

COVID-19 Lockdown Exit Analysis

3rd Feb 2021

News Highlights

Continued concern about the 'UK Variant'

Research indicates that the UK variant of COVID-19 has mutated. [On Monday, officials said genetic sequencing of 214,000 samples of B.1.1.7 detected eleven variations which had acquired the E484K mutation seen in the South African variant, B.1.351.](#) This has disappointed scientists, as the E484K mutation is believed to hinder vaccine efficacy, as is thought to be the case in South Africa. The mutation's effect does depend on the genetic makeup of the strain. Further research is needed to gauge how the new mutation could affect vaccine efficacy in the UK.

EU warns of consequences amidst vaccine row

The ongoing row over a shortfall in vaccine deliveries to the EU will not immediately lead to export controls, it said, but urged manufacturers to honour agreements. ['Contractual obligations will be respected, will be protected,' said ambassador Joao Vale de Almeida.](#) He emphasised that access to vaccines for all will depend on whether 'companies export according to their contractual obligations and our expectations are met'

South Africa enjoys some restrictions loosened

President Cyril [Ramaphosa has said South Africa has 'passed the peak'](#) of its second wave of Covid-19. Daily infection rates have halved and there are fewer hospital admissions. [The country is now relaxing some restrictions.](#) It has adjusted the curfew, allowing some gatherings such as for faith services and funerals, reopened some public places such as parks, and are permitting alcohol sales. In addition, vaccines are now arriving in South Africa; its first consignment arrived from India on Monday.

Biden administration accelerates vaccine rollout by distributing to pharmacies

The Biden administration is including national drug outlets in its vaccination efforts against COVID-19. One million doses of mRNA will be shipped to pharmacies, [the coordinator of the Biden Team's response Jeff Zients announced, in what represents a larger weekly delivery across the USA and is designed to scale up vaccine rollout.](#) 'Sites are selected based on their ability to reach some of the populations most at risk of severe illness from COVID-19, including more socially vulnerable communities,' Zients said.

Lockdown Exit

UK coronavirus variant develops vaccine-evading mutation

In a handful of instances, the U.K. coronavirus variant has developed a mutation that may help it evade current vaccines, according to news reports. The variant, called B.1.1.7, was first identified in the U.K. in September 2020 and has since spread around the world, Live Science previously reported. This variant is more contagious than earlier versions of the coronavirus. On Monday (Feb. 1), officials in the United Kingdom revealed that, out of about 214,000 samples of the variant that underwent genetic sequencing, they had identified 11 samples that had acquired a mutation known as E484K, according to government documents. This mutation has been seen before — notably, in

another coronavirus variant called B.1.351, which was first identified in South Africa in October 2020. Officials are concerned about this mutation because it could impact the effectiveness of COVID-19 vaccines. Indeed, data from several vaccine makers, including Johnson & Johnson and Novavax, have found that their COVID-19 vaccines were less effective in South Africa, where B.1.351 is dominant.

<https://www.livescience.com/uk-coronavirus-variant-mutation-e484k.html>

Biden administration to provide COVID-19 vaccines to pharmacies

The Biden administration announced on Tuesday that it will begin providing COVID-19 vaccines to US pharmacies, part of its plan to ramp up vaccinations as new and potentially more serious virus strains are starting to appear. Coronavirus coordinator Jeff Zients said starting from next week some 6,500 pharmacies around the country will receive one million doses of vaccine. The number of participating pharmacies, and the allocation of vaccines, are expected to accelerate as drugmakers increase production. "This is a key component of president Biden's national strategy: offering vaccination in America's pharmacies," Zients said during a White House virtual briefing.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/2/2/biden-administration-to-provide-covid-19-vaccines-to-pharmacies>

China arrests suspects in fake COVID-19 vaccine ring

Chinese police have arrested more than 80 suspected members of a criminal group that was manufacturing and selling fake COVID-19 vaccines, including to other countries. Police in Beijing and in Jiangsu and Shandong provinces broke up the group led by a suspect surnamed Kong that was producing the fake vaccines, which consisted of a simple saline solution, the official Xinhua News Agency reported. The vaccines were sold in China and to other countries although it was unclear which ones. The group had been active since last September, according to state media.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/china-arrests-suspects-in-fake-covid19-vaccine-ring-china-vaccines-countries-actions-vaccines-b1796257.html>

Covid: 'Mutations of concern' prompt government to look at vaccine effectiveness

A coronavirus "mutation of concern" has been identified in England, prompting the government to work with vaccine firms to assess the effectiveness of Covid-19 vaccines on new strains of the virus. Scientists have described the discovery of the mutation, which has been shown to reduce the effectiveness of vaccines in preventing people contracting Covid-19, as a "worrying development". The mutation - known as E484K, which is found on the South African and Brazilian variants - has now been identified on some samples of the UK variant of Covid-19 which was first found in Kent. A door-to-door testing blitz is underway in eight postcode areas in England, after 105 cases of the South African variant were found, to contain the strain and ensure it does not interfere with the vaccine rollout. Public health experts still believe current vaccines will still be effective against these strains and are good at preventing severe disease. But laboratory studies have shown that antibodies - which are produced by the body to counteract infection - are less able to bind to a part of the virus known as the spike protein, in order to stop it from unlocking human cells to gain entry.

<https://www.itv.com/news/2021-02-02/covid-mutation-of-concern-prompts-government-to-look-at-vaccine-effectiveness>

Palestinians begin COVID vaccinations in occupied West Bank

The Palestinian Authority (PA) has started COVID vaccination in the occupied West Bank after receiving 2,000 doses from Israel, Palestinian officials said. The Moderna vaccines are the first batch of the promised 5,000 shots to be delivered by Israel to inoculate medical workers. In recent weeks, Israel has faced mounting global pressure, including from the United Nations, to help Palestinians living under Israeli occupation in the West Bank and the besieged Gaza Strip to gain access to vaccines. "We started today," Palestinian Health Minister Mai al-Kaila said on Tuesday, adding that a supply of doses would be sent to Gaza, an Israeli-blockaded territory controlled by the Palestinian

group Hamas, so that inoculation of front-line workers could begin in the enclave. "We have given highest priority to health personnel ... and those working in intensive care units," she said in a video distributed by Palestinian television.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/2/2/palestinians-begin-covid-vaccinations-in-occupied-west-bank>

Exit Strategies

COVID-19: EU warns of consequences if vaccine orders not delivered

The EU has ruled out an immediate ban on vaccine exports, but signalled there could be consequences if manufacturers do not produce the expected doses. In an exclusive interview with Sky News, Joao Vale de Almeida, the bloc's ambassador to London, confirmed that the European Commission is not introducing export bans on vaccine supplies, as Prime Minister Boris Johnson agreed with Ursula von der Leyen on Friday night. But he added that "everyone will have access to the vaccines" if "companies export according to their contractual obligations and our expectations in contracts are met".

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-eu-warns-of-consequences-if-vaccine-orders-not-delivered-12206401>

Japan concerned over EU COVID-19 vaccine supply uncertainty

Japan is concerned about delays in the distribution of European-made coronavirus vaccines an official said Tuesday, as it struggles to obtain enough doses to allow it to host the Olympics this summer. Taro Kono the Cabinet minister in charge of COVID-19 vaccines, said the EU's lack of clarity in its supply schedule is affecting Japan's preparations. "Our vaccine supply schedule has not been finalized even now," Kono said. Last month, the EU announced export controls on coronavirus vaccines made in the bloc under a so-called transparency mechanism requiring producers to prioritize existing contracts with the EU.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/japan-concerned-over-eu-covid19-vaccine-supply-uncertainty-eu-japan-coronavirus-vaccines-official-delays-b1796284.html>

PM unveils deal with Novavax to produce its COVID-19 vaccine in Canada

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau says a deal has been struck with Novavax to produce its COVID-19 vaccine in Canada, but the pharmaceutical company isn't expected to be ready to roll out doses domestically until the fall at the earliest. The federal government has signed a "memorandum of understanding" with Novavax to pursue options to produce its COVID-19 vaccine at a new Montreal facility that is under construction. While the prime minister is calling this a "major step forward," it could be months before this potential first made-in-Canada vaccine candidate is approved, let alone shipped to delivery sites nationwide.

<https://www.ctvnews.ca/politics/pm-unveils-deal-with-novavax-to-produce-its-covid-19-vaccine-in-canada-1.5291835>

How Britain placed its coronavirus vaccine bets boldly and reaped rewards

With a record death toll, failure to secure PPE and bungled management of lockdowns, many felt Britain had been diminished internationally by its handling of the pandemic. Until, that is, the vaccine procurement effort when the country was fast out of the blocks to begin inoculating its population. Each day seems to bring positive vaccine news: yesterday it was announced that the manufacturer Valneva would deliver another 40 million doses to the UK stock, bringing its commitment to 100 million by 2022.

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/how-britain-placed-its-coronavirus-vaccine-bets-boldly-and-reaped-rewards-0n5mxnvjl>

Uganda orders 18 mln doses of AstraZeneca's COVID-19 vaccine

Uganda has ordered 18 million doses of the COVID-19 vaccine developed by AstraZeneca and up to 40% of the shipments are expected to arrive in the country by the end of March, the government said on Tuesday. Uganda has so far reported 39,651 COVID-19 cases and 325 deaths - a much lower

toll than in most countries due to what experts attribute to years of experience battling other viral outbreaks such as HIV AIDS and Ebola. Its economy, however, is reeling from the impact of the measures put in place to curb the spread of the coronavirus. The vaccine shots will be procured from the Serum Institute of India, the government said in a statement detailing cabinet deliberations at a sitting held on Monday.

<https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/uganda-orders-18-mln-doses-of-astrazenecas-covid-19-vaccine/ar-BB1dk8Hn>

COVID-19 vaccine will be manufactured in Canada once it is approved, Justin Trudeau says

On the same day that Ontario was lamenting the impact of vaccine delivery delays on nursing homes, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced Tuesday that Canada will be able to produce a new COVID-19 vaccine this year. But the news will do nothing to alleviate the provinces' frustration with delays in the deliveries of two other vaccines that have already been authorized for use in Canada, or help Ottawa keep a pledge to provide vaccinations to all Canadians by September. The new vaccine developed by the U.S.-based firm Novavax must first be approved by Health Canada. The National Research Council facility in Montreal that is expected to manufacture it is under construction, and scheduled to be completed by summer. That facility will then have to be certified by Health Canada.

<https://www.thestar.com/politics/federal/2021/02/02/covid-19-vaccine-will-be-manufactured-in-canada-once-it-is-approved-justin-trudeau-says.html>

UK compromising safety over Covid-19 vaccine, says Ursula von der Leyen

Britain failed its "gigantic responsibility" to ensure the proper safety of vaccines and the European Union should be proud of its strategy, Ursula von der Leyen said today. Amid growing criticism of her handling of the vaccine crisis, the German president of the European Commission has insisted that the EU has acted appropriately despite falling way behind the UK in the number of shots administered.

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/uk-compromising-safety-over-covid-19-vaccine-says-ursula-von-der-leyen-lbk60pzlf>

Eye on Africa - South Africa eases some Covid-19 restrictions as vaccines arrive

In tonight's edition: South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa says the country has "passed the peak" of its second wave of Covid-19, allowing for the easing of restrictions ahead of the first vaccinations this month.

<https://www.france24.com/en/tv-shows/eye-on-africa/20210202-south-africa-eases-some-covid-19-restrictions-as-vaccines-arrive>

Spain's vaccine delays hamper fight against pandemic

The Isabel Zendal hospital in Madrid only opened in December, but already it's feeling the strain. Spain's third wave of Covid-19 broke after the Christmas holiday, making January the worst month the country has had in terms of infections. "We had a terrible January," said Javier Marco, medical director of the hospital. It was built in just three months specifically to manage the Covid crisis. "It's been stressful." The country's infection rate has stabilised in recent days, at just below 900 cases per 100,000 inhabitants, but the pressure is still on the healthcare system.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-55902310>

France Says Europe Vaccine Strategy Safer Than U.K.'s

France is taking the lead in defending Europe's faltering vaccine program, and a jab at the U.K. in the process. "The Brits are in an extremely difficult health situation," France's junior minister for European Union affairs, Clement Beaune, said on France Inter radio. "Understandably, they are taking many risks in this vaccination campaign." Brexit Preparations at France's Second Biggest Port Beaune defended the EU's decision to purchase the doses in common. Beaune cited the U.K.'s

decision to focus on the first vaccine jabs and its reliance on AstraZeneca Plc despite doubts over its efficiency on older people. "I don't think citizens would accept us taking risks that contradict scientific recommendations," he said.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-02-02/france-says-europe-s-vaccine-strategy-is-safer-than-the-u-k-s>

Ramaphosa announces eased level 3 lockdown for South Africa - including changes for alcohol sales and curfew

President Cyril Ramaphosa has announced that South Africa's adjusted level 3 lockdown regulations will be relaxed following a decline in Covid-19 transmissions. In a national address on Monday (1 February), the president said that the country has recorded its lowest daily increase in infections since December, and that the country has now passed the peaked of the second wave. The average number of daily infections has almost halved, while the number of hospital admissions has also dropped, the president said. While the indicators are pointing in the right direction, Ramaphosa said that that the number of transmissions in the country is still relatively high.

<https://businesstech.co.za/news/trending/464736/ramaphosa-announces-eased-level-3-lockdown-for-south-africa-including-changes-for-alcohol-sales-and-curfew/>

Austria to loosen lockdown, allowing shops and schools to reopen

Austria will loosen its coronavirus lockdown next week, switching to a nighttime curfew from all-day restrictions on movement and letting non-essential shops and schools reopen. The conservative-led government announced the move despite coronavirus infections staying higher than it would like, citing the social toll of continuing the country's third lockdown, which began on Dec. 26. "Epidemiologically the issue is clear. The safest course would be to remain in lockdown," Chancellor Sebastian Kurz told a news conference after discussions with scientific experts, influential provincial governors and opposition parties.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-austria/austria-to-loosen-lockdown-allowing-shops-and-schools-to-reopen-idUSKBN2A1340>

White House to begin shipping COVID-19 vaccines to drug outlets

President Joe Biden's coronavirus czar, Jeff Zients, announced the administration would send 1 million doses of mRNA vaccines to more than 6,500 pharmacies across the country next week in an effort to further expand vaccination in the United States. The 1 million doses represent a weekly shipment expected to ramp up quickly, Zients said during a press conference. Eventually, Zients said, 40,000 retail pharmacies, including Walgreens, CVS, and Rite Aid locations, will receive millions of vaccine doses to distribute

<https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2021/02/white-house-begin-shipping-covid-19-vaccines-drug-outlets>

As 13 million in US get COVID vaccine, minority uptake uncertain

About 13 million Americans—about 5% of the population 16 years and older—received at least the first of their two COVID-19 vaccine doses in the first month of availability, but limited data paint a foggy picture of how many doses reached key demographics like blacks, according to a report yesterday in Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR). Another MMWR study homes in on skilled nursing facilities (SNFs), finding that more than three quarters of residents and almost 40% of staff members have received at least one vaccine dose during the first month. Both studies were led by scientists with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

<https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2021/02/13-million-us-get-covid-vaccine-minority-uptake-uncertain>

Germany looking to accelerate sluggish distribution of vaccines

Chancellor Angela Merkel and German state governors were planning to talk with representatives of the pharmaceutical industry on ways to beef up the country's sluggish vaccination campaign. Monday's videoconference, which also will involve the European Union's Executive Commission, comes as finger-pointing in the bloc's most populous country mounts over who is to blame for the

slow vaccine rollout. By Friday, 1.85 million people had received a first vaccine dose in Germany, a country of 83 million, and more than 461,000 had a second dose.

<https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/19054248.germany-looking-accelerate-sluggish-distribution-vaccines/?ref=rss>

Partisan Exits

Farmers sue state over COVID-19 rules for migrant workers

Two farm groups are suing the state of Washington for failing to revise emergency regulations that seek to protect migrant farmworkers from the COVID-19 virus. The groups filed the lawsuit Tuesday in Yakima County Superior Court. It seeks to invalidate the recently renewed rules as arbitrary, capricious and not feasible. "We're disappointed we had to take this step, but our farms are on the line and we had no other choice," said John Stuhlmiller, chief executive officer of the Washington Farm Bureau. The state Department of Health renewed the emergency rules, first adopted last spring, for the third time on Jan. 8. In addition, Gov. Jay Inslee last month rejected the two groups' request to repeal and revise the rules.

<https://apnews.com/article/spokane-health-lawsuits-migrant-workers-washington-77d62e818ce85c287d1867edfac80a5d>

Illegal religious schools exploiting 'loopholes' to teach full classes during lockdown

Humanists UK said unregistered Charedi Jewish schools were exploiting legal loopholes to teach packed classes during the lockdown. Unregistered illegal religious schools are continuing to operate during lockdown, sparking concerns about the health of pupils and the wider community, I can reveal. Humanists UK said it had received a number of reports from community insiders and local residents that unregistered Orthodox Charedi Jewish schools are continuing to teach full classes at various locations in the Stamford Hill area of Hackney, London

<https://inews.co.uk/news/education/illegal-religious-schools-loopholes-teach-full-classes-lockdown-853322>

Emergency UK funding failing to reach Covid-hit companies

Small businesses are missing out on millions of pounds of emergency grants promised by the UK government as long ago as November, sparking warnings that many will not survive unless access to this cash is unlocked. Councils have been struggling to distribute the money, including a share of £12bn worth of support first offered last year according to the Local Government Association, due to the volume of paperwork and changes to lockdown regulations. There have been 10 different tranches of funding to sustain small businesses without the cash reserves or covenants of larger companies through local tier restrictions established in October and the one month lockdown for England that ran from November 5. The schemes also cover support for different regional restrictions in December and the current lockdown in England, which is expected to run until at least February 22.

<https://www.ft.com/content/9aa3a382-c351-40e3-b575-0868a25aca57>

Poland: Rebellion against coronavirus lockdowns

"It's nice to eat out again," said one diner. "We were very lucky to get a table," said another. This is how guests described on Facebook their visit to the Goraleczka restaurant in the southern Polish town of Zakopane over the weekend. Restaurant owner Marek Lopata was one of the first restaurant owners in Poland to join the #WeOpenUp (#OtwieraMY) campaign and open his popular ski resort eatery — despite coronavirus restrictions. "Our income has been at zero since the end of October," he told DW. He said the situation had reached the point where he was forced to think about laying off staff, a move that "would break me mentally."

<https://indianexpress.com/article/world/poland-rebellion-against-coronavirus-lockdowns-7171429/>

Covid lockdown: I am not a 'murderer' for questioning the restrictions and highlighting the damage done to mental health - Michelle Ballantyne MSP

One recent morning, when I switched on my phone, the first message I saw was from a colleague advising that one of their apprentices had taken his own life, he was 21. That is the second time I have woken up to the news of the suicide of a young person since the lockdowns began. By 11am another two suicides of family friends had been communicated. I feel numb with despair for what is happening. Fear without hope is overwhelming and for young people we are seeing a rise in mental health problems that is unprecedented.

<https://www.scotsman.com/news/opinion/columnists/covid-lockdown-i-am-not-murderer-questioning-restrictions-and-highlighting-damage-done-mental-health-michelle-ballantyne-msp-3119376>

Mapping coronavirus anti-lockdown protests around the world

Since the start of 2021, a growing number of countries have seen street demonstrations, some of which have turned violent, against government measures implemented to fight COVID-19. Over the same period, nearly 100 countries have imposed nationwide lockdowns or stay-at-home orders, nearly one year since the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a global pandemic.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/2/2/mapping-coronavirus-anti-lockdown-protests-around-the-world>

Europol warns travellers over fake Covid-19 vaccine certificates

The EU's police agency on Monday warned travellers to watch for organised crime gangs selling fake Covid-negative certificates at airports, sometimes for as much as 300 euros each. The warning from Europol comes after police busted several suspects selling forged certificates declaring people Covid-19 negative at airports in Britain and France, online and through mobile messaging chat groups in Spain and the Netherlands. Many EU countries and others now require proof that passengers are not infected by the disease, which has killed more than 2.2 million people around the world. Many EU countries and others now require proof that passengers are not infected by the disease, which has killed more than 2.2 million people around the world. "As long as travel restrictions remain in place due to the pandemic, it is very likely that criminals will seize the opportunity of producing and selling fake Covid-19 test certificates," Europol said

https://www.france24.com/en/europe/20210202-eu-police-caution-travellers-over-fake-covid-19-vaccine-certificates?ref=tw_i

Continued Lockdown

Covid-19: 'Critical' those in South African variant test areas stay at home

It is "critical" that people in areas singled out for enhanced testing for the South African variant stay at home, Health Secretary Matt Hancock has said. He told MPs there were other "mutations of concern" in Bristol and Liverpool, and people there should also only go out when "absolutely essential". The government is expected to announce surge testing in certain postcodes of the two cities. Home testing kits are already being deployed in a number of other areas. On-the-spot doorstep tests and mobile testing units are also being used with the aim of reaching 80,000 people, amid fears the more infectious variant may be spreading in communities in England.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-55906365>

Scotland toughens quarantine rules, hopes for lockdown easing in March

Scotland will toughen its coronavirus controls on international travellers but it also hopes to start relaxing its lockdown restrictions in early March, the head of the country's devolved government, Nicola Sturgeon, said on Tuesday. Everyone arriving directly in Scotland from overseas will be required to quarantine, regardless of where they have come from, Sturgeon said. "I can confirm today that we intend to introduce a managed quarantine requirement for anyone who arrives directly into Scotland, regardless of which country they have come from," she told the Scottish parliament. Scotland will ask Britain's government to adopt a similar approach to minimise the risk of people with COVID-19 entering Scotland over the border with England and other parts of the United Kingdom.

<https://www.metro.us/scotland-toughens-quarantine-rules/>

Latest lockdown is leading to more of us looking for help

More couples are seeking relationship counselling as extended Covid lockdowns take their toll on household harmony, with one psychologist reporting a 30pc increase in calls for help. The stresses of homeschooling, working from home, job losses, financial worries and possible addictions and mental health deterioration can be devastating to even the healthiest of relationships. "When Covid caused the first lockdown last March there was a feeling that the country was all in it together and put their shoulders to the wheel, that it would be over soon. But now nearly a year later people are tired and exhausted," said Mary Johnston, specialist in counselling with Accord CLG.

<https://www.independent.ie/irish-news/latest-lockdown-is-leading-to-more-of-us-looking-for-help-40039868.html>

Alcohol Deaths in England and Wales Hit a Record in Lockdown

The number of alcohol-related deaths in England and Wales jumped to a record in the first nine months of last year, raising fresh concerns about the toll being taken by the pandemic. Health experts fear that many Britons are hitting the bottle to cope with the stress and isolation caused by lockdowns, leading to an increase in liver disease and mental health problems. Office for National Statistics figures Tuesday showed there were 5,460 deaths caused by alcohol misuse between January and September, a 16% leap from the same period of 2019. They accounted for 12.8 fatalities per 100,000 people, the highest since the data series began in 2001.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-02-02/alcohol-deaths-in-england-and-wales-hit-a-record-under-lockdown>

Spain's bars and restaurants confront their darkest hour

Spain's hospitality sector, which is taking the brunt of the economic effects of the coronavirus pandemic, now faces its toughest months since the country emerged from its first state of alarm in June. Between the start of the summer and the third wave of the pandemic, there were certain restrictions in place, but the vast majority of establishments were still able to stay open. Now, with the post-Christmas surge in Covid-19 cases filling hospitals' intensive care units, the authorities have once again been obliged to crack down. "The sector is in ruins, we are closed in half of Spain," notes José Luis Yzuel, president of the hospitality business association Hostelería de España.

https://english.elpais.com/economy_and_business/2021-02-02/spains-bars-and-restaurants-confront-their-darkest-hour.html

Hong Kong leader defends 'ambush lockdown' tactics

Hong Kong's leader defended her administration's use of "ambush lockdowns" on Tuesday after a spate of overnight operations to conduct surprise mandatory coronavirus tests uncovered no new cases. The new tactic involves authorities giving no warning of an impending lockdown, sealing off buildings where cases are detected and then ensuring everyone inside is tested, usually overnight. But the operations have had limited success.

<https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20210202-hong-kong-leader-defends-ambush-lockdown-tactics>

Hong Kong threatens to knock down doors to force COVID-19 tests

Hong Kong is threatening to knock down the doors of residents who don't respond to authorities conducting mandatory-testing blitzes as the city tries to end a persistent winter wave of coronavirus cases. "The government can take legal action, including evicting or expelling individuals, or applying to the magistrate for a warrant to break into the unit," the government said in a statement Tuesday. The Asian financial hub has been attempting to curb a fourth wave of COVID-19 infections with targeted lockdowns that see authorities cordon off an area and restrict movement until residents receive negative results. The government has suggested some might be deliberately evading the tests in areas that range from densely packed neighborhoods to just a handful of buildings.

<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2021/02/02/asia-pacific/hong-kong-coronavirus-china/>

Forced-entry lockdown warning; Hong Kong records 25 new Covid-19 cases

More than 20 coronavirus-hit buildings in Sham Shui Po, Jordan and Tin Shui Wai were placed under mandatory screening orders from 7pm. By Wednesday morning, residents were beginning to leave lockdown zones; no infections found in two of the neighbourhoods

<https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/politics/article/3120143/hong-kong-leader-carrie-lam-doubles-down-covid-19-lockdown>

Malaysia extends coronavirus lockdown by 2 weeks

Malaysia's government on Tuesday extended a lockdown and broad movement restrictions by two weeks, as the Southeast Asian nation grapples with a surge in coronavirus infections that has pushed the cumulative total past 200,000 cases. The lockdown, which covered all but one state and was to end on Feb. 4, will now continue until Feb. 18, Defense Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob said. "The health ministry has confirmed that daily cases in all states are still showing a rising trend... the sporadic spread in the community is also high," Ismail Sabri said in a televised address. The lockdown will allow some leeway for businesses to continue operating, especially micro-enterprises and small-time traders, but continue to bar inter-state travel and social activities, the minister said.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-malaysia-idUSL4N2K822L>

Scientific Viewpoint

Hundreds queue in rain as Covid doorstep tests for 'worrying' South Africa strain start

Hundreds of people have queued for coronavirus tests in the rain in areas of England where officials fear the South African variant is spreading. The Government has ordered urgent testing in eight postcode areas where the mutation has been detected. Even people with no symptoms are being urged to get tested. Around 80,000 residents in parts of London, Kent, Surrey, Hertfordshire, West Midlands, and Merseyside are caught up in the 'surge' testing blitz. Health Secretary Matt Hancock announced the door-to-door testing plan in a Downing Street press conference on Monday night. Officials are in a bid to track down "every single case" of the mutant South African strain to prevent it spreading further.

<https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/hundreds-queue-rain-covid-surge-23428339>

COVID: Poland decides against giving elderly AstraZeneca vaccine

Amid mounting questions over the efficacy of the Oxford University-AstraZeneca vaccine on people over 65, Poland has said it will only use the shot on people aged 18-60, the Polish prime minister's top aide said, following a recommendation from the country's medical council. "Yesterday evening, the medical council submitted recommendations regarding the AstraZeneca vaccine, on the basis of which it was decided that it will be used in Poland for people between the ages of 18 and 60," Michal Dworczyk, Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki's top aide who is in charge of Poland's vaccination programme, told a news conference. Also on Tuesday, Sweden's health agency said it would not recommend the AstraZeneca vaccine for people over 65. Poland's decision follows recommendations by medical experts in Germany and Austria that the vaccine should be given only to people aged between 18 and 64. Spain's health ministry, meanwhile, will decide this week whether or not to give AstraZeneca's vaccine to elderly people. For its part, AstraZeneca has dismissed concerns over efficacy but acknowledges that the company has less data than other drugmakers on the elderly because it started vaccinating older people later.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/2/2/poland-sweden-move-against-vaccinating-elderly-with-astrazeneca>

Recovered COVID patients likely protected for at least six months, study finds

Almost all people previously infected with COVID-19 have high levels of antibodies for at least six months that are likely to protect them from reinfection with the disease, results of a major UK study showed on Wednesday. Scientists said the study, which measured levels of previous COVID-19 infection in populations across Britain, as well as how long antibodies persisted in those infected,

should provide some reassurance that swift cases of reinfection will be rare. “The vast majority of people retain detectable antibodies for at least six months after infection with the coronavirus,” said Naomi Allen, a professor and chief scientist at the UK Biobank, where the study was carried out.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-antibodies/recovered-covid-patients-likely-protected-for-at-least-six-months-study-finds-idUSKBN2A3002>

Pfizer expects \$15bn sales of Covid-19 vaccine

Drugs giant Pfizer has said it expects \$15bn (£11bn) of sales this year of the coronavirus vaccine it developed with German firm BioNTech. The vaccine was one of the first to be authorised for use by countries including the UK and the US. The vaccine sales represent a quarter of its expected revenue for this year. Many countries around the world have been scrambling to vaccinate their populations in a bid to save lives and aid economic recovery.

<https://www.msn.com/en-xl/finance/topstories/pfizer-expects-2415bn-sales-of-covid-19-vaccine/ar-BB1djPPd>

Single dose of Pfizer-Biontech vaccine may not protect elderly from Covid-19 infection

A significant proportion of people over 80 may have only a “poor” immune response after a single dose of the Pfizer-Biontech vaccine, researchers have said. Three weeks later, one jab did not always

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/single-dose-of-pfizer-biontech-vaccine-may-not-protect-elderly-from-covid-19-infection-qgphrzfb6>

UK finds more coronavirus cases with 'concerning' mutations

Public Health England is investigating cases of coronavirus with 'worrying' new genetic changes that have been found in some regions of the UK. Tests show they have a mutation, called E484K, that is already seen in the South Africa variant. Although this change may reduce vaccine effectiveness, the current ones in use should still work, say experts. There have been 11 cases in Bristol and a cluster of 32 cases in Liverpool. Urgent testing for the South Africa variant is already starting in parts of England and could be rolled out to other areas seeing different variants with the same E484K mutation. Scientists working with Public Health England found a small number of cases of the UK 'Kent' variant with the E484K mutation - it was seen in 11 out of 214,159 samples that they tested, and predominantly from the South West of England.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/health-55900625>

Coronavirus vaccines ‘can be created in weeks’ to fight new strains

Vaccines to combat new strains of coronavirus could be created for laboratory testing in just three weeks, according to a top scientist. Professor Robin Shattock, who is leading Covid-19 vaccine research at Imperial College London, said scientists are working on vaccines which could counter new variants like the one that emerged in South Africa. After being redesigned for lab testing, it could take two to three months to get the vaccines to the manufacturing stage, he added. Speaking on BBC Radio 4's Today programme Prof Shattock said: “Vaccine researchers around the world to looking at these new variants and making new vaccine candidates against them so we can study in the laboratory. “And that’s quite a fast process - we can go from seeing these changes to making a new vaccine in the laboratory in a period of about three weeks.

<https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/uk-news/vaccine-three-weeks-coronavirus-strains-19753935>

COVID-19 survivors may only need one vaccine dose because they already have high levels of antibodies, study suggests

People previously infected with coronavirus may only need one dose of the vaccine, a new study suggests. Researchers found that participants who had contracted COVID-19 in the past and received one shot had antibody levels similar to - and even higher than - those who had never been infected and were given two doses. Additionally, virus survivors were more likely to report side effects after being immunized such as pain at the injection site, fever and fatigue. The team, from the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai in New York, says giving previously infected individuals

only one dose would 'spare them from unnecessary pain and free up many urgently needed vaccine doses.'

<https://www.msn.com/en-gb/health/medical/covid-19-survivors-may-only-need-one-vaccine-dose-study-suggests/ar-B1dkclk>

COVID-19: Why are Asian and Black patients at greater risk?

Even after accounting for other known risk factors, such as diabetes and high blood pressure, a study found that Black and Asian patients hospitalized with COVID-19 were more likely to need mechanical ventilation and more likely to die than white patients.

<https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/covid-19-why-are-asian-and-black-patients-at-greater-risk>

Scots who have already had Covid -19 'could still catch South African variant'

Scots could catch the South African variant of coronavirus, even if they've already had Covid-19, one professor claims. Linda Bauld is professor of public health at the University of Edinburgh. She said that with the risk of infection, more focus should be put on self-isolating. She told BBC Breakfast: "That is something that is causing concern around the world

<https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/health/scots-who-already-covid-19-23426241>

COVID-19 Vaccine: Will It Protect Against New Variants And Do You Need A 2nd Dose?

As the virus that causes COVID-19 continues its global attack, it has done what scientists predicted it would do — it has given rise to new, slightly different strains. How significant some of those strains will be to the pandemic is now under intense study. Meanwhile, demand for the currently available vaccines is outstripping the early supply, and some scientists have sparked controversy by suggesting holding off on booster shots until more people have had their initial shots. That's something the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention does not endorse — but the agency has extended the timing on the second dose a bit. What does this all mean for you? Let's start with the question of second doses.

<https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2021/02/02/963047878/covid-19-vaccine-will-it-protect-against-new-variants-and-do-you-need-a-2nd-dose>

COVID-19: Mutation of Kent variant detected in samples could help virus evade immune system

Delaying the second dose of the Pfizer jab – the current government strategy – may leave some elderly patients at risk of infection by the South African variant, new research suggests. Lab tests by scientists at Cambridge University showed that one dose of the vaccine may not stimulate the immune system to produce enough antibodies to kill the virus. Only after a second dose would antibody levels be protective, according to preliminary data in the study, which has not yet been peer-reviewed. Meanwhile, the South African variant has a mutation called E484K that helps it evade the immune system.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-mutation-of-kent-variant-detected-in-samples-could-help-virus-evade-immune-system-12206375>

Russia's COVID-19 Vaccine Reported To Be 92% Effective : Coronavirus Updates

Russia's Sputnik V vaccine is 92% effective in protecting people from developing COVID-19 symptoms, according to a study published in The Lancet on Tuesday. The study follows a Phase 3 trial in Moscow hospitals and clinics that included nearly 22,000 participants age 18 and older. The vaccine, known as Gam-COVID-Vac, "was well tolerated in a large cohort," the researchers said. It was administered in two doses, 21 days apart. The study was financed by government entities such as the Moscow City Health Department and the Russian Direct Investment Fund. The findings stand to add legitimacy to the Sputnik vaccine, which met with skepticism last August when the Russian government touted its move to formally register the world's first vaccine, despite not having completed clinical trials. The Phase 3 clinical trials in the Lancet study did not begin until Sept. 7.

<https://www.npr.org/sections/coronavirus-live-updates/2021/02/02/963166648/russias-sputnik-vaccine-is-reported-to-be-92-effective-against-covid-19>

WHO Covid investigators praise 'excellent facilities' at Wuhan's animal disease centre as the health body defends its probe amid concerns China is still covering up crucial data

The team of experts arrived at an animal disease centre in Wuhan amid a high security presence. WHO expert Peter Daszak praised 'excellent facilities, very informative meeting.' China has been accused of covering up the virus ahead of WHO investigation

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-9213509/WHO-Covid-investigators-praise-excellent-facilities-Wuhans-animal-disease-centr.html>

Moderna Could Boost Vaccine Supply by Adding Doses to Vials

U.S. regulators could decide within a few weeks whether to allow Moderna, the developer of one of the two federally authorized Covid-19 vaccines, to increase the number of doses in its vials — which could accelerate the nation's vaccination rate. Moderna is hoping to raise the number of doses in its vials to as many as 15 from the current 10 doses. The proposal reflects the fact that the company has been ramping up production of its vaccine to the point where the final manufacturing stage, when it is bottled, capped and labeled, has emerged as a roadblock to expanding its distribution. If the change does go through, it could be hugely welcome news in the campaign to curb a pandemic that has killed more than 440,000 people in the United States alone. In a statement late Monday, Ray Jordan, a Moderna spokesman, said the constraint on dosage per vial was limiting Moderna's output.

<https://www.nytimes.com/live/2021/02/01/world/covid-19-coronavirus>

WHO team visits animal disease center in Wuhan, China

Further details of the visit were not announced in what has been a tightly controlled trip, with the media only able to glimpse the team coming and going from its hotel and site visits. The team members wore full protective gear during Tuesday's visit. It's not clear if they wore similar full-body suits at the research institutes, hospitals and markets they visited on previous days. Outside their hotel and en route to and from visits, the experts have worn masks and professional or business casual attire. Intense negotiations preceded the WHO visit to Wuhan, where the first COVID-19 cases were detected in late 2019. China has maintained strict controls on access to information about the virus, possibly to avoid blame for alleged missteps in its early response to the outbreak. Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said the Chinese government had provided significant support and assistance to the WHO team, responding to criticism that China has not revealed much about what the researchers are being allowed to do.

<https://apnews.com/article/pandemics-coronavirus-pandemic-wuhan-china-united-nations-46239fe322133a20e0b3844e26ae1b8f>

UK virus variant has developed concerning new mutation in small number of cases

The UK variant of the coronavirus has developed a new, concerning mutation in a small number of cases, which scientists said makes it similar to the South African and Brazilian variants and could reduce the efficacy of vaccines. The emergence of the mutation to the variant first discovered in Britain highlights how complicated exiting COVID-19 lockdown will be even once vaccines are rolled out. Public Health England said there had been 11 reports of the UK variant which feature the E484K mutation, mostly in south-west England. The E484K mutation, which occurs on the spike protein of the virus, is the same change as has been seen in the South African and Brazilian variants that have caused international concern.

https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-health-coronavirus-britain-mutation-idUSKBN2A2146?taid=60193d9cc1bd3b0001730c49&utm_campaign=trueAnthem:+Trending+Content&utm_medium=trueAnthem&utm_source=twitter

New variant COVID findings fuel more worries about vaccine resistance

Scientists in the United Kingdom yesterday reported that a small number of B117 variants have developed the E484K mutation thought to help SARS-CoV-2 partly evade immunity, and today another UK group said their lab experiments suggest the mutation added to B117 may dampen the impact of vaccination after one dose. In its weekly update on pandemic activity, the World Health Organization (WHO) said today that the three variants of concern have been reported in more countries, with 80 now reporting the B117 variant.

<https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2021/02/new-variant-covid-findings-fuel-more-worries-about-vaccine-resistance>

Russia's COVID vaccine 92% effective, even in those over 60

An interim analysis of data from a phase 3 clinical trial of Russia's two-dose Gam-COVID-Vac (Sputnik V) coronavirus vaccine involving nearly 20,000 adult volunteers suggests an efficacy of 91.6% against symptomatic infection. In the randomized, controlled, double-blind study, published today in *The Lancet*, researchers from the Ministry of Health of the Russian Federation in Moscow randomly assigned 19,866 participants at 25 hospitals and clinics in a 3:1 ratio to receive either the adenovirus-based vaccine or a placebo from Sep 7 to Nov 24, 2020. A 0.5-milliliter (mL) dose was given, followed by a second dose 21 days later.

<https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2021/02/russias-covid-vaccine-92-effective-even-those-over-60>

Amid supply snafu, new data show AstraZeneca's COVID-19 shot is more effective with doses 12 weeks apart

While supply constraints have hung over the rollout of the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine in Europe, last week, CEO Pascal Soriot offered one way officials could make the most of available doses. And now AZ has more data to support the idea. Soriot pointed out that the label allows the second dose to be administered between 4 and 12 weeks after the first. Officials could use all available doses to vaccinate as many people as possible now, he suggested, without reserving booster doses. Before 12 weeks passed, more supply would arrive to cover the boosters and start a new round of vaccinations. In fact, waiting could be even better. New data show the vaccine was 54.9% effective in trial participants who received their second standard dose within 6 weeks of the first. For those who got a second standard dose 12 weeks or more after the first, efficacy was a much higher 82.4%.

<https://www.fiercepharma.com/vaccines/amid-supply-shortfall-new-data-show-az-s-covid-19-vaccine-works-for-3-months-after-first>

The Second COVID-19 Shot Is a Rude Reawakening for Immune Cells

At about 2 a.m. on Thursday morning, I woke to find my husband shivering beside me. For hours, he had been tossing in bed, exhausted but unable to sleep, nursing chills, a fever, and an agonizingly sore left arm. His teeth chattered. His forehead was freckled with sweat. And as I lay next to him, cinching blanket after blanket around his arms, I felt an immense sense of relief. All this misery was a sign that the immune cells in his body had been riled up by the second shot of a COVID-19 vaccine, and were well on their way to guarding him from future disease. Side effects are a natural part of the vaccination process, as my colleague Sarah Zhang has written. Not everyone will experience them. But the two COVID-19 vaccines cleared for emergency use in the United States, made by Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna, already have reputations for raising the hackles of the immune system: In both companies' clinical trials, at least a third of the volunteers ended up with symptoms such as headaches and fatigue; fevers like my husband's were less common.

<https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2021/02/second-vaccine-side-effects/617892/>

Comparing the Covid-19 vaccines developed by Pfizer, Moderna, and Johnson & Johnson

In an ideal world, a pandemic vaccine could be delivered in a single shot, so supplies could be stretched to cover a lot of people. It would trigger no side effect more significant than a sore arm. And it would be easy to ship and store. Soon, it seems, this ideal of a Covid-19 vaccine will be within

reach. Last Friday, Johnson & Johnson announced that a one-dose vaccine being developed by its vaccines division, Janssen Pharmaceuticals, had been shown to be 66% protective against moderate to severe Covid infection in a multicountry study. But, importantly, it was 85% effective in protecting against severe disease. And there were no hospitalizations or deaths among people in the vaccine arm of a large clinical trial.

<https://www.statnews.com/2021/02/02/comparing-the-covid-19-vaccines-developed-by-pfizer-moderna-and-johnson-johnson/>

Russia's Sputnik V vaccine 91.6% effective: Lancet study

Russia's Sputnik V vaccine is 91.6 percent effective against symptomatic Covid-19, according to results published Tuesday that independent experts said allayed transparency concerns over the jab, which Moscow is already rolling out. Sputnik V -- named after the Soviet-era satellite -- was approved in Russia months before results from its final-stage clinical trials were published, leading to scepticism among experts. But the new analysis of data from 20,000 Phase 3 trial participants, published in the medical journal The Lancet, suggests that the two-dose vaccination offers more than 90 percent efficacy against symptomatic Covid-19.

<https://news.yahoo.com/russias-sputnik-v-vaccine-91-124039154.html>

Coronavirus Resurgence

COVID-19: More than 10 million vaccine doses administered in UK - as deaths rise by 1,449

The number of COVID vaccine jabs given in the UK has now passed 10 million, government figures show. A total of 9,646,715 were first doses, while 496,796 were second doses. Meanwhile, the UK has recorded another 1,449 coronavirus deaths - yesterday this number was 406, and last Tuesday it was 1,631. A further 16,840 cases have also been confirmed, compared to 18,607 on Monday and 20,089 last Tuesday.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-more-than-10-million-vaccine-doses-administered-in-uk-as-deaths-rise-by-1-449-12206598>

Covid-19: Captain Sir Tom Moore dies with coronavirus

In England, Captain Sir Tom Moore has died with coronavirus. The 100-year-old, who raised almost £33m for NHS charities by walking laps of his garden, was admitted to Bedford Hospital on Sunday. The Queen led tributes to Capt Sir Tom, "recognising the inspiration he provided for the whole nation and others across the world". He tested positive for Covid-19 last week. His family said due to other medication he was receiving for pneumonia, he was unable to be vaccinated.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-beds-bucks-herts-55881753>

China sees new COVID-19 cases drop to lowest in a month

China reported the fewest new COVID-19 cases in a month as imported cases overtook local infections, official data showed on Tuesday, suggesting the country's worst wave since March 2020 is being stamped out ahead of a key holiday. Thirty cases were reported in the mainland on Feb. 1, the National Health Commission said in a statement, down from 42 cases a day earlier and marking lowest total since 24 cases were reported on Jan. 2. The commission said 18 of the new cases originated overseas, overtaking locally transmitted cases for the first time in about a month

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-china/china-sees-new-covid-19-cases-drop-to-lowest-in-a-month-idUSKBN2A20BA>

French COVID-19 indicators at a two-months high but no lockdown

France's main COVID-19 indicators have reached two-month highs on average on Monday and the country's ski lifts will remain closed throughout February but the government is still hoping to avoid a third national lockdown. President Emmanuel Macron on Saturday defended his decision to hold off

such a new lockdown, telling the public he had faith in their ability to rein in COVID-19 with less severe curbs even as a third wave spreads and the vaccine rollout falters. Earlier in the day, government spokesman Gabriel Attal did nonetheless say the chance of avoiding a third lockdown was slim, adding everything would be done to avoid it.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-france-infections/french-covid-19-indicators-at-a-two-months-high-but-no-lockdown-idUSKBN2A13E0>

New Lockdown

Coronavirus lockdown for Perth and South West leaves WA facing a week like no other

WA's regime to swab people for the virus will itself be tested over the coming days, as people who attended the 17 possible exposure sites present to COVID clinics. Health Minister Roger Cook has repeatedly promised WA has the surge capacity to deal with a rush on clinics, but officials have admitted there could be significant waits over the coming days. If the worst fears are realised and the virus has spread unknowingly through the community, WA's contact tracing regime will also be tested like never before.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-02-01/coronavirus-lockdown-leaves-wa-facing-a-week-like-no-other/13108216>

Much of Western Australia in lockdown after 1 case of COVID-19. Here's what Canada can learn from the approach

As the debate about the merits of strict lockdowns continues in Canada, and the federal government introduces its own version of hotel quarantine, the successes and failures of those practices in other countries can be looked to for insight. As vaccines begin to be rolled out in Canada, and the chance of a return to "normal" seems within reach, there will be many questions to answer about what was done right, what could have been handled better, and what have we learned to prepare for another pandemic.

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatoon/western-australia-covid-19-lockdown-canada-approach-1.5896504>