

COVID-19 Lockdown Exit Analysis

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Lockdown Exit

Biden, 79, will receive his second booster today

President Joe Biden will receive his second COVID-19 booster shot Wednesday afternoon. On Tuesday, the Food and Drug Administration approved a fourth dose of the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines for Americans over age 50. Immunocompromised adults over 12 could get a fourth Pfizer dose, while those 18 and older could get a fourth Moderna shot. Biden received his original Pfizer booster in late September, rolling up his sleeve in the White House complex's South Court Auditorium. He'll use the same venue Wednesday for his second booster shot, receiving the dose after delivering a COVID-19 update to the American people

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10668847/Biden-79-receive-second-booster-today.html>

Is Covid Over? Probably Not — Just Ask Australian Rabbits

The case of Australia's rabbits is particularly instructive. European rabbits, brought to Australia by humans, overran the country and devoured its farmland. In a desperate attempt to remedy the problem, scientists working with the Australian government released a virus called myxoma, which is endemic to other animals and was thought to be unlikely to make a jump to humans. "It was the biggest, most devastating outbreak of virus for any vertebrate that we know of," says Andrew Read, a Penn State University evolutionary biologist who studies pathogens and their hosts. "The virus was extremely virulent ... it killed 99.9% of rabbits." But a few rabbits carried a winning combination of genes that allowed them to survive the attack. Their descendants, armed with better resistance, allowed the species to bounce back, though the rabbits have never reached their previously copious numbers.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2022-03-30/is-covid-over-probably-not-just-ask-australian-rabbits>

Switzerland Mask Mandate: Last Covid Restrictions Dropped to Return to Normal

Switzerland is lifting the remaining pandemic-related restrictions, pushing ahead with a plan to return to normal life after two years. A mask mandate on public transport and in health-care facilities will be abandoned as of April 1, the Swiss government said Wednesday. People who test positive will also no longer have to adhere to a five-day isolation period. The move comes after the more transmissible BA.2 subvariant of omicron led to a resurgence of cases across Europe, though authorities have shrugged off the increase as it has had a less severe impact on hospitals. Switzerland had already scrapped most of its safety measures in February, including a work-from-home recommendation and the need for Covid-documentation to enter the country.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-03-30/switzerland-abandons-last-covid-restrictions-to-return-to-normal>

Never Had Covid? You May Hold Key To Beating the Virus

More than half of Americans may have never had Covid, according to U.S. government data, leaving scientists wondering whether those who've avoided the novel coronavirus might actually be immune to the virus altogether. This could offer new clues into how to attack Covid. At this stage in the pandemic, people may be immune due to vaccines, a past infection, or a combination of both. There's also evidence that, in rare instances, some people may be Covid-immune without infection or vaccination at all.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-03-30/never-had-covid-you-may-hold-key-to-beating-the-virus>

Shanghai expands lockdown to more areas as new local cases hit 5,982

Shanghai on Wednesday extended its shut downs to some western parts of the city, earlier than scheduled, as it reported a total of 5,982 new local cases.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/china/shanghai-expands-lockdown-more-areas-new-local-cases-hit-5982-2022-03-30/>

Opinion | Failing to fund the U.S. covid response bodes trouble for the entire world

Atul Gawande, who leads global health and is co-chair of the Covid-19 Task Force at the U.S. Agency for International Development, writes: "The global battle against covid-19 is not done. Instead, the challenge has changed. The lowest-income countries, where vaccinations have reached less than 15 percent of people, are now declining free vaccine supply because they don't have the capacity to get shots in arms fast enough. We must therefore not just provide an arsenal; to protect our allies against future variants, we must also provide the support they need to ramp up their vaccination campaigns. That effort requires money, and despite generously funding our covid-19 response up to this point, Congress is now failing to provide the resources we need."

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2022/03/30/failure-to-fund-covid-response-bodes-serious-trouble-global-vaccination/>

Despite High Covid-19 Case Counts, Asian Nations Learn to Live With the Virus

The Covid-19 wave that is tearing through South Korea is the largest that any developed country has experienced, reaching three times the number of new daily cases per capita than previous peaks in the U.S. and the U.K. Yet, South Korea has all but given up on trying to stop the spread of the virus. Health officials recently called such a mass outbreak necessary. It was a test of faith for a health system—and a population—ahead of a new pandemic target: downgrading Covid-19 from the riskiest category of infectious disease.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/despite-high-covid-19-case-counts-asian-nations-learn-to-live-with-the-virus-11648643055>

Britain may be wasting nearly 3 billion pounds on COVID gear

Britain may be wasting nearly 3 billion pounds (\$3.94 billion) on contracts for COVID-19 gear that have not given value for money, with millions spent each month storing unneeded and sometimes out-of-date kit, a watchdog said on Wednesday. The report by the parliament-supervised National Audit Office (NAO) will fuel opposition claims that Prime Minister Boris Johnson's government was wasteful and nepotistic in its allocation of huge contracts during the two-year pandemic.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/britain-may-be-wasting-nearly-3-billion-pounds-covid-gear-2022-03-29/>

Swiss to lift last of COVID-19 restrictions from April 1

Switzerland will lift the last of its remaining COVID-19 restrictions from Friday, the government said on Wednesday, as the country seeks to live with the virus. The obligation to wear a mask on public transport and at health facilities, as well as the requirement to self-isolate for five days after a positive test will be removed, the government said. Responsibility for containing the virus will be handed to local authorities, it added, with a phase of heightened vigilance planned over the next 12 months.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/swiss-lift-last-covid-19-restrictions-april-1-2022-03-30/>

Exit Strategies

'We demand an explanation!' Shanghai residents vent COVID lockdown irritation

Frustrated and locked down, residents of Shanghai have taken to social media to vent, questioning the practicality of persisting with China's zero-tolerance approach to COVID-19 in its most populous city. In the home to 26 million people, videos and images of crowded quarantine centres were shared as authorities extended lockdown from the east of the city to parts of the west, posting calls for help with medical treatment and purchasing food. One video widely shared on Chinese social

media featured an angry exchange between a group of patients and hazmat suit-clad healthcare workers at the vast Shanghai World Expo Center - temporarily converted into a giant quarantine facility.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/we-demand-an-explanation-shanghai-residents-vent-covid-lockdown-irritation-2022-03-30/>

Vaccine mandate for South Australian teachers and transport workers dropped as COVID-19 cases approach record

Unvaccinated teachers and school staff in South Australia, as well as public transport workers and taxi and rideshare drivers, will be able to return to work tomorrow. Vaccine mandates on workers in the school and passenger transport sectors will lift at midnight, Police Commissioner Grant Stevens announced. Both sectors have faced workforce pressures amid escalating COVID-19 cases in South Australia.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-03-30/vaccine-mandate-for-sa-teachers-and-transport-workers-dropped/100951400>

CDC: If you got J&J's vaccine and booster, consider an mRNA shot now

The nearly 17 million Americans who received the one-shot Johnson & Johnson coronavirus vaccine are less protected against serious illness and hospitalizations than those who got the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna shots, according to federal data released Tuesday. The latest data suggest Johnson & Johnson recipients should get a booster with one of the messenger RNA vaccines, if they haven't already done so — and even consider a second messenger RNA booster for the greatest protection. The data come from a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report that analyzed the results of mix-and-match vaccine-and-booster combinations during a four-month period when the highly transmissible omicron variant was dominant.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2022/03/29/messenger-rna-boosters-recommended-johnson-johnson-vaccine/>

Who is eligible for fourth Covid vaccine in Scotland? How to book 'spring booster' jab

A second Covid booster dose is now being offered to high risk groups of people across Scotland. Coronavirus infection can be more serious for those who are older as well as those with a weakened immune system, meaning it is important to ensure protection levels remain high. To help ensure this, a fourth dose of the vaccine is being offered as a precaution to those who are deemed to be at higher risk. This dose - which is a second booster - is being given to reduce your risk of getting seriously ill from coronavirus, requiring hospital treatment or even dying if you become ill with coronavirus.

<https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/lifestyle/who-eligible-fourth-covid-vaccine-26591538>

People with cancer 'risk being left behind' under new Covid-19 testing guidance

Some cancer patients are at risk of being "left behind" under new guidance which sets out who is eligible for free Covid-19 tests, a charity has warned. Macmillan Cancer Support said it was welcome that people with symptoms of Covid-19 who are vulnerable to the effects of the disease will still be eligible for free tests. But it urged minister to extend the offer of free testing to include immunocompromised people without symptoms.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/macmillan-cancer-support-people-covid-government-england-b2046787.html>

EU health ministers call for common approach to 2nd boosters for elderly

European health ministers urged the bloc's executive on Tuesday to back a fourth COVID-19 shot for people over the age of 60 to boost immunity in the absence of vaccines that specifically protect against the Omicron variant. Pointing to data from Israel, minister Karl Lauterbach said a recommendation was "urgently necessary" to reduce the risk of death from an infection. He raised

the issue at a meeting of health ministers in Brussels on Tuesday and said most of them supported the idea of harmonising European vaccination strategies

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/german-health-minister-wants-eu-recommend-fourth-covid-shot-2022-03-29/>

White House launches COVID.gov amid push for more funds, booster shots

The Biden administration on Wednesday launched a new website to provide a clearinghouse of information on COVID-19 as part of a continuing effort to prepare to live with the coronavirus. The launch of COVID.gov comes a day after U.S. health officials approves a second booster shot for Americans age 50 and older and those who are immunocompromised, two years after the start of the pandemic

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/white-house-launches-covidgov-amid-push-more-funds-booster-shots-2022-03-30/>

Indonesia seeks longer shelf life donations as 19 mln COVID shots expired

Nineteen million doses of COVID-19 vaccines in Indonesia's national stockpile have expired this year and 1.5 million more are set to expire next month, as donated shots arrive with a short shelf life, a health official said on Wednesday. Indonesia and many other developing nations are ramping up their vaccination campaign, aided by donations from wealthy countries, but they have been calling for donations with a longer shelf life.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/indonesia-seeks-longer-shelf-life-donations-19-mln-covid-shots-expired-2022-03-30/>

UK says healthcare workers, vulnerable will still get free COVID tests

Britain said on Tuesday that healthcare workers, social care staff and the most vulnerable will still get COVID-19 tests without any charge when it ends free testing for the general public next month. When he announced all coronavirus restrictions would be scrapped in February, Prime Minister Boris Johnson said free tests would end on April 1, saying the country could not afford their cost

<https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uk-says-healthcare-workers-vulnerable-will-still-get-free-covid-tests-2022-03-29/>

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Switzerland will lift the last of its remaining COVID-19 restrictions from Friday, the government said, as the country seeks to live with the virus. The obligation to wear a mask on public transport and at health facilities, as well as the requirement to self-isolate for five days after a positive test will be removed, the government said. Responsibility for containing the virus will be handed to local authorities, it added, with a phase of heightened vigilance planned over the next 12 months.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/swiss-lift-last-covid-19-restrictions-april-1-2022-03-30/>

Partisan Exits

Adelaide Hills woman faces court accused of paying vulnerable woman to have COVID-19 vaccine for her

Article reports that Chapel Hill woman Susan Louise Clarke, 52, is accused of paying a vulnerable woman a sum of money to receive a COVID-19 vaccine in her name in the Adelaide Hills in early January. Police said Ms Clarke accompanied Tania Marshall to the Mount Barker vaccination clinic and deceived SA Health workers into giving the 57-year-old the vaccine in her name by pretending to be her carer. Police said Ms Clarke needed evidence of the vaccination for her employment.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-03-30/woman-accused-of-paying-woman-to-have-covid19-vaccine-for-her/100952556>

COVID-19: Billions of pounds of taxpayers' money still at risk as a result of government's handling of PPE contracts, spending watchdog warns

Billions of pounds worth of taxpayers' money is still at risk as the government continues to deal with issues with personal protective equipment (PPE) stocks and contracts, according to the spending watchdog. The National Audit Office (NAO) found the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC)

was being charged millions of pounds to store PPE equipment it has purchased for longer than expected. It also found there were "inconsistencies" between the volume of PPE ordered and what was actually received, and that billions of items were not suitable for frontline use.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-billions-of-pounds-of-taxpayers-money-still-at-risk-as-a-result-of-governments-handling-of-ppe-contracts-spending-watchdog-warns-12577377>

Boris should 'hang his head in shame and quit' relatives of Covid dead say

Bereaved relatives tearfully called on Boris Johnson to 'hold his head in shame' and resign over lockdown-breaking parties in Whitehall. They called for the Prime Minister to stand down as they led a silent procession to Downing Street for coronavirus victims. Hundreds of grief-stricken families gathered at the National Covid Memorial Wall in London on Tuesday to mark its first anniversary and pay tribute to those they lost during the pandemic. Those attending, joined by politicians including Labour MP Afzal Khan and shadow health minister Rosena Allin-Khan, then walked to No 10 to hand in a petition to make the mural permanent.

<https://www.msn.com/en-gb/news/world/boris-should-hang-his-head-in-shame-and-quit-relatives-of-covid-dead-say/ar-AAVDdRv>

China truckers use fake records, 'clean' drivers to dodge COVID rules

Article reports that Chinese truck drivers hoping to outwit COVID-19 inspectors are faking travel histories to get through checkpoints or avoid quarantine, state media reported, as weary citizens struggle with restrictions more than two years after the pandemic began. While some truckers try to use hi-tech sleight of hand to dodge the restrictions, some desperate travellers are simply trying to hide in their cars to get where they want to go. Authorities across China have tightened COVID curbs this month as the highly transmissible Omicron variant spreads, triggering lockdowns in Shanghai and the whole province of Jilin.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/china/china-truckers-use-fake-travel-records-clean-drivers-dodge-covid-rules-2022-03-30/>

Continued Lockdown

China: Panic buying in divided Shanghai under lockdown

After weeks of isolated compound lockdowns, the city of 25 million has been split into two. Earlier this week those living in Shanghai's eastern half were told to stay home, with the western half due to enter a lockdown on Friday. The move comes as the city battles a surge in Omicron Covid cases. The city has reported around 20,000 Covid-19 infections since 1 March, registering more cases in four weeks than in the previous two years of the pandemic. China's zero-Covid strategy has been increasingly challenged by the highly infectious Omicron variant.

https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-china-60912846?at_medium=RSS&at_campaign=KARANGA

'Pick the shelves clean': food shortage rap helps cut through gloom of Shanghai lockdown

A rap about food shortages has become a hit in Shanghai, with the artists behind the song describing it as an attempt to "cheer up" tens of millions of residents locked down in China's largest city amid a surging Covid outbreak and increasing restrictions. The song, Grocery Shopping, laments empty shelves and fights in the supermarket aisles, and is set to footage of residents crowding around market stalls, or lining up for PCR tests. "Set your alarm, wake up, food fight," the lyrics say. "Order that tofu, but the sauce all gone." The song's release comes as Shanghai authorities expanded some lockdown measures and the city reported record daily case numbers in an outbreak city-wide frustrations.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/30/pick-the-shelves-clean-food-shortage-rap-helps-cut-through-gloom-of-shanghai-lockdown>

Shanghai in lockdown: 'It's like being in a cage'

As Shanghai enters a two-stage COVID lockdown, some residents are struggling with the new restrictions. Rachel Judah has more.

<https://www.reuters.com/video/watch/idRCV00AWA7>

Shanghai expands COVID lockdown as new daily cases surge by a third

Authorities began locking down some western areas of Shanghai two days ahead of schedule, as new COVID-19 cases in China's most populous city jumped by a third despite stringent measures already in place to try to stop the virus spreading. Home to 26 million people, China's financial hub is in the third day of a lockdown officials are imposing by dividing the city roughly along the Huangpu River, splitting the historic centre west of the river from the eastern financial and industrial district of Pudong to allow for staggered mass tests.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/china/shanghai-expands-lockdown-more-areas-new-local-cases-hit-5982-2022-03-30/>

Scientific Viewpoint

How Does Covid Affect Diabetes, the Brain and Long Covid?

Commenting on Britain's near-record-high number of Covid cases, the U.K.'s chief medical officer, Chris Whitty, said last Wednesday that we should expect seasonal peaks for the next few years, interspersed with new variants of SARS-CoV-2. As we move into the post-pandemic, living-with-the-virus era, more research is surfacing about the ways even mild Covid cases leave lingering effects on health in some people. Three conditions in particular are capturing scientists' attention due to the large number of sufferers: increased rates of diabetes, neuropsychological problems, and the illness known as long Covid. Researchers have found associations between Covid infections and each of these issues, but we don't know enough yet to establish causality. Bloomberg Opinion columnist Therese Raphael and Bloomberg Intelligence senior pharmaceutical analyst Sam Fazeli look at why the long tail of Covid is hard to pin down.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2022-03-30/how-does-covid-affect-diabetes-the-brain-and-long-covid>

CureVac and GSK Start Clinical Development of Second-Generation COVID-19 Vaccine Candidate, CV2CoV

CureVac N.V. a global biopharmaceutical company developing a new class of transformative medicines based on messenger ribonucleic acid ("mRNA"), today announced that the first participant was dosed in a Phase 1 study of COVID-19 second-generation mRNA vaccine candidate, CV2CoV, developed in collaboration with GSK. The clinical trial is expected to provide valuable data to further evaluate the performance of CureVac's second-generation mRNA backbone, which has the potential to be applied broadly in future vaccines against COVID-19 variants and other pathogens. A preclinical study of CV2CoV in cynomolgus macaques, published in Nature in November 2021, demonstrated rapid induction of higher antibody titers, better induction of immune memory and stronger protective efficacy of CV2CoV compared to CureVac's first-generation vaccine candidate, CVnCoV. The same study demonstrated comparable neutralizing antibody titers in animals fully vaccinated with either 12µg of CV2CoV or a 30µg standard dose of a licensed mRNA COVID-19 vaccine..

<https://www.pharmiweb.com/press-release/2022-03-30/curevac-and-gsk-start-clinical-development-of-second-generation-covid-19-vaccine-candidate-cv2cov>

Those with allergies should not fear Covid-19 vaccines, Hong Kong medical experts say, citing poll showing few suffer adverse reactions

Hongkongers suffering from allergies should not be afraid of getting a Covid-19 vaccine, medical experts said on Wednesday, citing a poll revealing only a small number of such patients reported adverse reactions after receiving jabs. Only eight out of 161 respondents with allergies said they had experienced a negative reaction and needed to consult a doctor after receiving at least one

dose of a vaccine, according to a survey conducted by the Hong Kong Allergy Association in March. The group said the eight people had recovered after treatment. "The figure is not alarming. The reason why the respondents consulted doctors may not be due to their allergies," said Dr Philip Li Hei, a specialist in immunology and allergy, adding that even those who experienced a reaction could still get the second and third dose.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/health-environment/article/3172454/those-allergies-should-not-fear-covid-19-vaccines?module=live&pgtype=homepage>

Moderna's COVID-19 Vaccine Boosts Some Antibodies More than Pfizer's

In many ways, the two mRNA COVID-19 vaccines—BNT162b2 made by Pfizer and mRNA-1273 by Moderna—are very similar. But real-world vaccine efficacy has begun to show subtle differences across the two approved mRNA platforms. A new study has investigated the variation in immune responses induced by the BNT162b2 and mRNA-1273 vaccines. To do this, the researchers profiled the post-boost binding and functional capacity of humoral immune responses induced by the two vaccines in a cohort of hospital staff. The study found that both vaccines induced robust humoral immune responses to SARS-CoV-2 and to variants of concern.

<https://www.genengnews.com/news/moderna-covid-19-vaccine-boosts-some-antibodies-more-than-pfizer/>

COVID vaccines: head-to-head comparison reveals how they stack up

A rare head-to-head comparison shows that the COVID-19 vaccines made by Pfizer and Moderna outperform those from Johnson & Johnson and Novavax1. The data also provide a finely detailed picture of the immune protection that each vaccine offers — information that could be useful for designing future vaccines. The research was posted on the preprint server bioRxiv on 21 March. It has not yet been peer reviewed. The study assessed the 4 vaccines using 14 metrics, including levels of several types of immune cell such as T cells and B cells, as well as immune molecules called neutralizing antibodies. Such investigations are sorely needed to sort through the flood of COVID-19 vaccines in the research pipeline and on the market, researchers say.

<https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-022-00885-y>

Preclinical investigation of intranasal adjuvanted COVID-19 vaccine

The researchers observed antibodies against the S1 and NC antigens in all the animals except those controlled negatively. However, the serological responses varied significantly. Serum IgG titers were significantly elevated in mice receiving vaccines with N3 adjuvant and exhibited nearly a 10-fold increase, and increasing the concentration of anionic L3 to 2% resulted in comparable antibody titers. A similar trend was observed only after the second vaccination for IgA titers, nearly 10-fold higher than the first dose. Microneutralizing antibody titers differed variably across mice receiving different vaccine doses. Mice in groups 5 (1 µg dose + N3 adjuvant) and 6 (0.1 µg + N3 adjuvant) exhibited significantly higher antibody titers. At the same time, those with L3 adjuvants had higher antibody titers than the positive control group. All immunized mice produced IgA antibodies against the SARS-CoV-2 antigens in the respiratory and gastrointestinal tracts.

<https://www.news-medical.net/news/20220330/Preclinical-investigation-of-intranasal-adjuvanted-COVID-19-vaccine.aspx>

Decline of testing, sequencing could hinder search for future COVID-19 variants, experts warn

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, disease surveillance efforts that rely on testing and variant sequencing have been critical tools in the global efforts to fight the virus. Without these tools, experts said, the spread of COVID-19 could have been exponentially greater, potentially resulting in many more deaths. "Testing and sequencing have been critical to understanding where the virus is and how it is evolving. This is critical information for response and mitigation efforts," Dr. Rebecca Katz, professor and director of the Center for Global Health Science and Security at Georgetown

University, told ABC News. Surveillance tools have helped health officials make important recommendations throughout the pandemic -- including the decision to green light booster doses for extra protection, and decision to pull back on some monoclonal antibody treatments authorized for COVID-19, following concerns that it was not effective against certain variants.

<https://abcnews.go.com/Health/decline-testing-sequencing-hinder-search-future-covid-19/story?id=83727646>

COVID-19 vaccines for the youngest children may be inching closer to authorization - a pediatrician explains how they're being tested

For some parents of young children, the wait for COVID-19 vaccines has been long and agonizing. Throughout 2021, vaccines against COVID-19 emerged as the most effective way to prevent severe forms of the disease. Vaccines are currently recommended for everyone 5 years and older in the United States but are not yet available for younger age groups. Though more rare in young children, severe disease leading to hospitalization and even death from COVID-19 can occur. Recent U.S. rates of COVID-19-associated hospitalization in those under 5 have been the highest on record, as a result of the surge in cases from the highly transmissible omicron variant.

<https://theconversation.com/covid-19-vaccines-for-the-youngest-children-may-be-inching-closer-to-authorization-a-pediatrician-explains-how-theyre-being-tested-176774>

BioNTech's quarterly profit soars on COVID-19 vaccine demand

BioNTech, the German pharmaceutical company that teamed with Pfizer to develop the first widely used COVID-19 vaccine, on Wednesday reported strong quarterly earnings growth on pandemic-fueled demand. The company posted net profit of nearly 3.2 billion euros (\$3.6 billion) for the final three months of 2021, up from 367 million euros in the same period the previous year. Earnings per share rose to 12.18 euros from 1.43 euros a year ago. Quarterly revenue rose to 5.5 billion euros from 345.4 million euros previously

<https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/biontechs-quarterly-profit-soars-covid-19-vaccine-demand-83759020>

Ghana to start producing own Covid-19 vaccines in January 2024

Ghana will start producing its own COVID-19 vaccines in January 2024, President Nana Akufo-Addo said on Wednesday in his State of the Nation Address in parliament. A National Vaccine Institute would be established to lay out a strategy for the West African country to begin the first phase of commercial production for the jabs, he said without providing further details. "A bill will shortly be brought to you, in this House, for your support and approval for the establishment of the National Vaccine Institute," he said. So far Ghana has fully vaccinated around 21.4% of its 30-million-odd inhabitants against coronavirus, according to Reuters data.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/ghana-start-producing-own-covid-19-vaccines-january-2024-2022-03-30/>

BA.2 Omicron subvariant is now dominant among US Covid-19 infections

The BA.2 subvariant of Omicron is now the dominant Covid-19 variant in the US, estimated to represent more than half of coronavirus variants circulating in the country, according to federal health officials. The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that the so-called "stealth" Omicron variant was discovered in nearly 55 per cent of samples that underwent genetic sequencing within the last week, the agency announced on 28 March. Scientists have attributed BA.2's rapid growth to its several key mutations; the gene for the spike protein on its surface has eight mutations not found in BA.1. Researchers have determined that such mutations have made BA.2 more transmissible, not that it necessarily evades antibody protection or causes more-severe illness.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/ba2-omicron-variant-cdc-b2046762.html>

Covid-19: Americans who are over 50 or immunocompromised are advised to have second booster

Second booster doses against covid-19 for Americans aged over 50 and for certain

immunocompromised people aged over 12, using either the Pfizer-BioNTech or the Moderna vaccine, may become available as early as later this week after they were authorised in the US. The new recommendations from the Food and Drug Administration (FDA)¹ and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)² come as the BA.2 omicron variant spreads rapidly in the US and is responsible for about 55% of new infections. The variant seems to be more contagious but does not cause more severe infections. Peter Marks, director of the CDC's Center for Biologics Evaluation and Research, said on 29 March, "Current evidence suggests some waning of protection over time against serious outcomes from covid-19 in older and immunocompromised individuals. Based on an analysis of emerging data, a second booster dose of either the Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna covid-19 vaccine could help increase protection levels for these high risk individuals

<https://www.bmj.com/content/376/bmj.o842>

BioNTech to expand trial programme for more anti-Omicron vaccine options

BioNTech has expanded an ongoing clinical trial programme to develop new vaccines and patterns of administration for better protection against the dominant Omicron coronavirus variant as it reported a profit boost from its first-generation shot. The enlargement of its trial programme with partner Pfizer, initially unveiled in January, comes as global COVID-19 cases are on the rise and protection against infection from its established Comirnaty vaccine has waned, though protection against severe disease remains. BioNTech boosted the number of participants in the trial - in which participants' blood will be monitored for immune responses - to 2,150 from the 1,420 announced in January.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/biontech-expand-trial-programme-more-anti-omicron-vaccine-options-2022-03-30/>

Pfizer, Moderna win over FDA for second round of COVID-19 boosters in older adults

Only two weeks after Pfizer and its partner BioNTech asked the agency for an emergency use authorization (EUA) for a second round of COVID-19 boosters in people 65 and older, the FDA has granted the nod. The new FDA authorization covers those who have already been boosted with any COVID vaccine and are either 50 and older or 12 and older if they are immunocompromised. At around the same time on Tuesday morning, Moderna said the FDA had granted its application for a second booster. The Moderna nod covers adults over 50 who have been boosted once, plus immunocompromised adults over 18. Moderna applied for a second booster on March 17.

<https://www.fiercepharma.com/pharma/pfizer-moderna-score-fda-nods-second-round-covid-19-boosters-older-adults>

Patients with both COVID-19 and influenza four times more likely to need ventilation support, study suggests

Patients infected with both COVID-19 and influenza at the same time are more than four times more likely to require ventilation support and more than twice as likely to die, compared with just having COVID-19, research published in the Lancet has suggested. The study was delivered as part of the International Severe Acute Respiratory and emerging Infection Consortium's Coronavirus Clinical Characterisation Consortium; the largest study to look at COVID-19 and other endemic respiratory viruses. The researchers examined the clinical outcomes of 212,466 patients co-infected with COVID-19 and either influenza, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) or an adenovirus, who were admitted to hospital in the UK between 6 February 2020 and 8 December 2021.

<https://pharmaceutical-journal.com/article/news/patients-with-both-covid-19-and-influenza-four-times-more-likely-to-need-ventilation-support-study-suggests>

Coronavirus Resurgence

U.K. Hospitalizations Rise After Covid Cases Edge Back Up

Covid-19 infections in the U.K. have edged back up following the easing of restrictions and rapid spread of a more-transmissible subvariant of omicron. In the U.K. more than 574,000 people have

tested positive and about 15,530 hospitalized in the last week. Still, this wave may be close to peaking, according to Chief Scientific Adviser Patrick Vallance. While omicron has proven to be more mild in general compared to previous strains, it would be wrong to assume that the coronavirus will continue evolving into a less severe infection, Vallance told the Science and Technology parliamentary committee on Wednesday.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-03-30/u-k-covid-cases-edge-back-up-as-hospitalizations-rise>

NYC Covid Cases Are Rising Again, Mostly Among Those 25 to 34

New York City Covid-19 cases are rising again, particularly among people 25 to 34 years old, according to city officials. The surge appears to be concentrated in Manhattan, the most vaccinated borough. In an unusual move, the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene posted a warning on Twitter on Wednesday, saying they “strongly recommend” New Yorkers mask-up indoors and get booster shots. The warning came in contrast to the city’s Covid alert system, which identifies the Covid alert level as ‘low risk.’

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-03-30/nyc-warns-covid-cases-are-rising-mostly-among-those-25-to-34>

Covid 19 Omicron outbreak: 15,918 cases, 14 deaths as Government outlines vaccine mandates, passes

There are 15,918 new cases today, Covid-19 Response Minister Chris Hipkins announced this afternoon. It comes as a new initiative aimed at improving access to rapid-antigen testing to people in rural areas is announced, as cases continue to rise in various spots around the country. But Hipkins wouldn't be drawn on Auckland's chances of moving from red to orange under the traffic light system, having already passed its Omicron peak. He said he was yet to have "a firm leaning" for Cabinet's review of traffic light settings on Monday. There are 817 people in hospital with the virus, including 24 in intensive care, the Ministry of Health announced this afternoon.

<https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/covid-19-omicron-outbreak-15918-cases-14-deaths-as-government-outlines-vaccine-mandates-passes/HFLUMONOXDTSTA7MGEIATWWH5I/>

New Zealand reports 15,918 community cases of Covid-19 in 24 hours

New Zealand reported 15,918 new community cases of Covid-19 on Wednesday, the Ministry of Health said in a statement. There are also 14 new deaths due to Covid in the country, fewer than the 34 deaths reported on Tuesday, the highest daily fatality number reported by the ministry, Xinhua news agency reported. Among the new community infections, 2,691 were recorded in the largest city Auckland. The rest of the cases were identified across the nation, including 2,535 in Canterbury, according to the ministry.

https://www.business-standard.com/article/international/new-zealand-reports-15-918-community-cases-of-covid-19-in-24-hours-122033000262_1.html

Covid-19 news: Just 64 per cent are self-isolating in England

Self-isolation rate dropped from 80 per cent to 64 per cent after the legal requirement changed to guidance. Fewer than two-thirds of people who test positive for covid-19 in England are choosing to self-isolate, according to an Office for National Statistics (ONS) survey. Using the NHS Test and Trace database, 1369 adults in England who tested positive for covid-19 before 24 February, when the legal requirement to self-isolate was dropped, were asked about their behaviour while infected. They were interviewed between 28 February and 8 March, when self-isolation was advised but not legally required. Fewer than two-thirds (64 per cent) said they fully self-isolated, compared with 80 per cent in a similar survey last month.

<https://www.newscientist.com/article/2237475-covid-19-news-just-64-per-cent-are-self-isolating-in-england/>

China reports 1629 new COVID cases for March 29 vs 1293 a day earlier

China reported 1,629 confirmed coronavirus cases for March 29, the national health authority said

on Wednesday, compared with 1,293 a day earlier. Of the new cases, 1,565 were locally transmitted, the National Health Commission said, versus 1,228 a day earlier. The number of new asymptomatic cases, which China does not classify as confirmed cases, stood at 7,196 compared with 5,758 a day earlier. There were no new deaths, leaving the death toll at 4,638.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/china/china-reports-1629-new-covid-cases-march-29-vs-1293-day-earlier-2022-03-30/>

France reports over 217000 new COVID-19 infections - health ministry

France on Tuesday reported 217,480 new COVID-19 infections over the last 24 hours, a level unseen since early February. 1,538 people are currently in intensive care units, France's health ministry said, 5 more than on Monday.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/france-reports-over-217000-new-covid-19-infections-health-ministry-2022-03-29/>

COVID cases in Asia surpass 100 million - Reuters tally

Coronavirus infections in Asia passed 100 million on Wednesday, according to a Reuters tally, as the region records a resurgence in cases, dominated by the BA.2 Omicron sub-variant. The region is reporting over 1 million new COVID-19 cases about every two days, according to a Reuters analysis. With more than half of the world's population, Asia contributes 21% of all reported COVID-19 cases. The highly contagious but less deadly BA.2 sub-variant of Omicron has pushed the figures to greater highs in recent weeks in countries such as South Korea, China and Vietnam. BA.2 now represents nearly 86% of all sequenced cases, according to the World Health Organization.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/covid-cases-asia-surpass-100-million-reuters-tally-2022-03-30/>

WHO: COVID deaths jump by 40%, but cases falling globally

The number of people killed by the coronavirus surged by more than 40% last week, likely due to changes in how COVID-19 deaths were reported across the Americas and by newly adjusted figures from India, according to a World Health Organization report released Wednesday. In its latest weekly report on the pandemic, the U.N. health agency said the number of new coronavirus cases fell everywhere, including in WHO's Western Pacific region, where they had been rising since December. About 10 million new COVID-19 infections and more than 45,000 deaths were reported worldwide over the past week, following a 23% drop in fatalities the week before. The jump in reported deaths, up from 33,000 last week, was due mainly to an accounting change; WHO noted that countries including Chile and the United States altered how they define COVID-19 deaths.

<https://apnews.com/article/covid-health-pandemics-united-nations-world-health-organization-90777e9441ce05a2d4c63476751b7434>