

COVID-19 Lockdown Exit Analysis

6th May 2022

Lockdown Exit

FDA Limits Authorized Use of J&J's Covid-19 Vaccine

The Food and Drug Administration limited the use of the Covid-19 vaccine from Johnson & Johnson after reviewing the risk of life-threatening blood clots. The agency said Thursday that the J&J shot's authorization was now only for adults for whom other shots aren't available or medically appropriate, or who won't take another vaccine. The FDA said it was making the move after confirming a total of 60 cases, including nine deaths, of the clotting condition known as thrombosis with thrombocytopenia syndrome, or TTS, among the millions of people who got the J&J shot. The change will likely sharply scale back use of a vaccine that health authorities had once hoped would be a convenient option for many people, but has become a third choice for most people because of the emergence of the risk for the rare but life-threatening side effect.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/fda-limits-authorized-use-of-j-j-s-covid-19-vaccine-11651788829>

Carnival Cruise Passengers Complain After Covid-19 Outbreak

Guests aboard a Carnival Corp. ship with an outbreak of Covid-19 say the staff was overwhelmed by the number of cases, showing the cruise industry is continuing to struggle with the illness. Carnival didn't say how many people were infected on the Carnival Spirit, which docked Tuesday in Seattle and has a capacity of more than 2,000 passengers. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is looking into the situation, according to its website. The CDC is investigating cases on 53 cruise ships, more than half of those participating in its program. The agency investigates ships that report more than 0.3% of passengers or crew testing positive. Carnival, the largest cruise line operator, had 24 of its ships under investigation. But all of the major carriers have ships that met that criteria.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-05-05/carnival-passengers-complain-of-high-number-of-covid-19-cases>

New York City could bring back Covid mask mandate, vaccine checks if hospitals come under pressure

New York City could bring back mask mandates and proof of vaccination status to go to restaurants, bars and other venues if Covid hospitalizations rise to a concerning level, according to the city's top health official. The city increased its Covid alert level from low to medium earlier this week as infections surpassed a rate of 200 per 100,000 people, driven by the more contagious omicron BA.2 subvariant. For now, health officials are asking residents to exercise increased caution by voluntarily masking indoors and getting tested before and after gatherings. However, Health Commissioner Ashwin Vasan said New York might reinstate mandatory masking and vaccine checks if the city raises its Covid alert level to high.

<https://www.cnn.com/2022/05/05/covid-new-york-city-could-bring-back-mask-mandate-vaccine-checks.html>

Is Covid over? What scientists say about when the pandemic will end, why restrictions ended

With life now largely getting back to normal in many parts of the UK, people could be forgiven for believing the worst of the Covid-19 pandemic is behind us. Foreign travel has opened up and self-isolation rules have been scrapped for most of the UK. But cases of Covid-19 infection and deaths reported (28 days after testing positive for Covid) are still high in the UK.

<https://inews.co.uk/news/health/covid-over-is-when-pandemic-end-restrictions-why-scrapped-explained-1611867>

Spain's tourist arrivals jump 8-fold in March, edge toward pre-COVID levels

Spain received 4 million tourists in March, more than eight times as many as in the same month last year, after most pandemic-related restrictions were lifted, data from the National Institute of Statistics (INE) showed on Thursday. Foreign tourists spent 5.07 billion euros (\$5.37 billion) while on holiday in the country in March, up from a mere 544 million euros a year earlier, the data showed. "Spain closes this first quarter with good data on arrivals and tourist spending, a trend that we hope will intensify in the summer period," Tourist Minister Reyes Maroto said on her Twitter account.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/spains-tourist-arrivals-jump-8-fold-march-edge-toward-pre-covid-levels-2022-05-05/>

U.S. summer travelers can expect long lines, higher prices as COVID restrictions ease

With more U.S. travelers expected to take to the skies and the roads this summer as COVID restrictions ease, unbridled demand will strain capacity in the leisure and travel industry and push prices even higher. Airlines, hotels, rental car companies and booking sites all reported a surge in demand for their services in the latest batch of company earnings. But at the same time, many of those companies face a tight labor market and limited volume as they scramble to restart and expand operations after more than two years of depressed demand due to the pandemic.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-summer-travelers-can-expect-long-lines-higher-prices-covid-restrictions-ease-2022-05-05/>

Covid Killed About 1 Out of Every 500 People, WHO Report Shows

The Covid-19 death toll probably climbed to almost 15 million in its first two years -- about one out of every 500 people globally -- according to a new World Health Organization estimate. The figure, far higher than the official numbers for 2020 and 2021, includes deaths directly due to Covid infection and those indirectly caused by pandemic disruptions, the Geneva-based health agency said Thursday. The WHO's new estimate is more than twice the figures from individual governments' reports showing about 6.2 million Covid deaths.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-05-05/covid-killed-about-1-out-of-every-500-people-who-report-shows>

Almost three times as many died as a result of COVID than officially reported - WHO

Almost three times as many people have died as a result of COVID-19 as the official data show, according to a new World Health Organization (WHO) report, the most comprehensive look at the true global toll of the pandemic so far. There were 14.9 million excess deaths associated with COVID-19 by the end of 2021, the U.N. body said on Thursday. The official count of deaths directly attributable to COVID-19 and reported to WHO in that period, from January 2020 to the end of December 2021, is slightly more than 5.4 million.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/almost-three-times-many-died-result-covid-than-officially-reported-who-2022-05-05/>

'How did we catch it?': spread of COVID baffles locked-down Shanghai residents

For weeks, their housing estate was free of COVID. But in late April, after what Veronica thinks was her 12th PCR test, she, another member of her family, and a handful of neighbours tested positive. "I have no idea how we caught it," said Veronica, who declined to give her full name, citing privacy. Her building was declared "sealed". She, her family and the others who tested positive were sent into quarantine. Everyone else was ordered back indoors for another 14 days.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/china/how-did-we-catch-it-spread-covid-baffles-locked-down-shanghai-residents-2022-05-05/>

U.S. limits use of J&J's COVID vaccine on blood clot risks

The U.S. health regulator said on Thursday it was limiting the use of Johnson & Johnson's COVID-19 vaccine for adults due to the risk of a rare blood clotting syndrome, the latest setback to the shot that has been eclipsed by rivals. The J&J shot, which received U.S. clearance in February 2021 for

adults, can be administered in cases where authorized or approved COVID-19 vaccines are not accessible or if an individual is less keen on using the other two shots, the Food and Drug Administration said.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/us-limits-use-jjs-covid-19-vaccine-adults-blood-clot-risks-2022-05-05/>

Exit Strategies

A Covid vaccine waiver? WTO has a plan for that.

World Trade Organization officials have circulated a draft proposal that would temporarily waive intellectual property protections for Covid-19 vaccines, paving the way for members to start discussing the plan. That will compel members, including the deal's brokers, to signal whether they'll support the divisive proposal. The deal, which emerged from talks among U.S., European, South African and Indian representatives, would temporarily ease patent restrictions on Covid-19 vaccines for developing countries that exported less than 10 percent of the world's coronavirus vaccine doses in 2021.

<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/global-pulse/2022/05/05/trips-waiver-00030066>

Western Australia could hit fresh COVID-19 peak as AMA remains nervous over removal of mask mandate

After Western Australia removed almost all of its COVID-19 rules last week, yesterday's new peak of 9,782 daily cases was pretty much expected. And with case numbers tending to be higher on Thursdays, it's possible today's tally will be another record. The Chief Health Officer warned this would likely happen, and it was a consequence of easing restrictions accepted by both Premier Mark McGowan and the Health Minister, Amber-Jade Sanderson. Asked about the rise yesterday, Ms Sanderson reiterated the key statistics are hospitalisations and intensive care admissions, which have remained relatively consistent.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-05-05/wa-facing-fresh-covid-peak-after-removing-restrictions/101037872>

In Covid-19 Battle, Taiwan Finds Alternative to Chinese-Style Lockdowns

Two of the last governments on earth to stick with zero-Covid policy are separated by only 100 miles of water. As both contend with Omicron outbreaks, the distance between their approaches to the virus is expanding rapidly. In China, government authorities have imposed full or partial lockdowns on dozens of cities, home to hundreds of millions of people, in a frantic bid to suffocate multiplying infection clusters. In Taiwan, a self-ruled island that Beijing claims just off the coast of China's Fujian province, the government has responded to its own Omicron outbreak by phasing out contact-tracing, reducing quarantine times and rolling out a campaign to soothe public concerns about the virus.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/in-covid-19-battle-taiwan-finds-alternative-to-chinese-style-lockdowns-11651678618>

Africa CDC urges COVID-19 vaccine buyers to order from S.Africa's Aspen

Africa's top public health body urged all those purchasing COVID-19 vaccines for the continent to place orders with South Africa's Aspen Pharmacare, saying the market was key to developing vaccine manufacturing on the continent. The Africa Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said it was doing everything it could behind the scenes to prevent a situation where Aspen closes its facility due to a lack of orders.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/africa-cdc-urges-covid-19-vaccine-buyers-order-safricas-aspen-2022-05-05/>

COVID-hit Beijing returns to work after subdued Labour Day break

Beijing residents tentatively returned to work on Thursday after a muted five-day Labour Day holiday devoid of the usual trips across the country or lavish family dinners, as China pledged to

fight any criticism of its uncompromising "zero-COVID" policy. The long break is usually one of the most lucrative times of the year for restaurants, hotels and other businesses in China. This year, travellers spent 43% less than in 2021, data showed on Thursday

<https://www.reuters.com/world/china/beijing-returns-work-after-5-day-break-high-alert-covid-2022-05-05/>

S.Africa's Aspen to slash COVID vaccine capacity within 6 weeks if no orders - CEO

Aspen Pharmacare will switch about half of its COVID-19 vaccine production capacity onto other products if demand doesn't pick up within six weeks, its CEO warned, as South Africa's president and health officials urged more Africans to take up the shots. Aspen completed a deal in March to package, sell and distribute Johnson & Johnson's COVID-19 vaccine in what was considered a game-changing moment for an under-vaccinated continent frustrated by sluggish Western handouts.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/safricas-aspen-slash-covid-vaccine-capacity-within-6-weeks-if-no-orders-ceo-2022-05-05/>

China's Services Sector in Doldrums as Covid-19 Lockdowns Bite

Activity in China's services sector fell in April to its weakest level since the early days of the pandemic, according to one indicator, as lockdowns aimed at containing Covid-19 shut restaurants and stores and kept millions of people at home. The data add to evidence that China's economy slowed sharply last month as authorities imposed restrictions on businesses and daily life in major cities including Shanghai.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/chinas-services-sector-is-in-the-doldrums-as-covid-19-lockdowns-bite-11651739499>

New Africa Covid-19 Cases Outside Southern Region Remain Low

African countries saw a 38% jump in coronavirus cases last week even as the official number of deaths fell, supporting evidence that recent surges are being driven by more transmissible but less lethal strains. "The saving grace is that we have fewer that are being hospitalized and fewer that are actually losing their lives as a result of exposure to this virus," Ahmed Ogwel Ouma, Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention deputy director, told reporters Thursday in a virtual briefing. The vast majority of the continent's 37,111 new weekly cases were reported by South Africa, where a pickup in infections is being led by the BA.4 and BA.5 sublineages of the omicron variant. Still, most African nations haven't yet characterized these new strains, Ouma said.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-05-05/new-africa-covid-19-cases-outside-southern-region-remain-low>

North Korea Lifts Sweeping Lockdown After One Day, Yonhap Says

North Korea on Thursday lifted a temporary lockdown it had imposed a day earlier after reports from across the country of fevers of unknown origins, Yonhap News Agency reported, citing multiple South Korean government officials. The brief lockdown followed a military parade last week marking the anniversary of the founding of its army. Pyongyang also held festivities a few weeks ago for the 110th birth anniversary of state founder Kim Il Sung -- the grandfather of current leader Kim Jong Un -- where the country organized mass events despite maintaining strict Covid-19 border closures in place since early 2020. It was unclear which parts of the country were under the daylong lockdown. There is speculation, the fever cases were caused by waterborne diseases such as typhoid because a coronavirus infection would have prompted more stringent curbs, according to Yonhap.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-05-05/north-korea-lifts-sweeping-lockdown-after-one-day-yonhap-says>

Hong Kong reopens beaches, Beijing relaxes quarantine rules

Hong Kong reopened beaches and pools and relaxed other pandemic restrictions Thursday, a day after China's capital, Beijing, announced it would ease its tough quarantine rules for arrivals from overseas. The two Chinese cities are at opposite ends of COVID-19 outbreaks. Hong Kong is emerging from by far its deadliest wave, which killed 9,000 people. In Beijing, a new wave is just

beginning and authorities have imposed a series of restrictions on residents to try to snuff it out.

<https://apnews.com/article/covid-health-beijing-hong-kong-shanghai-48f7989e778e5a29e5b1a2df2fc1cedd>

Travel industry, airlines urge end to COVID testing to enter U.S.

Major U.S. airlines, business and travel groups and other companies urged the White House on Thursday to abandon COVID-19 pre-departure testing requirements for vaccinated international passengers traveling to the United States. "Given the slow economic recovery of the business and international travel sectors, and in light of medical advancements and the improved public health metrics in the U.S., we encourage you to immediately remove the inbound testing requirement for vaccinated air travelers," said the letter signed by American Airlines, Carnival Corp, Marriott International, Walt Disney Co's Disney Parks, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, U.S. Travel Association and others.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/us-travel-industry-airlines-urge-end-predeparture-covid-19-testing-rule-2022-05-05/>

Partisan Exits

Bill Gates opens up on vaccine conspiracy theories: 'People yell at me that I'm tracking them.'

Bill Gates says people yell at him in the street over conspiracy theories surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic. In a wide-ranging interview with the BBC on Thursday, the billionaire Microsoft co-founder said: "You almost have to laugh because it's so crazy." One particular conspiracy theory that has gained traction over the past two years makes false claims that Gates wants to use mass vaccination to implant microchips into people so that he can track them digitally. Gates has always denied such accusations, which have circulated widely on social media. But Gates' denial hasn't been enough to extinguish the theory. In May 2020, a Yahoo/YouGov poll of 1,640 U.S. adults found that almost one in three people believed the debunked microchipping conspiracy theory to be true.

<https://fortune.com/2022/05/05/bill-gates-vaccine-conspiracy-theories-people-yell-you-are-tracking-me/>

Recent COVID-19 court cases show New Zealand's Bill of Rights Act is not as strong as some might wish

At the end of April, the High Court found the border quarantine (MIQ) system did work well to protect public health and many of the resulting restrictions on rights were justifiable. However, the court also found the allocation of space in MIQ through a virtual lobby system amounted to an unjustifiable limit on the right of New Zealand citizens to return because it did not prioritise citizens over non-citizens, and it did not prioritise on individual need or delays experienced. What we see in these cases is the New Zealand constitution in action, operating as a system of checks and balances to protect individuals from arbitrary interference by the state. As an aspect of that, the cases show the operation of the rule of law, which means any power exercised by the government has to be based on legal authority and that everyone is subject to the law, whether they are members of the public or politicians.

<https://theconversation.com/recent-covid-19-court-cases-show-new-zealands-bill-of-rights-act-is-not-as-strong-as-some-might-wish-182232>

China to fight comments, actions denying its COVID response policy -state media

China will fight any comments and actions that distort, doubt or deny the country's COVID-19 response policy, state television reported on Thursday, after a meeting of the country's highest decision-making body. Relaxing COVID controls will lead to large-scale infections, state television reported, following the meeting of the Standing Committee of the Communist Party's politburo, adding that China will step up research into and its defence against virus mutations, and will avoid one-size-fit-all policies.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/china/china-fight-comments-actions-denying-its-covid-response-policy-state-media-20>

[22-05-05/](#)

Scientific Viewpoint

Medicago announces publication of Phase 3 COVID-19 vaccine study results in New England Journal of Medicine

Medicago today announced the publication of the results from the Phase 3 study of COVIFENZ®, COVID-19 Vaccine (plant-based virus-like particles [VLP], recombinant, adjuvanted), in the New England Journal of Medicine (NEJM). The Phase 3 trial studied the two-dose regimen of COVIFENZ® given 21 days apart versus placebo in over 24,000 subjects aged 18 and above. Common side effects in the vaccine group included injection site pain, headache, fatigue, fever, muscle aches, and chills. COVIFENZ® is indicated for active immunization to prevent coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) in individuals 18 to 64 years of age. The safety and efficacy of COVIFENZ® in individuals younger than 18 years of age or 65 years and older have not been established. COVIFENZ® has not yet received approval in other jurisdictions. "We are proud to have our Phase 3 clinical trial published in the esteemed New England Journal of Medicine to be shared with the larger scientific community

<https://www.pharmiweb.com/press-release/2022-05-05/medicago-announces-publication-of-phase-3-covid-19-vaccine-study-results-in-new-england-journal-of-medicine>

Plant-based COVID-19 vaccine grown inside Australian native shows 'promising results'

A plant-based coronavirus vaccine grown inside a native Australian plant related to tobacco is showing promising results against the virus, which has claimed more than six million lives globally. The vaccine, known as CoVLP+AS03 and developed by Medicago, has been approved in Canada for people who are 18 to 64 years of age. So, how does it work? Scientists insert bacteria containing the virus' genetic code into the plant *Nicotiana benthamiana*. The plant then starts developing its own coronavirus-like particles or CoVLP. These are extracted and combined with an immune-boosting additive, known as an adjuvant, in the final vaccine, called CoVLP+AS03.

<https://www.9news.com.au/national/coronavirus-vaccine-update-australian-plant-based-vaccine-showing-promising-results-medicago/d021b5bc-7427-40f2-b3db-827f187fa26c>

Novavax seeks expanded authorisation for Covid-19 vaccine in Great Britain

Novavax has sought expansion of the authorisation from the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) for its Covid-19 vaccine, Nuvaxovid (NVX-CoV2373), for use in adolescents of the age 12 to 17 years in Great Britain. The recombinant, adjuvanted vaccine is intended for active immunisation to prevent Covid-19 in adolescents of this age group. In February this year, the vaccine obtained conditional marketing authorization (CMA) from MHRA for use in people aged 18 years and above. The vaccine is administered in two doses at a gap of 21 days as the initial vaccination regimen. This CMA expansion request is based on the entirety of pre-clinical, clinical and manufacturing-related (CMC) data submitted to the regulatory authority.

<https://www.pharmaceutical-technology.com/news/novavax-expanded-authorisation-vaccine/>

Are nasal sprays the answer to stopping Covid transmission?

The roaring success of Covid vaccines – in countries able to obtain them – has led to deaths and severe disease from the infection plummeting even as the virus evolved to sidestep immunity and rip through populations more swiftly. But while the rapid development of Covid shots ranks as the finest achievement of the pandemic, scientists are not done yet. In a small number of labs around the world, teams are taking on a problem that cannot be ignored: that the virus remains rampant in the face of mass immunity. The problem has arisen because existing Covid vaccines are better at preparing the immune system to fight the virus inside the body than stopping it at the gates. So even though immunity has largely “defanged” Covid, countries still face waves of infection that hospitalise vulnerable people, keep staff off work, and leave an uncertain proportion of people with

long Covid.

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2022/may/05/are-nasal-sprays-vaccine-answer-to-stopping-covid-transmission>

WHO Says 15 Million Have Died From Covid-19 Pandemic

The World Health Organization estimated that nearly 15 million people had died from causes related to the coronavirus pandemic by the end of 2021, putting the toll from Covid-19 at nearly three times the number that had been officially recorded by countries. India suffered the highest toll of any country in the world, according to the report released Thursday, but most of the deaths have gone unrecorded. The 4.7 million people who had died in India by the end of last year, according to WHO estimates, was nearly 10 times the official tally at that time of 481,000 deaths. India's count has risen to about 524,000 since then. The report, which was compiled by scientists from around the world, has sparked fierce resistance from India, where government officials have denounced the health agency's methodology and objected to the release of the report.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/who-says-15-million-have-died-from-covid-19-pandemic-11651755496>

FDA rebukes Pfizer CEO's suggestion to take more Paxlovid if COVID-19 symptoms return

The FDA rebuked Pfizer CEO Albert Bourla's proposed solution to reports that some patients experienced a relapse of COVID-19 symptoms after treatment with the company's antiviral Paxlovid. After reports said some patients who took Paxlovid rebounded and started feeling symptoms again, the CEO told Bloomberg that patients can take another course, "like you do with antibiotics." "Paxlovid does what it has to do: It reduces the viral load," Bourla, Ph.D., told Bloomberg in an interview. "Then your body is supposed to do the job." The FDA isn't on board with the suggestion. "There is no evidence of benefit at this time for a longer course of treatment ... or repeating a treatment course of Paxlovid in patients with recurrent COVID-19 symptoms following completion of a treatment course," John Farley, M.D., director of the Office of Infectious Diseases, said in a post.

<https://www.fiercepharma.com/pharma/fda-rebukes-pfizers-suggestion-take-more-paxlovid-if-covid-19-symptoms-return>

Omicron just as deadly as earlier Covid variants, Harvard scientists claim

The Omicron variant of Covid-19 is just as potent as other variants that came before it, according to a new study in the US. The study, which has yet to be peer-reviewed, would bring into question the widespread public perception that Omicron — while more transmissible — results in less severe symptoms and fewer hospitalisations. Researchers assessed the records of 130,000 Covid patients in the past two years, spanning periods when different variants were dominant across the world. "We found that the risks of hospitalisation and mortality were nearly identical between periods," said the four scientists, three of whom are based at Harvard Medical School in Massachusetts. The study, titled "Sars-Cov-2 Omicron Variant is as deadly as previous waves after adjusting for vaccinations, demographics and comorbidities", was published on Research Square on 2 May.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/health/covid-omicron-variant-symptoms-delta-b2072021.html>

Does the World Still Need New Covid-19 Vaccines?

Our mandate remains to develop the best tools to prevent the emergence of new variants of concern and control the health and socioeconomic fallout from new surges. The decision by representatives of the African region to establish a network of six mRNA technology hubs¹⁰ is a sign that countries and regions are motivated to build local and regional capacity and expand self-sufficiency not only in planning and participating in key clinical trials but also in designing and manufacturing vaccines to better meet the needs of their populations during pandemic threats. Such technology hubs will need to embrace technologies beyond the mRNA approach.

<https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMe2204695>

Doctors investigating why some report rebound in COVID-19 symptoms after Paxlovid

When Laura Martin tested positive for COVID-19 last month during an extended stay in California,

she was prescribed Paxlovid, the highly touted antiviral drug created by Pfizer. Just one day after her diagnosis, she started her five-day course of pills, which have been shown to dramatically reduce the risk of hospitalization and death. Martin, a 63-year-old Boston native who now resides in Canada, said she was thrilled when her symptoms began to subside. "By the end of [the treatment], on Day 5, I was negative and feeling completely normal like without any symptoms, so I thought, 'Wow, this is really great. What a great drug,'" Martin told ABC News.

<https://abcnews.go.com/Health/scientists-investigate-perplexing-viral-rebound-covid-19-cases/story?id=84475465>

EMA says it hopes to approve Covid variant-adapted vaccines by autumn

The European Union's drug regulator said on Thursday it hoped to have vaccines adapted to address coronavirus variants, such as Omicron, approved by September. "Our priority is to ensure that adaptive vaccines are possibly approved by September at the latest to be ready for the rollout of new immunisation campaigns in the EU in the autumn," said Marco Cavaleri, head of biological health threats and vaccines strategy at the European Medicines Agency (EMA)

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/ema-says-it-hopes-approve-covid-variant-adapted-vaccines-by-autumn-2022-05-05/>

Omicron as severe as previous COVID variants, large study finds

The Omicron variant of the SARS-CoV2 virus is intrinsically as severe as previous variants, according to a preprint version of a large U.S. study that counters assumptions in other studies that it was more transmissible but less severe. The findings, which estimated Omicron's severity after accounting for the impact of vaccines, should reinforce the importance of inoculations and booster shots, experts said. Vaccines helped keep hospitalizations and deaths relatively low during the Omicron surge compared with previous variants.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/omicron-severe-previous-covid-variants-large-study-finds-2022-05-05/>

WHO: Nearly 15 million deaths associated with COVID-19

The World Health Organization estimates that nearly 15 million people were killed either by coronavirus or by its impact on overwhelmed health systems during the first two years of the pandemic, more than double the current official death toll of over 6 million. Most of the deaths occurred in Southeast Asia, Europe and the Americas, according to a WHO report issued Thursday. The U.N. health agency's director-general, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, described the newly calculated figure as "sobering," saying it should prompt countries to invest more in their capacities to quell future health emergencies. WHO tasked scientists with determining the actual number of COVID-19 deaths between January 2020 and the end of last year.

<https://apnews.com/article/covid-health-europe-united-nations-world-organization-420b7dce6ecd0fc57a0faea02327b5f8>

Evidence mounts for need to study Pfizer's Paxlovid for long COVID - researchers say

Additional reports of patients with long COVID who were helped by Pfizer Inc's oral antiviral treatment Paxlovid offer fresh impetus for conducting clinical trials to test the medicine for the debilitating condition, U.S. researchers said on Thursday. Three new case studies follow earlier reports of long COVID patients who experienced relief of their symptoms after taking the treatment, which is currently only authorized for high-risk people early after onset of COVID symptoms.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/evidence-mounds-need-study-pfizers-paxlovid-long-covid-researchers-say-2022-05-05/>

Moderna tunes booster pitch ahead of potential shift to private COVID vaccine market this fall

To boost or not to boost, that is the question. The answer, according to executives at mRNA expert Moderna, is a resounding yes. The meteoric rise and fall of the SARS-CoV-2 omicron variant this past

winter “continues to demonstrate the remarkable evolutionary capacity of this virus,” Paul Burton, M.D., Ph.D., Moderna’s chief medical officer, said on the company’s earnings call Wednesday. “The slowing of booster uptake now means there will be individuals who are under-vaccinated and under-protected as we move into late spring and summer, when we thought we would have declining case counts,” the biotech’s top scientist added. With COVID-19’s infectious potential considered, the company is arguing for a “variant adapted booster campaign this coming fall,” Burton said.

<https://www.fiercepharma.com/pharma/moderna-tunes-booster-pitch-ahead-potential-shift-endemic-covid-19-market-fall>

Coronavirus Resurgence

Victoria passes 3,000 COVID-19 deaths as families remember those they've lost during the pandemic

Victoria is the first Australia jurisdiction to pass 3,000 COVID deaths. Australia's death rate for COVID is one of the lowest in the world at 0.12 per cent. An estimated 30,000 Victorians have been affected by a COVID death to date

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-05-05/victoria-records-covid-death-milestone/101039142>

Subvariants fuel COVID-19 rises in Africa and the Americas

Cases declined for a sixth week in a row, and deaths are at the lowest level since March 2020. Though the trends are welcome, they don't tell the whole story, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, PhD, director-general of the WHO, said today at a briefing. He said Omicron subvariants are driving increases in Africa and the Americas. In Africa, cases were up 31% compared to the week before, and in the Americas, case rose 13%. In Africa, 12 countries last week saw cases rise by more than 20%, but most of the new infections were reported by South Africa, which saw a 67% increase compared with the previous week. Last week, the country's health officials said the country was experiencing rising proportions of BA.4 and BA.5 subvariants, and they warned that a fifth surge could be under way.

<https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2022/05/subvariants-fuel-covid-19-rises-africa-and-americas>

COVID-19: Deaths involving coronavirus rise for sixth successive week in England and Wales, ONS says

Deaths involving COVID in England and Wales have risen for the sixth successive week, figures show. A total of 1,042 deaths registered in the seven days to 22 April mentioned COVID-19 on the death certificate, according to the Office for National Statistics (ONS). Deaths also increased by 4% in the previous week. The latest figures would likely have been higher as they were affected by Good Friday on 15 April and bank holiday Monday on 18 April, when very few deaths were registered. The continuing rise comes despite the latest figures covering a period that includes the Easter Monday bank holiday, when most register offices were closed.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-deaths-involving-coronavirus-rise-for-sixth-successive-week-in-england-and-wales-12605253>

India's Covid-19 toll highest in the world - WHO

Article reports that more than 4.7 million people in India - nearly 10 times higher than official records suggest - are thought to have died because of Covid-19, according to a new World Health Organization (WHO) report. India's government has rejected the figure, saying the methodology is flawed. Will we ever know how many Indians died in the pandemic? In November 2020, researchers at the World Mortality Dataset - a global repository that provides updated data on deaths from all causes - asked authorities in India to provide information. "These are not available," India's main statistical office told the researchers, according to Ariel Karlinsky, a scientist who co-created the dataset and is a member of an advisory group set up by the the WHO for its estimates of excess deaths caused by Covid globally during 2020 and 2021.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-60981318>