

# COVID-19 Lockdown Exit Analysis

## 24th Feb 2022

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### Lockdown Exit

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#### **A Pandemic Baby Bump Shines a Spotlight on the Nordic Welfare Model**

Finland's government has been working arduously to stem the country's rapid population decline. Since the 2019 elections, a cabinet run by a millennial woman has produced eight offspring, with two more on the way. Regular Finns have joined in the baby making: The number of live births jumped 6.7% last year, the most in nearly five decades. Other nations on Europe's northern rim have experienced their own pandemic baby bumps, making the region of 28 million people an outlier among advanced economies, several of which have seen fertility rates drop to historic lows.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-02-23/northern-european-pandemic-baby-bump-shows-benefits-of-social-welfare-model>

#### **UK in most challenging time for monetary policy since 1992: BoE's Broadbent**

Article reports that Britain is in the midst of its most challenging period for monetary policy since it started to target inflation 30 years ago, Bank of England Deputy Governor Ben Broadbent said. In an annual report to parliament, Broadbent said there was no guarantee that the inflationary impact of rising import prices would fade quickly, adding that rate-setters would monitor domestic cost pressures carefully. He said it remained to be seen what that meant for policy decisions. "This is the most challenging period for monetary policy since inflation targeting began in 1992," he wrote.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uk-most-challenging-time-monetary-policy-since-1992-boes-broadbent-2022-02-23/>

#### **COVID raises risk of mental health problems; new Omicron version not making people sicker in S. Africa**

The following is a summary of some recent studies on COVID-19. They include research that warrants further study to corroborate the findings and that has yet to be certified by peer review. Coronavirus infection raises risk of mental health issues Psychological stress from the pandemic may be widespread, but those who have had COVID-19 are at much higher risk for new mental health problems than individuals who have managed to avoid the virus, according to a new study. Researchers compared nearly 154,000 people who survived at least a month after a SARS-CoV-2 diagnosis to more than 5.6 million peers without prior COVID infections. Over the course of one year, infection survivors were at 35% higher risk of new anxiety disorders, 39% higher risk for new depressive disorders, 55% higher risk for new use of antidepressants, 34% higher risk for a new opioid use disorder, and 20% higher risk for a new non-opioid substance use disorder

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/covid-raises-risk-mental-health-problems-new-omicron-version-not-making-people-2022-02-23/>

#### **Scotland Covid restrictions: Face mask rules and vaccine passports to end but tests will remain free for now**

Wearing a face mask in shops, on public transport and in other shared indoor spaces in Scotland will no longer be a legal requirement after 21 March. All other legal restrictions designed to protect the public from Covid will also be scrapped from that date, with a greater emphasis placed on individual responsibility. Scotland's vaccine passport scheme, which was previously used to gain entry to nightclubs and big sporting events, will also be scrapped from Monday 28 February.

<https://inews.co.uk/news/scotland/scotland-covid-restrictions-face-mask-rules-vaccine-passports-tests-free-nicola-stur>

[geon-announcement-1475682](#)

### **Face masks scrapped on Tube and TfL services from Thursday**

Face coverings will no longer be required on Transport of London (TfL) services - including the Underground - from tomorrow. They had been a "condition of carriage" but now they will only be "strongly recommended" for customers and staff, according to TfL. TfL said it "considered a variety of factors" including "the shift in the government's approach towards living with the virus" and decreasing infection rates in London.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-face-masks-scrapped-on-london-underground-from-tomorrow-12549431>

### **Slovakia to lift most COVID restrictions over the coming month**

Slovakia will lift most COVID-19 restrictions over the next month, beginning with loosening measures for the unvaccinated before cancelling crowd limits in a later phase, according to plans approved by the government on Wednesday. The first phase of the loosening will begin on Feb. 26, material on the government's website showed. A second phase will follow on March 26 to end limits on crowds and opening hours.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/slovakia-lift-most-covid-restrictions-over-coming-month-2022-02-23/>

### **Polish prime minister says Poland will remove most COVID curbs**

Poland will remove most COVID-19 restrictions from March 1, while keeping the obligation to wear face masks in enclosed public spaces, Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki said on Wednesday. "After medical consultations and watching what's happening in other countries we can introduce far-reaching changes in our restrictions policy. We can remove restrictions that have been with us for many months," Morawiecki told reporters. While face masks will remain compulsory in public spaces including shops and transportation, limits on the number of people visiting stores, restaurants and cultural venues will be removed.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/polish-prime-minister-says-poland-will-remove-most-covid-curbs-2022-02-23/>

### **Iceland to lift all COVID-19 restrictions on Friday**

Iceland will lift all remaining COVID-19 restrictions on Friday, including a 200-person indoor gathering limit and restricted opening hours for bars, the Ministry of Health said on Wednesday. "Widespread societal resistance to COVID-19 is the main route out of the epidemic," the ministry said in a statement, citing infectious disease authorities. "To achieve this, as many people as possible need to be infected with the virus as the vaccines are not enough, even though they provide good protection against serious illness," it added.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/iceland-lift-all-covid-19-restrictions-friday-media-reports-2022-02-23/>

### **EU countries agree to admit travellers vaccinated with WHO-approved shots**

European Union countries agreed on Tuesday to open their borders to travellers from outside the bloc who have had shots against COVID-19 authorised by the World Health Organization, easing restrictions on those who received Indian and Chinese vaccines. The EU has so far authorised vaccines produced by Pfizer-BionTech, Moderna, AstraZeneca (when produced in Europe), Johnson & Johnson and Novavax. In addition to these shots, the WHO has also approved the vaccines produced by Chinese makers Sinopharm and Sinovac and by Indian company Bharat Biotech

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/eu-countries-agree-admit-travellers-vaccinated-with-who-approved-shots-2022-02-22/>

## **Exit Strategies**

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### **Hong Kong budget proposals offer COVID relief with tax breaks, handouts**

Hong Kong will offer tax breaks, handouts and subsidies to small businesses and residents, to

mitigate the impact of the most stringent social restrictions imposed in the city to curb the spread of COVID-19, Finance Secretary Paul Chan said. The 2022/23 budget proposals were announced as hundreds of bars, restaurants and small retailers warned they were months away from closure, and shopping malls were deserted while the city endured its worst COVID-19 outbreak so far. "Hong Kong is currently experiencing its hardest time in the fight against the epidemic, and we are facing enormous challenges," Chan told legislators via videoconference on Wednesday.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/china/hong-kong-budget-proposals-offer-covid-relief-with-tax-breaks-handouts-2022-02-23/>

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<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/polish-prime-minister-says-poland-will-remove-most-covid-curbs-2022-02-23/>

### **Reduced testing is concerning, WHO official says**

A World Health Organization official on Tuesday expressed concern about reduced testing and surveillance of the coronavirus in countries around the world, saying monitoring remains critical. "We need to be strategic about this, but we cannot abandon it," said WHO epidemiologist Maria Van Kerkhove during an online question-and-answer session. "And what we do not want to see is the dismantling of these surveillance systems that have been put in place for covid-19."

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2022/02/22/covid-omicron-variant-live-updates/>

### **North Korea should be convinced into accepting 60 million Covid vaccine doses, says UN official**

North Korea should be provided at least 60 million doses of Covid-19 vaccines and the international community should come together to chart out a strategy for this, an independent UN human rights investigator has said. "It is imperative that the population of North Korea start to be vaccinated... so that the government will have no excuse to maintain the closing of the borders," Tomas Ojea Quintana, a UN special rapporteur on human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, said on Wednesday.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/asia/east-asia/north-korea-covid-vaccines-unhrc-b2021245.html>

### **Germany expects deliveries of Novavax COVID vaccine later this week**

The delivery process for the Novavax COVID-19 vaccine is underway and the first contingents will arrive in individual Germany states later this week, a health ministry spokesperson told a regular news conference on Wednesday.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/germany-expects-deliveries-novavax-covid-vaccine-later-this-week-2022-02-23/>

### **Hong Kong budget offers COVID relief with tax breaks, handouts**

Hong Kong will offer tax breaks, handouts and subsidies to small businesses and residents, to mitigate the impact of the most stringent social restrictions imposed in the city to curb the spread of COVID-19, Finance Secretary Paul Chan said. The 2022/23 budget proposals were announced as hundreds of bars, restaurants and small retailers warned they were months away from closure, and shopping malls were deserted while the city endured its worst COVID-19 outbreak so far.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/china/hong-kong-budget-proposals-offer-covid-relief-with-tax-breaks-handouts-2022-02-23/>

### **Cambodia vaccinates children aged three to five against COVID**

Cambodia started vaccinating children as young as three against COVID-19 on Wednesday, becoming one of the first countries to cover the age group of those below five. The Southeast Asian nation has vaccinated more than 90% of its population of 16 million, for one of the highest rates in

the region, official data show. In January, it started rolling out a fourth dose for high-risk groups.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/cambodia-vaccinates-children-aged-three-five-against-covid-2022-02-23/>

### **Romania to donate 1.1 million AstraZeneca COVID vaccines**

Romania will donate 1.1 million AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccines to Pakistan, Bangladesh, Algeria and Libya, the health ministry said on Wednesday. Romania is the European Union's second-least vaccinated country after Bulgaria, with roughly 42% of the population fully inoculated, reflecting mistrust in state institutions and poor vaccine education. With supplies far outstripping demand for COVID-19 shots, the Bucharest government has sold or donated excess shots before their expiry date.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/romania-donate-11-million-astrazeneca-covid-vaccines-2022-02-23/>

### **Hong Kong's Biggest Developer Offers Land for Covid Isolation**

Hong Kong's biggest property developer offered to make land and commercial properties available to the government to help contain the city's Covid-19 outbreak. Sun Hung Kai Properties Ltd. will provide two land plots in the New Territories for use as temporary isolation and treatment facilities, the company said in an emailed statement late Tuesday. One of the sites is co-owned by Henderson Land Development Co.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-02-23/hong-kong-s-biggest-developer-offers-land-for-covid-isolation>

### **Sanofi, Glaxo Seek Covid-19 Vaccine Approval in Crowded Market**

Sanofi SA and GlaxoSmithKline GSK PLC said they would seek authorization for their Covid-19 vaccine, a sign that pharmaceutical companies still see an opportunity for new shots despite ebbing demand in the West. While vaccine uptake across the West has slowed significantly after a big push by governments to inoculate their populations, some companies say new vaccines could be used as boosters, or in low- and middle-income countries. Novavax Inc., another latecomer, recently sought emergency approval from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration for its shot, which has already been authorized in the European Union. Sanofi and Glaxo said Wednesday that their shot was 100% effective at preventing severe disease and 75% effective against moderate-to-severe illness. The shot was 57.9% effective at preventing any symptomatic disease, a result the companies said was in line with expected vaccine effectiveness in the current environment, where variants have blunted the protection afforded by shots. In a separate trial, the shot was shown to increase antibody levels by 18 to 30 times when given as a booster following a primary series of the already-authorized mRNA and adenovirus vaccines.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/sanofi-glaxo-seek-covid-19-vaccine-approval-in-crowded-market-11645627003>

## **Partisan Exits**

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### **Montenegro Protesters Demand Snap Ballot, Plan to Block Roads**

Thousands of protesters took to the streets in the Montenegrin capital of Podgorica, demanding early elections as they rallied against President Milo Djukanovic and denounced a plan for a minority government that would bolster his party's influence. Infighting among fractured political groups brought down Premier Zdravko Krivokapic's cabinet on Feb. 4, a year after a historic power shift that ended decades-long dominance over the Balkan state by Djukanovic's Democratic Party of Socialists. The president's party is now supporting efforts to form a minority cabinet. "People have to give their say" in a vote before any new government is formed, said Aleksa Becic, who was ousted as parliament speaker, told the crowd on Wednesday, state broadcaster RTCG reported.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-02-23/montenegro-protesters-demand-snap-ballot-plan-to-block-roads>

### **National Guard to Bolster Cops as Washington Trucker-ConvoY Buzz Builds**

The Pentagon is making as many as 700 National Guard troops available to Washington law enforcement to keep traffic flowing if a threatened protest convoY of trucks clogs the already congested Beltway in coming days. Social media users opposed to vaccine mandates have posted frequently about the so-called People's ConvoY, inspired by recent protests in Canada. But there is no official organization sponsoring it, and the viability of an 11 day cross-country convoY is unclear and proposals for it have varied. The most prevalent suggests it would arrive near the nation's capital March 5.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-02-23/national-guard-to-bolster-cops-as-washington-convoY-buzz-builds>

### **A Pandemic Baby Bump Shines a Spotlight on the Nordic Welfare Model**

Finland's government has been working arduously to stem the country's rapid population decline. Since the 2019 elections, a cabinet run by a millennial woman has produced eight offspring, with two more on the way. Regular Finns have joined in the baby making: The number of live births jumped 6.7% last year, the most in nearly five decades. Other nations on Europe's northern rim have experienced their own pandemic baby bumps, making the region of 28 million people an outlier among advanced economies, several of which have seen fertility rates drop to historic lows.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-02-23/northern-european-pandemic-baby-bump-shows-benefits-of-social-welfare-model>

### **Inspired by Canadian truck protests, 'People's ConvoY' heads to Washington**

A group of American truckers began a cross-country drive from California to Washington on Wednesday to protest coronavirus restrictions, taking a cue from demonstrations that paralyzed Canada's capital city, Ottawa, for weeks. More than two dozen 18-wheeler trucks, along with some 50 pickups and recreational vehicles, left Adelanto, California, about 80 miles (130 km) northeast of Los Angeles. The self-styled 'People's ConvoY' is beginning an 11-day trek to the Beltway, a major highway encircling the U.S. capital, to demand an end to COVID-19 vaccine and mask requirements.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-truckers-plan-pandemic-protest-inspired-by-canadian-counterparts-2022-02-23/>

### **U.S. truckers plan pandemic protest, inspired by Canadian counterparts**

Taking a cue from demonstrations that paralyzed Canada's capital city, Ottawa, for weeks, U.S. truckers on Wednesday plan to embark on a 2,500-mile (4,000-km) cross-country drive toward Washington to protest coronavirus restrictions. Organizers of the "People's ConvoY" say they want to "jumpstart the economy" and reopen the country. Their 11-day trek will approach the Beltway around the U.S. capital on March 5, "but will not be going into D.C. proper," according to a statement. The Pentagon said on Tuesday it had approved 400 National Guard troops from the District of Columbia, who would not carry weapons, to help at traffic posts from Saturday through March 7.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-truckers-plan-pandemic-protest-inspired-by-canadian-counterparts-2022-02-23/>

### **Weary of promises, Bulgarians protest against COVID curbs, inflation**

About 1,000 Bulgarian demonstrators gathered in downtown Sofia on Wednesday to protest against curbs imposed to combat COVID-19 and rampant inflation at a rally organized by the opposition ultra-nationalist Revival party. Holding banners reading "I want a normal life," and "COVID is a tyranny, not a pandemic" the demonstrators booed as Prime Minister Kiril Petkov addressed them. Bulgaria, where scepticism about vaccines and entrenched distrust of government institutions has meant fewer than one in three adults are inoculated against the coronavirus, has seen infections drop in recent weeks after they peaked at the end of January, prompting the government to start easing restrictions.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/weary-promises-bulgarians-protest-against-covid-curbs-inflation-2022-02-23/>

## Scientific Viewpoint

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### **COVID-19 shot interval can be extended to 8 weeks for some -U.S. CDC**

Extending the interval between the first two doses of the most widely used COVID-19 vaccines in the country to eight weeks for young men can reduce the rare risk of heart inflammation, U.S. health officials said. The side effect, which has been linked to both Pfizer and Moderna's COVID-19 vaccines, is higher in 12- to 39-year-old men, and therefore the eight-week interval could be optimal for some people aged 12 years and older, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said on Tuesday. The recommended interval between the first two shots will remain three weeks for Pfizer's vaccine and four weeks for Moderna's vaccine in other population groups, the CDC said.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/covid-19-shot-interval-can-be-extended-8-weeks-some-us-cdc-2022-02-23/>

### **Coronavirus vaccine protection was much weaker against omicron, data shows**

While coronavirus shots still provided protection during the omicron wave, the shield of coverage they offered was weaker than during other surges, according to new data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The change resulted in much higher rates of infection, hospitalization and death for fully vaccinated adults and even for people who had received boosters. The decline in protection continued a pattern driven by coronavirus vaccines' reduced effectiveness over time, combined with the increasing contagiousness of the delta and omicron waves. Before delta struck the United States in July, there were five to 10 cases of covid-19 for every 100,000 fully vaccinated adults each week, while the rate for unvaccinated people was 50 to 90 cases. In the delta wave, unvaccinated people were five times as likely to get infected as vaccinated people. With omicron, that difference dropped to less than three times as likely.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/interactive/2022/vaccine-protection-was-much-weaker-against-omicron-cdc-data-shows/>

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Sanofi SA and GlaxoSmithKline PLC said they would seek authorization for their Covid-19 vaccine, a sign that pharmaceutical companies still see an opportunity for new shots despite ebbing demand in the West. While vaccine uptake across the West has slowed significantly after a big push by governments to inoculate their populations, some companies say new vaccines could be used as boosters, or in low- and middle-income countries. Novavax Inc., another latecomer, recently sought emergency approval from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration for its shot, which has already been authorized in the European Union. Sanofi and Glaxo said Wednesday that their shot was 100% effective at preventing severe disease and 75% effective against moderate-to-severe illness. The shot was 57.9% effective at preventing any symptomatic disease, a result the companies said was in line with expected vaccine effectiveness in the current environment, where variants have blunted the protection afforded by shots.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/sanofi-glaxo-seek-covid-19-vaccine-approval-in-crowded-market-11645627003>

### **Mental health improved for 1 in 3 children during Covid-19 lockdown**

One in three young people said their mental health and wellbeing improved during lockdown measures. Getting more sleep and exercise, and avoiding bullying were among the reasons. More than 17,000 UK school students took part in a study during the last two months of the first national lockdown, answering questions about their experiences of the pandemic, school, home life, and relationships, among others.

<https://inews.co.uk/news/health/mental-health-improved-1-in-3-children-during-covid-19-lockdown-1476103>

### **People with Covid-19 may face long-term cardiovascular complications, study says**

As the Covid-19 pandemic enters its third year, scientists are finding that the coronavirus has far-reaching effects on health beyond the acute phase of illness. One recent study has found that people with Covid-19 are at an increased risk for cardiovascular diseases for at least a year after

recovery. The study, published this month in the journal Nature Medicine, used data from US Department of Veterans Affairs national health care databases to follow over 153,000 veterans with a history of Covid-19 infection for up to a year after their recovery. Compared with those who were never infected, people who had a coronavirus infection were more likely to have symptoms including inflammatory heart disease, heart failure, dysrhythmia, heart attacks, strokes and clotting in the long term.

<https://www.cnn.com/2022/02/22/health/covid-cardiovascular-complications/index.html>

### **Mental health risk increases for COVID-19 survivors**

A study tracking COVID-19 survivors found them more likely to develop mental health issues than other people over the year following diagnosis. The researchers saw an increased risk even for those whose COVID-19 was mild enough that they did not require hospitalization. Conditions the researchers investigated included anxiety, depression, opioid use, and cognitive decline.

<https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/covid-19-survivors-increased-risk-of-mental-health-issues>

### **COVID-19 shots unlikely to prompt rare inflammation in kids**

COVID-19 vaccines are unlikely to trigger a rare inflammatory condition linked to coronavirus infection in children, according to an analysis of U.S. government data published Tuesday. The condition, formally known as multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children, involves fever plus symptoms affecting at least two organs and often includes stomach pain, skin rash or bloodshot eyes. It's a rare complication in kids who have had COVID-19, and very rarely affects adults. The condition often leads to hospitalization, but most patients recover. First reported in the United Kingdom in early 2020, it is sometimes mistaken for Kawasaki disease, which can cause swelling and heart problems. Since February 2020, more than 6,800 cases have been reported in the U.S., according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/covid-vaccine-moderna-united-kingdom-centers-for-disease-control-and-prevention-b2021028.html>

### **WHO plans second hub for training countries to make COVID vaccines**

The World Health Organization said on Wednesday it has set up a hub in South Korea to train low- and middle-income countries to produce their own vaccines and therapies, and is expanding its COVID-19 vaccine project to a further five nations. The new training hub comes after the U.N. agency set up a technology transfer hub in Cape Town, South Africa, last year to give companies from poor and middle-income countries the know-how to produce COVID-19 vaccines based on mRNA technology. The new hub outside Seoul will provide workforce training to all countries wishing to produce products such as vaccines, insulin, monoclonal antibodies, WHO Director General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told a press briefing.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/who-plans-second-hub-training-countries-make-covid-vaccines-2022-02-23/>

### **Moderna, Thermo Fisher partner to manufacture COVID vaccine, other drugs**

Moderna Inc has entered into a long-term agreement with Thermo Fisher Scientific for the manufacturing of its COVID-19 vaccine and other experimental medicines based on mRNA technology, the companies said on Wednesday. Thermo Fisher had already partnered with Moderna last year to help scale up production of its COVID vaccine, branded as Spikevax. As a part of the 15-year expanded deal, Thermo Fisher would provide dedicated manufacturing capacity in the United States for fill/finish services as well as labeling and packaging services for Spikevax and other mRNA drugs in Moderna's pipeline.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/moderna-thermo-fisher-partner-manufacture-covid-vaccine-other-drugs-2022-02-23/>

### **Sanofi, GSK to seek approval for COVID vaccine candidate**

French drugmaker Sanofi and its British partner GlaxoSmithKline are seeking regulatory approval for their COVID-19 vaccine to be used as a booster, as well as a standalone two-dose shot, after several setbacks. The companies said on Wednesday they intended to submit data to regulators from a late-stage trial of the vaccine, and another testing it as a booster, with full results for both studies expected to be published "later this year." Sanofi is hoping for a comeback after falling behind in the race for COVID-19 shots, while GSK, the world's biggest vaccine maker by sales, has not developed its own candidate and is instead supplying its adjuvant technology to developers.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/sanofi-gsk-seek-covid-19-vaccine-candidate-approval-2022-02-23/>

### **COVID vaccine supply for global programme outstrips demand for first time**

The global project to share COVID-19 vaccines is struggling to place more than 300 million doses in the latest sign the problem with vaccinating the world is now more about demand than supply. Last year, wealthy nations snapped most of the available shots to inoculate their own citizens first, meaning less than a third of people in low-income countries have been vaccinated so far compared with more than 70% in richer nations. As supply and donations have ramped up, however, poorer nations are facing hurdles such as gaps in cold-chain shortage, vaccine hesitancy and a lack of money to support distribution networks, public health officials told Reuters.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/covax-vaccine-supply-outstrips-demand-first-time-2022-02-23/>

### **Deutsche Telekom to build global COVID vaccine verification app for WHO**

The World Health Organization has signed a contract with Deutsche Telekom subsidiary T-Systems to build a software solution for global electronic verification of coronavirus vaccination certificates, the telecoms company said. The QR code-based software solution will be used for other vaccinations as well, such as polio or yellow fever, T-Systems said in a statement on Wednesday, adding that the WHO would support its 194 member states in building national and regional verification technology. The financial details of the transaction were not disclosed. "Health is a strategic growth area for T-Systems," said T-Systems Chief Executive Officer Adel Al-Saleh.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/deutsche-telekom-build-global-covid-vaccine-verification-app-who-2022-02-23/>

### **Very small blood clot risk after first AstraZeneca COVID shot - UK studies**

A large study into rare blood clots linked with AstraZeneca's COVID-19 vaccine found between just one and three cases per million, and only after the first dose, shedding fresh light on the side-effects from the shot. Researchers have sought to analyse any link between COVID-19 vaccines and rare blood clots in the brain, arteries or veins - sometimes accompanied by low platelets, reports of which led many nations last year to pause use of the AstraZeneca shot, which was developed with Oxford University. A study published in the PLOS Medicine journal on Tuesday looked at health records of 46 million adults in England between December 2020 and March 2021 to assess the risk of clots in the month after vaccination with either the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine or AstraZeneca-Oxford shot, compared with the unvaccinated.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/very-small-blood-clot-risk-after-first-astrazeneca-covid-shot-uk-studies-2022-02-22/>

### **Is omicron leading us closer to herd immunity against COVID?**

Is omicron leading us closer to herd immunity against COVID-19? Experts say it's not likely that the highly transmissible variant — or any other variant — will lead to herd immunity. "Herd immunity is an elusive concept and doesn't apply to coronavirus," says Dr. Don Milton at the University of Maryland School of Public Health. Herd immunity is when enough of a population is immune to a virus that it's hard for the germ to spread to those who aren't protected by vaccination or a prior

infection. For example, herd immunity against measles requires about 95% of a community to be immune. Early hopes of herd immunity against the coronavirus faded for several reasons. One is that antibodies developed from available vaccines or previous infection dwindle with time. While vaccines offer strong protection against severe illness, waning antibodies mean it's still possible to get infected — even for those who are boosted.

<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-health-lifestyle-public-health-c64f8ba0e7885e4686e13a4d76ff49b9>

### **3 COVID vaccine doses 99% effective against Omicron, Delta hospitalization**

Three doses of the Moderna mRNA COVID-19 vaccine were more effective against infection with the SARS-CoV-2 Delta variant than against Omicron but were highly protective against hospitalization with either subtype, according to a study yesterday in Nature Medicine. A team led by Kaiser Permanente Southern California researchers conducted a test-negative case-control study among 26,683 COVID-19 cases caused by the Delta or Omicron variants in December 2021. Of all cases, 16% were Delta, and 84% were Omicron. The incidence of Omicron infections in Southern California increased from 1.2% to 94.1% from Dec 6 to 31.

<https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2022/02/3-covid-vaccine-doses-99-effective-against-omicron-delta-hospitalization>

### **U.S. FDA limits use of GlaxoSmithKline-Vir COVID-19 drug**

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration said on Wednesday GlaxoSmithKline and Vir Biotech's COVID-19 antibody treatment should not be used in places with circulation of variants that are not susceptible to the drug. Vir has said the drug, sotrovimab, retains neutralizing activity against the emerging BA.2 form of the Omicron coronavirus variant. However, other recent research suggests that the variant showed resistance to nearly all of the monoclonal antibodies they tested, including sotrovimab. The GSK-Vir drug is one of the few COVID-19 treatments shown to have worked against the original Omicron variant, spurring demand.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-fda-limits-use-glaxosmithkline-vir-covid-19-drug-2022-02-23/>

## **Coronavirus Resurgence**

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### **More than 6,200 people died with Covid-19 in Ireland in last two years**

There have been more than 6,200 Covid-19 related deaths in Ireland over the last two years, new figures show. Based on mortality data reported to the Department of Health, more than 1,000 of those deaths occurred in the first four weeks of 2021, according to the Central Statistics Office (CSO). The CSO published a series of figures showing the impact of coronavirus on Ireland from the date of the first confirmed case on February 29 2020. The CSO said Covid has affected every aspect of life in Ireland and the ripple effect of the virus is still being felt and measured two years on. A spokeswoman said the impact of the pandemic on Ireland's society will be felt for years to come.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/department-of-health-people-men-government-covid-b2021423.html>

### **Fast-Spreading Covid-19 Omicron Type Revives Questions About Opening Up**

A more infectious type of the Omicron variant has surged to account for more than a third of global Covid-19 cases sequenced recently, adding to the debate about whether countries are ready for full reopening. Health authorities are examining whether the subvariant of Omicron, known as BA.2, could extend the length of Covid-19 waves that have peaked recently in Europe, Japan and some other places. "We're looking not only at how quickly those peaks go up, but how they come down," World Health Organization epidemiologist Maria Van Kerkhove said. "And as the decline in cases occurs...we also need to look at: Is there a slowing of that decline? Or will we start to see an increase again?"

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/fast-spreading-covid-19-omicron-type-revives-questions-about-opening-up-1164561647>

### **Hong Kong COVID cases hit record as compulsory testing looms**

Hong Kong reported a record 8,674 new COVID-19 infections on Wednesday, as authorities announced the toughest social restrictions since the pandemic began to combat the surge, and as the city prepares for compulsory testing of residents. From Thursday residents will have to show their vaccine record to access venues including supermarkets, malls and restaurants, wear masks for all outdoor exercise, and they will not be allowed to remove masks to eat or drink on public transport.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/hong-kong-covid-cases-hit-record-compulsory-testing-looms-2022-02-23/>

### **Singapore's daily COVID-19 cases hit record of more than 26000**

Singapore's health ministry reported a record 26,032 COVID-19 infections on Tuesday and said it may take a few weeks before the current transmission wave peaks and subsides. "While the number of patients needing oxygen supplementation and intensive care unit (ICU) care is not high, there is a surge in demand for hospital beds, mostly for patients with underlying chronic illnesses to recover," the health ministry said in a statement on Tuesday evening. It reiterated that people with mild or no symptoms who had tested positive should consider self-recovery at home to reduce the pressure on healthcare workers.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/singapores-daily-covid-19-cases-hit-record-more-than-26000-2022-02-23/>

### **Chinese capital Beijing finds most daily local COVID cases in nearly a month**

Beijing reported on Wednesday the highest number of daily local COVID-19 cases since late January, less than two weeks before the opening of China's annual parliamentary meeting in the capital on March 5. The city of Beijing detected 10 domestically transmitted COVID-19 cases with confirmed symptoms for Tuesday, data from the National Health Commission (NHC) showed on Wednesday. That marks the highest daily count for Beijing since Jan. 29. Despite the tiny case load by global standard, the city, in line with China's "dynamic-zero" strategy against the virus, has sealed up some buildings where cases and their close contacts lived

<https://www.reuters.com/world/china/chinese-capital-beijing-finds-most-daily-local-covid-cases-nearly-month-2022-02-23/>

### **S.Korea prime minister calls for calm as COVID cases hit new record**

South Korea's prime minister on Wednesday called on people not to panic about a major increase in coronavirus infections as new daily cases surged past 170,000 for the first time. Serious cases and deaths are at manageable levels despite record cases caused by the highly infectious Omicron variant, Prime Minister Kim Boo-kyum told a pandemic response meeting. "Although our awareness and implementation of anti-COVID rules should not be loosened, there is no reason at all to fear or panic about the numbers of new cases as in the past," he said, according to a transcript.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/skorea-prime-minister-calls-calm-covid-cases-hit-new-record-2022-02-23/>

### **Omicron Ripping Through Cargo Ships May Exacerbate Shipping Woes**

Omicron is ripping through cargo ships, raising concerns that a surge in cases, coupled with China's tightened quarantine requirements for vessels, could delay supply chain stabilization for the shipping industry. Covid outbreaks are hitting ships globally, with cases increasing "exponentially," said Francesco Gargiulo, CEO of the International Maritime Employers' Council Ltd., which represents shipping companies. Anglo-Eastern Univan Group, which has an active crew of about 16,000, is seeing infections on five to seven vessels a month compared with only one or two a month last year, the company said. Meanwhile, Wilhelmsen Ship Management Ltd. has had infections on four of its ships since January after less than a dozen vessels were struck with Covid in all of 2021, said Carl Schou, chief executive officer at the ship manager.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-02-23/omicron-ripping-through-cargo-ships-may-exacerbate-shipping-woes?srd=premium-europe>