

COVID-19 Lockdown Exit Analysis

29th Apr 2022

Lockdown Exit

Xi in a Bind Over Who to Blame for Shanghai's Covid Outbreak

Li Qiang, 62, once served as a top aide to Xi, and has long been included among the most likely contenders to join him on the seven-member Politburo Standing Committee after a party congress planned for later this year, perhaps even as premier. All but one Shanghai party secretary has made it to the top body since 1987, with former Premier Zhu Rongji and Xi himself among those who have advanced. The outbreak in Shanghai, however, has raised the price of elevating Li. The financial hub has seen food shortages, overwhelmed quarantine facilities and clashes between citizens and health workers, generating an unusual outpouring of anti-government posts on social media. Some residents have dismissed his public visits during the lockdown as "choreographed." In one exception, he was intercepted by a woman in a wheelchair who scolded the government for failing to provide enough food.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-04-28/xi-in-a-bind-over-who-to-blame-for-shanghai-s-covid-outbreak>

S.Korea to lift outdoor mask mandate starting next week

South Korea said on Friday it will lift an outdoor face mask mandate next week in the country's latest step to ease COVID-19 restrictions, despite opposition from the incoming government which labelled the decision "premature". Prime Minister Kim Boo-kyum said the decision was made as the government could "no longer look away" from the inconveniences experienced by its citizens when the country's virus situation was stabilising.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/skorea-lift-outdoor-mask-mandate-starting-next-week-yonhap-2022-04-28/>

Italy orders mask wearing for some indoor venues until mid-June

Face masks will remain compulsory in Italy on public transport and in some indoor venues until June 15, the health minister said on Thursday, as one of the country's hardest hit by COVID delayed an end to pandemic restrictions. Masks will still be required to access cinemas, theatres, indoor events and to enter hospitals, Health Minister Roberto Speranza said, adding that the government intends to be cautious in lifting the remaining measures. "We have decided to keep in place for a while, at least until June 15, an element of caution that I believe is necessary," Speranza said at an event organised by a medical doctors' union.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/italy-orders-mask-wearing-some-indoor-venues-until-mid-june-2022-04-28/>

A fight over coronavirus safety at journalists' gala event

More than 2,000 journalists, celebrities and politicians, including President Biden, are set to descend on the White House Correspondents' Association dinner this weekend in what is shaping up to be a major test of whether large gatherings can be safely held at this stage of the pandemic. Organizers say they are committed to holding an event that significantly reduces the risk of coronavirus infections, pointing to vaccine and testing requirements that were strengthened after a dinner hosted by Washington's Gridiron Club this month was linked to at least 85 infections that sickened Cabinet members, reporters and other guests. Yet some White House officials and experts worry that those measures are insufficient and that this weekend's events may become another high-profile superspreader event, said three administration officials who spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the issue. Behind the scenes, one prominent

coronavirus expert is scrapping with party organizers hesitant to install devices that disinfect the air using ultraviolet light because of concerns the devices might interfere with the program.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2022/04/27/white-house-correspondents-dinner-covid-safety/>

COVID-19: Denmark suspends COVID vaccination programme with health chiefs saying virus under control

Health chiefs have said Denmark is in "a good position" after all remaining COVID restrictions were lifted two months ago. It is believed to be the first country in the world to pause the vaccine rollout.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-denmark-suspends-covid-vaccination-programme-with-health-chiefs-saying-virus-under-control-12600593>

Fauci: 'Pandemic phase' over for US, but COVID-19 still here

Dr. Anthony Fauci has given an upbeat assessment of the current state of the coronavirus in the United States, saying the country is "out of the pandemic phase" when it comes to new infections, hospitalizations and deaths, but that it appears to be making a transition to COVID-19 becoming an endemic disease — occurring regularly in certain areas. Fauci, the nation's top infectious disease expert, said on the PBS "NewsHour" on Tuesday that the coronavirus remains a pandemic for much of the world, but the threat is not over for the United States, adding that he was speaking about the worst phase of the pandemic. "Namely, we don't have 900,000 new infections a day and tens and tens and tens of thousands of hospitalizations and thousands of deaths. We are at a low level right now," he said.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/ap-covid-biden-centers-for-disease-control-and-prevention-b2066878.html>

Denmark becomes the first country to "pause" its Covid vaccination program

Denmark has become the first country to halt its Covid vaccination program, saying it is doing so because the virus has been brought under control. "Spring has arrived, vaccine coverage in the Danish population is high, and the epidemic has reversed," Danish Health Authority said in a statement Wednesday announcing the move. Far from scrapping its vaccination program altogether, however, the Danish Health and Medicines Authority said there will probably be a need to vaccinate against Covid-19 again in the fall.

<https://www.cnn.com/2022/04/28/denmark-the-first-country-to-halt-its-covid-vaccination-program.html>

Hungary, EU at odds over billions of euros of COVID funds

Hungary sees no obstacles to the European Union releasing billions in economic stimulus funds to Budapest, Prime Minister Viktor Orban's top aide said on Thursday, but the bloc's executive disagreed, quoting corruption and anti-LGBT policies. The executive European Commission has been withholding its approval to pay out money meant to help lift economies from the COVID-19 malaise to Poland and Hungary, accusing them of undermining the rule of law.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/hungary-says-no-obstacles-signing-agreement-eu-recovery-funds-2022-04-28/>

Mental health issues in kids rose during pandemic; awareness and use of COVID treatments is low

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. Pandemic linked with mental health issues in kids. The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly impacted the mental health of children and adolescents, researchers say, based on their analysis of findings from 17 earlier studies.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/mental-health-issues-kids-rose-during-pandemic-awareness-use-covid-treatments-is-2022-04-28/>

Exit Strategies

Tourist favourite Thailand's recovery lags on COVID rule changes

As regional peers have eased entry requirements, Thailand has clung to a cumbersome process. "Whichever (country) offers easy, smooth, less complicated procedures wins my heart," said Johansen. Tourism professionals say Thailand's complicated entry rules are now holding back recovery in an industry that contributed 12% of GDP before the pandemic. Forward bookings for 2022 show Thailand reaching 25% of pre-pandemic levels, behind levels of 72% and 65% each for Singapore and the Philippines.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/tourist-favourite-thailands-recovery-lags-covid-rule-changes-2022-04-28/>

Govt promises to add halal vaccine to booster program

The Health Ministry in Jakarta has announced that it will add one of the more widely available COVID-19 vaccines with halal certification to the state-led booster jab rollout, in an effort to assuage the concerns of the country's Muslim majority. A ministry official confirmed on Tuesday that it would add the CoronaVac vaccine, co-manufactured by state-run pharmaceuticals company BioFarma and China's Sinovac Biotech, to its current roster of booster shot offerings.

<http://www.thejakartapost.com/indonesia/2022/04/27/govt-promises-to-add-halal-vaccine-to-booster-program.html>

COVID-19 contacts to receive fewer free tests during '3+4' quarantine

People in Taiwan listed as contacts of confirmed COVID-19 patients will now be given three free rapid tests, instead of five, during their seven-day isolation and self-initiated epidemic prevention period, the Central Epidemic Command Center (CECC) said Thursday. Under the CECC's new "3+4" quarantine policy that took effect Tuesday, contacts of COVID-19 cases were being given five free rapid tests by the government during their three days of home quarantine and four days of "self-initiated epidemic prevention."

<https://focustaiwan.tw/society/202204280021>

Nearly 60,000 COVID-19 rapid test kits sold in 2 hours

Nearly 60,000 COVID-19 rapid test kits were sold in two hours across Taiwan as the government launched its rapid test kit rationing scheme on Thursday. As of 9 a.m. on Thursday, 59,214 test kits had been sold at 2,323 stores and health centers, Director-General of the National Health Insurance Administration (NHIA) Lee Po-chang said.

<https://focustaiwan.tw/society/202204280012>

Shanghai's focus shifts to vaccination of elderly as new cases decline

The COVID-hit city of Shanghai is making more resources available to improve vaccination rates among the elderly as daily case numbers decline and it looks for a way out of four weeks of stringent lockdown restrictions. The city, battling China's biggest ever coronavirus outbreak, saw new asymptomatic cases fall to 9,330 on April 27, down 22% from a day earlier and its lowest rate in 24 days, with symptomatic infections also down by almost a fifth.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/china/shanghais-focus-shifts-vaccination-elderly-new-cases-decline-2022-04-28/>

Latin American nations ease restrictions as COVID cases drop

Colombians will soon be going to movie theaters without having to wear face masks. Chile opens its borders next week for the first time in two years. Mexico's president has declared the pandemic over. And in Rio de Janeiro, tens of thousands attended Carnival parades just two months after the world-famous spectacle was postponed to prevent COVID-19 infections. Even as coronavirus cases rise half a world away in China and authorities there impose new lockdowns, plummeting infection rates in Latin America have countries eliminating restrictions on mass gatherings, lifting some travel requirements and scrapping mask mandates that have been in place for two years.

<https://apnews.com/article/covid-travel-health-colombia-china-57fedcf60784554447b41060d398e32d>

New tests to decide Shanghai reopening as Beijing stocks up

Shanghai authorities said new COVID-19 testing over the next few days will determine which

neighborhoods can safely start reopening, as residents in Beijing watched carefully for word for whether the capital will lock down. On Wednesday, China reported 14,222 new cases of coronavirus infection, the vast majority in people not showing symptoms. Shanghai residents will begin another round of testing over the next few days and areas that have achieved “societal zero COVID” could see some measure of limited freedom, the vice head of the city health committee, Zhao Dandan, said.

<https://apnews.com/article/covid-health-business-shanghai-wuhan-469235110d103463dd9479a3161a7eb1>

'These lives matter': Oxfam and partners urge J&J, Pfizer and Moderna investors to focus on vaccine equity efforts

As the world struggles with COVID-19 more than two years after the virus first broke out, vaccine disparities continue to undermine the global response in some regions. During the annual meetings for three major vaccine players, access advocates are asking investors to step in. While 65.1% of the world population has received at least one COVID-19 vaccine dose, only 15.2% of people in low-income countries can say the same, according to Our World In Data. Vaccine inequity could cost the global economy more than \$2 trillion by 2025 and spur “bouts of social unrest,” according to a CNBC report last summer. Oxfam has a goal for “everyone, everywhere” to have access to COVID-19 vaccines. The group says three major vaccine players shoulder much of the blame for vaccine disparities. During their annual meetings, it's renewing calls more transparency and access.

<https://www.fiercepharma.com/pharma/these-lives-matter-oxfam-urges-jj-pfizer-and-moderna-investors-press-companies-vaccine>

Partisan Exits

Republicans Don't Want Ukraine Aid Tied With Covid Bill

President Joe Biden has broad support in Congress for a massive \$33 billion Ukraine aid package, but the proposal risks getting tangled in a long-simmering partisan dispute over immigration and Covid-19 funding. The Senate could vote on the emergency spending package next week, but the House will be on recess. Congress could finish by the week of May 9 and send it to Biden for his signature. But if Democrats insist on attaching long-stalled funding for coronavirus vaccinations and treatment to the package, action could be delayed indefinitely. “That’s not going to happen. That’s an awful way to do business,” Senator Jim Risch of Idaho, the top Republican on the Foreign Relations Committee, said about combining the two spending requests.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-04-28/republicans-warn-against-combining-ukraine-aid-with-covid-bill>

New Zealanders who couldn't go home in COVID lockdown win case against government

New Zealanders overseas have won a high court victory over border restrictions that left many of them unable to return home during the coronavirus pandemic. New Zealand's COVID-19 policies allowed the country to escape the worst of the virus, keeping cases and deaths relatively low compared to many other countries. But the New Zealand High Court ruled that the system used to allocate places in border quarantine facilities infringed on the rights of some citizens to return home. For most of the period between 10 April 2020 until 28 February 2022, returning citizens had to get a place in hotel isolation (MIQ - managed isolation and quarantine) before they could board a plane home.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-court-finds-new-zealands-quarantine-allocation-system-infringed-on-rights-12599856>

COVID-19: What it was really like in care homes as govt found guilty of breaking law during early stages of pandemic

It was the Easter weekend in April 2020 and a clear blue sky and a warm breeze disguised the fact that the nation was in lockdown. A new disease called COVID-19 was spreading fast. Cameraman Andy and I were about to step into a residential nursing home that was in the grip of this virus. I

didn't know it at the time but what I was about to witness what would set the tone for a year-long investigation into how COVID killed thousands of elderly care home residents. That weekend, we witnessed staff struggling to find the right personal protective equipment (PPE) like masks, gloves and aprons.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-what-it-was-really-like-in-care-homes-as-govt-found-guilty-of-breaking-law-during-early-stages-of-pandemic-12600323>

Outpouring of Resentment on Chinese Social Media Is Overwhelming Censors

In the early hours of April 14, the Chinese Communist Party's social media strategy went off the rails. It began when state media accounts on Weibo, China's Twitter equivalent, promoted the hashtag "The U.S. is the country with the largest human-rights deficit." Tens of thousands of Chinese internet users turned the accusation around onto Beijing. They criticized not only China's Covid response of strict stay-at-home orders and minimal financial support for households but also wider social problems: long working hours, high property prices, violence against women, and censorship itself. "Our doors are locked down. Our pets are killed. Our medical resources are wasted so that people with acute illness can't be treated," wrote one poster. "The American government is so horrible, I'm so lucky to be born in China," read a typically ironic post.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-04-27/covid-zero-criticism-is-new-test-for-china-censorship?srnd=premiu-europe>

Continued Lockdown

Analysis: China struggles for options as COVID threatens economic goals

China's policymakers are struggling to find ways to ward off an economic slowdown that threatens job losses in a politically sensitive year, as COVID-19 lockdowns disrupt supply chains and jolt businesses. Beijing is sticking with an economic growth target of around 5.5% this year and plans to create more than 11 million new urban jobs, policy insiders say. However, analysts say that goal will become harder to achieve unless China eases its zero-COVID policy, which it has shown few signs of doing.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/china/china-struggles-options-covid-threatens-economic-goals-2022-04-28/>

COVID lockdowns upset the rice bowls of China's commuter workers

Analysts at Nomura estimate 46 cities are currently in full or partial lockdowns involving strict mobility restrictions on local residents, affecting the lives of 343 million people. Border towns such as Yanjiao have grown at a dizzying rate over the past decade as office workers in Beijing looked for affordable housing nearby, with hundreds of thousands crossing the Hebei-Beijing border on a daily basis before COVID. Even after the lockdown for Yanjiao residents was lifted on April 4, border checkpoints were clogged in the early hours of the morning and resentment at COVID curbs was palpable.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/china/covid-lockdowns-upset-rice-bowls-chinas-commuter-workers-2022-04-28/>

Beijing orders schools closed in tightening of virus rules

Beijing is closing all city schools in a further tightening of COVID-19 restrictions, as China's capital seeks to prevent a wider outbreak. The city of 21 million has already ordered three rounds of mass testing this week, with the third coming Friday. On Thursday, the city's Education Bureau ordered all schools to end classes from Friday and said it hadn't determined when they would resume. It also wasn't clear whether schools would be able to offer classes online or allow students facing crucial exams to return to class. Beijing announced 50 new cases on Thursday, two of them asymptomatic, bringing its total in the latest wave of infections to around 150. Students make up more than 30% of total cases, with clusters linked to six schools and two kindergartens in Chaoyang.

<https://apnews.com/article/covid-business-health-china-beijing-31ceb93765be067616bb287b5cfaf5e6>

Scientific Viewpoint

Merck quarterly profit tops expectations on demand for COVID pill, cancer drugs

Merck & Co posted better-than-expected first-quarter earnings and raised its full-year sales estimate on strength from its top-selling cancer drug Keytruda, human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine Gardasil and its COVID-19 antiviral pill molnupiravir.

<https://www.msn.com/en-ca/finance/topstories/merck-quarterly-profit-tops-expectations-on-demand-for-covid-pill-cancer-drugs/ar-AAWGSou>

Valneva awaits EU COVID-19 vaccine decision

Valneva remains optimistic that its COVID-19 vaccine could get the green light in the EU in the near future. On Monday, the French vaccine company announced that the European Medicine Agency's Committee for Medicinal Products for Human Use (CHMP) has asked for additional data and further justification for a Conditional Marketing Authorization for the vaccine.

https://www.biopharma-reporter.com/Article/2022/04/28/valneva-awaits-eu-covid-19-vaccine-decision?aca_news_section=Global+Industry+News

Study shows public health impact of covid-19 vaccines in the U.S.

A large US study published by The BMJ today finds that fewer people die from covid-19 in better vaccinated communities. The findings, based on data across 2,558 counties in 48 US states, show that counties with high vaccine coverage had a more than 80% reduction in death rates compared with largely unvaccinated counties. This large benefit complements the growing body of evidence indicating individual level benefits of covid-19 vaccination. A linked editorial also proposes that encouraging people to keep up to date with vaccination saves lives. As of 11 April 2022, more than 11 billion covid-19 vaccine doses have been administered globally and the World Health Organization's target is to vaccinate 70% of the world's population by mid-2022.

<https://www.news-medical.net/news/20220428/Study-shows-public-health-impact-of-covid-19-vaccines-in-the-US.aspx>

Covid-19: Highly vaccinated communities see far fewer deaths - study

High vaccination rates reduced Covid-19 deaths by more than 80% compared with places with low vaccine uptake, according to a major study of cases in the United States. The researchers, from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), looked at infections of the Alpha and Delta strains, and deaths from these strains, across more than 2,500 US counties during 2021. They compared places where the number of adults who had received at least one dose of a Covid-19 vaccine was very low (<10%), low (10-39%), medium (40-69%), and high (>70%) and found as vaccine rate increased, death rates and infections from the virus fell away dramatically.

<https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/health/coronavirus/128471218/covid19-highly-vaccinated-communities-see-far-fewer-deaths--study>

Measles cases surge nearly 80% in wake of Covid chaos, with fears other diseases could follow

In the short term, if the goal is to stop transmission when cases are rising and enhance society's transition to more normal activities, boosters could conceivably help. "If you can quickly boost a bunch of people at the cusp of a surge, you might be able to flatten that curve," Swift says. She notes, however, that boosters only temporarily slow the spread of infection. Adding to the public's risk calculation fatigue, many airlines lifted mask requirements last week after a federal judge ruled that a mask mandate on public transportation is unlawful. (The Department of Justice has since appealed that ruling.) "It feels like a mixed message to people to say, 'Get your booster but stop wearing masks,'" Swift says. "It's been such a quagmire."

<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2022/apr/28/measles-cases-surge-nearly-80-in-wake-of-covid-chaos-with-fears-other-diseases-could-follow>

Here's Who Should Get a Second COVID Booster

Although the consensus remains that getting the initial full-series vaccination offers a clear benefit, scientists today disagree on the value of a fourth mRNA vaccine dose. Some say a second booster is essential for protecting highly vulnerable people—and that it should also be available to their families and other close contacts. Others note that the FDA’s decision about a fourth dose was based on limited evidence—primarily one study in Israel—and that the original two-shot series still provides durable protection against the most severe outcomes in adults with a healthy immune system. For its part, guidance published on April 6 by the European Center for Disease Prevention and Control and the European Medicines Agency’s COVID-19 Emergency Task Force states that a fourth mRNA COVID vaccine dose can be given to adults age 80 and older but that it is too early to consider that booster for the general population.

<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/heres-who-should-get-a-second-covid-booster/>

The future of vaccine research and learning the lessons of COVID-19

The global effort to produce a vaccine for COVID-19 has rightly been lauded as one of the greatest scientific achievements of the past century. The sheer speed at which the process moved from producing the first viral genetic sequence to global rollout of effective vaccines was all the more impressive when remembering that the fastest any vaccine had previously been developed was around four years, for mumps in the 1960s, and most vaccine production timescales had been a decade or more. A number of factors – including a wealth of funding, regulatory flexibility, and scientific expertise – were on our side, which is unsurprising given the matter that needed addressing was the worst global health crisis for a generation.

<https://www.europeanpharmaceuticalreview.com/article/170768/the-future-of-vaccine-research-and-learning-the-lessons-of-covid-19/>

Merck Profit Boosted by Sales of Covid-19 Pill

Merck & Co. reported stronger-than-expected first-quarter profit and revenue and raised its full year outlook Thursday, buoyed by sales of its Covid-19 antiviral following the winter omicron wave. Merck reported \$3.2 billion in revenue from its Covid antiviral, known as Lagevrio or molnupiravir, compared with Wall Street expectations of \$2.72 billion. The drug was cleared by regulators in late 2021 so the first quarter is its first full quarter of sales. The company now expects overall full-year sales of \$56.9 billion to \$58.1 billion, up from a prior forecast that topped out at \$57.6 billion. Adjusted 2022 earnings will be \$7.24 to \$7.36 a share, Merck said, up from a range of \$7.12 to \$7.27.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-04-28/merck-increases-full-year-guidance-as-new-covid-pill-beats-views>

The benefits of large scale covid-19 vaccination

New evidence confirms that fewer people die in better vaccinated communities - The first covid-19 vaccines were administered under emergency use authorisation in December 2020, just one year into the pandemic, a “miracle” of pharmaceutical innovation that has saved an estimated million lives or more in the US alone.¹² The authorisation was given on the basis of safety and efficacy in randomised controlled trials, which found that immunisation with Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna mRNA vaccines protected a remarkably high percentage (>90%) of recipients from developing symptomatic infection and, to a lesser extent, from asymptomatic infection too. In other words, when tested against the SARS-CoV-2 variants prevailing in 2020 and early 2021, these novel covid-19 vaccines could stop the great majority of infections from causing illness and help to prevent transmission of SARS-CoV-2. But could vaccination prevent infection and illness on a large scale, outside the controlled environment of clinical trials? A linked study by Suthar and colleagues (doi:10.1136/bmj-2021-069317) adds to the evidence that it can, across the US

<https://www.bmj.com/content/377/bmj.o867>

WHO says pandemic justifies leader's pitch at Moderna meeting

A shareholder proposal calling on Moderna Inc to study transferring production of COVID-19 vaccines to less-developed countries won 24% support from investors on Thursday after it received a rare endorsement from the World Health Organization. Proponents say production shifts could help combat the global pandemic. Moderna of Cambridge, Mass. opposed the measure, saying among other things it already maximized its manufacturing capacity with partners, and that poorer countries have declined millions of doses that Moderna was prepared to deliver.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/who-says-pandemic-justifies-leaders-pitch-moderna-meeting-2022-04-28/>

Moderna files for U.S. authorization of COVID shot for kids under 6

Moderna Inc said it asked U.S. regulators to authorize its COVID-19 vaccine for children under the age of 6, which would make it the first shot against the coronavirus available for those under 5-years-old. The COVID-19 vaccine from Pfizer Inc and BioNTech SE is authorized for children 5 and older. But their trial results for 2- to 4-year-olds showed a weaker immune response than in adults, forcing the study to be extended to test a third dose. Pfizer has said that data would come in April.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/moderna-files-us-authorization-covid-shot-kids-under-6-2022-04-28/>

European studies shed light on long COVID risk and recovery

A trio of new observational studies from Europe describes long COVID prevalence in Luxembourg, the effect of initial infection severity on risk in Sweden, and an occupational therapy program to ease symptoms in Ireland. The research was presented at the annual congress of the European Society of Clinical Microbiology and Infectious Diseases (ESCMID) in Portugal, which ended yesterday.

<https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2022/04/european-studies-shed-light-long-covid-risk-and-recovery>

Coronavirus Resurgence

Africa seeing uptick in COVID cases driven by S.Africa, WHO says

Africa is seeing an uptick in COVID-19 infections, largely driven by a doubling in cases reported in South Africa, the World Health Organization said on Thursday, urging people across the continent to continue to get vaccinated. Africa had been experiencing a lull in COVID cases, with the WHO earlier this month pointing to the longest-running decline in weekly infections on the continent since the start of the pandemic. But last week cases started to pick up in South Africa -- the country that has recorded the most infections and deaths in Africa to date -- and health authorities there are monitoring for signs of a fifth infection wave. "This week new COVID-19 cases and deaths on the continent increased for the first time after a decline of more than two months for cases and one month for deaths," Benido Impouma, director for communicable and non-communicable diseases at the WHO's Africa office, told an online news conference.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/africa-seeing-uptick-covid-19-cases-who-says-2022-04-28/>

Taiwan's daily COVID cases top 10000 for first time

Taiwan reported on Thursday that the daily number of confirmed domestic COVID-19 cases had topped 10,000 for the first time, in line with predictions, and the health minister said infections would continue to rise. Taiwan, population 23 million, has reported a spike in cases since the start of the year - 51,504 so far - after having previously well controlled the pandemic with tight border controls and tough quarantines. With a well-vaccinated population, more than 99% of those infected in the current wave are either asymptomatic or have not fallen seriously ill. Only seven people have died since Jan. 1.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/taiwans-daily-covid-cases-top-10000-first-time-2022-04-28/>

Taiwan faces largest COVID-19 outbreak yet

Taiwan, which had been living mostly free of COVID-19, is now facing its worst outbreak since the beginning of the pandemic with over 11,000 new cases reported Thursday. Cases have been on the upswing since late March. In April, the island's central authorities announced that they would no longer maintain a "zero-COVID" policy like the Chinese government's in which they would centrally quarantine positive cases. Instead, the government is asking people to quarantine at home if they test positive, unless they show moderate to severe symptoms. Chen Shih-chung, the island's health minister, announced Thursday they had found 11,353 new cases, along with two deaths. During the daily press briefing held by the Central Epidemic Command Center, he said 99.7% of the cases in the current outbreak either had no symptoms or had mild symptoms.

<https://apnews.com/article/covid-business-health-asia-taiwan-f46f2cff593fcbbc0ce9923b0e62fe8>

Global COVID deaths drop to lowest since early pandemic months

Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, PhD, said cases and deaths continue to drop, with just over 15,000 deaths reported to the WHO last week, which he said is the lowest weekly total since March 2020. He said the welcome news comes with the caveat that countries are reducing their testing, and the WHO is receiving less information on transmission and evolution. "But this virus won't go away just because countries stop looking for it," Tedros said. "It's still spreading, it's still changing, and it's still killing." The threat of new variants is still very real, and scientists still don't understand the long-term consequences of infection, he said, repeating the WHO's call for countries to maintain their surveillance activities. In China, Beijing has completed its first round of mass testing, which targeted 20 million people and yielded 12 cases. Cases in the city have been slowly rising, prompting mass testing and fears that residents of the country's capital could face a lockdown, similar to Shanghai's—which has been in effect for about a month.

<https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2022/04/global-covid-deaths-drop-lowest-early-pandemic-months>