

# COVID-19 Lockdown Exit Analysis

## 20th Dec 2021

---

### Lockdown Exit

---

#### **New U.S. push for vaccines, boosters to stem 'raging' Omicron**

U.S. health officials urged Americans on Sunday to get booster shots, wear masks and be careful if they travel over the winter holidays, as the Omicron variant raged across the world and was set to take over as the dominant strain in the United States. The government is gearing up for the next phase of battle in a two-year fight against a virus that has killed 800,000 people in the United States and disrupted every aspect of daily life. Two U.S. senators, Democrats Elizabeth Warren and Cory Booker, said on Sunday they tested positive for COVID-19 but were experiencing only mild symptom <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/covid-omicron-variant-raging-through-world-traveling-increases-risk-fauci-2021-12-19/>

#### **Vaccine Data Gaps Point to Millions More in U.S. Who Lack Shots**

The U.S. government has over-counted the number of Americans who are at least partly vaccinated against the coronavirus, state officials warn, meaning millions more people are unprotected as the pandemic's winter surge gathers steam. Last weekend, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention revised a bellwether metric -- the share of people 65 and older with at least one shot. The agency reduced the proportion from 99.9%, where it had been capped for weeks, to 95%, without changing its raw shot totals. The move acknowledged a dynamic state officials have discovered: in collating reams of data on vaccinations, the U.S. has counted too many shots as first doses when they are instead second doses or booster shots. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-12-18/vaccine-data-gaps-point-to-millions-more-in-u-s-who-lack-shots>

#### **France Curbs New Year's Eve Partying in a Bid to Shield Hospitals**

French officials will curb outdoor revelry on New Year's Eve in a bid to limit Covid-19 infections that risk overwhelming hospitals, Prime Minister Jean Castex said. "I'm appealing to everyone's responsibility to find other ways to celebrate than large gatherings, and avoiding moments of conviviality," Castex said in a televised speech on Friday, as many people in France began their winter vacations. Regional prefects will ban spontaneous parties and ask cities to hold off on fireworks and other celebrations, he said. "I understand the frustration to limit yourselves in such festive moments, but we owe that to our health-care personnel," Castex said. France closed nightclubs this month, though not bars. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-12-17/france-curbs-new-year-s-eve-partying-in-bid-to-shield-hospitals>

#### **Omicron may sideline two leading drugs against COVID-19**

As strained U.S. hospitals brace for a new surge of COVID-19 cases caused by the fast-spreading omicron variant, doctors are warning of yet another challenge: the two standard drugs they've used to fight infections are unlikely to work against the new strain. For more than a year antibody drugs from Regeneron and Eli Lilly have been the go-to treatments for early COVID-19, thanks to their ability to head off severe disease and keep patients out of the hospital. But both drugmakers recently warned that laboratory testing suggests their therapies will be much less potent against omicron, which contains dozens of mutations that make it harder for antibodies to attack the virus. And while the companies say they can quickly develop new omicron-targeting antibodies, those aren't expected to launch for at least several months. <https://apnews.com/article/omicron-may-sideline-two-covid-antibody-drugs-ffab32bd6e4e6b4822360b34da1785f0>

## **England Has Hundreds of Thousands of New Omicron Cases Daily**

Article reports that England is “almost certain” to be suffering hundreds of thousands of omicron variant cases a day, the U.K.’s top scientific advisers said as they urged the government to act within days to prevent hospitals being overrun. “The earlier interventions happen, the greater the effect they will have,” the scientists said. Levels of infection from the new strain are at their highest in London, the government’s Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies, or SAGE, said in the minutes of its Dec. 16 meeting, released on Saturday.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-12-18/england-has-hundreds-of-thousands-of-new-omicron-cases-daily>

## **CNN Closes Offices as Covid-19 Cases Spike**

CNN is closing its offices to nonessential employees, network President Jeff Zucker told employees in a memo Saturday, as Covid-19 cases rise at the network and nationwide. Employees who don’t need to be in the office to produce shows or provide other essential functions for the network’s broadcast operations will be asked to work from home, Mr. Zucker said, citing a surge of cases of Covid-19 at CNN. “If your job does not require you to be in the office in order to do it, please work from elsewhere,” Mr. Zucker said in the memo. Mr. Zucker said the network would be making changes to studios and control rooms to “minimize the number of people in our spaces.”

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/cnn-closes-offices-as-covid-19-cases-spike-11639876526>

## **France brings forward third COVID-19 vaccine shot**

France will from next month reduce the time between second and third COVID-19 vaccination injections to four months and require people to show proof of vaccination to enter some venues, Prime Minister Jean Castex said on Friday. The gap between shots is currently five months but the French government is concerned about the spread of the Omicron coronavirus variant. Castex said that big public parties and fireworks would be banned on New Year's Eve and recommended that people - even if vaccinated - test themselves before attending year-end parties.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/france-reduces-delay-get-third-covid-19-booster-shot-four-months-2021-12-17/>

## **Pfizer says pandemic could extend to 2024, vaccine data for younger children delayed**

Pfizer Inc on Friday forecast that the COVID-19 pandemic would not be behind us until 2024 and said a lower-dose version of its vaccine for 2- to 4-year-olds generated a weaker immune response than expected, potentially delaying authorization. Pfizer Chief Scientific Officer Mikael Dolsten said in a presentation to investors that the company expects some regions to continue to see pandemic levels of COVID-19 cases over the next year or two. Other countries will transition to "endemic" with low, manageable caseloads during that same time period.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/pfizer-test-additional-third-dose-covid-19-vaccine-trial-children-2021-12-17/>

## **Omicron rewrites the COVID plan for 2022**

As the Omicron variant gains momentum in Europe and the United States, scientists are rewriting their expectations for the COVID-19 pandemic next year. Just weeks ago, disease experts were predicting that countries would begin to emerge from the pandemic in 2022 after enduring a series of surges driven by the Alpha, Beta, Gamma and Delta variants. First among them would be populations with a significant amount of exposure to the coronavirus, through a combination of infections and vaccination.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/omicron-rewrites-covid-plan-2022-2021-12-17/>

## **Exit Strategies**

---

### **France hopes new vaccine pass will speed up vaccination amid Omicron spread**

France hopes that a planned new vaccine pass that will be required to enter public places will persuade more people to get inoculated against COVID-19 as the country faces a rapid spread of the Omicron variant, the health minister said on Saturday. The government does not want to impose new curfews or lockdowns on people who have been vaccinated, but the threat of Omicron means authorities have to increase pressure on those refusing vaccination, Olivier Veran said on France Inter radio.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/up-10-new-french-covid-19-cases-suspected-be-omicron-variant-minister-2021-12-18/>

### **UK health minister doesn't rule out new COVID restrictions before Christmas**

Britain's health minister on Sunday declined to rule out the chance of further COVID-19 restrictions before Christmas, saying the spread of the Omicron variant was a very fast moving situation. Britain has reported a surge in Omicron cases, which government advisers said could be just the tip of the iceberg. On Saturday, London's mayor declared a "major incident" to help the city's hospitals cope. read more. Asked whether he could rule out new restrictions before Christmas, health minister Sajid Javid told BBC Television: "We are assessing the situation, it is very fast moving."

<https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uk-health-minister-doesnt-rule-out-new-covid-restrictions-before-christmas-2021-12-19/>

### **CNN closes U.S. offices to most workers as COVID-19 cases spike - memo**

CNN is closing its offices in the United States to all nonessential employees as COVID-19 cases increase, the network said on Saturday in an internal memo to staff seen by Reuters. CNN, part of AT&T Inc's WarnerMedia division, will close its offices to all employees who do not have work in the office, the memo said. "We are doing this out of an abundance of caution," CNN President Jeff Zucker said in the memo. "And it will also protect those who will be in the office by minimizing the number of people who are there."

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/cnn-closes-us-offices-most-workers-covid-19-cases-spike-2021-12-19/>

### **Italy eyes new COVID-19 measures amid Omicron worries**

Italy's government is considering new measures to avoid a surge in COVID-19 infections during the holiday period, local newspapers reported on Sunday, amid worries over the spread of the highly contagious Omicron coronavirus variant. After holding a meeting with ministers on Dec. 23, Prime Minister Mario Draghi could impose an obligation on the vaccinated to show a negative test to access crowded places, including discos and stadiums, daily Corriere della Sera reported. Negative tests could also be required to enter cinemas and theatres, along with wearing masks outdoors.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/italy-eyes-new-covid-19-measures-amid-omicron-worries-newspapers-2021-12-19/>

### **Swiss order more COVID-19 jabs, tighten pandemic measures**

Switzerland is ordering more COVID-19 vaccination doses, the government said on Friday, as it tightened pandemic curbs while opting not to embrace -- for now -- an even stricter limited lockdown. It is ordering 7 million doses each from Moderna and from Pfizer and BioNTech for the second half of next year, it said, bringing to 34 million doses its stockpile for 2022 and ensuring anyone who wants a jab will get it. After consulting regional authorities, the federal government said it will expand from Monday the requirement for people to show proof of vaccination or recovery from the coronavirus to access many indoor venues like restaurants.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/swiss-order-more-covid-19-jabs-tighten-pandemic-measures-2021-12-17/>

### **Pfizer Delays Plans to Seek Authorization of Covid-19 Vaccine for Young Children**

Pfizer Inc. and partner BioNTech have pushed back plans to request authorization of their Covid-19 vaccine in children ages 2 to 5, after the shot generated a weaker than expected immune response

in a key study. The companies said Friday they would begin testing the addition of a third dose in the children, and if successful, would ask U.S. health regulators to authorize use sometime during the first half of 2022. Many parents of young children, who don't have any Covid-19 vaccines available for use, have been looking forward to clearance of the shots.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/pfizer-delays-plans-to-seek-authorization-of-covid-19-vaccine-for-young-children-11639772874>

### **Appeals Court Reinstates Biden Covid-19 Vaccine Rules for Large Employers**

A federal appeals court Friday reinstated Biden administration rules that require many employers to ensure that their workers are vaccinated or tested weekly for Covid-19. A divided panel of the Sixth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals dissolved a stay issued by another court that had blocked the rules. The majority, in a 2-to-1 ruling, said legal challenges to the administration's vaccination-and-testing requirements were likely to fail. The ruling is a near-term boost to the White House but was immediately appealed on an emergency basis to the Supreme Court by some employers who oppose the mandate. The requirements, issued by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration and scheduled to take effect in January, apply to businesses with 100 or more employees and cover roughly 84 million workers.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/appeals-court-reinstates-biden-administration-covid-19-vaccine-rules-for-large-employers-11639787840>

### **Germany Declares U.K. Virus-Variant Area, Tightens Travel Rules**

Germany tightened rules for travelers from the U.K. as the spread of omicron there threatens progress in reversing a virus wave that recently swamped German hospitals. The U.K. will be designated as a virus variant area from Monday, the highest risk category, which means restrictions on who can travel to Germany, the Robert Koch Institute, a national infectious-disease agency, said on its website. Germany's the latest country to adopt measures against the U.K., where cases of the new Covid variant are rising sharply. France temporarily banned entry for many Britons last week, and Cyprus will require visitors from the UK ages 12 or above, regardless of vaccination status, to self isolate.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-12-18/germany-declares-u-k-virus-variant-area-tightens-travel-rules>

### **Biden to Issue 'Stark Warning' on Vaccination Amid Covid Surge**

President Joe Biden is set to warn the nation of the perils of remaining unvaccinated against the coronavirus in a planned speech Tuesday as the omicron variant takes hold in the U.S. and the nation experiences a surge in cases. "We are prepared for the rising case levels, and @POTUS will detail how we will respond to this challenge," White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said on Twitter. "He will remind Americans that they can protect themselves from severe illness from Covid-19 by getting vaccinated and getting their booster shot when they are eligible."

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-12-18/biden-to-issue-stark-warning-on-vaccination-amid-covid-surge>

### **London Mayor Declares 'Major Incident' as Omicron Cases Surge**

London Mayor Sadiq Khan has declared a "major incident" due to a rapid spread of the omicron variant across the U.K. capital, according to a statement. A major incident refers to an event or situation with a range of serious consequences which requires special arrangements to be implemented by one or more emergency responder agencies. It is "beyond the scope of business-as-usual operations, and is likely to involve serious harm, damage, disruption or risk to human life or welfare, essential services, the environment or national security," the government said.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-12-18/london-mayor-declares-major-incident-as-omicron-cases-surge>

### **Germany to impose quarantine on travellers from Britain from Monday**

Germany will impose quarantine on travellers from Britain from midnight on Monday and require a negative COVID-19 test for entry into the country, the Robert Koch Institute for infectious diseases

said on Saturday. Germany's regional health ministers had urged the national government on Saturday to introduce tougher rules on people arriving from Britain, where the Omicron coronavirus variant has sparked a surge in infections. At a meeting, the ministers called on Berlin to classify Britain as a virus-variant area, enforcing a two-week quarantine on all travellers including those who are vaccinated.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/german-regional-health-ministers-call-tighter-rules-uk-arrivals-2021-12-18/>

### **COVID forces players into isolation as calls for vaccination grow**

World sport continued to reel from the surge in COVID-19 cases on Friday with politicians urging sportspeople to set an example by not shunning the vaccine, while international competitions were affected as countries introduced travel curbs. As Europe's top soccer leagues prepare to wind down for a short winter break, England's Premier League is looking to go full steam ahead over the busy festive period. Nine scheduled matches have been postponed so far due to COVID-19 outbreaks.

<https://www.reuters.com/lifestyle/sports/covid-forces-players-into-isolation-calls-vaccination-grow-2021-12-17/>

### **Canada's vaccine mandate for foreign crews a headache for European airlines**

European airlines are walking an increasingly fine line to meet both foreign inoculation and local privacy requirements, as more countries require flight crews to be vaccinated against COVID-19, carriers say. Canada is slated on Jan. 15 to end an exemption that allowed entry of unvaccinated foreign flight crews, joining others that have vaccine mandates for pilots and passengers alike. That's creating a logistical headache for European carriers, who are unable to ask for their employees' vaccination status since they are bound to strict data protection laws in Europe, a spokesperson for the trade group Airlines For Europe (A4E) said.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/canadas-vaccine-mandate-foreign-crews-headache-european-airlines-2021-12-17/>

### **JPMorgan tells unvaccinated Manhattan staff to work from home**

JPMorgan Chase & Co (JPM.N) instructed unvaccinated staff in Manhattan to work from home starting Tuesday, a further sign that banks and other financial firms are tightening protocols as COVID-19 infections rise and the Omicron variant spreads. The U.S. bank, one of the most aggressive in bringing employees back to the office, previously allowed unvaccinated staff to work in its Manhattan offices provided they were tested twice a week. In a memo to staff on Monday announcing the policy change, the bank urged unvaccinated staff to get vaccinated and for eligible employees to get booster shots. It also relaxed mask requirements for vaccinated staff working in its Manhattan offices.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/exclusive-jpmorgan-tells-unvaccinated-manhattan-staff-work-home-2021-12-14/>

### **CDC releases new guidance to allow children exposed to coronavirus to attend school**

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released a new strategy called "test-to-stay" that allows unvaccinated children to stay in school even if they have been exposed to the coronavirus, agency Director Rochelle Walensky said on Friday. "If exposed children meet a certain criteria and continue to test negative, they can stay at school instead of quarantining at home," Walensky said during a press briefing. Some states are already advising their schools to use "test-to-stay" strategies in order to keep more children in class.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/cdc-releases-new-guidance-allow-children-exposed-covid-19-attend-school-2021-12-17/>

### **Boeing suspends vaccine mandate for U.S. employees**

Boeing Co suspended its coronavirus vaccination requirement for U.S.-based employees, the U.S. planemaker said on Friday, capping weeks of uncertainty as thousands of workers sought exemptions and challenges to a federal mandate played out in court. In an internal announcement, Boeing said its decision came after a review of a U.S. District Court ruling earlier this month that

halted the enforcement of President Joe Biden's vaccine requirement for federal contractors. Some big healthcare chains and companies such as General Electric, Spirit AeroSystems, and Amtrak have also suspended vaccine mandates for workers.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/exclusive-boeing-suspends-vaccination-requirement-us-based-employees-internal-2021-12-17/>

---

## **Partisan Exits**

### **Head of UK COVID-19 lockdown parties probe drops out over own event**

Britain's top civil servant Simon Case has stepped down from leading an investigation into alleged parties last year in government offices in breach of COVID-19 lockdowns after an event was held in his own office. "To ensure the ongoing investigation retains public confidence the Cabinet Secretary has recused himself for the remainder of the process," a spokesperson for Prime Minister Boris Johnson's office said. "The work will be concluded by Sue Gray, second permanent secretary at the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. "She will ascertain the facts and present her findings to the Prime Minister."

<https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/top-uk-official-steps-down-covid-19-lockdown-parties-probe-2021-12-17/>

---

## **Scientific Viewpoint**

### **Pfizer says pandemic could extend through 2023, studies three-dose vaccine course for children**

The U.S. pharmaceutical company made its comments as European countries geared up for further travel and social restrictions and a study warned that the rapidly spreading Omicron coronavirus variant was five times more likely to reinfect people than its predecessor, Delta. Pfizer executives said the company believed that by 2024, the disease should be endemic around the globe, meaning it would no longer be a pandemic. The company projected that "COVID will transition to an endemic state potentially by 2024."

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe-gears-up-more-restrictions-omicron-infections-rise-2021-12-17/>

### **CDC recommends Moderna, Pfizer COVID-19 vaccines over J&J's**

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on Thursday recommended Americans choose to receive one of two other authorised COVID-19 vaccines over Johnson & Johnson's shot, due to rare but sometimes fatal cases of blood-clotting. The CDC's move came after its Advisory Committee on Immunization voted unanimously to make the recommendation in favour of the vaccines made by Moderna Inc and Pfizer)/BioNTech over the J&J shot.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/blood-clot-rates-after-jj-vaccine-higher-than-previous-estimates-cdc-advisers-2021-12-16/>

### **S.Africa says vaccines, prior infection help mildness of COVID cases**

South Africa's health minister said on Friday that the government believed that vaccines and high levels of prior COVID-19 infection were helping to keep disease milder in a wave driven by the Omicron variant. There have been early anecdotal accounts suggesting that Omicron is causing less severe illness than previous variants in South Africa but scientists say it is too early to draw firm conclusions. The country reported a record number of daily infections earlier this week.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/south-africa-seeing-slight-increase-covid-19-deaths-off-low-base-2021-12-17/>

### **The Science Behind Omicron's Rapid Spread**

As Omicron has rapidly taken over as the dominant variant of the coronavirus in South Africa and the U.K., scientists are beginning to piece together what gives it its evolutionary advantage. Researchers are still refining and augmenting their findings, but Omicron's heightened transmissibility appears to be a combination of several properties: It seems able to more easily bind to and break into human respiratory cells; it appears to replicate faster once within our bodies; and

it can substantially evade the immunity gained from past infection or vaccination. These advantages mean Omicron is spreading across the world at a breakneck pace. Since scientists in South Africa first flagged its presence last month, it has been detected in 77 countries and is probably present in most others, according to the World Health Organization.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-science-behind-omicrons-rapid-spread-11639823405>

### **Fauci says omicron variant is 'just raging around the world'**

The COVID-19 omicron variant is "just raging around the world," the White House's top medical adviser said Sunday as President Joe Biden prepares to issue "a stark warning of what the winter will look like" for unvaccinated Americans. Dr. Anthony Fauci, the country's leading infectious disease expert, told NBC's "Meet the Press" that "the real problem" for the U.S. hospital system is that "we have so many people in this country who are eligible to be vaccinated who have not yet been vaccinated." The prospect of a winter chilled by a wave of coronavirus infections is a severe reversal from the optimism projected by Biden some 10 months ago, when he suggested at a CNN town hall that the country would essentially be back to normal by this Christmas. Biden has been careful not to overpromise, yet confidence in the country has been battered by an unrelenting wave of COVID-19 mutations and variations that have left many Americans emotionally exhausted, dispirited and worried about infections.

<https://apnews.com/article/fauci-says-omicron-variant-is-just-raging-around-the-world-45ef459c5020d1bb1b2a71d0a98b0183>

### **Is UK heading for New Year lockdown? Professor Neil Ferguson: 7,000 Omicron deaths a DAY**

Professor Ferguson - the UK Government adviser whose modelling has spooked No10 into lockdowns before - said tighter curbs were needed before New Year to stop a massive hospital surge.

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10321139/Is-UK-heading-New-Year-lockdown-Professor-Neil-Ferguson-7-000-Omicron-deaths-DAY.html>

### **Moderna COVID-19 shot likelier to cause heart inflammation than Pfizer's: study**

Moderna's COVID-19 vaccine is up to four times more likely to cause inflammation of the heart muscle, a very rare side effect, than its rival vaccine from Pfizer-BioNTech, according to a Danish study published in the British Medical Journal late on Thursday. The study, in which almost 85% of Danes, or 4.9 million individuals, aged 12 and older participated, investigated the link between mRNA-based COVID-19 vaccines and heart inflammation, also known as myocarditis or myopericarditis. Earlier studies from Israel and the United States have indicated an increased risk of heart inflammation after inoculation with the mRNA-vaccines developed by Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/moderna-covid-19-shot-more-likely-cause-heart-inflammation-than-pfizers-study-2021-12-17/>

### **'Tidal wave': Omicron could put U.S. COVID-19 surge into overdrive**

Two years into the coronavirus pandemic, the United States is confronting another dark winter, with the red-hot Omicron variant threatening to worsen an already dangerous surge of cases. Hospitalizations for COVID-19 have jumped 45% over the last month, and confirmed cases have increased 40% to a weeklong average of 123,000 new U.S. infections a day, according to a Reuters tally. Pfizer Inc, one of the chief vaccine makers, on Friday predicted the pandemic would last until 2024 and said a lower-dose version of its vaccine for children ages 2 to 4 generated a weaker-than-expected immune response, which could delay authorization

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/tidal-wave-omicron-could-put-us-covid-19-surge-into-overdrive-2021-12-17/>

### **EU to place order with Pfizer for COVID shots adapted to Omicron**

European Union governments have agreed to exercise an option to buy more than 180 million doses

of a version of the COVID-19 vaccine adapted for the Omicron variant developed by BioNTech and Pfizer, the head of the European Commission said. Pfizer and BioNTech began development of a prototype Omicron-specific vaccine on November 25, and said they could have it ready in March. "The Member States have agreed to trigger a first tranche of over 180 million extra doses of adapted vaccines, in our third contract with BioNTech-Pfizer," Ursula von der Leyen told a news conference on Thursday night at the end of a regular summit with EU leaders.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/eu-place-order-with-pfizer-covid-shots-adapted-omicron-2021-12-17/>

### **Moderna Drops Pursuit of U.S. Patent for Key Component of Covid-19 Vaccine**

Moderna Inc. has abandoned its application for a U.S. patent covering its Covid-19 vaccine that has been the subject of a heated dispute with the National Institutes of Health over the invention of a key component of the shot. The Cambridge, Mass., company said Friday it dropped the patent application "to allow more time for discussions with the NIH" aimed at an amicable resolution. At issue was credit for a key component of Moderna's Covid-19 vaccine, among the most widely used in the world. Patent holders could seek a cut of the shot's billions of dollars in sales, though NIH hasn't said whether it is interested in royalties.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/moderna-drops-pursuit-of-u-s-patent-for-key-component-of-covid-19-vaccine-11639782753>

## **Coronavirus Resurgence**

---

### **Omicron coronavirus cases surge in UK, scientists see bigger wave**

Britain reported a surge in cases of the Omicron coronavirus variant on Saturday which government advisors said could be just the tip of the iceberg, and London's mayor declared a "major incident" to help the city's hospitals cope. The number of Omicron cases recorded across the country hit almost 25,000 as of 1800 GMT on Friday, up by more than 10,000 cases from 24 hours earlier, the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) said. Seven people believed to have had the Omicron variant had died as of Thursday, up from one death in the UKHSA's previous data which ran up to Tuesday. Admissions to hospital of people thought to have the variant increased to 85 from 65.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/london-declares-major-incident-help-covid-hit-hospitals-2021-12-18/>

### **Australia undaunted by mounting COVID-19 cases**

Australian officials on Sunday said there was no need to clamp down on Christmas festivities even as new COVID-19 infections climbed in Sydney, with the country's high vaccination rate helping keep people out of hospital. Health Minister Greg Hunt said he was confident Australia would not need to follow the Netherlands, which has reimposed a strict lockdown over the Christmas and New Year period to curb the spread of the highly contagious Omicron variant

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/australia-says-it-is-well-prepared-mounting-covid-19-cases-2021-12-19/>

### **S. Africa Covid-19 Hospitalizations Fall for First Time in Weeks**

South African hospitals reported having slightly fewer Covid-19 patients than yesterday, the first decline in weeks. Still, the National Institute of Communicable Diseases, does caution that figures can be skewed by late reporting of admissions. Even so the number could be taken as more evidence that the wave of infections caused by the omicron variant may be slowing. On Friday the South African Medical Research Council said that wastewater analyses showed a decreasing incidence of the virus in Pretoria, the South African capital.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-12-18/s-africa-covid-19-hospitalizations-fall-for-first-time-in-weeks>

### **China reports 125 new COVID-19 cases on Dec 17**

China reported 125 new confirmed coronavirus cases for Dec. 17, up from 76 a day earlier, its health authority said on Saturday. Of the new infections, 89 were locally transmitted, according to a statement by the National Health Commission, compared with 56 a day earlier. Most of the new local

cases, 77 cases, were reported by authorities in the eastern province of Zhejiang. China reported 19 new asymptomatic cases, which it classifies separately from confirmed cases, compared with 23 a day earlier.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/china/china-reports-125-new-covid-19-cases-dec-17-2021-12-18/>

### **Spain's coronavirus infection rate rises to 'very high risk' level**

Spain's coronavirus infection rate rose above 500 cases per 100,000 people on Friday, crossing over the threshold considered "very high risk" by the Health Ministry and more than doubling since the start of December. On Friday the infection rate, or incidence, as measured over the preceding 14 days, was 511 cases per 100,000, up 38 points on Thursday's 473. There were 33,359 new infections and 41 deaths according to Health Ministry data. Roughly 80% of Spain's population of 47 million has been fully vaccinated against COVID-19, and some 10 million have received booster shots.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/spains-coronavirus-infection-rate-rises-very-high-risk-level-2021-12-17/>

## **New Lockdown**

---

### **Netherlands starts 'painful' Christmas coronavirus lockdown**

Dutch urban centres were largely deserted on Sunday as the country began a snap lockdown that, aimed at stemming an expected COVID-19 surge caused by the fast-spreading Omicron variant, left people's Christmas plans in disarray. Prime Minister Mark Rutte announced the shutdown on Saturday evening, ordering the closure of all but essential stores, as well as restaurants, hairdressers, gyms, museums and other public places from Sunday until at least Jan. 14. In Rotterdam, police used a water cannon to disperse a group of around 1,000 people who had gathered outside the city's main soccer stadium, ahead of a clash between local team Feyenoord and bitter rivals Ajax Amsterdam.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/netherlands-starts-painful-christmas-coronavirus-lockdown-2021-12-19/>

### **Officials draw up plans for two-week 'circuit breaker' lockdown**

Plans for a two-week circuit breaker lockdown after Xmas are being drawn up. Leaked minutes from a SAGE meeting said restrictions are needed 'very soon.' During the Thursday meeting, the experts backed a ban on indoor social contact. It is believed that they want fresh measures to come in before January 1

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10323203/Officials-draw-plans-two-week-circuit-breaker-lockdown.html>

### **Virus News: Netherlands Goes Back Into Lockdown**

The Dutch government announced plans to enforce a stricter lockdown to stem a surge in coronavirus infections caused by the spread of the omicron variant. "Omicron spreads even quicker than we feared. That is why we have to act now, to prevent worse," Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte said Saturday at a news conference in The Hague. "We are going back into a lockdown." The tougher measures mean the country pivots from evening restrictions that shuttered shops, bars and restaurants after 5 p.m. to a so-called full lockdown that allows only supermarkets and essential shops to stay open. They'll take effect on Sunday and last until at least Jan. 14. All schools and universities will stay closed while the stricter curbs last.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-12-18/the-dutch-roll-out-stricter-lockdown-measures-as-omicron-spreads>