

COVID-19 Lockdown Exit Analysis

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Brazil is suffocating: COVID surge creates severe oxygen crisis

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- [Two months on, Brazil's COVID-19 catastrophe has worsened](#). Now with COVID-19 variants and a grim record of infections and deaths, there are fears that a lack of oxygen supplies seen in Manaus, state capital of Amazonas, could soon be seen all over Brazil.

A dire shortage of oxygen as cases spike

'Brazil is suffocating': COVID surge creates severe oxygen crisis

Earlier this year, the jungle city of Manaus sent shockwaves across the globe when hospitals ran out of oxygen with lethal consequences – turning the city into the world's COVID-19 epicentre. Two months on, Brazil's COVID catastrophe has never been worse. Now, with new coronavirus variants and a series of grim records of deaths and infections, there are fears that a lack of oxygen supplies seen in Manaus, the Amazonas state capital, could unfold elsewhere.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/3/24/brazil-is-suffocating-covid-surge-creates-severe-oxygen-crisis>

Syria provides Lebanon oxygen supplies amid dire shortages

War-torn Syria promised oxygen supplies to neighbouring Lebanon as both countries struggle with unprecedented economic woes and a surge of coronavirus infections. "We will supply Lebanon with 75 tonnes of oxygen in instalments of 25 tonnes a day for a period of three days," Health Minister Hasan al-Ghabbash told reporters after a meeting with his Lebanese counterpart on Wednesday.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/3/24/syria-promises-to-lebanon-oxygen-supplies-amid-dire-shortages>

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Coronavirus cases among healthcare workers declined dramatically after staff got their first vaccine dose, two new studies have found. In one study of employees at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center, 2.6 percent of all workers who were unvaccinated tested positive for COVID-19 compared to 1.82 percent of those given their first shot, a drop of 31 percent. That same study also found that just 0.05 percent of those who received both doses of either the Pfizer-BioNTech or the Moderna vaccine were later infected.

https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-9398191/Fewer-1-healthcare-workers-fully-vaccinated-against-COVID-19-test-positive-virus.html?ito=social-twitter_dailymailus

Risk of COVID very low in vaccinated medical workers: study

COVID-19 infection was very low in a cohort of vaccinated California healthcare workers (HCWs) amid a surge of new cases, according to a research letter yesterday in the New England Journal of Medicine. "We were able to describe the infection rates in a real-world scenario, where vaccine roll-out coincided with a surge of infections," coauthor Jocelyn Keehner, MD, of the University of California San Diego (UCSD), said in a UCSD news release. "We observed a low overall positivity rate

among fully immunized health care workers, supporting the high protection rates of these vaccines."

<https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2021/03/risk-covid-very-low-vaccinated-medical-workers-study>

BNT162b2 mRNA Covid-19 Vaccine Effectiveness among Health Care Workers

Since the introduction of Covid-19 vaccines, prioritizing vaccination of health care workers has been advocated, and data on vaccine effectiveness among health care workers in real-world settings is beginning to emerge. In our study that was conducted in an active hospital setting in a community with a high incidence of Covid-19, vaccination of health care workers with the BNT162b2 vaccine resulted in a major reduction of new cases of Covid-19 among those who received two doses of the vaccine, even when a surge of the B.1.1.7 variant was noted in up to 80% of cases.⁵ These findings suggest that widespread and effective vaccination among health care workers provides a safe environment, even in the presence of a high rate of SARS-CoV-2 infection in the community.

<https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMc2101951>

Infection rates in many countries are too high

Global COVID-19 cases rise for 4th straight week

In its latest weekly snapshot of global COVID-19 activity, the World Health Organization (WHO) said yesterday that cases rose for the fourth week in a row, led by cases in the Americas and Europe, with deaths now leveling off after a 6-week drop. Though much of the rise was spread across four of the WHO's regions, rises were especially steep in certain countries, such as India, where cases were up by 35% over the previous week.

<https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2021/03/global-covid-19-cases-rise-4th-straight-week>

Central Europe's hospitals slammed, can't treat all in need

Poland recorded its highest daily number of new coronavirus infections Wednesday as hospitals buckle under a new surge. Hungary has the highest per capita death rate in the world. And Romanian doctors are working around the clock and having to decide who does — and doesn't — get a bed in an intensive care unit. The coronavirus pandemic is unleashing enormous suffering as infection rates rise across central Europe even as the Czech Republic and Slovakia — recently among the worst-hit areas in the world — are finally seeing some improvements following tight lockdowns.

<https://apnews.com/article/world-news-pandemics-europe-romania-poland-67132169f6f216ec97b67e87b63015a9>

India reports novel COVID-19 variant, daily deaths at year's high

India has detected a new "double mutant variant" of the novel coronavirus, the health ministry said, adding to concern as the government struggles with the highest single-day tally of new infections and deaths this year. Genome sequencing and analysis of samples from Maharashtra state found mutations in the virus that do not match previously catalogued "variants of concern" (VOC), the ministry said in a statement on Wednesday.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/3/24/india-reports-novel-covid-19-variant-daily-deaths-at-years-high>

France hit by 3rd virus surge; culture minister in hospital

France's high-profile culture minister has been hospitalized for COVID-19, the latest senior official to become ill as the nation faces a third surge of coronavirus infections, this one propelled by a highly contagious variant first found in Britain. Roselyne Bachelot, 74, announced last weekend that she tested positive and her hospitalization was made public Wednesday, just as Employment Minister Elisabeth Borne left the hospital, tweeting "I'm relieved." The virus has been gaining steam in France, with ICUs in the Paris region, the north and southeast France bursting at the seams.

<https://apnews.com/article/paris-emmanuel-macron-coronavirus-pandemic-france-6485a3052201452d92aef88031383a44>

India: Delhi orders Covid tests at airports as cases surge

India's capital, Delhi, will begin randomised Covid tests at airports, bus stops and train stations amid what some experts say is a second wave. Mumbai, a financial hub and virus hotspot, ordered mandatory testing in busy areas earlier this week. Cases have surged in recent weeks - on Wednesday, India reported more than 47,000 new cases and 275 deaths, it's highest this year. It has reported more than 11.7 million cases and 160,000 deaths so far

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-56506545>

Belgium imposes new lockdown to fight third COVID-19 wave

Belgium will close schools, non-food stores and hairdressers for four weeks from Saturday, in a sharp renewed lockdown designed to contain a rising third wave of COVID-19 infections. A year on from the first pandemic shutdown, Prime Minister Alexander De Croo told a news conference that the variant of the virus first discovered in Britain had become dominant in the country and led to a doubling of COVID-19 patients in hospitals. More than 22,000 people have died from COVID-19 in Belgium, among the world's highest per capita fatality rates. Infections, which were running at a daily average of about 2,000 for three months, are now more than double that level

<https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-health-coronavirus-belgium/belgium-imposes-new-lockdown-to-fight-third-covid-19-wave-idUSKBN2BG20W?il=0>

Qatar reimposes coronavirus-related restrictions

Qatar has announced a series of coronavirus-related restrictions on education, leisure and business activities including closing gyms and restricting restaurant capacity. The measures, announced in a cabinet statement on Wednesday, will come into effect on Friday as the country battles a surge in new COVID-19 infections.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/3/24/qatar-reimposes-coronavirus-related-restrictions>

The race to vaccinate

U.S. COVID-19 cases top 30 million as states race to vaccinate

The United States crossed 30 million coronavirus cases on Wednesday, according to a Reuters tally, as states accelerate the vaccination process by lowering age limits. Health authorities are racing to vaccinate in the face of the first uptick in new cases on a weekly basis since January. Against the advice of health experts, several states have lifted mask mandates and more infectious variants have also spread across the nation. Although cases are trending higher in 30 out of 50 states compared with the previous week, health officials hope the vaccinations will prevent a rise in deaths. The United States has lost a total of 544,000 lives to the virus.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-usa-cases/u-s-covid-19-cases-top-30-million-as-states-race-to-vaccinate-idUSKBN2BG2QU>

AstraZeneca coronavirus vaccine rollout begins in Far West NSW after delivery delay

The first COVID-19 jabs have been administered in Broken Hill after a short, unexplained delay in the delivery of AstraZeneca vaccines to the New South Wales region. Wilyakali elder Maureen O'Donnell was the first to receive the vaccine at local Aboriginal health service Maari Ma on Monday. Frontline medical staff at Broken Hill Hospital and top health bureaucrats were due to begin receiving their vaccinations at the hospital on the same day. But "unforeseen circumstances related to the delivery of the vaccine" meant that the first inoculations were not administered until today. The delay also set back the concurrent 1A and 1B vaccine rollout phases at other health sites in the area.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-03-24/first-astrazeneca-vaccinations-start-far-west-of-new-south-wales/13271312>

Coronavirus: NI 'a month ahead' of Ireland on vaccines

Northern Ireland is about a month ahead of the Republic of Ireland's Covid-19 vaccination programme, according to the taoiseach (Irish prime minister). Micheál Martin said it did not make much sense to talk about north-south vaccination alignment because NI was part of the UK

programme while Ireland was part of the EU's. Alignment would be ideal, he said, but "we're not in that situation". An alignment on mandatory quarantines, however, would be "useful", he added.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-56513627>

Half of adults in Scotland to have first dose of Covid-19 vaccine by end of day

More than half of adults in Scotland will have received a first dose of coronavirus vaccine by the end of Wednesday, Nicola Sturgeon has announced. The First Minister also confirmed the Scottish Government is on course to have offered a first dose to all adults by the end of July, supplies permitting. As she announced three deaths of coronavirus patients and 692 new cases have been recorded in Scotland in the past 24 hours, she said the Scottish Government is also set to have offered a first vaccine jab to all the JCVI priority groups by mid-April.

<https://www.standard.co.uk/news/uk/scotland-nicola-sturgeon-scottish-parliament-first-minister-scottish-government-b926008.html>

Cuba will administer Covid-19 experimental vaccines to nearly all Havana residents

Cuba will administer experimental Covid-19 shots to nearly the entire population of the capital Havana by May as health authorities carry out massive interventional studies and late stage trials, officials said on Tuesday. Cuba, which has a long history of developing and exporting vaccines, this month began late phase trials of two of its five experimental shots, Soberana 2 and Abdala, which will be Latin America's first homegrown COVID-19 vaccines if they prove successful. Authorities could seek approval for emergency use of Abdala and Soberana 2, which both target the spike protein of the novel coronavirus, in June

<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/cuba-will-administer-covid-19-experimental-vaccines-nearly-havana-resi-rcna491>

Hong Kong halts use of Pfizer coronavirus vaccine due to defective packaging

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Hong Kong suspended use of the Pfizer coronavirus vaccine Wednesday after its Chinese distributor informed the city that one batch had defective bottle lids. The city's government said the suspension was immediate while the matter is investigated by distributor Fosun Pharma and BioNTech, the German company which created the vaccine with American pharmaceutical firm Pfizer. BioNTech and Fosun Pharma have not found any reason to believe the product is unsafe, according to the statement. However, vaccinations will be halted as a preventive and safety measure.

<https://globalnews.ca/news/7715549/hong-kong-coronavirus-vaccine-packaging/>

Hong Kong, Macau suspend Pfizer vaccine amid 'packaging issue'

Hong Kong and Macau have suspended the use of Pfizer-BioNTech vaccines because of a defect in the packaging of one batch of doses, officials said on Wednesday. Vials with lot number 210102 were found to have defective packaging, authorities said, and an investigation was under way. "For the sake of precaution, the current vaccination must be suspended during the period of investigation," Hong Kong's government said in a statement, noting there had been "deviations in the vial seal". Vaccinations using a second batch - 210104 - were also suspended, it added. It did not elaborate on whether that batch was similarly affected.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/3/24/hong-kong-macau-suspend-use-of-biontech-vaccine>

Britain to launch new health security agency to battle pandemics

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Britain will launch a new health security agency next week to better prepare for and tackle pandemics by bringing together its testing, analytical and scientific capabilities, health minister Matt Hancock said on Wednesday. The new agency, called the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA), will

be headed up by Jenny Harries, England's deputy chief medical officer, who has been at the forefront of the government's efforts to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic. Britain has one of the highest death tolls from the novel coronavirus but is gradually easing the latest lockdown under a four-step plan underpinned by the success of its vaccination programme.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-health-coronavirus-britain-agency/britain-to-launch-new-health-security-agency-to-battle-pandemics-idUSKBN2BG1GM>

Merkel drops Easter shutdown plan for Germany

Merkel drops Easter shutdown plan for Germany, apologizes

German Chancellor Angela Merkel on Wednesday dropped plans for a five-day shutdown over Easter, which had prompted confusion and criticism. She called the idea a mistake and apologized to Germans. Merkel announced the decision after a hastily arranged videoconference with Germany's 16 state governors, who are responsible for imposing and lifting restrictions. The same group, faced with rising coronavirus infections, had come up early Tuesday with the unexpected plan for tighter restrictions over Easter.

<https://apnews.com/article/pandemics-angela-merkel-germany-coronavirus-pandemic-64baf934e39a94e2ef635676b92222cb>

EU and stricter export controls for COVID vaccines

EU moves toward stricter export controls for COVID vaccines

The European Union moved Wednesday toward stricter export controls for coronavirus vaccines, seeking to make sure its 27 nations have more COVID-19 shots to boost the bloc's flagging vaccine campaign amid a surge in new infections. The EU's executive Commission said on the eve of a summit of the EU's leaders that it has a plan to guarantee that more vaccines produced in the bloc are available for its 450 million citizens even if that comes at the cost of helping nations outside the bloc, most notably Britain. EU officials said trade with the United States should not be affected and assured nations that sought to have an open, transparent relationship with the bloc that they had little to fear.

<https://apnews.com/article/eu-stricter-export-control-covid-19-vaccines-20d8d9b5c358b67b3ea5d3565c5e9e2d>

COVID-19: EU calls for more vaccine export controls as PM says UK jabs success built on 'greed'

The European Commission is calling for tougher controls on COVID-19 vaccine exports to Britain and other areas with much higher vaccination rates. President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen said "open roads should run in both directions", adding: "The EU has an excellent portfolio of different vaccines and we have secured more than enough doses for the entire population. But we have to ensure timely and sufficient vaccine deliveries to EU citizens. Every day counts." The proposals recommend more transparency and reciprocity but do not go as far as including a ban on exports to the UK.

<https://news.sky.com/story/eu-calls-for-tougher-vaccine-export-controls-to-ensure-more-supplies-for-the-blocs-citizens-12255152>

Coronavirus: EU and UK try to end row with 'win-win' on vaccines

After weeks of tensions over Covid vaccine supplies, the UK government and European Commission have said they are working together to improve their relationship over the pandemic. They said they wanted to "create a win-win situation and expand vaccine supply for all our citizens". The Commission earlier proposed tougher export controls on vaccines, amid tensions over AstraZeneca supplies. Prime Minister Boris Johnson warned that "blockades" were not "sensible". The joint EU-UK statement said that "openness and global co-operation" would be key to tackling the pandemic. However, there was little harmony earlier when the Commission announced plans for all shipments of vaccines to be assessed on the destination country's rate of vaccinations and vaccine exports.

The proposals, to be put before EU leaders on Thursday, are seen as focused on the UK and US in particular.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-56509521>

People are selling Covid vaccine passports on the dark web

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Hackers are offering forged Covid-19 vaccination certificates and negative test results on the dark web, new research has revealed. The new trend was identified by cyber threat analysis firm Check Point Research, who also noted a spike in posts for alleged coronavirus vaccines over the last three months. The company's analysis found that fake government vaccination certificates and passports are selling for \$150 on the dark web – a section of the internet that is only accessible using a specialist web browser. "The dark web is booming with activity related to Covid vaccines," said Oded Vanunu, head of product vulnerabilities research at Check Point.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/gadgets-and-tech/covid-vaccine-passport-for-sale-dark-web-b1821139.html>

Facebook, Twitter must do more to stop COVID-19 anti-vaxxers, US states say

Attorneys general for 12 U.S. states on Wednesday accused Facebook Inc and Twitter Inc of doing too little to stop people from using their platforms to spread false information that coronavirus vaccines are unsafe. In a letter to Facebook Chief Executive Mark Zuckerberg and Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey, the Democratic attorneys general said "anti-vaxxers" lacking medical expertise and often motivated by financial gain have used the platforms to downplay the danger of COVID-19 and exaggerate the risks of vaccination. They called on both companies to enforce their own community guidelines by removing or flagging vaccine misinformation.

<https://cn.reuters.com/article/instant-article/idUSKBN2BG2VK>

Covid-19: 'Greed' helped UK's vaccines success and fraudsters steal £34.5m in scams

More than 6,000 cases of Covid-related fraud and cyber-crime have been recorded and £34.5m has been stolen during the pandemic in the UK. The Action Fraud team says that sum has been stolen since 1 March 2020, with the activity only covering England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Many of the scams involved conning people out of their money and financial details by focusing on internet shopping. The National Cyber Security Centre also reveals it is tackling about 30 "significant" attacks a month against the country's pandemic response infrastructure including the NHS, vaccine producers and vaccine supply chains.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-56504732>