge that it's not that bad, that it could be a lot worse. The mere fact we can move around the towns and cities, squeeze into elevators, and mooch around with each other in offices and cafes and doctor's waiting rooms and any confined space you care to name, is a joy. Freedom isn't just the open road; freedom is also a day measured in paperclips and paper jams. It's a freedom denied other countries in lockdown.

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/jan/25/the-daily-grind-never-felt-sweeter-new-zealanders-should-enjoy-their-covid-free-liberties>

Hong Kong lifts lockdown in Kowloon district after testing 7,000 people

The Hong Kong government lifted a lockdown in an area of Kowloon district in the early hours of Monday after testing about 7,000 people for coronavirus to curb an outbreak in the densely populated area. The government set up 51 temporary testing stations on Saturday and found 13 confirmed cases in the restricted area that is home to many ageing, subdivided flats in which the disease could spread more quickly. "Businesses in the area have been hit hard and brought to a standstill," the government said in a statement. "The government hopes this temporary inconvenience will completely cut the local transmission chains in the district and ease residents' worries and fear, so that they will regain confidence in resuming social and business activities in the area, and return to a normal life."

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-hongkong/hong-kong-lifts-lockdown-in-kowloon-district-after-testing-7000-people-idUSKBN29U037>

Ukraine completes tough COVID lockdown with optimistic expectations

Ukraine reopens schools, restaurants and gyms on Monday, ending a tough lockdown introduced on Jan. 8 to prevent a new wave of coronavirus infections, Ukrainian authorities said. The number of new cases of coronavirus infection in Ukraine has significantly decreased from 6,000 to 9,000 cases a day at the beginning of January to 2,516 new cases on January 25, the fewest since early September. "Such statistics, which indicate the stabilisation of the situation, the improvement of the situation could be obtained only thanks to you, Ukrainians," health minister Maksym Stepanov told a televised briefing.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/healthcoronavirus-ukraine-lockdown/ukraine-completes-tough-covid-lockdown-with-optimistic-expectations-idUSL1N2K00CW>

As this second Covid wave rips through minorities, inequalities are becoming even more apparent

Within months of Britain's first wave of the coronavirus pandemic, it grew clear that the virus attacked fiercely along pre-existing pathways of inequality. By May last year, studies showed that the virus discriminates in the same way as society: along racial, class and regional lines, causing twice as many tragic deaths among Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities and in the most

deprived areas. Many wondered if the UK's inequality epidemic, at last so viscerally exposed, might finally be addressed.

<https://inews.co.uk/opinion/covid-ethnic-minorities-cases-deaths-inequality-841306>

Exit Strategies

Covid-19: Passengers may be required to pay for stay in quarantine

Passengers required to quarantine after arriving in Ireland may be asked to contribute towards the costs under new measures being discussed by the Cabinet subcommittee on Covid-19. The details of the measure are expected to be discussed later on Monday.

<https://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/covid-19-passengers-may-be-required-to-pay-for-stay-in-quarantine-1.4467181>

Coronavirus in Scotland: Nicola Sturgeon reveals almost half of over 80s have been vaccinated against Covid-19

Speaking at her daily press briefing, Nicola Sturgeon said 46 per cent of all over 80s had been given a jab since the start of the vaccine rollout. At the same time, she revealed that the Scottish Government would publish more detailed data on its immunization effort, including breakdowns of the number of people who have been vaccinated in each age and risk category.

<https://www.scotsman.com/health/coronavirus/coronavirus-scotland-nicola-sturgeon-reveals-almost-half-over-80s-have-been-vaccinated-against-covid-19-3111872>

German health minister calls for coronavirus vaccine exports to be authorized by EU

The export of coronavirus vaccines should be authorized at the EU level before leaving the bloc, German Health Minister Jens Spahn said on Monday. "As the EU, we must be able to know whether and which vaccines are being exported from the EU," said Spahn in a statement. "This is the only way we can understand whether our EU contracts with manufacturers are being served fairly." The EU will be taking up the call for registration of exports, according to Reuters, quoting an official who stated that a transparency register would be created and come into force in the coming days.

<https://www.politico.eu/article/german-health-minister-calls-for-coronavirus-vaccine-exports-to-be-authorized-by-eu/>

COVID-19: Almost four in five of over-80s have received first dose of coronavirus vaccine but supply is 'tight', says Matt Hancock

Almost four in five of those aged over 80 have received a first dose of a COVID vaccine, Health Secretary Matt Hancock has said. Speaking at a Downing Street news conference, Mr Hancock said the government was "on track" to meet its deadline of offering a first dose of a coronavirus jab to 15 million of the most vulnerable by 15 February. He said more than one in nine of the UK's adult population had now received a jab, including 78.7% of all over-80s. Over the last week, 2.5 million got a vaccine at a rate of more than 250 people per minute, the health secretary added.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-almost-four-in-five-of-over-80s-have-received-first-dose-of-coronavirus-vaccine-but-supply-is-tight-says-matt-hancock-12198701>

Covid-19: Why the US hasn't hit vaccine targets so far

President Joe Biden has pledged to boost the rollout of Covid vaccines in the US, and has criticised the speed of the operation under the previous administration. It's been "a dismal failure thus far," the president said, and he's committed to overseeing 100 million vaccine doses administered in his first 100 days. So how slowly has the rollout gone?

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-55721437>

California to reportedly lift Covid stay-at-home orders on Monday

California lifted its stay-at-home order statewide Monday after four-week projections showed intensive care unit capacity to be above 15% in beleaguered regions for the first time in weeks. "Today we can lay claim to starting to see some light at the end of the tunnel as it relates to case

numbers," said the California governor Gavin Newsom during a press briefing on Monday. Monday's change moves counties back to a tiered system of reopening, with most regions across the state expected to move into the most restrictive tier. It lifts an evening curfew and, in many areas, will allow restaurants and churches to resume outdoor operations and hair and nail salons to reopen. Local officials still could choose to impose stricter rules.

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/jan/25/california-lockdown-rules-lifting-stay-at-home-orders-reports>

Difficult to put timeline on lockdown easing- UK minister

It is difficult to put a timeline on easing lockdown measures, Britain's health minister said on Monday, adding that the government will look at the death rate, the number of hospitalisations, variants and the success of the vaccine rollout. "It is difficult to put a timeline on it because it is a matter of monitoring the data and the facts," Matt Hancock told a press conference.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-britain-hancock-lockd/difficult-to-put-timeline-on-lockdown-easing-uk-minister-idUSS8N2II06S>

Hancock says vaccine roll-out 'on track' as 4/5 of over-80s now jabbed

Nearly four in five over-80s in the UK have now received a first dose of coronavirus vaccine, the Health Secretary has said. Matt Hancock revealed the latest figures at a Downing Street press conference and said the roll-out was "on track" to hit its target of vaccinating 15 million vulnerable people by February 15. Meanwhile, Tory MPs have warned that England's school children have become the "forgotten victims" of the coronavirus pandemic, mounting pressure on Boris Johnson to get kids back into the classroom after the February half-term.

<https://www.standard.co.uk/news/uk/covid-uk-coronavirus-live-latest-updates-schools-lockdown-b900968.html>

Bulgaria will have all travellers entering the country take Covid-19 test

On Monday, the health minister of Bulgaria announced that they will make all the travellers coming in the country, take a Covid-19 test in order to curb the spread of the new strain of coronavirus. Bulgaria will make everyone coming into the country take Covid-19 tests to stop the spread of a more contagious variant of the coronavirus, health minister Kostandin Angelov said on Monday. Bulgarian health authorities say they have so far recorded eight cases of the new variant that was first identified in Britain. "Today we will undertake actions to make PCR tests compulsory for all travellers that want to enter the country, including from the European Union," Angelov told a government meeting. The country has seen a significant drop in new infections in recent weeks and is planning to ease some restrictions and reopen secondary schools, shopping malls and gyms from February 4.

<https://www.hindustantimes.com/lifestyle/travel/bulgaria-will-have-all-travellers-entering-the-country-take-covid-19-test-101611571549404.html>

Medical-grade masks now mandatory in Austria

Medical-grade FFP2 face masks are now mandatory in Austria for people aged over 14 on public transport, shops and businesses, pharmacies, as well as hospitals or medical practices. Austria is among the first European countries to make FFP2 masks mandatory. The measure has largely been accepted without complaint, despite controversy over other measures, such as the closing of schools while ski lifts remain open. Though often sold for more than €5 each just a few weeks ago, the masks, which block 94% of aerosols, can now be found at all grocery stores for 59 cent each.

<https://www.rte.ie/news/coronavirus/2021/0125/1191810-world-covid-19/>

UK could face three-month 'halfway house' lockdown while over-50s get jabs

Under plans being considered, ministers could kick start the economy in April but a full easing of lockdown rules will be delayed to allow more people to get the vaccine.

<https://metro.co.uk/2021/01/25/uk-faces-three-month-halfway-house-lockdown-while-over-50s-get-jabs-13959469/>

Britain still a long way from easing virus lockdown, minister says

British Health Secretary Matt Hancock said on Sunday the country was still a long way from being able to relax a national lockdown despite evidence that the restrictions were bringing down the rate of COVID-19 infections. "There is early evidence that the lockdown is starting to bring cases down. But we're a long, long, long way from that from being low enough because the case rate was incredibly high and you can see the pressure on the NHS (National Health Service)," he said during an interview on Sky News.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-britain/britain-still-a-long-way-from-easing-virus-lockdown-minister-says-idUSS8N2DU0AZ>

Partisan Exits

Lockdown Skeptic AMLO on Duty in Mexico Despite Catching Virus

Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador is continuing to work after contracting Covid-19, holding a call with Russian President Vladimir Putin and attending meetings remotely. The 67-year-old leader said Monday that Putin had agreed to send 24 million doses of the Sputnik V vaccine to Mexico. He tweeted a photo of himself sitting at his desk, without a mask. Lopez Obrador, known as AMLO, announced his diagnosis in a tweet late Sunday, following a trip that took him to two states amid a surge in infections and deaths in recent days. The nation now has the fourth-highest number of fatalities globally, after the U.S., Brazil and India

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-01-25/mexico-s-president-says-he-s-infected-with-covid-19-kkbvblk3>

Covid England: Boris Johnson urged to loosen lockdown as cases fall

Boris Johnson has caused confusion by suggesting some lockdown measures could be lifted in mid-February. In same interview the Prime Minister repeatedly refused to guarantee that schools will reopen before Easter. Comments left No10 scrambling to clarify mid-February is earliest possible point and nothing likely to change. Many headteachers now believe schools will remain closed until April or May with announcement expected. Tories are up in arms with education committee chair Robert Halfon among those voicing serious concerns

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-9183521/Furious-MPs-summon-Gavin-Williamson-Commons-schools-plan.html>

Covid: 'Why I'm breaking lockdown rules'

For most of us, last Friday night was spent on the sofa glued to a screen. Because aside from a Zoom quiz, there's not much else to do during lockdown. Right? Not if you're Max. Last Friday he hosted a dinner party for seven others, inviting five people from two other houses. That's despite current lockdown rules that ban almost all mixing of households inside. Meeting up with friends is something he's done throughout the pandemic. At some points, he went to parties with more than 20 other people. "The size of the gatherings I was going to over the span of the last eight months have varied depending on the policies in place," he tells Radio 1 Newsbeat.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/newsbeat-55668923>

Rioters torch Covid testing facility as Dutch police clash with lockdown protesters in Amsterdam

Dutch police used water cannons to disperse hundreds of protesters in Amsterdam demonstrating against a new lockdown curfew that was introduced to curb the spread of coronavirus. It comes after rioting youths set a coronavirus testing facility on fire in Urk, a small fishing village in the Netherlands on Saturday. Police clashed with protesters taking part in the outlawed anti-lockdown demonstration in Amsterdam's Museum Square on Sunday. Officials said many of the protesters failed to social distance and were not wearing protective face masks.

<https://www.standard.co.uk/news/world/amsterdam-lockdown-protests-fire-covid-testing-b900951.html>

Hong Kong needs to address efficacy of Jordan lockdown

Over the weekend, thousands of people in a virus-hit Kowloon neighbourhood had the taste of a full lockdown as compulsory mass Covid-19 testing was carried out. Notwithstanding its relatively short timescale, the move was unprecedented and highly controversial. Officials are adamant that it was a necessary step in light of the latest outbreak, while affected residents and businesses described it as a nuisance and waste of resources. It is important that the government critically reviews its logistics and effectiveness before determining whether the exercise should be extended elsewhere.

<https://www.scmp.com/comment/opinion/article/3119185/hong-kong-needs-address-efficacy-jordan-lockdown>

A Wuhan dissident's lockdown has lasted nearly 400 days and counting

Zhu Tao's anti-state sentiment has alienated his in-laws and neighbours, he has been detained, subjected to surveillance and censored. As he self-quarantines, bracing for another wave of infections, he wonders how it's possible that people are carrying on with life as usual.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/politics/article/3119136/coronavirus-wuhan-dissidents-lockdown-has-lasting-nearly-400>

Year after COVID-19 lockdown, Wuhan dissident remains isolated

A year after its coronavirus lockdown, Wuhan has long since sprung back to life — but Zhu Tao remains bunkered in his 14th-floor apartment, spending his days doomscrolling through news, playing virtual soccer on his PlayStation and feeling that China is teetering on the brink of collapse. He has blown thousands of dollars, his life savings, stockpiling beef jerky and chocolate bars, bottles of water, sacks of rice, masks, alcohol and disinfecting wipes, and a \$900 solar panel. Haunting Zhu is the fear that the coronavirus might return — that once again, the government will conceal the truth, and, once again, Wuhan will fall under lockdown.

<https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2021-01-25/year-after-lockdown-wuhan-dissident-more-isolated-than-ever>

Pandemic: Lockdown: Covid deniers should be held to account | HeraldScotland

Neil O'Brien, Tory MP for Harborough and vice-chairman of the Conservative Party, has suggested, "Covid sceptics have a hell of a lot to answer for". Mr O'Brien is a rare right-wing voice calling out the Covid and lockdown deniers who have undermined the national pandemic response. Some, Piers Corbyn for example, are so cartoonish and deluded that they are difficult to take seriously. Mr Corbyn confirms Richard Dawkins' opinion that, "a delusion is something people believe in, despite a total lack of evidence". Mr Corbyn's lack of a public platform, furth of Speakers' Corner, renders him relatively harmless. Others however, with access to more public soapboxes, have greater culpability.

<https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/19034847.pandemic-lockdown-covid-deniers-held-account/>

Covid-19: Hundreds of ultra-Orthodox Israelis protest over lockdown rules

Hundreds of members of Israel's ultra-Orthodox community have taken to the streets of the country to protest the imposition of lockdown rules to tackle the Covid-19 pandemic. Protesters scuffled with police in the city of Bnei Brak, while a 41-year-old bus driver was hurt after he was attacked with pepper spray by demonstrators, who proceeded to set his bus on fire, according to Reuters and eyewitnesses who posted video footage on Twitter. One police officer reportedly fired in the air to repel crowds throwing stones after feeling his life was in danger. Police said that smaller confrontations with ultra-Orthodox protesters also broke out in several other towns, including the port city of Ashdod.

<https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/israel-covid-ultra-orthodox-protest-lockdown-rules>

'Lockdown fatigue' cited as UK shopper numbers rose 9% last week

The number of shoppers heading out to retail destinations across Britain rose by 9% last week from the previous week, indicating "lockdown fatigue" for people cooped up at home, market researcher Springboard said on Monday. Footfall across all retail destinations was 65% lower than in the same

week last year, Springboard said. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson ordered England into a new national lockdown on Jan. 4 to contain a surge in COVID-19 cases that threatens to overwhelm parts of the health system.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/britain-retail-springboard/update-1-lockdown-fatigue-cited-as-uk-shopper-numbers-rise-9-last-week-idUSL8N2K02SW>

Dutch police detain 240 nationwide as anti-lockdown protests turn violent

Images on Dutch television showed bands of youths looting shops, throwing bicycles and setting fires in the southern city of Eindhoven. At least 55 people were arrested in Eindhoven, the city said in a statement. The demonstration in the city's Museum Square, which violated a ban on public gatherings, came the day after the government introduced a nightly curfew for the first time since World War Two. Police cleared the square after people ignored instructions to leave and detained those who attacked them with stones and fireworks in nearby streets, the mayor's office said. Parliament voted narrowly last week to approve the curfew, swayed by assertions that a variant of COVID-19 first identified in Britain was about to cause a new surge in cases. New infections in the country have generally been declining for a month, and fell again on Sunday, to 4,924 new cases.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-netherlands-protos/dutch-police-detain-240-nationwide-as-anti-lockdown-protests-turn-violent-idUSKBN29T0B2>

Dutch PM condemns lockdown riots as 'criminal violence'

Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte on Monday condemned riots across the country this weekend in which demonstrators attacked police and set fires to protest against a night-time curfew to slow the spread of the coronavirus, calling them "criminal violence". The police said hundreds of people had been detained after incidents that began on Saturday evening and lasted until the early hours of Monday, including some in which rioters threw rocks and in one case knives at police and burned down a COVID-19 testing station. "This has nothing to do with protest, this is criminal violence and we will treat it as such," Rutte told reporters outside his office in The Hague. Schools and non-essential shops in the Netherlands have been shut since mid-December, following the closure of bars and restaurants two months earlier.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-netherlands-protos/dutch-pm-condemns-lockdown-riots-as-criminal-volence-idUSKBN29U0W3>

Boris Johnson will sign off new border controls within hours

Ministers are expected to make a decision later today on the shape of tougher Covid rules for the UK's borders. Signs that the Government is preparing to announce that all arrivals must quarantine for 10 days in hotels. Growing Cabinet support for blanket rather than targeted curbs to stop coronavirus variants being imported. Travel industry warned unless an end date is set UK could end up isolated for a year as happened in Australia. Boris Johnson said yesterday he is 'definitely looking at' quarantine hotels with senior ministers on board. Government sources believe Britons largely obeying edict not to travel for holidays or 'non-essential' reasons

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-9183627/Cabinet-split-coronavirus-hotel-quarantine-plans.html>

Polish president backs lockdown despite business frustration

Poland's president on Monday expressed understanding for the "despair" of people who are opening their businesses in defiance of the anti-COVID-19 lockdown, but said they still must be punished for breaking government-ordered restrictions. In comments published Monday, Andrzej Duda was reacting to the swelling nationwide #OtwieraMY (We Are Opening) movement of thousands of business owners opening their restaurants, hotels, ski lifts, fitness centers and similar businesses to avoid going under as a result of the prolonged social distancing and lockdown, recently extended through January. "I can understand the impatience and often even the despair of people, who see the work of their entire lives falling apart," Duda said in an interview for the conservative weekly

“Sieci.”

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/polish-president-backs-lockdown-despite-business-frustration-people-people-president-president-andrzej-duda-b1792374.html>

Continued Lockdown

Three weeks into harsh lockdown, weary Brits fear it will take much longer to beat the new variant

People in the United Kingdom have been living under lockdown for the past three weeks, hoping their sacrifice would bring the country's latest coronavirus surge -- caused by the new, more contagious variant of the virus -- under control. But despite the harsh restrictions, case numbers are not dropping as fast as experts have hoped. Deaths continue to rise and public health experts and government are starting to warn people that the country will be in this battle for the long run. The new variant, known as B.1.1.7, has wreaked havoc in the UK, fueling a surge in cases towards the end of 2020 despite a national lockdown being in place. Data showing an uptick in cases in younger people suggests this was largely because schools had stayed open, enabling the variant to spread rapidly.

<https://www.cnn.com/2021/01/25/uk/coronavirus-uk-variant-lockdown-gbr-intl/index.html>

Covid and Economy: UK Restaurants, Bars, Small Business Teetering in Lockdown

The U.K.'s third major lockdown to control the coronavirus could be the final straw for thousands of businesses struggling to pay rent and taxes with little or no money coming in the door. “It is costing us thousands of pounds a week, even being shut, and we have zero income,” said Andrew Wong, owner of the upmarket Chinese restaurant A. Wong in London's fashionable Pimlico neighborhood. “I think all the time about shutting down and walking away, though I'm not going to do it.” While the economy appears to be adapting better to virus curbs -- gross domestic product shrank 2.6% in November versus 19% in April -- the same can't be said about company finances. One lobby group estimates 250,000 small firms are at risk of going bust. Almost 10,000 pubs and restaurants licensed to serve alcohol closed permanently last year, according to consultants CGA and AlixPartners.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-01-25/rent-s-due-and-no-revenue-u-k-businesses-teetering-in-lockdown>

Young people on growing up in lockdown: 'All we want is to be heard, not ignored'

Throughout the pandemic, decisions made by adults have had a significant impact on all aspects of young people's lives, yet some teenagers feel their voice and experiences during the pandemic have not been heard. The political has become personal for many, leading some young people to become increasingly engaged with politics and involved in community action. Research undertaken by my colleagues and I at the University of Huddersfield and consultancy Ecorys, funded by the Nuffield Foundation, has been exploring young people's experiences during lockdown, including their engagement and involvement with politics. The research project, Growing up under COVID, involves 70 young people aged 14-18 in the UK, Italy, Lebanon and Singapore.

<https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/young-people-on-growing-up-in-lockdown-e2-80-98all-we-want-is-to-be-heard-not-ignored-e2-80-99/ar-BB1d4jQN>

The Truth About North Korea's Ultra-Lockdown Against 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 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 citizens of the dangers of Covid-19 and praising the country's "flawless" approach to the pandemic.

<https://www.wired.com/story/truth-about-north-koreas-ultra-lockdown-covid-19/>

Lebanon's Coronavirus lockdown: 'We can't leave our homes day or night'

People in Lebanon are living under one of the world's strictest lockdowns. Under the round-the-clock curfew, citizens who are not "essential workers" have been barred from leaving their homes since 14 January. Here residents in the capital, Beirut, describe what it's like.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-55717523>

Boris Johnson is set to give go-ahead for Australia-style quarantine

Minister plans will force travellers to isolate for ten days when they enter Britain Cabinet sources expect Prime Minister to sign off on a comprehensive proposal It means Britons will face having to pay extra, on top of the cost of their trip

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-9182219/Boris-Johnson-set-ahead-Australia-style-quarantine.html>

Norway widens capital region's lockdown to combat pandemic

The Norwegian government will widen the capital region's coronavirus lockdown from Monday onwards, increasing the number of affected municipalities to 25 from the 10 that were initially included, health minister Bent Høeie said on Sunday. Oslo and nine neighbouring municipalities imposed some of their toughest lockdown measures yet on Saturday after an outbreak of a more contagious coronavirus variant, first identified in Britain, closing all non-essential stores.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-norway/norway-widens-capital-regions-lockdown-to-combat-pandemic-idUSL8N2JZ0KK>

UK extends councils' lockdown powers until July 17, Telegraph says

The British government has quietly extended coronavirus lockdown laws to give local councils in England the power to close pubs, restaurants, shops and public spaces until July 17, the Telegraph reported on Saturday. Prime Minister Boris Johnson said on Friday the government could not consider easing lockdown restrictions with infection rates at their current high levels, and until it is confident the vaccination programme is working. The changes to the regulation governing coronavirus restrictions were made as part of a review of the third lockdown earlier this month by Health Secretary Matt Hancock, the Telegraph said.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-health-coronavirus-britain-lockdown-idUSKBN29S0PW>

Scientific Viewpoint

Germany fears AstraZeneca vaccine won't get EU approval for those over 65 -Bild

AstraZeneca denied on Monday its COVID-19 vaccine is not very effective for people over 65, after German media reports said officials fear the vaccine may not be approved in the European Union for use in the elderly. German daily papers Handelsblatt and Bild said in separate reports the vaccine - co-developed by AstraZeneca and Oxford University - had an efficacy of 8% or less than 10%, respectively, in those over 65. German officials were concerned that the vaccine may not receive approval from the EU's medicines authority EMA for use in those over 65, Bild said in its online edition. The reports mark another potential issue for AstraZeneca, which told the EU on Friday it could not meet agreed supply targets up to the end of March after running into vaccine production problems.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-eu-astrazeneca-ger-idUSKBN29U2D9>

Merck ends its COVID-19 vaccine programme after disappointing early trial results

Merck & Co (MSD) has ended its COVID-19 vaccine programme after reviewing some disappointing phase 1 results for its candidates V590 and V591. Although both V590 and V591 were generally

well-tolerated in the phase 1 trials, immune responses for the candidates were inferior to those observed in recovered COVID-19 patients as well as those reported for other vaccines. Merck did not disclose the exact response levels but the company is planning to submit the results for publication in a peer-reviewed journal.

https://www.pmlive.com/pharma_news/merck_ends_its_covid-19_vaccine_programme_after_disappointing_early_trial_results_1361879

COVID-19 cases, deaths in US increase with higher income inequality

U.S. counties with higher income inequality faced higher rates of COVID-19 infections and deaths in the first 200 days of the pandemic, according to a new study. Counties with higher proportions of Black or Hispanic residents also had higher rates, the study found, reinforcing earlier research showing the disparate effects of the virus on those communities. The findings, published last week by JAMA Network Open, were based on county-level data for all 50 states and Washington, D.C.

https://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2021-01/uoia-ccd012521.php

AstraZeneca say they cannot meet EU's Covid-19 vaccine demands 'due to bloc's supply chain' problems

EU leaders have voiced their fury after AstraZeneca said it could not meet the demands of a £300m vaccine deal following a weekend of riots in Europe over lockdown restrictions. The vaccine makers have blamed the EU's supply chain for their failure to deliver the promised 80million vaccines by the end of March as part of the deal. AstraZeneca, which developed its shot with Oxford University, said they could only offer 31million vaccines in the first quarter, a cut of 60 per cent

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-9184203/AstraZeneca-say-meet-EUs-Covid-19-vaccine-demands-blocs-supply-chain-problems.html>

Heavy smokers face nearly double risk of dying of COVID-19 compared to people who have never smoked

Cigarette smokers face a much higher risk of hospitalization and death from COVID-19 compared to those who have never smoked, a new study suggests. Researchers found that all smokers had higher odds of poor outcomes due to the virus, but those at the highest risk were heavy smokers, defined as those smoking at least one pack per day for more than 30 years. These patients had nearly double the risk of death due to COVID-19 and were more than twice as likely to be hospitalized because of the disease.

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-9184631/Heavy-smokers-face-nearly-DOUBLE-risk-dying-COVID-19-compared-people-never-smoked.html>

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. 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. Matt Hancock said 75% of over-80s in the UK have now had a first virus jab. Both the Pfizer-BioNTech and Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccines require two doses, and figures so far reflect those given the first dose.

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

COVID-19: Medical-grade masks should be compulsory in shops, says former health secretary

Former health secretary Jeremy Hunt has joined growing calls for medical-grade masks to be made compulsory on public transport and in shops. It comes as experts fear that cloth masks, which are often homemade, are not of a good enough quality to cope with the emerging new strains of COVID-19. Mr Hunt said "last time we waited too long" before taking action on masks, adding "let's not make the same mistake again". Trisha Greenhalgh, a professor of primary care at the University

of Oxford, said "the context has changed" and everyone should be wearing medical-standard coverings.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-medical-grade-masks-should-be-compulsory-in-shops-says-former-health-secretary-12198259>

Fauci: U.K. coronavirus variant leads to worse infections

Dr. Anthony Fauci warned Monday that the Covid-19 variant ravaging the United Kingdom — which the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has predicted will become dominant in the United States within roughly two months — is likely more deadly than the current common strain of the coronavirus. The remarks from Fauci, the nation's top infectious disease expert and President Joe Biden's chief medical adviser, represent a new assessment from senior U.S. health officials — who had acknowledged in recent weeks that the U.K. strain was more contagious but said there was no evidence suggesting it was more dangerous

<https://www.politico.com/news/2021/01/25/fauci-uk-coronavirus-462117>

New UK and South Africa Covid variants may spread more easily, so what does this mean for the fight against coronavirus?

New research suggests that new coronavirus variants may spread more easily than the regular, or wild type coronavirus. Fifty-five countries have now reported the presence of the coronavirus variant B.1.1.7, originally identified in the UK, and 23 countries have identified the 501Y.V2 variant, originally identified in South Africa. Most of the research characterising the new variants has been published as "preprints", which means that the studies have not yet gone through the usual peer review and journal publication process. In areas where more infectious variants are established in the community current controls are likely to be less effective and need to be strengthened to prevent the risk of an increase in cases, deaths and long-term illness.

<https://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2021/jan/25/new-coronavirus-variants-may-spread-more-easily-so-what-does-this-mean-for-the-fight-against-covid>

COVID-19: Moderna to test out jab against South African variant

Vaccine manufacturer Moderna is to test out a jab against the South African variant of the virus that causes COVID-19. The company made the decision after laboratory tests showed a six-fold reduction in the ability of antibodies, produced in response to the vaccine, to kill the new version of the virus. The UK has 17 million doses of Moderna's vaccine on order, with deliveries due to start in the spring.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-moderna-to-test-out-jab-against-south-african-variant-12198642>

Risk of 'vaccine-busting' coronavirus variants prompt tougher UK quarantine - Johnson

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said on Monday he was looking at toughening border quarantine rules because of the risk of "vaccine-busting" new coronavirus variants. New variants of the virus that causes COVID-19 are opening up the prospect of a much longer battle against the pathogen than previously thought. Scientists fear the new variants may be more deadly, and that vaccines may be less effective against them. "We have to realise there is at least the theoretical risk of a new variant that is a vaccine-busting variant coming in - we've got to be able to keep that under control," Johnson told reporters at a vaccination centre. "We want to make sure that we protect our population, protect this country against reinfection from abroad," Johnson said. "We need a solution."

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-britain-johnson/risk-of-vaccine-busting-new-variants-prompting-tougher-uk-border-control-johnson-says-idUSKBN29U14Y>

Merck ends COVID vaccine program, cites inferior immune responses

Drugmaker Merck & Co said on Monday it would stop development of its two COVID-19 vaccines and focus pandemic research on treatments, with initial data on an experimental oral antiviral expected by the end of March. Merck was late to join the race to develop a vaccine to protect against the

coronavirus, which has so far killed more than 2 million people and continues to surge in many parts of the world including the United States. The company will record a pre-tax discontinuation charge in the fourth quarter for vaccine candidate V591, which it acquired with the purchase of Austrian vaccine maker Themis Bioscience, and V590, developed with nonprofit research organization IAVI, Merck said in a statement.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-merck/merck-ends-covid-vaccine-program-cites-inferior-immune-responses-idINKBN29U187>

Merck Shuts Down Covid Vaccine Program After Lackluster Data

Merck & Co. is discontinuing development of its two experimental Covid-19 vaccines after early trial data showed they failed to generate immune responses comparable to a natural infection or existing vaccines. The U.S. drug giant, which has a history of successfully developing vaccines, had adopted a different strategy from rivals Pfizer Inc., Moderna Inc. and Johnson & Johnson, using a more traditional approach of focusing on shots based on weakened viruses. One, called V590, borrowed technology from Merck's Ebola inoculation, while the other, V591, is based on a measles vaccine used in Europe.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-01-25/merck-shuts-down-covid-vaccine-program-after-lackluster-data>

EU urges AstraZeneca to explain vaccine delay

The European Commission has issued a strongly worded statement demanding that the pharmaceutical company AstraZeneca spells out what Covid-19 vaccine doses it has produced and to whom they have been delivered, as the controversy over the disruption to vaccine supplies deepens. A statement by the EU Health Commissioner appears to suggest that the Commission believes that vaccine doses produced by AstraZeneca that were destined for EU member states may have gone elsewhere. Stella Kyriakides said: "The EU wants to know exactly which doses have been produced whereby AstraZeneca so far, and if, or to whom, they have been delivered."

<https://www.rte.ie/news/coronavirus/2021/0125/1191881-coronavirus-vaccine-eu/>

UK official Covid death toll has always undercounted fatalities, analysis shows

The UK government death toll is missing coronavirus fatalities and it always has, Guardian analysis has shown. According to the paper by the University of Leicester 30% of Covid-19 patients discharged from English hospitals were readmitted within five months and almost one in eight of them die, raising further concerns over the accuracy of the widely quoted official figure. If the paper proves correct, it would mean in the future thousands of coronavirus patients will be readmitted to hospital and some will die with complications from the virus without being included in the government tally.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jan/22/uk-official-covid-death-toll-undercounted-fatalities>

Fewer stayed home, more wore masks as pandemic wore on

Self-reported adherence to such coronavirus-curbing behaviors as physical distancing fell substantially—while mask wearing rose significantly—from spring to fall 2020, regardless of US Census region, according to a research letter published in JAMA. The study, led by scientists from Johns Hopkins University, analyzed responses to 16 waves of the national Coronavirus Tracking Survey from Apr 1 to Nov 24, 2020. The respondents were recruited from the University of Southern California's Understanding America Study, an ongoing nationwide panel of US residents. The researchers asked all participants to complete a survey every 14 days on 16 evidence-based nonpharmaceutical interventions (NPIs) vulnerable to COVID-19 pandemic fatigue, or apathy due to prolonged coronavirus-related isolation, uncertainty, and disruptions. Among the 7,705 participants who completed all survey waves, the NPI index showed peak compliance at the beginning of the pandemic (70.0 in early April), a leveling off in June (high 50s), and a slight climb to 60.1—but still

much lower than in the spring—at the end of the survey in November.

<https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2021/01/fewer-stayed-home-more-wore-masks-pandemic-wore>

Moderna to test different booster shot against South Africa coronavirus variant

Moderna is weighing a second booster shot to battle back a new coronavirus variant, even as it affirms its current vaccine's activity against newly emerging mutants. While the current two-dose regimen is holding so far, it's less effective against a South African variant—which has the company exploring a third shot and a variant-specific booster. The variant candidate is moving into preclinical studies and a phase 1 U.S. study, targeting the coronavirus strain first identified in South Africa, Moderna said Monday. The South African variant, known as B.1.135, notched a sixfold reduction in neutralizing titers in tests made by Moderna and the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID). Despite the decrease, the vaccine maintained levels expected to protect vaccine recipients, Moderna said.

<https://www.fiercepharma.com/pharma/moderna-develops-booster-shot-for-new-covid-strain-affirms-current-vaccine-effectiveness>

AstraZeneca's surprise COVID-19 vaccine shortfall prompts Europe to press for answers

After AstraZeneca's surprise announcement Friday that its first COVID-19 vaccine deliveries to Europe would be lighter than expected, angry government officials have been demanding answers. In Italy, prime minister Giuseppe Conte said he'd consider "all legal steps" against the company, the Financial Times reports. Italy's first-quarter allotment had been cut to 3.4 million doses from 8 million, according to the report. Following AZ's announcement Friday, European officials were set to meet with AstraZeneca executives on Monday to seek clarification, Reuters reports; one European official had called AstraZeneca CEO Pascal Soriot ahead of the meeting. Europe has the power to review AstraZeneca's documents under their contract, and one official told Reuters that penalties aren't out of the question.

<https://www.fiercepharma.com/pharma/astrazeneca-s-surprise-covid-19-vaccine-shortfall-prompts-europe-to-press-for-answers>

Pfizer's 6-dose-per-vial OK boosts its supply numbers. The catch? Special syringes are required

When pharmacists discovered a sixth dose could be pulled from vials of Pfizer and BioNTech's vaccine, rather than the original five, it looked like a solution to supply-constrained vaccine rollouts. But now that the FDA has approved that tactic, Pfizer's counting those extra doses toward its established orders, The New York Times reports—which means it won't help boost immediate supplies. In fact, it might actually cut them. Special syringes needed to extract that extra shot aren't necessarily on hand, meaning states could wind up with fewer doses than expected, not more. Pfizer is reportedly working with the U.S. government to pair the right syringes with vaccine shipments—and count doses accordingly—but that's not official or certain.

<https://www.fiercepharma.com/manufacturing/pfizer-s-six-dose-vial-counts-toward-company-s-elevated-production-supplying-supply>

Moderna's vaccine is less potent against one coronavirus variant but still protective, company says

Moderna is studying adding booster doses to its vaccine regimen after finding its Covid-19 vaccine was less potent against a coronavirus variant that was first identified in South Africa, the company said Monday. In lab research that involved testing whether blood from people who had received the vaccine could still fend off different coronavirus variants, scientists found that there was a sixfold reduction in the vaccine's neutralizing power against the variant, called B.1.351, than against earlier forms of the coronavirus, Moderna reported. There was no loss in neutralization levels against a different variant, called B.1.1.7, that was first identified in the United Kingdom. Both variants are

thought to be more transmissible than other forms of the SARS-CoV-2 virus.

<https://www.statnews.com/2021/01/25/moderna-vaccine-less-effective-variant/>

In a major setback, Merck to stop developing its two Covid-19 vaccines and focus on therapies

Merck said Monday it will stop developing both of the current formulations of the Covid-19 vaccines the company was working on, citing inadequate immune responses to the shots. Work will continue on at least one of the vaccines, which is being developed in partnership with the International AIDS Vaccine Initiative (IAVI), to see if using a different route of administration would improve how effective it is. The announcement marks a shocking setback for one of the most storied vaccine makers, and will raise tensions around readouts expected soon from other companies, including Johnson & Johnson and the upstart NovaVax.

<https://www.statnews.com/2021/01/25/in-a-major-setback-merck-to-stop-developing-its-two-covid-19-vaccines-and-focus-on-therapies/>

First U.S. case of highly transmissible Brazil coronavirus variant identified in Minnesota

Minnesota officials announced Monday they have identified a person infected with a highly transmissible variant of the coronavirus that has been spreading at alarming rates in recent weeks in Brazil. This is the first report in the United States of the P.1 variant, which has been of particular concern to scientists as they have observed the disastrous surge in infections in the Brazilian city of Manaus. One research study published in the journal Science estimated that 76 percent of the Manaus population already had been infected by the coronavirus. That should have put Manaus close to herd immunity. The new surge has raised fears that the P.1 variant has mutations that allow it to evade the human immune system. Evidence to support this hypothesis remains limited.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/brazil-coronavirus-variant-minnesota/2021/01/25/bff5a8de-5f53-11eb-9430-e7c77b5b0297_story.html

New coronavirus variants accelerate race to make sure vaccines keep up

The scientific and pharmaceutical race to keep coronavirus vaccines ahead of new virus variants escalated Monday, even as a highly transmissible variant first detected in people who had recently traveled to Brazil was discovered in Minnesota. Moderna, the maker of one of the two authorized coronavirus vaccines in the United States, announced it would develop and test a new vaccine tailored to block a similar mutation-riddled virus variant in case an updated shot becomes necessary. The effort is a precautionary step. Evidence released Monday suggested that the Moderna vaccine will still work against two variants of concern that emerged in the United Kingdom and South Africa.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2021/01/25/covid-vaccine-virus-variant/>

Coronavirus Resurgence

Grandmother, 92, dies with Covid-19 five days after her first vaccine dose

Mary Green, 92, got the Covid-19 vaccine at her care home in North Tyneside But the dementia-sufferer tested positive for the virus five days later. Scientists say jab came too late to save her as it takes two weeks for immunity. Professor Adam Finn said data showed there could be a large gap between doses. UK's largest charity care home boss says he feels residents are 'half-protected'

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-9183587/Grandmother-92-dies-Covid-19-five-days-vaccine-dose.html>

Covid-19: Mexican President López Obrador tests positive

Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador has announced he has tested positive for Covid-19. The 67-year-old said on Twitter that his symptoms were mild and that he was "optimistic" following the diagnosis. The development comes as Mexico grapples with an upsurge in infections, with deaths nearing 150,000. Mr López Obrador says he will continue working from home, including

speaking to President Vladimir Putin about acquiring a Russian-made vaccine. It was announced earlier on Sunday that a call between the two leaders will take place on Monday to discuss their bilateral relationship and the possible supply of Sputnik V jabs.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-55791743>

Confirmed cases of coronavirus pass 25 million in the US

The US has passed the grim milestone of more than 25 million confirmed cases of coronavirus. The new milestone means the US accounts for roughly one in four cases reported worldwide and one in five deaths. According to the data compiled by Johns Hopkins University, the total number of infections since the pandemic began is 25,077,155. Earlier this week the US coronavirus death toll passed 400,000. It means the number of people who have died from Covid-19 is nearly equal to the number of Americans killed in the Second World War.

<https://www.standard.co.uk/news/world/us-coronavirus-cases-25-million-b900957.html>

Covid: Ministers urged to intervene as mass outbreak at DVLA offices in Swansea branded a 'scandal'

Ministers have been urged to intervene after a mass outbreak at the DVLA's offices in Wales, by a union declaring the government agency's response a "scandal". More than 350 employees at the UK vehicle licensing agency's contact centre in Swansea tested positive in the four months to December, bringing the total number of cases since the start of the pandemic to above 500. Welsh health minister Vaughan Gething is among several senior politicians to say he is "concerned about anecdotal reports" emerging from the offices - with the BBC and The Observer reporting that some symptomatic employees had been encouraged to return to work, amid an alleged "culture of fear".

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/covid-dvla-swanea-outbreak-scandal-pcs-b1791986.html>

COVID-19: UK records lowest daily rise in coronavirus cases so far this year

The UK has recorded its lowest daily rise in coronavirus cases so far this year, with 22,195. The last time the number of cases by date reported was lower than that was 15 December, according to the government's coronavirus data dashboard. While there is usually a reporting lag over and immediately after the weekend, resulting in lower increases, it's also well down on yesterday's figure of 30,004 and the 37,535 posted last Monday.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-uk-records-lowest-daily-rise-in-coronavirus-cases-so-far-this-year-12198422>

Spain's virus surge hits mental health of front-line workers

The unrelenting increase in COVID-19 infections in Spain following the holiday season is again straining hospitals, threatening the mental health of doctors and nurses who have been at the forefront of the pandemic for nearly a year. In Barcelona's Hospital del Mar, the critical care capacity has more than doubled and is nearly full, with 80% of ICU beds occupied by coronavirus patients. "There are young people of 20-something-years-old and older people of 80-years-old, all the age groups," said Dr. Joan Ramon Masclans, who heads the ICU. "This is very difficult, and it is one patient after another."

<https://apnews.com/article/international-news-pandemics-mental-health-coronavirus-pandemic-barcelona-6985c38f750a1b923ecee4b5ad03b2>

Spain struggling to contain third coronavirus wave as more infectious strain takes hold

Disastrous. Difficult. Disheartening. That's how dozens of health experts have described the coronavirus epidemiological situation in Spain to EL PAÍS. The country is reaching the peak of the third wave of the pandemic, if it is even possible to say the second ever ended. The number of new infections likely peaked last Thursday, when 44,357 cases were reported - the highest single-day figure since the start of the pandemic. If the curve has not started to flatten since then, it will do so this week, according to experts. But with the 14-day cumulative number of cases per 100,000 inhabitants at 828, the real question is how quickly will contagions start to fall and if they will

instead reach a plateau.

<https://english.elpais.com/society/2021-01-25/spain-struggling-to-contain-third-coronavirus-wave-as-more-infectious-strain-takes-hold.html>

Head of French health regulatory body: COVID situation is worrying

The COVID-19 situation in France is worrying, the head of the country's Haute Autorite de Sante (HAS) health regulator told France Inter radio on Monday, as President Emmanuel Macron's government considers a new lockdown. France has the world's seventh-highest COVID-19 death toll, with more than 73,000 deaths. "It is a worrying moment. We are looking at the figures, day by day. We need to take measures pretty quickly....but at the same time, not too hastily," said HAS head Dominique Le Guludec.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-france/update-1-head-of-french-health-regulatory-body-covid-situation-is-worrying-idUSL1N2K00D1>

Mexican president contracts COVID-19 after worst week of pandemic

Mexico's President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador said on Sunday he had tested positive for COVID-19 amid the country's deadliest week yet in the coronavirus pandemic, which has pushed the health system of the Mexican capital to its limits. The 67-year-old president, who was a heavy smoker until suffering a major heart attack in 2013, said in a tweet that his symptoms were light and he was receiving treatment. "As always, I am optimistic," said Lopez Obrador, who has resisted wearing a face mask in public since the virus reached Mexico over 10 months ago. The president, who is back in Mexico City after a three-day visit to parts of northern and central Mexico, said he would continue working, and still planned to take part in a call with Russian President Vladimir Putin on Monday morning.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-mexico-president/mexican-president-lopez-obrador-tests-positive-for-covid-19-idUSKBN29U02F?il=0>

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/us-health-coronavirus-britain-variants/uk-detects-77-cases-of-south-african-covid-variant-nine-of-brazilian-idUSKBN29T07P>

Israel bans international flights to curb coronavirus spread

Israel will ban passenger flights in and out of the country from Monday evening for a week, the government announced on Sunday, as protesters in some ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities clashed with police over coronavirus lockdown measures. Clashes broke out between ultra-Orthodox protesters in the city of Bnei Brak and police forces who came to enforce the lockdown. One police officer, feeling his life was in danger, fired in the air to repel the crowds, police said. Smaller confrontations with ultra-Orthodox protesters broke out in several other towns, police said. The ban on flights will come into force from Monday at 2200 GMT and last until the end of January, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said in a statement.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-israel-teens/israel-bans-international-flights-to-curb-coronavirus-spread-idUSKBN29T0A4>

France probably needs new lockdown as early as February: top adviser

France probably needs to move into a third lockdown, perhaps as early as the February school holidays, because of the circulation of new variants of the virus, the government's top medical adviser on COVID-19 policy said on Sunday. French schoolchildren have two weeks off in February, but the entire month is a holiday month as three different zones stagger the start of their holidays by one week, with the first starting on Feb. 6. "We probably need to go towards a confinement. Whether that needs to be a very strict confinement like the first one in March or a softer form like in November, that is a political decision," Jean-François Delfraissy, head of the scientific council that advises the government on COVID-19 response, told BFM television.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-france-lockdown/update-1-france-probably-needs-new-lockdown-as-early-as-february-top-adviser-idUSL1N2JZ0FP>

New Lockdown

France May Be Headed for New Lockdown as Scientists Raise Alarm

France probably needs to move into a third lockdown, perhaps as early as the February school holidays, because of the circulation of new variants of the virus, the government's top medical adviser on Covid-19 policy said on Sunday. French schoolchildren have two weeks off in February, but the entire month is a holiday month as three different zones stagger the start of their holidays by one week, with the first starting on Feb. 6.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-01-25/france-may-be-headed-for-new-lockdown-as-scientists-raise-alarm>

France to decide on possible 3rd lockdown amid rise in new Covid-19 variants cases

The French government is considering whether or not to impose a third national lockdown. France is now under a 6pm curfew but coronavirus cases have still continued to rise. A final decision on that move is said to be announced on Wednesday and depending on the effects of this tightened curfew. But just how could this new lockdown look like: a very strict one like in March 2020, or rather a loosened up version like in November 2020?

<https://www.france24.com/en/video/20210125-france-to-decide-on-possible-3rd-lockdown-amid-rise-in-new-covid-19-variants-cases>

Top advisor warns France probably needs new lockdown as early as February

France probably needs to move into a third lockdown, perhaps as early as the February school holidays, because of the circulation of new variants of the virus, the government's top medical adviser on Covid-19 policy said on Sunday. French schoolchildren have two weeks off in February, but the entire month is a holiday month as three different zones stagger the start of their holidays by one week, with the first starting on Feb. 6. "We probably need to go towards a confinement. Whether that needs to be a very strict confinement like the first one in March or a softer form like in November, that is a political decision," Jean-François Delfraissy, head of the scientific council that advises the government on Covid-19 response, told BFM television.

<https://www.france24.com/en/france/20210125-top-advisor-warns-france-probably-needs-new-lockdown-as-early-as-february>

France Faces Renewed Lockdown 'Within Days,' JDD Says

France is set to go back into lockdown "within days" amid concerns that a new wave of infections driven by the more-contagious U.K. variant of the coronavirus could spiral out of control, Journal du Dimanche said, citing unidentified people with knowledge of the matter. A decision is imminent, JDD wrote, saying President Emmanuel Macron could announce the country's third lockdown on Wednesday night. It could start before the end of the week and last at least three weeks, according to the paper.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-01-24/france-faces-renewed-lockdown-within-days-jdd-says>

China's COVID-19 case spike forces another harsh lockdown, and citizens are calling out for help

Authorities in a north-eastern Chinese city have come under fire for their poor handling of a recent spike in COVID-19 cases, as anger mounts over a shortage of food and medication during lockdown measures. The latest outbreak in Tonghua city, in the northern province of Jilin, saw local authorities impose strict measures last week, resulting in residents being banned from leaving their homes. More than 190 cases of COVID-19 have been recorded in Tonghua since China's north-eastern outbreak began earlier this month, and residents in the lockdown zones are now desperate to find food and essential goods.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-01-25/china-covid-19-coronavirus-cases-rise-tonghua-response/13089004>