

COVID-19 Lockdown Exit Analysis

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Lockdown Exit

Covid-19 Cases Fall Sharply in India's Biggest Cities, Raising Hopes for Nearing Peak

A swift decline of cases following a huge surge is a pattern seen with the Omicron variant in other countries such as South Africa, epidemiologists say. But they are watching India especially closely because of its large population, its relatively low vaccination rate and the severity of last year's wave—factors which led public-health experts to warn the country's hospitals could be overwhelmed by Omicron. "The virus is meeting up with a whole population of people already previously infected and immune or vaccinated and immune," said T. Jacob John, a retired professor of virology at the Christian Medical College in India's southern city of Vellore. "That adds to the mildness of the disease."

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/covid-19-cases-fall-sharply-in-indias-biggest-cities-raising-hopes-for-nearing-peak-11642596397>

Scientists develop new Covid diagnosis test using X rays

A new covid diagnosis could replace PCR tests using X-rays - within minutes. Experts developed Artificial Intelligence (AI) to detect the virus faster than PCR. In testing, this groundbreaking technique was found to be 98 per cent accurate. It is hoped that this technology could be used to aid medical staff on frontline.

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10419947/Scientists-develop-new-Covid-diagnosis-test-using-X-rays.html>

Airlines Step Up Hygiene to Keep Covid Out of the Air

In that long-ago time before the pandemic, most travelers chose an airline based on a single, straightforward factor: price. And those who didn't grab the cheapest fare typically steered their business toward a carrier where they had frequent-flyer miles. Cleanliness, by contrast, barely registered. These days, hygiene is the most important factor in choosing a travel company for almost 60% of Americans, according to a survey by aerospace products manufacturer Honeywell International Inc. That tracks with International Air Transport Association data showing that passengers worry about boarding planes, with 42% of them uncomfortable using lavatories and more than a third concerned about breathing recirculated cabin air. "We know that our customers are more conscious than ever about hygiene," says Anil Jain, engineering chief at Air India Express, which has introduced robots to clean its planes. "We need to be proactive."

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-19/airlines-step-up-plane-hygiene-and-safety-measures-to-keep-covid-out>

Beijing Covid Flareup Worsens with New Clusters at Cold Storage

China's capital found a Covid-19 cluster among cold chain workers on Wednesday, the latest sign the country is seeing more infections resulting from a controversial claim of transmission through contaminated goods. Five people who worked at a cold chain storage facility in the Fangshan district of Beijing tested positive for Covid, with genetic sequencing showing three of them were infected by the delta variant, Beijing officials said at a briefing on Wednesday. The refrigeration facility also deals with imports, and the workers who tested positive hadn't left the city in the past two weeks, they added. While authorities are still investigating the source of the infection, the cluster among cold chain workers adds to a growing body of cases linked to exposure to Covid-contaminated goods ranging from frozen seafood and fruits to international parcels.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-19/beijing-covid-flareup-worsens-with-new-clusters-at-cold-storage>

China's Zero Covid, Vaccine Program Leaves It With Omicron Whack-a-Mole

The U.S. recently passed the grim marker of 850,000 deaths from Covid-19. By contrast, China has recorded 4,636 Covid-related deaths since the pandemic began. And yet the policies that were so successful for Beijing over the past two years have now become something of a trap. On the face of it, China has changed its policy to reflect its high rate of vaccination. Beijing recently replaced “Zero Covid,” an approach that kept infections and deaths extremely low while allowing the economy to grow, with what it calls “dynamic clearing.” The new policy accepts that infections will happen and empowers local regions to deal with them.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2022-01-19/china-s-zero-covid-vaccine-program-leaves-it-with-omicron-whack-a-mole>

Omicron Pushes Japan to Consider Living With Covid Like the Flu

Calls are growing in Japan to treat Covid-19 as endemic, adding to a global chorus pushing for a return to normal life as people tire of pandemic restrictions, vaccines become more accessible and virus deaths remain low. Drawing on data that shows omicron posing a less severe risk than previous variants, public figures from Tokyo’s governor to former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe have signaled their support for downgrading the legal status of the virus in Japan. The change would widen health care access for patients, effectively casting the virus as no different than the flu.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-19/omicron-pushes-japan-to-consider-living-with-covid-like-the-flu>

End of Plan B Covid Restrictions: Boris Johnson Drops Work-From-Home Guidance

Most Covid-19 restrictions are being lifted in England over the coming days, Prime Minister Boris Johnson said, as he set out his ambition for a transition to “living with” the virus -- including the end of mandatory isolation for positive cases -- by the end of March. People are no longer being asked to work from home, and rules forcing people to wear face masks in shops and on public transport will be dropped from Jan. 27, Johnson told the House of Commons on Wednesday. Mandatory Covid passes for businesses will also end next week. The move unwinds rules put in place in December, when the omicron variant was spreading rapidly across the U.K. “Scientists believe it is likely that the Omicron wave has now peaked nationally,” Johnson said.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-19/johnson-drops-work-from-home-guidance-as-covid-cases-dwindle>

Prior COVID infection more protective than vaccination during Delta surge -U.S. study

People who had previously been infected with COVID-19 were better protected against the Delta variant than those who were vaccinated alone, suggesting that natural immunity was a more potent shield than vaccines against that variant, California and New York health officials reported on Wednesday. Protection against Delta was highest, however, among people who were both vaccinated and had survived a previous COVID infection, and lowest among those who had never been infected or vaccinated, the study found. Nevertheless, vaccination remains the safest strategy against COVID-19, according to the report published in U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/prior-covid-infection-more-protective-than-vaccination-during-delta-surge-us-2022-01-19/>

Starbucks suspends vaccine, test requirement after U.S. court ruling

Starbucks Corp suspended COVID-19 vaccine-or-test requirement for U.S. employees that had been mandated by the government, according to a memo sent to workers on Tuesday, following an adverse U.S. Supreme Court ruling. The coffee giant had said earlier this month it would require its around 220,000 U.S. employees to be fully vaccinated against COVID-19 or undergo weekly testing.

The U.S. Supreme Court last week struck down Joe Biden administration's vaccination-or-testing mandate for large businesses, ruling that the policy overstepped executive authority.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/retail-consumer/starbucks-suspends-vaccine-test-requirement-after-us-court-ruling-2022-01-19/>

Greece imposes rolling fines to push COVID-19 vaccinations in older people

Greece has begun imposing recurring fines on those over the age of 60 who are unvaccinated against COVID-19 to try to boost inoculation in the most vulnerable age group even as infection rates from the fast-spreading Omicron variant are slowing. After hitting an all-time high of 50,126 registered coronavirus infections on Jan. 4, mainly driven by the spread of the Omicron variant over the Christmas holidays, cases have been falling in recent days

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/greece-imposes-rolling-fines-push-covid-19-vaccinations-older-people-2022-01-19/>

Coronavirus spreading like never before in Americas, health agency says

COVID-19 infections are reaching new peaks in the Americas with 7.2 million new cases and more than 15,000 COVID-related deaths in the last week, the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) said. "The virus is spreading more actively than ever before," PAHO Director Carissa Etienne told a briefing. The Caribbean has had the steepest increase in infections since the start of the two-year-old pandemic, the regional agency said. In North America, the United States and Canada are experiencing a surge of COVID-19 hospitalizations.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/coronavirus-spreading-like-never-before-americas-health-agency-warns-2022-01-19/>

UnitedHealth says Omicron-driven cost impact cushioned by healthcare deferrals

UnitedHealth Group Inc said added costs of testing and treatment related to the recent surge in COVID-19 cases are being offset by postponements of non-urgent healthcare procedures, and the health insurer maintained its 2022 profit forecast. The comments should help allay investor concerns that the steep rise in COVID infections and hospitalizations driven by the Omicron variant of the virus in recent weeks would significantly drive up medical costs for health insurers. Adding to those concerns was a Biden administration initiative requiring insurers to reimburse Americans for up to eight at-home rapid COVID-19 tests per month, while setting no limit for tests, including at-home tests, that insurers must cover if they are ordered or administered by a healthcare provider.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/health-insurer-unitedhealth-profit-rises-84-optum-strength-2022-01-19/>

U.S. judge calls unvaccinated adults 'unpatriotic' as Omicron prompts trial delay

A federal judge in Florida in a scathing order delayed an upcoming trial due to the surge in COVID-19 cases as he blasted adults who have yet to get vaccinated as "uninformed and irrational, or – less charitably – selfish and unpatriotic." U.S. District Judge Robert Scola, an appointee of former Democratic President Barack Obama, in Tuesday's order said that given the rapid spread of the Omicron variant, he had proposed requiring all jurors in the Feb. 7 trial to be vaccinated. But Scola said lawyers for Progressive Select Insurance Co, which is defending against claims for coverage by a motorist who was in a car crash in 2019, objected, saying they did not want to exclude unvaccinated jurors.

<https://www.reuters.com/legal/government/us-judge-calls-unvaccinated-adults-unpatriotic-omicron-prompts-trial-delay-2022-01-19/>

U.S. to distribute 400 million free N95 masks at CVS, Walgreens in COVID fight

The U.S. government will make 400 million non-surgical "N95" masks from its strategic national stockpile available for free to the public starting next week, a White House official said, as the Biden administration tries to curb the COVID-19 pandemic. Snug-fitting N95 face masks, so-called because

they filter at least 95% of particulate matter from the air, will be shipped to pharmacies and community health centers this week, the official said, and will be available for pickup late next week. The U.S. government is leveraging the "federal retail pharmacy program" it used for vaccines, the White House said, as well as federally funded health clinics that serve minority groups hit hard by COVID infections and deaths.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-make-400-million-n95-masks-available-free-fight-covid-19-pandemic-official-2022-01-19/>

Djokovic has 80% stake in biotech firm developing Covid drug

Novak Djokovic is the controlling shareholder in a Danish biotech firm aiming to develop a treatment for Covid-19 that does not involve vaccination, it has emerged. The world No 1, who was deported from Australia this week after the government cancelled his visa in a dispute over a medical exemption relating to his unvaccinated status, bought an 80% stake in QuantBioRes in 2020. Ivan Loncarevic, the company's chief executive, confirmed the investment to Reuters. He subsequently told the Financial Times that he had not spoken to Djokovic, who has won more than \$150m in prize money, since November and that the tennis star was "not anti-vax"

<https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2022/jan/19/novak-djokovic-stake-biotech-firm-quantbiores-covid>

Ireland announces annual bank holiday to honour Covid victims and workers

Ireland is to get a bank holiday as a national commemoration of those who have lost their lives to Covid and to recognise those who worked on the frontline of the pandemic, the government has announced. Frontline healthcare workers in hospitals and nursing homes are also to receive a €1,000 (£830) tax-free bonus for their contribution to the national pandemic effort as part of a package of measures agreed by the cabinet on Wednesday. The government has estimated the cost of the giveaway at €100m, but questions remain as to who will qualify for the ha

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/19/ireland-announces-annual-bank-holiday-to-honour-covid-victims-and-workers>

Why Some Vaccinated People Resist Omicron and Others Don't

A recent study led by Harvard and MIT showed that about 20% of people get much poorer protection from their vaccines against omicron. They're still better off than completely unvaccinated people, but this variability could account for some of the fully vaccinated people who've been hospitalized in the omicron wave. The researchers looked at blood samples from 76 volunteers to examine the part of the immune system known as the T cells. While antibodies wane over time, T cells last longer and provide a second line of defense by identifying and killing infected cells. In vaccinated people, T cells are primed to fight SARS-CoV-2 and can usually clear the infection within a couple of days. Many experts consider them the most critical part of our defenses against omicron.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2022-01-19/why-some-people-s-vaccines-fight-omicron-and-others-don-t>

Young Brazilians Studying Less, Dropping Out More During Covid

Young Brazilians are studying less and dropping out more during the pandemic, reversing decades of educational advances and exacerbating the country's demographic inequalities, a new study found. School dropout rates among children aged 5-9 years old rose from 1.4% in 2019 to 5.5% by the end of 2020, the highest percentage seen since 2006, according to research from the Getulio Vargas Foundation, a Brazilian think tank. Although the dropout rate improved to 4.25% in the third quarter of 2021, that was still 128% higher than before the pandemic. "Younger children, the age group in which we have made great educational advances in the last 40 years, is where we are having the greatest losses," co-author and economist Marcelo Neri said during a phone interview Wednesday. There was also a socioeconomic gap when it came to time spent hitting the books when school wasn't in session.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-19/young-brazilians-studying-less-dropping-out-more-during-covid>

Covid-19, Endemic or Not, Will Still Make Us Poorer

The prospect that Covid-19 is transitioning from pandemic to endemic has brought out the bulls on Wall Street. "Meaningful upside to our medium-term economic outlook," writes Bank of America Corp. "A positive for risk assets," says JPMorgan Chase & Co. A "silver lining" of the "highly infectious" Omicron variant, says BlackRock Inc. By "endemic," they mean Omicron will leave almost everyone highly immune through vaccination, prior infection, or both. Then, they reason, Covid-19 will be a more predictable, less deadly presence, much like flu, and the world will return to normal. Such optimism needs a reality check. This new normal won't be the same as the old normal: Endemic Covid-19 will still take a toll on health, work and mobility; the only question is how big.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/covid-19-endemic-or-not-will-still-make-us-poorer-11642608213>

Exit Strategies

China plays lonely game of Covid whack-a-hamster

Hamsters have become the latest victims of China's Covid-zero policy. Hong Kong is culling 2,000 read more of them after 11 tested positive, while Beijing curiously blames the mail for spreading the Omicron variant. Dogged devotion to an elimination strategy and the resulting disruptions are becoming farcical, and costly, as the rest of the world learns to live with the virus. Rising vaccination rates and the economic consequences of restrictions have prompted most policymakers to relax their approaches.

<https://www.reuters.com/markets/asia/china-plays-lonely-game-covid-whack-a-hamster-2022-01-19/>

Yellen says U.S. state, local aid strengthened cities' COVID responses

The \$350 billion in coronavirus relief aid for state and local governments has allowed U.S. cities to respond faster and stronger to an ever changing COVID-19 pandemic, U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said on Wednesday. Yellen told a meeting of the U.S. Conference of Mayors that the response by state and local governments is helping to blunt the impact of the highly-contagious Omicron coronavirus variant.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/yellen-says-us-state-local-aid-strengthened-cities-covid-responses-2022-01-19/>

Betting Omicron has peaked, England set to lift COVID rules

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson is set to announce the end of most COVID-19 measures introduced to curb the rapid spread of the Omicron variant in England as he looks to live with the virus after an apparent peak in cases. Britain was the first country to limit international travel over the Omicron variant, raising alarm bells about its mutations, and in December introduced work at home advice, more mask-wearing and vaccine passes to slow its spread. But while cases soared to record highs, hospitalisations and deaths have not risen by the same extent, in part due to Britain's booster rollout and the variant's lesser severity.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/betting-omicron-has-peaked-british-pm-johnson-set-lift-covid-rules-2022-01-19/>

Australia calls on backpackers to help ease Omicron-fuelled labour shortage

Australia threw out an invitation to backpackers on Wednesday, seeking reinforcements for a workforce crippled by an Omicron COVID-19 outbreak as the country's health system creaks under the pandemic's strain with more deaths predicted in weeks ahead. Prime Minister Scott Morrison said his government was waiving the A\$630 (\$453) visa application fee for any backpacker or student who arrives in Australia within the next 12 weeks, and encouraged them to see work as they tour the country. "Come on down now because you wanted to come to Australia," Morrison said during a televised press conference.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/australians-told-brace-more-deaths-amid-omicron-wave-2022-01-19/>

Czech gov't debates mandatory COVID-19 vaccinations, daily cases jump

The Czech government is due to decide on Wednesday whether to retain mandatory COVID-19 vaccinations for workers in key professions and people over 60 as the daily tally of new coronavirus cases hit a record high. Authorities said 28,469 new COVID-19 cases were reported on Tuesday, more than double the 12,371 reported for Tuesday of last week. Omicron is now the dominant coronavirus variant in the central European country of 10.7 million people and the government expects about 50,000 daily cases by the end of the month

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/czech-republic-reports-28469-new-cases-coronavirus-record-daily-tally-2022-01-19/>

Xi Jinping's Covid Defense Gets Weaker With Every Omicron Case

More than two years into the pandemic most countries are striving to live alongside Covid, accepting the virus as part of everyday life. China, where the pathogen first emerged, exists in an alternate reality, wedded to a zero-tolerance strategy that's growing harder to maintain. Despite firmly closed borders and a vaccination rate near 90%, the highly transmissible omicron variant has been reported in seven out of 31 provinces and all of China's biggest cities. Port disruptions and citywide shutdowns are increasingly common, and on Monday, the government signaled it's bracing for more: The central bank cut its key interest rate after the economy posted its weakest quarter since the beginning of the pandemic.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2022-01-18/omicron-in-china-new-variant-weakens-xi-jinping-s-covid-policies>

U.S. to make 400 million N95 masks available for free to fight COVID-19 pandemic - official

The U.S. government will make 400 million non-surgical N95 masks from its strategic national stockpile available for free to the public starting next week, a White House official said, marking the Biden administration's latest effort to help curb the COVID-19 pandemic. The face masks will be shipped to pharmacies and community health centers this week, the official said, and available for pickup late next week.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-make-400-million-n95-masks-available-free-fight-covid-19-pandemic-official-2022-01-19/>

UK PM aims to relax COVID rules amid threat to position

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson is expected to announce the easing of COVID-19 restrictions in the country, in a bid to placate members of the ruling Conservative party as he tries to avert a possible revolt in his own ranks following revelations of parties at his residence during the lockdowns of 2020 and 2021. Johnson's cabinet will review the current restrictions - imposed last month amid an Omicron surge - at a meeting on Wednesday, according to UK media reports.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/1/19/uk-pm-johnson-wants-to-relax-covid-limits-amid-threat-to-his-position>

Pharmacies shouldn't be the only place to get Paxlovid, the new Covid pill

As another year of pandemic fatigue looms, the US is once again in the position of having to decide how to allocate and distribute scarce health care resources, from ICU beds to Covid-19 drugs. Important mistakes are still being made. In the penultimate week of 2021, the FDA granted emergency use authorization to Paxlovid, a two-drug antiviral developed by Pfizer for treating individuals ages 12 and up who test positive for Covid-19 and are at high risk for progression to the severe form of the disease. The problem is that there isn't nearly enough Paxlovid to treat the staggering number of people who could benefit from it.

<https://www.statnews.com/2022/01/19/pharmacies-shouldnt-be-only-place-to-get-paxlovid/>

Partisan Exits

German prosecutors probe Greens' leaders over COVID bonus

German prosecutors have opened an investigation into the two leaders of the co-governing Greens, Robert Habeck and Annalena Baerbock, over alleged special coronavirus payments, the party said on Wednesday. Spiegel Online reported the start of the investigation for a possible breach of trust to the detriment of the party over illegal payments of 1,500 euros to Greens board members in 2020. The allegations concern the approval of a "coronavirus bonus" given by board members to themselves in 2020, a spokesperson for Berlin prosecutors was quoted by Spiegel Online as saying.
<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/german-prosecutors-probe-greens-leaders-over-covid-bonus-2022-01-19/>

Surgeries fear an exodus of GPs as deadline for staff Covid jabs nears

GPs say an exodus of staff due to mandatory coronavirus vaccination is "a significant concern", with the deadline for health workers to have a first jab just over a fortnight away. From April 1 everyone working in health or social care who has direct contact with patients must have had two doses of a coronavirus vaccine. In order to meet the deadline they must have received a first dose by February 3. Vaccination figures for NHS staff working in community settings such as GP surgeries have not been published, but figures based on trusts show that more than 10 per cent of staff in some areas are yet to receive a first dose. Across England 5.7 per cent of staff are unvaccinated.
<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/surgeries-fear-an-exodus-of-gps-as-deadline-for-staff-covid-jabs-nears-660zv3xr2>

Report: German police see surge in fake vaccine certificates

Police in Germany are investigating thousands of cases of suspected forgery of coronavirus vaccine certificates, the dpa news agency reported Wednesday. It cited figures obtained from the country's 16 states showing more than 12,000 police investigations have been opened nationwide. Those who supply or use fake certificates could face severe penalties, from fines and suspended prison sentences to losing their jobs. Prosecutors have opened a manslaughter investigation in one case after a woman used a fake vaccine certificate to continue working at a nursing home, despite having family members ill with COVID-19 at home.
<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/police-berlin-covid-b1996036.html>

Canadian truckers block highway at US border to protest Covid vaccine mandates

Dozens of Canadian truck drivers have blocked the highway near the US-Manitoba international border to protest against Covid-19 vaccine mandates. Videos shared on social media showed truck drivers carrying Canadian flags and holding a demonstration on the Manitoba Highway 75, which connects the Emerson community in Manitoba with the US city of Pembina in North Dakota. The demonstration slowed down traffic on both sides and caused delays for vehicles both entering and leaving Canada.
<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/canada-us-border-truckers-vaccine-b1995972.html>

Dutch museums, concert halls open briefly in protest at COVID-19 lockdown

Museums and concert halls in the Netherlands opened briefly on Wednesday to protest at their continued closure under a COVID-19 lockdown, offering yoga sessions in front of paintings by Dutch masters and haircuts to the swell of a live symphony orchestra. The Netherlands eased a month-long lockdown last weekend, allowing gyms, hair dressers and shops to reopen. But cultural venues were ordered to remain closed to the public until at least Jan. 25.
<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/dutch-museums-concert-halls-open-briefly-protest-covid-19-lockdown-2022-01-19/>

Continued Lockdown

Swiss cabinet extends quarantine, work-from-home rules into February

Switzerland will extend until the end of February coronavirus quarantine and mandatory work-from-home rules and tentatively plans to keep until the end of March other curbs on public life it tightened last month, the government said on Wednesday. Those measures included the need for

people to prove they have been vaccinated or recovered from COVID-19 to gain entry to many indoor venues as the cabinet tries to avoid another lockdown while COVID-19 cases spike.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/swiss-cabinet-extends-quarantine-work-from-home-rules-into-february-2022-01-19/>

Scientific Viewpoint

Merck-Ridgeback to supply courses of Covid-19 oral antiviral to UNICEF

Merck (MSD) and Ridgeback Biotherapeutics have entered a supply agreement with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to aid in wider worldwide access for investigational oral antiviral, molnupiravir, for Covid-19. According to the long-term deal, Merck will allocate up to three million courses of the oral antiviral to UNICEF for supply in over 100 low and middle-income nations during the first half of this year on obtaining regulatory authorisations.

<https://www.pharmaceutical-technology.com/news/merck-ridgeback-unicef-molnupiravir/>

WHO says no evidence healthy children, adolescents need COVID-19 boosters

There is no evidence at present that healthy children and adolescents need booster doses of COVID-19 vaccine, the World Health Organization's chief scientist Soumya Swaminathan said on Tuesday. Speaking at a news briefing, she said that while there seems to be some waning of vaccine immunity over time against the rapidly spreading Omicron variant of the coronavirus, more research needs to be done to ascertain who needs booster doses.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/who-says-no-evidence-healthy-children-adolescents-need-covid-19-boosters-2022-01-18/>

Mild COVID cases still lead to attention and memory issues - study

People with mild COVID-19 who do not suffer any other traditional "long COVID" symptoms can still exhibit deteriorated attention and memory six to nine months after infection, a study by Britain's Oxford University has found. Cognitive issues impacting concentration levels, along with forgetfulness and fatigue, are features of long COVID - a condition that afflicts some after an initial bout of infection - but it has not been established how widespread issues with attention span might be following COVID-19 infection.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/mild-covid-cases-still-lead-attention-memory-issues-study-2022-01-19/>

Fuzzy Hamsters Are Hong Kong's Newest Enemy in Its Covid-Zero Campaign

Authorities ordered some 2,000 hamsters in Hong Kong to be killed over concerns that the animals may have transmitted Covid-19 to humans, one of the city's latest measures to try to stamp out a fresh outbreak. Under the latest order, authorities will cull the animals at almost three dozen pet shops across the city, including a store selling small animals linked to two recent Covid-19 infections in the city. One of the two infections was an employee at the pet store, while another was a recent visitor to the store, authorities said. Health chiefs said the order was being made out of prudence as there was no international evidence that pets can transmit the Covid-19 to humans.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/hong-kong-orders-2-000-hamsters-to-be-killed-after-pet-shop-covid-19-cases-11642518762>

To Help Battle Covid-19, a Hospital Borrows Tactics From Combat Veterans

At Rush University Medical Center, nurses still talk about their feelings of guilt from the early months of treating Covid-19 patients. How they hadn't known how to best treat desperate patients. How worried they were about bringing Covid-19 home to their families. Except now they report having more mental and emotional tools at their disposal than they did at the beginning of the pandemic, thanks in large part to the work of Mark Schimmelpfennig, a hospital chaplain who is also an Army veteran. Mr. Schimmelpfennig months ago noticed that phrases nurses were using in conversation

sounded like what he had heard from troops who had served in combat zones. The same techniques veterans use to wrestle with combat trauma also could be used by the healthcare profession, he said.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/to-help-battle-covid-19-a-hospital-borrows-tactics-from-combat-veterans-11642588203>

Are hospital admissions still the best way to gauge the COVID crisis?

More people in hospital with COVID are there for other reasons. Italian regions want to overhaul way admissions counted. ICU occupancy may better reflect severity, scientist says. Omicron still putting hospitals under pressure, doctors warn

<https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/are-hospital-admissions-still-best-way-gauge-covid-crisis-2022-01-19/>

Report outlines 8 steps for current, future pandemics

A new report from the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) comments on the "ineffectual and fragmented" US COVID-19 pandemic responses thus far and recommends eight steps to manage the ongoing crisis amid variant fatigue, inflation, and supply chain disruptions. CSIS, a bipartisan, nonprofit policy research organization based in Washington, DC, said it issued the recommendations to secure US global leadership in the next phase of the pandemic response. Among the steps recommended in the "2022 is the year of decision" report are to launch a US international pandemic readiness project and to appoint a presidential global health security envoy.

<https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2022/01/report-outlines-8-steps-current-future-pandemics>

Why big data didn't deliver on its big promises to combat Covid-19

When the pandemic hit, technology companies pledged to do their part by cracking open their secretive datasets and letting public health researchers mine it for clues about how to bring Covid-19 under control. Two years in, it's clear that big data isn't the panacea they'd hoped for. In part, that's because the pandemic has stretched far longer than most anticipated. But as Andrew Schroeder, a co-leader of the Covid-19 Mobility Data Network, lay out in an opinion published in PLOS Digital Health, it's also because public health goals ran headlong into the business interests of the companies that provided their data for analysis, including Facebook and a cluster of ad-tech firms that tie clicks to location data.

<https://www.statnews.com/2022/01/18/big-data-covid-public-health/>

Coronavirus Resurgence

Nepal faces a new omicron-fueled coronavirus surge

Nepal's health ministry on Tuesday reported an all-time daily high of over 10,200 new COVID-19 infections showing that the virus has returned in force. The tally tops the previous high of over 9,300 daily cases in May 2021, when the delta variant tore through South Asia. The capital Kathmandu and the surrounding valley is the current coronavirus hotspot, with health officials in that region reporting more than half the total of current daily cases. Virologists estimate that the true number of infections could be much higher than the reported figure as many people remain without proper access to health care, adding that the omicron variant is likely driving the high infection numbers.

<https://www.dw.com/en/nepal-faces-a-new-omicron-fueled-coronavirus-surge/a-60481393>

COVID-19: Infections falling in three of the four UK nations, says ONS

COVID-19 infection levels dropped last week in all nations of the United Kingdom except Northern Ireland, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) has said. Its data suggests the latest wave of coronavirus, with the dominant Omicron variant, may have peaked. The figures cover people in private households estimated to have had COVID-19 in the seven days to 15 January.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-infections-falling-in-three-of-the-four-uk-nations-says-ons-12519987>

Bulgaria posts record of more than 11000 daily COVID-19 cases

Bulgaria reported a record 11,181 coronavirus infections in a single day on Wednesday, official data

showed, dominated by the more contagious Omicron variant. The European Union nation, where less than 30% of the population of 7 million has been vaccinated, added 91 deaths. Bulgaria's tally of infections exceeds 840,000, with 32,332 deaths since the pandemic began.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/bulgaria-posts-record-more-than-11000-daily-covid-19-cases-2022-01-19/>

Germany tops 100000 daily COVID-19 cases for first time

Germany reported a record 112,323 new coronavirus cases on Wednesday, after the health minister said the peak had not been reached yet and compulsory vaccination should be introduced by May. Germany also recorded 239 deaths in the space of 24 hours, for a cumulative total of 116,081, the Robert Koch Institute (RKI) for infectious disease said. Despite the new record, Germany's association for intensive care medicine (DIVI) said the number of COVID-19 patients in intensive care units was falling.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/germany-surpasses-100000-daily-covid-19-cases-first-time-2022-01-19/>

Japan widens COVID-19 curbs as Omicron drives record infections

Japan on Wednesday widened COVID-19 curbs to the capital Tokyo and a dozen regions covering half the population as the Omicron variant of coronavirus drove record new infections. Already in effect in three regions, the measures, set to run from Friday until Feb. 13, were made official by Prime Minister Fumio Kishida after getting the sign-off from an expert panel earlier in the day. "We are battling against an unknown virus, and I hope that we can overcome this situation with sufficient preparation and without excessive fear," Kishida said.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/japan-poised-widen-covid-19-controls-omicron-drives-record-infections-2022-01-19/>

Worker Absences in U.K. Fall in Sign of Omicron Wave Ebbing Away

Omicron's grip on the U.K. economy is weakening, with falling Covid-19 case numbers mirrored by a drop in worker absences during the second week of January. The estimated number of people missing work in the U.K. from Jan. 10 through Jan. 16 stood at almost 2.7 million, a 3% decrease from a year earlier and down from 3.1 million in the first week of this year, according to data from GoodShape, which tracks work-related illness and wellbeing at U.K. employers. The lower level of absence meant the U.K. economy lost 112 million pounds (\$152 million) less compared to the same period in 2021, GoodShape estimates showed.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-19/worker-absences-in-u-k-fall-in-sign-of-omicron-wave-ebbing-away>

Brazil reports record daily COVID-19 infections as Omicron spreads

Brazil reported a record 137,103 new cases of the novel coronavirus in the past 24 hours as the Omicron variant spreads in the South American country, the Health Ministry said on Tuesday. The number of deaths has also risen, to 351 reported on Tuesday, the highest number since mid-November. With the highly transmissible Omicron becoming the dominant variant in the country, new cases have soared above the previous daily record of 115,228 on June 23 last year. Brazil has now registered 23,211,894 cases since the pandemic began in 2020, while the official death toll has risen to 621,517, according to ministry data.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/brazil-reports-351-covid-19-deaths-highest-daily-toll-since-nov-17-ministry-2022-01-18/>

Vietnam detects first Omicron cases in the community -state media

Vietnam has recorded its first cases of the Omicron variant of the coronavirus in the community, state media reported on Wednesday, as health authorities urged people to increase their vigilance due to the threat from the variant. The three positive cases were detected over the weekend in Ho Chi Minh City and confirmed as Omicron late on Tuesday, the Tien Phong Newspaper reported, citing health authorities. The Southeast Asian country had previously detected more than

70 cases of the highly transmissible variant among quarantined people entering Vietnam from overseas.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/vietnam-detects-first-omicron-cases-community-state-media-2022-01-19/>

India's new COVID-19 cases hit eight-month high, full impact weeks away

India reported new coronavirus infections at an eight-month high on Wednesday and a government scientist warned it will take weeks before data on hospitalisations and deaths will show how severe the latest wave driven by the Omicron variant will be. The federal authorities have said Omicron was causing fewer hospitalisations and deaths than the Delta variant, which killed hundreds of thousands last year. But Tarun Bhatnagar from the ICMR-National Institute of Epidemiology in Chennai said the impact of the current run-up in infections will show up with a lag.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/india/indias-new-covid-19-cases-hit-eight-month-high-full-impact-weeks-away-2022-01-19/>

Germany surpasses 100000 daily COVID-19 cases for first time

Germany reported 112,323 new coronavirus cases on Wednesday, a fresh single-day record as the health minister said the peak had not been reached and compulsory vaccination should be introduced by May. Germany's tally of COVID-19 infections now stands at 8,186,850, the Robert Koch Institute (RKI) for infectious disease said. The death toll also rose by 239 on Wednesday to reach 116,081. Health Minister Karl Lauterbach said he expected the wave to peak in a few weeks as the highly infectious Omicron variant brought Germany's seven-day incidence rate to 584.4 cases per 100,000 people.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/germany-surpasses-100000-daily-covid-19-cases-first-time-2022-01-19/>

Poland's daily COVID cases could top 50,000 next week, minister says

Polish state employees will move to remote working and private sector companies should follow suit as the country faces another surge in daily COVID-19 cases, driven by the Omicron variant, that could soon top 50,000, the health minister said. Poland reported more than 30,000 daily cases on Wednesday for the first time since April, intensifying debate over whether stricter restrictions on public life are needed.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/polands-daily-covid-cases-could-top-50000-next-week-minister-says-2022-01-19/>

'Scarred for life': Australia COVID wave heaps pressure on nurses

Nurses in New South Wales, home to a third of Australia's nearly 26 million people, are coming under increasing pressure as an Omicron-fuelled wave of COVID-19 sweeps across the state. Senior Intensive Care Unit (ICU) nurse Michelle Rosentreter, who is also a member of the NSW Nurses and Midwives Association (NSWMWA), says the variant has doubled the number of patients in ICU and quadrupled the number on the wards.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/1/19/scarred-for-life-australia-covid-wave-heaps-pressure-on-nurses>

US faces wave of omicron deaths in coming weeks, models say

The fast-moving omicron variant may cause less severe disease on average, but COVID-19 deaths in the U.S. are climbing and modelers forecast 50,000 to 300,000 more Americans could die by the time the wave subsides in mid-March. The seven-day rolling average for daily new COVID-19 deaths in the U.S. has been trending upward since mid-November, reaching nearly 1,700 on Jan. 17 — still below the peak of 3,300 in January 2021. COVID-19 deaths among nursing home residents started rising slightly two weeks ago, although still at a rate 10 times less than last year before most residents were vaccinated. Despite signs omicron causes milder disease on average, the unprecedented level of infection spreading through the country, with cases still soaring in many states, means many vulnerable people will become severely sick. If the higher end of projections

comes to pass, that would push total U.S. deaths from COVID-19 over 1 million by early spring.

<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-omicron-covid-19-deaths-08f8db29985b992d5ef98ccfa1459eb7>