

COVID-19 Lockdown Exit Analysis

19th Jan 2022

Lockdown Exit

Covid pandemic is 'nowhere near over' and new variants are likely to emerge, WHO warns

WHO chief warned against dismissing the coronavirus Omicron variant as mild. Omicron more contagious than previous variants but causes less serious disease. Some have suggested that Covid is passing from pandemic stage to endemic. But Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus warned that the sheer numbers of people still being infected will mean many vulnerable people falling ill and dying

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10415297/Covid-pandemic-near-new-variants-likely-emerge-warns.html>

Swift End to Covid Threatened by Unvaccinated Faraway Locales

After losing her son who got infected with Covid-19 last year, 79-year-old Tomasa Valdez was desperate to get vaccinated. But on the remote Philippine island of San Salvador, where she lives, there were no shots to be had. Getting to the mainland, where the vaccinations were available, meant a boat ride that was arduous at her age and expensive for her meager income from drying sea grass which she sells for less than 100 pesos (\$1.95) a sack. Help only arrived in December 2021 -- 10 months after the Philippines began its national program and about a year after Western nations like the U.S. and U.K. started theirs.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-18/swift-end-to-covid-threatened-by-unvaccinated-faraway-locale>

Covid Infections Ravage Venezuela's Congress, Delaying Session

Dozens of Venezuelan lawmakers tested positive for Covid-19 Tuesday amid a wave of new infections in the country, delaying the start of a meeting of congress. Forty-two members of the National Assembly tested positive for the disease on Tuesday ahead of a meeting of the legislative body,

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-18/covid-infections-ravage-venezuela-s-congress-delaying-session>

COVID-19 concerns force U.N. to prepare tsunami-hit Tonga relief aid at a distance

The United Nations is preparing for distanced relief operations in Tonga to avoid a COVID-19 outbreak in the Pacific island nation that is reeling under the impact of a volcanic eruption and tsunami, an official said on Wednesday. All the homes on one of Tonga's small outer islands have been destroyed and three people have so far been confirmed dead, the government said in its first statement after Saturday's devastating eruption. With communications badly hampered by the severing of an undersea cable, information on the scale of the devastation so far has mostly come from reconnaissance aircraft.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/covid-19-concerns-force-un-prepare-tsunami-hit-tonga-relief-aid-distance-2022-01-18/>

French Covid Infections Hit Record as Patients Fill Up Hospitals

France registered a record number of daily Covid-19 infections as the omicron variant spreads across the country, sending a growing number of patients to hospitals. New cases totaled 464,769 Tuesday, according to data from the public health office. That far surpassed the previous high of 368,149 recorded a week ago. The surge comes as France is poised to require a complete vaccination regimen for many public activities -- from eating in restaurants to attending the theater or getting on an airplane -- saying a recent negative test isn't good enough anymore

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-18/french-covid-infections-hit-record-as-patients-fill-up-hospitals>

COVID-19: All Omicron restrictions in Scotland to be lifted next Monday

Nightclubs will reopen and limits on hospitality come to an end as all of Scotland's Omicron coronavirus restrictions are lifted next Monday. The changes - first introduced to slow the spread of the Omicron variant - will take place from 24 January, as First Minister Nicola Sturgeon confirmed the country is on a "downward slope" of infections. The requirement for table service in hospitality will come to an end and attendance limits on indoor events will also be lifted, as well as restrictions preventing adults from taking part in indoor contact

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-all-omicron-restrictions-in-scotland-to-be-lifted-next-monday-12519177>

Sweden scraps demand for negative COVID test to enter country

Travelers to Sweden will no longer be required to show a negative COVID test before entering the country, the government said on Tuesday. Sweden introduced rules for a recent negative COVID test on Dec. 28 last year in a bid to slow the spread of the more contagious Omicron variant. Since then, Sweden has repeatedly set new daily case records with Omicron now the totally dominant variant. "Travelers are no longer considered to pose a particular risk of affecting the spread of Omicron in Sweden," the government said

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/sweden-scraps-demand-negative-covid-test-enter-country-2022-01-18/>

Denmark eases coronavirus restrictions, as cases hit new record

Denmark registered a record number of coronavirus infections on Monday, as cinemas, museums and other cultural institutions reopened after a month-long COVID-19 lockdown. The Nordic country registered 28,780 new cases in the space of 24 hours and the number of coronavirus-related hospitalisations rose to 802, the highest in a year. Still, health authorities said earlier this month that the now-predominant Omicron variant was milder than initially thought and that around 29% of those in hospital were there due to reasons other than COVID-19

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/denmark-eases-coronavirus-restrictions-cases-hit-new-record-2022-01-17/>

Analysis: With Omicron, global economy spots chance to push past COVID

Governments worldwide are easing quarantine rules, reviewing coronavirus curbs and dialling back pandemic-era emergency support as they bid to launch their economies back into some version of normality. The moves, motivated by the lower severity of the Omicron variant and the need to keep workers in work and the global recovery on track, have generated a whiff of optimism that has lifted oil and stock prices. Health experts say the variant's rapid spread may yet herald a turning point in the pandemic.

<https://www.reuters.com/markets/europe/with-omicron-global-economy-spots-chance-push-past-covid-2022-01-18/>

Exit Strategies

Britain preparing for end-June switch to paid COVID tests - document

British health officials are aiming to be ready to start charging Britons for COVID-19 tests that are currently free at the end of June, a document seen by Reuters shows, in what could be a risky gambit for the government. Britain has been increasingly dependent on rapid testing to try to tackle the more-transmissible Omicron variant, which has spread rapidly through the population but is less severe. The government has previously said it will end the universal free provision of easy-to-use lateral flow devices (LFDs) at a "later stage", with individuals and businesses bearing the cost.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/exclusive-britain-preparing-end-june-switch-paid-covid-tests-document-2022-01-18/>

U.S. website to order free COVID-19 tests up and running

The U.S. government's new COVIDTests.gov website, set up for American households to order four free COVID-19 tests amid the Omicron variant surge, is up and running ahead of its official launch on Wednesday, the White House said. U.S. households can secure four tests at no cost when ordering

from the website, with shipping expected within seven to 12 days of ordering, the White House said on Friday. President Joe Biden has pledged to procure 1 billion free tests for Americans, and more may be ordered in the future.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-website-order-free-covid-19-tests-up-running-2022-01-18/>

Thailand to lower COVID-19 alert, ease curbs as infections slow

Thailand will lower its COVID-19 alert level and is considering easing more restrictions to boost its economy, its health minister said on Tuesday, in response to a slower infection rate. Among measures being considered are establishing more "sandbox" areas for tourists, who can skip quarantine if they stay in specified areas for seven days and undergo two COVID-19 tests. Nightclubs, pubs and bars will remain closed for now, however, Health Minister Anutin Charnvirakul told reporters, adding the COVID-19 alert level will be lowered to 3, from 4, on the government's 5-level system

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/thailand-lower-covid-19-alert-ease-curbs-infections-slow-2022-01-18/>

Texas, Arizona Have Recovered All the Jobs Lost When Covid-19 Hit

Texas and Arizona have joined two other states in recovering all the jobs they lost at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, leading a trend that is expected to include another dozen states by the middle of this year. The states, which also include Utah and Idaho, have benefited from demographic shifts before and during the pandemic—experiencing outsize payroll growth in retail, warehousing, technology and transportation industries. Companies have moved operations to the states, and workers have moved in as well, sometimes leaving more crowded and expensive urban areas. The states—all Republican controlled—also have had relatively relaxed Covid-19 restrictions during the pandemic, which economists say softened the blow on their economies.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/texas-arizona-have-recovered-all-the-jobs-lost-when-covid-19-hit-11642501805>

Israel sticks with 4th vaccine shot, sees Omicron wave waning in a week

Israel will continue to offer a fourth COVID-19 vaccine shot despite preliminary findings that it is not enough to prevent Omicron infections, the Health Ministry said on Tuesday, predicting contagions stoked by the variant will wane in a week. With his government scaling back Omicron countermeasures to ease the strain on the economy, Prime Minister Naftali Bennett sought to cast Israel's still-high case numbers primarily as a result of an en-masse testing drive rather than infection rates.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/israel-sticks-with-4th-vaccine-shot-sees-omicron-waning-week-2022-01-18/>

Abu Dhabi requires booster shots to enter the emirate

Facing a nationwide surge in coronavirus cases fueled by the spread of the highly transmissible omicron variant, Abu Dhabi is requiring people entering the city to show proof of booster shots. The government's health app said earlier this week that people entering the capital of the United Arab Emirates must show a "green pass," confirming their vaccination status. The app says that visitors are no longer considered fully vaccinated unless they have received a booster at least six months after their second dose. Those wishing to enter Abu Dhabi also must have tested negative for the virus within the last two weeks to maintain their "green" status.

<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-health-middle-east-dubai-united-arab-emirates-b9fa075f196f00935e53af20c31a4265>

Rising Omicron Infections May Force Idaho to Return to Hospital Rationing

Rising Covid-19 omicron infections could force Idaho to start rationing hospital care again as health care workers fall ill, the state's top health official warned Tuesday. If the trend continues, "it is likely Idaho will enter crisis of standards of care for a second time," Dave Jeppesen, director of the state Department of Health and Welfare, said during an online briefing. The state ended rationing Dec. 20. One in four people tested for Covid-19 in Idaho are receiving positive results, the highest statewide

positivity rate of the pandemic, Jeppesen said.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-18/idaho-could-return-to-hospital-rationing-due-to-omicron>

Morrisons confirms sick pay cut for unvaccinated staff

Supermarket Morrisons has confirmed it has cut sick pay for unvaccinated workers who are forced to isolate after being exposed to Covid. It follows similar moves from big retailers including Ikea, Next and Ocado as staff absences rise. Unjabbed Morrisons workers who are told to isolate but test negative now get statutory sick pay of £96.35 a week. Covid-positive staff get full sick pay regardless of vaccination status. The firm pays staff at least £10 per hour.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-59902929>

Partisan Exits

Hong Kong police arrest two ex-flight attendants over COVID-19 rule breach

Hong Kong police said they have arrested and charged two former flight attendants over allegations they broke the city's coronavirus rules. The statement, which was published late on Monday, did not name the airline but the announcement comes after Cathay Pacific said in January it had fired two aircrew who were suspected of breaching COVID-19 protocols. Police said the two had returned to Hong Kong from the United States on Dec. 24 and 25 where they had "conducted unnecessary activities" during their home isolation period.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/china/hong-kong-police-arrest-two-ex-flight-attendants-over-covid-19-rule-breach-2022-01-18/>

British PM Johnson denies lying about lockdown party

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson denied on Tuesday an accusation by his former adviser that he had lied to parliament about a lockdown party, saying nobody had warned him the "bring your own booze" gathering might contravene COVID-19 rules. Johnson faces the gravest crisis of his tenure after revelations about gatherings during lockdowns, some when British people could not even bid farewell in person to dying relatives and the Queen was mourning her husband.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/it-is-nonsense-that-uk-pm-johnson-lied-about-lockdown-party-deputy-pm-raab-says-2022-01-18/>

Djokovic has to comply with rules to go to Spain, PM says

World men's tennis No. 1 Novak Djokovic will have to comply with Spanish health rules to be able to travel to Spain, Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said on Monday. Answering a question on whether Djokovic would be allowed to enter Spain to compete after Australia deported him for being unvaccinated against COVID-19, Sanchez said: "Any sportsperson who wishes to compete in our country must comply with the health rules of Spain".

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/djokovic-has-comply-with-rules-go-spain-pm-says-2022-01-17/>

Scientific Viewpoint

Pfizer's New Covid-19 Pill Works Against Omicron in Lab

Pfizer Inc.'s new Covid-19 pill, Paxlovid, was effective against the Omicron variant in laboratory tests, an encouraging early sign the drug will be an important tool while the strain spreads. Pfizer said Tuesday the drug's main component, nirmatrelvir, worked in three separate laboratory studies. Patients take two tablets of nirmatrelvir with one tablet of another antiviral called ritonavir twice a day for five days. The company issued the results by news release. The research hasn't been published in a peer-reviewed medical journal.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/pfizers-new-covid-19-pill-works-against-omicron-in-lab-11642528120>

Placebo effect accounts for more than two-thirds of COVID-19 vaccine adverse events, researchers find

The placebo effect is the well-known phenomenon of a person's physical or mental health improving after taking a treatment with no pharmacological therapeutic benefit—a sugar pill, or a syringe full of saline, for example. While the exact biological, psychological and genetic underpinnings of the placebo effect are not well understood, some theories point to expectations as the primary cause and others argue that non-conscious factors embedded in the patient-physician relationship automatically turn down the volume of symptoms

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2022-01-placebo-effect-accounts-two-thirds-covid-.html>

Merck signs supply deal with UNICEF for 3 mln courses of COVID-19 pill

Merck & Co Inc and partner Ridgeback Biotherapeutics said on Tuesday they had signed an agreement with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to supply up to 3 million courses of their COVID-19 antiviral pill. Merck would supply the pill, molnupiravir, to UNICEF through the first half of 2022 for distribution in more than 100 low- and middle-income countries upon regulatory authorizations, the companies said. The pill received authorization from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration in December and has also been authorized in several other countries including India, Mexico and the UK. Many countries have signed supply deals with Merck for the drug.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/merck-signs-supply-deal-with-unicef-3-mln-courses-covid-19-pill-2022-01-18/>

EU regulator finds mRNA COVID-19 shots safe during pregnancy

COVID-19 vaccines made using mRNA technology do not cause pregnancy complications for expectant mothers and their babies, the European Union's drug regulator said on Tuesday, following a detailed review of several studies. The review based on studies involving around 65,000 pregnancies at different stages did not find any sign of higher risk of complications, miscarriages, preterm births or severe side-effects on the unborn babies from mRNA shots, the European Medicines Agency said.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/eu-regulator-finds-mrna-covid-19-shots-safe-during-pregnancy-2022-01-18/>

Hong Kong to cull 2000 hamsters after COVID-19 outbreak

Hong Kong warned people not to kiss pets and ordered a mass cull of hamsters on Tuesday, to the outrage of animal-lovers, after 11 of the rodents tested positive for COVID-19. A recent coronavirus cluster in humans traced to a pet shop worker prompted checks on hundreds of animals in the Chinese-ruled territory, with 11 hamsters found infected, officials said. Echoing the mainland's zero-tolerance policy even as much of the world shifts to living with COVID, Hong Kong ordered 2,000 hamsters "humanely" put down, and imports and sales stopped.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/china/hong-kong-orders-hamster-cull-after-covid-19-hits-pets-2022-01-18/>

WHO urges manufacturers to provide COVID-19 vaccine data

A World Health Organization committee urged COVID-19 vaccine manufacturers on Tuesday to provide it with the data it requires in order to list their shots for emergency use, saying the delays were affecting equitable vaccine access. An emergency use listing with the U.N. agency means shots can be shipped to multiple developing nations that rely on WHO guidance for their regulatory decisions. It also allows them to be used by the COVAX vaccine-sharing programme that aims to ramp up vaccinations in poorer countries.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/who-urges-manufacturers-provide-covid-19-vaccine-data-2022-01-18/>

Covid-19 Infected Lions Prompt Variant Warning in South Africa

Lions and pumas at a zoo in the South African capital of Pretoria got severe Covid-19 from asymptomatic zoo handlers, raising concerns that new variants could emerge from animal reservoirs of the disease,

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-18/covid-19-infected-lions-prompt-variant-warning-in-south-africa>

'Deltacron': Should we worry about new COVID-19 variants merging?

During the past week, my inbox has been flooded with messages telling me a new COVID-19 variant had been discovered in Cyprus. Dubbed "Deltacron", it was said to be responsible for a series of hospitalisations in the country. I groaned at the thought of a new variant and one that was said to be a combination of the Delta and Omicron variants sounded ominous. So, I decided to do some digging.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2022/1/17/deltacron-and-flurona-should-we-worry-about-covid-19-variant>

2,000 hamsters to be culled in Hong Kong over fears of animal-to-human Covid-19 link

Hong Kong authorities have asked pet shops and owners to hand over about 2,000 hamsters for a mass cull and temporarily suspended imports of small animals after finding evidence of the first possible animal-to-human transmission of Covid-19 in the city. Officials on Tuesday also ordered all 34 licensed pet stores that sell hamsters to suspend operations and about 150 customers who had visited the Little Boss shop in Causeway Bay since January 7 to enter quarantine. Pet owners whose hamsters test positive must also be isolated as well. While animal welfare groups expressed shock at the "drastic action", authorities and health experts stressed the risks to public health made the cull necessary. Two people tied to the Little Boss shop have been confirmed as infected and another is listed as a suspected case, while 11 hamsters from the store were categorised as preliminary-positive.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/article/3163775/coronavirus-hong-kong-leader-worried-about-community-outbreak>

'The next variant is just around the corner': Experts warn the world's at risk until all are vaccinated

New Covid-19 variants are likely to keep on emerging until the globe has been vaccinated against the virus, experts warn, saying that the sharing of vaccines is not just an altruistic act but a pragmatic one. "Until the whole world is vaccinated, not just rich Western countries, I think we are going to remain in danger of new variants coming along and some of those could be more virulent than omicron," Dr. Andrew Freedman, an academic in infectious diseases at Cardiff University Medical School, told CNBC on Thursday. Viruses "tend to become milder" as they evolve, Freedman noted, but he cautioned that this "isn't always the case."

<https://www.cnn.com/2022/01/06/new-covid-variants-are-a-danger-until-the-whole-world-is-vaccinated.html>

Your Child's Fussy Eating May Stem From Covid-19

Covid infection could be turning more and more children into fussy eaters, experts have suggested. This may be because they are suffering from parosmia - a disorder where people experience strange and often unpleasant smell distortions. For example, chocolate may smell like petrol, or someone may smell rotting cabbage instead of lemon. Smell experts at the University of East Anglia and Fifth Sense, the charity for people affected by smell and taste disorders, say children in particular may be finding it hard to eat foods they once loved. Fifth Sense and Carl Philpott, from UEA's Norwich Medical School, are launching guidance to help parents and healthcare professionals better recognise the disorder.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-18/your-child-s-fussy-eating-may-stem-from-covid-19>

China cites coronavirus on packaging, despite doubts abroad

Chinese state media say parcels mailed from overseas may have spread the omicron variant of the coronavirus in Beijing and elsewhere, despite doubts among overseas health experts that the virus can be transmitted via packaging. The State Post Bureau said it has ordered stronger measures to ventilate and disinfect sites where items mailed from overseas are handled. Postal workers must wear protective equipment, receive booster shots and undergo regular testing, it said on its website.

International packages must be isolated, cleaned and held for a waiting period to ensure they are free from the virus, it said. Global health experts say the virus mainly spreads through respiratory droplets when infected people breathe, speak, cough and sneeze.

<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-science-health-business-china-81e8dba1471f55309d112749d9c71aa5>

Uncorking today's Covid-19 supply chain to meet the challenges of future pandemics

At what point do the benefits of local production of medical supplies outweigh the potentially higher cost? The sudden and near-overwhelming demand for Covid-19 testing during the Omicron phase of the pandemic means that the U.S. is now at a critical point where we need better — and quicker — access to testing supplies via a domestic supply chain. Over the last three decades, the world's economy has become increasingly globalized, resulting in lower inflation-adjusted prices for goods and products and improved standards of living around the world. The Covid-19 pandemic has provided an opportunity to once again debate the United States' reliance on inexpensive overseas manufacturing, and reconsider the value of high-quality domestic production.

<https://www.statnews.com/2022/01/18/covid-19-supply-meet-challenges-future-pandemics/>

U.S. would seek global approach to updating Covid-19 vaccines, official says

If the Food and Drug Administration decides to update Covid-19 vaccines to take better aim at Omicron or other variants, it is unlikely to go it alone. Instead, a senior FDA official told STAT, the agency expects to take part in an internationally coordinated program aimed at deciding if, when, and how to update Covid-19 vaccines. The approach would ensure decisions are not left solely to individual vaccine manufacturers. "We can't have our manufacturers going willy-nilly [saying], 'Oh well, the EMA decided they wanted this composition, but FDA wanted that composition,'" the official said, referring to the European Medicines Agency. "So we are very much of the mind that we would like to be part of a more global process in helping to come to what vaccine composition there should be now."

<https://www.statnews.com/2022/01/18/u-s-would-seek-global-approach-to-updating-covid-19-vaccines-official-says/>

Coronavirus Resurgence

Japan PM plans stronger COVID curbs for Tokyo, 12 other regions

Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said on Tuesday he planned to impose a state of quasi-emergency, meaning stronger COVID-19 curbs on dining and gatherings, on 13 regions including Tokyo from Jan. 21 to Feb. 13. He said the government had halted a programme where those vaccinated or with negative test results would be exempted from coronavirus restrictions as virus cases jumped.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/japan-pm-plans-stronger-covid-curbs-tokyo-12-other-regions-2022-01-18/>

Nepal says COVID-19 cases may double as daily infections hit record level

Nepal recorded 10,258 new coronavirus infections on Tuesday, government data showed, the highest number reported in a single day as the government projected the tally could double by the end of the month. Total infections topped 972,198 and COVID-19-related deaths stood at 11,624. The previous daily record was 9,483 cases in May last year.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/nepal-says-covid-19-cases-may-double-daily-infections-hit-record-level-2022-01-18/>

Romania sees biggest daily jump in COVID-19 cases in three months

Romania reported 16,760 new cases of COVID-19 on Tuesday, more than double on the day and the biggest single-day rise since October, as the Omicron coronavirus variant takes hold. Romania is the European Union's second-least vaccinated state, with just under 41% of the population fully inoculated amid distrust of state institutions and poor vaccine education. The number of new

infections was approaching a record high of 18,863 daily cases seen in October, official data showed, but hospitalisations were still relatively low.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/romania-sees-biggest-daily-jump-covid-19-cases-three-months-2022-01-18/>

Australia suffers deadliest day of pandemic as Omicron drives up hospital cases

Australia suffered its deadliest day of the pandemic on Tuesday as a fast-moving Omicron outbreak continued to push up hospitalisation rates to record levels, even as daily infections eased slightly. Australia is dealing with its worst COVID-19 outbreak, fuelled by the Omicron variant of the coronavirus that has put more people in hospitals and intensive care than at any time during the pandemic. A total of 77 deaths was recorded, exceeding the previous national high of 57 last Thursday, official data showed.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/australia-suffers-deadliest-day-pandemic-omicron-drives-up-hospital-cases-2022-01-18/>

Czech Republic sees biggest daily jump in COVID cases since Dec 1

The Czech Republic reported on Tuesday more than 20,000 new cases of COVID-19, the biggest single-day rise since Dec. 1, the Health Ministry said. The central European country of 10.7 million is bracing for a new wave of the pandemic as the Omicron variant of the coronavirus begins pushing up cases. The government has shortened quarantine and isolation times as part of new measures while also launching mandatory testing of employees at companies, which got underway this week.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/czech-republic-sees-biggest-daily-jump-covid-cases-since-dec-1-2022-01-18/>

Tianjin reports fewer COVID-19 cases; curbs affect some Boeing employees

The Chinese city of Tianjin reported fewer COVID-19 cases on Tuesday after measures such as conducting mass testing and locking down some areas to curb the highly transmissible Omicron variant, steps that have also affected the local operations of foreign firms such as Boeing. Tianjin, a key port in northern China, reported 18 domestically transmitted cases with confirmed symptoms for Monday, National Health Commission (NHC) data showed on Tuesday. That marks the lowest daily number in a week.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/china/chinas-tianjin-reports-fewer-covid-19-cases-its-outbreak-shows-sign-easing-2022-01-18/>

South American health networks struggling as Omicron cases rise

The rapid spread of the Omicron coronavirus variant has prompted dire warnings from healthcare workers across South America, as pressure builds at hospitals whose employees are taking sick leave, leaving facilities understaffed to cope with COVID-19. A major hospital in Bolivia's largest city stopped admitting new patients due to a lack of personnel. One of Brazil's most populous states cancelled scheduled surgeries for a month. And Argentina's federation of private healthcare providers told the Associated Press news agency that it estimates about 15 percent of its health workers currently have the virus.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/1/17/south-american-health-networks-struggling-as-omicron-cases-rise>

Philippine COVID deaths may be double the current number

Deaths in the Philippines due to the COVID-19 pandemic may be double the health department's official numbers, according to a new government report, as the country battles a record-breaking wave of the pandemic due to the Omicron variant. In a preliminary report released on Monday, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) put "registered deaths due to COVID-19" at 75,285 from January to October 2021.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/1/18/philippine-covid-deaths-may-be-double-than-current-number-report>

Poland has entered a fifth wave of COVID, says minister

Poland is experiencing a fifth wave of COVID-19 infections, the health minister said on Monday, warning that the spread of the Omicron variant could send daily case numbers soaring to levels not yet seen in the country. While daily case numbers have fallen since early December, the European Union's largest eastern member has had little respite since the fourth wave, regularly reporting over 10,000 new infections per day amid low vaccine take-up and limited restrictions on public life.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/poland-has-entered-fifth-wave-covid-says-minister-2022-01-17/>