COVID-19 Lockdown Exit Analysis
26th Mar 2021

Overnight News Round Up

A U.S. government patent on tech used in mRNA COVID vaccines could be an 'important policy tool' to boost production, activists and academics say

- Academics and activists are calling on the U.S. government to make sure an upcoming patent for technology at the heart of several cotonavirus vaccines is used to increase access to the inoculants globally.
- A patent is soon to be issued for a particular form of molecular engineering developed by U.S. government scitnists that is currently used by five manufacturers of mRNA coronavirus vaccines.
- In a letter to U.S health officials, six health advocacy organizations and 15 public health academics said the upcoming patent is 'an important policy tool that the U.S. government could use to facilitate the scaling up of production of mRNA vaccines that use the technology.'
- The letter singled out the Moderna vaccine, which was developed with the NIAID and received $2.5bn in government funding. The authors of the letter said that any licensing should include provisions that allow the U.S. to authorise manufacturing of the Moderna vaccine and require technlogy sharing with the WHO to help ramp up global production; and include requirements for accessible pricing universally.
- 'This could contribute to saving millions of lives globally,' they wrote. 'It will also help protect public health in the USA. Global vaccination with highly effective vaccines, like mRNA-1273 is the best defence against the development of vaccine-resistant variants of the coronavirus.'

Advocates call on US to use vaccine patent to boost global access

Advocates call on US to use vaccine patent to boost global access
A group of academics and activists are calling on the United States government to make sure an upcoming patent for technology at the heart of several coronavirus vaccines is used to increase access to the inoculants globally. A patent is expected to soon be issued for a particular form of molecular engineering developed by US government scientists that is currently used by five manufacturers of mRNA coronavirus vaccines. In a letter to US health officials, six health advocacy organisations and 15 public health academics said the upcoming patent is an “important policy tool that the US government could use to facilitate scale up of production” for mRNA vaccines that use the technology.
https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/3/25/advocates-call-on-us-to-use-vaccine-patent-to-aid-global-access

HHS is urged to use its patents for the Moderna Covid-19 vaccine to widen global access
Seeking to quickly widen global access to Covid-19 vaccines, academics, and patient advocates are urging the Biden administration to use a key patent owned by the U.S. government to boost manufacturing and distribution of the Moderna (MRNA) shot. In a letter to federal officials, the group noted that a soon-to-be-issued-patent covering the use of spike proteins in the vaccine was jointly developed by the company and the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases. The patent has not been licensed to Moderna; the group maintains it is an “important policy tool” that can be used to ensure any licensing agreement fosters greater access.
https://www.statnews.com/pharmalot/2021/03/25/covid19-coronavirus-vaccnie-moderna-patents-nih-hhs/

Biden should use emergency powers to license Covid-19 vaccine technologies to the WHO

for global access

Following the WTO's failure to act, Biden's best option to lead the world toward equitable vaccine access is by using his executive powers to extricate the Moderna, Pfizer, and Johnson & Johnson vaccine patents from the grip of stifling monopolies and license the Covid-19 vaccine technology to the World Health Organization's Covid-19 Technology Access Pool, which would enable a rapid scale-up of generic vaccine manufacturing worldwide. This would give Biden a chance for a rare triple win: Licensing Covid-19 vaccine technologies to the pool would be a major victory for global social justice, a win for the self-interested American public, and a foreign policy victory for world order and stability.

https://www.statnews.com/2021/03/25/biden-use-emergency-powers-license-covid-19-vaccines-for-global-access/

A better U.S. response to COVID-19 would have saved tens of thousands of lives

U.S. COVID response could have avoided hundreds of thousands of deaths - research

The United States squandered both money and lives in its response to the coronavirus pandemic, and it could have avoided nearly 400,000 deaths with a more effective health strategy and trimmed federal spending by hundreds of billions of dollars while still supporting those who needed it. That is the conclusion of a group of research papers released at a Brookings Institution conference this week, offering an early and broad start to what will likely be an intense effort in coming years to assess the response to the worst pandemic in a century. U.S. COVID-19 fatalities could have stayed under 300,000, versus a death toll of 540,000 and rising, if by last May the country had adopted widespread mask, social distancing, and testing protocols while awaiting a vaccine, estimated Andrew Atkeson, economics professor at University of California, Los Angeles.

https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-usa-economy-idUSKBN2BH1DK

UN-backed vaccine delivery program warns of supply delays

UN-backed vaccine delivery program warns of supply delays

The U.N.-backed program to ship COVID-19 vaccines worldwide has announced supply delays involving a key Indian manufacturer, a major setback for the ambitious rollout aimed at helping low- and middle-income countries vaccinate their populations and fight the pandemic. Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, and its partners said Thursday that the Serum Institute of India, a pivotal vaccine maker behind the COVAX program, will face increasing domestic demands as coronavirus infections surge. "Delays in securing supplies of SII-produced COVID-19 vaccine doses are due to the increased demand for COVID-19 vaccines in India," Gavi said.

https://apnews.com/article/pandemics-coronavirus-pandemic-united-nations-98e1561a12c4944478e27c0214f8e447

India delays jab supplies to UN-backed vaccine programme

The deliveries of vaccines from the world's biggest manufacturer in India are going to be delayed in March and April due to increasing demand within the country which is struggling with a surge in COVID-19 infections, according to the United Nations-backed vaccine alliance Gavi. "Delays in granting further export licences for Serum Institute of India (SII)-produced COVID-19 vaccine doses are due to the increased demand of COVID-19 vaccines in India," a spokesperson from Gavi said on Thursday. The news is a further blow to global vaccine distribution, especially in poorer countries, as the jabs produced by SII represent the main supplies to COVAX

https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/3/25/indias-biggest-world-vaccine-manufacturer-to-delay-jab-exports

India blocks vaccine exports in blow to dozens of nations

India, one of the world's biggest vaccine producers, has imposed a de facto ban on jab exports as it seeks to prioritise local vaccinations amid an accelerating second wave of coronavirus infections. The Serum Institute of India, the largest manufacturer of vaccines in the world and the biggest supplier to the international Covax programme, has been told to halt exports and that the measures could last as long as two to three months, according to two people familiar with the situation. Gavi,

the UN-backed international vaccine alliance, immediately warned that the controls would have a direct impact on the Covax scheme, set up with the World Health Organization to ensure the equitable global distribution of at least 2bn Covid-19 vaccine doses in 2021.
https://www.ft.com/content/5349389c-8313-41e0-9a67-58274e24a019

South Sudan receives first batch of COVID-19 vaccines through COVAX Facility
Today 132,000 doses of the Astra Zeneca COVID-19 vaccine arrived at the Juba International Airport. This is the first of several vaccine shipments scheduled to arrive over the coming months to South Sudan through the support of the COVAX Facility. The COVAX Facility is a global partnership comprised of Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, UNICEF and WHO established to ensure all countries can equitably access COVID-19 vaccines. The first COVAX supported shipment of vaccines will target health care workers as well as persons aged 65 years and older, given their increased risk of severe disease and death due to a potential COVID-19 infection.
https://www.miragenews.com/south-sudan-receives-first-batch-of-covid-19-534692/

Africa experienced 30% rise in COVID cases during 2nd wave: Study

Africa experienced 30% rise in COVID cases during 2nd wave: Study
Africa experienced a 30 percent rise in infections in its second wave of coronavirus last year but implemented fewer public health measures than in the first, research showed on Thursday. Writing in The Lancet medical journal, researchers said the loosening of public health measures such as distancing and intermittent lockdowns probably contributed to higher death tolls during the second wave. The study looked at COVID-19 case, death, recovery and test data carried out across all 55 African Union member states between February 14 and December 31 2020. Using publicly available data, it also analysed health control measures such as school closures and travel restrictions.
https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/3/25/africa-experienced-30-rise-in-covid-cases-during-2nd-wave-study

Bill Gates says world should be back to normal by end-2022 due to vaccines: Polish media

Bill Gates says world should be back to normal by end-2022 due to vaccines: Polish media
The world should be back to normal by the end of 2022 thanks to COVID-19 vaccines, Bill Gates said in an interview for Polish newspaper Gazeta Wyborcza and television broadcaster TVN24. “This is an incredible tragedy,” the Microsoft co-founder said on the pandemic, adding that the only good news was the access to vaccines. “By the end of 2022 we should be basically completely back to normal,” Gates said.
https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-billgates-idUSKBN2BH0SX?taid=605c6c0e9d53350001995626&utm_campaign=trueAnthem:+Trending+Content&utm_medium=trueAnthem&utm_source=twitter

The battle against disinformation

Coronavirus vaccine hesitancy could lead to thousands of extra deaths , Imperial College London report finds
Rutgers University announced on Thursday that all students returning to campus in the Fall 2021 will need to be vaccinated against COVID-19. The mandate applies to all three of the school's campus locations: New Brunswick, Newark, and Camden. The university is believed to be the first in the United States to mandate the vaccine for students. The announcement came from the school president's office as the school aims for a 'full return to our pre-pandemic normal as a vibrant institution.'
https://www.standard.co.uk/news/uk/coronavirus-vaccine-hesitancy-lead-thousands-extra-deaths-imperial-college-london-report-b926060.html

Vaccination race enlists grassroots aides to fight mistrust

His last job was selling cars, but in his new gig, working to turn the tide against a pandemic, Herman Simmons knows not to be too pushy or overbearing. He's one of more than 50 outreach workers a Chicago hospital has enlisted to promote vaccination against COVID-19 in hard-hit Black and brown neighborhoods. Their job is approaching strangers at laundromats, grocery stores and churches, handing out educational material and making vaccination appointments for those who are willing. "I see myself as my brother's keeper. I don't try to force them. I'm persistent," he said.

https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-vaccine-access-safety-c64b38c09a71bcedc76e7e16349e7652

Study says COVID-19 vaccines provide protection for pregnant and lactating women -- and their newborns

Study says COVID-19 vaccines provide protection for pregnant and lactating women -- and their newborns

The Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines are effective in pregnant and lactating women, who can pass protective antibodies to newborns, according to research published Thursday in the American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology. Researchers at Massachusetts General Hospital, Brigham and Women's Hospital and the Ragon Institute of MGH, MIT and Harvard looked at 131 women who received either the Pfizer/BioNTech or Moderna COVID-19 vaccine. Among the participants, 84 were pregnant, 31 were lactating and 16 were not pregnant. Samples were collected between December 17, 2020 and March 2, 2021.

https://www.ctvnews.ca/health/coronavirus/study-says-covid-19-vaccines-provide-protection-for-pregnant-and-lactating-women-and-their-newborns-1.5362003

Regeneron Antibody Cocktail May Reduce COVID-19 Hospitalization by 70%

Regeneron Antibody Cocktail May Reduce COVID-19 Hospitalization by 70%

Results from a phase 3 clinical trial show that Regeneron's antibody cocktail has the ability to cut the risk of COVID-19 hospitalization and death by 70 percent. The treatment also shortened the duration of COVID-19 symptoms by 4 days. The two antibodies work similarly to the antibodies the immune system naturally produces to fight the coronavirus.

https://www.healthline.com/health-news/regeneron-antibody-cocktail-may-reduce-covid-19-hospitalization-by-70

Study: Remdesivir speeds recovery in hospitalized COVID patients

Study: Remdesivir speeds recovery in hospitalized COVID patients

The antiviral drug remdesivir (Veklury) was associated with faster clinical improvement in hospitalized COVID-19 patients in a multicenter comparative-effectiveness study published yesterday in JAMA Network Open. The retrospective study, conducted by Johns Hopkins University researchers, involved 2,299 COVID-19 patients receiving care in a 5-hospital health system in the Baltimore and Washington, DC, area from Mar 4 to Aug 29, 2020. About 15% percent received remdesivir (342) as part of their treatment, of which 285 were matched with controls for primary statistical analysis.

https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2021/03/study-remdesivir-speeds-recovery-hospitalized-covid-patients

Pfizer and BioNTech to begin testing Covid-19 vaccine in children

Pfizer and BioNTech to begin testing Covid-19 vaccine in children

Pfizer and BioNTech said Thursday they are beginning a study aimed at showing their Covid-19 vaccine can be used in children as young as 6 months. The study follows the launch of a separate and ongoing trial in children ages 12 to 15, which was fully enrolled in January. That study could lead to results by the end of the first half of the year, depending on the data, and then to an emergency use authorization. That will depend on the Food and Drug Administration and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The vaccine already has an EUA for people 16 and older.

https://www.statnews.com/2021/03/25/pfizer-and-biontech-to-begin-testing-covid-19-vaccine-in-children/

Novavax delays EU vaccine supply deal amid production problems

Novavax delays EU vaccine supply deal amid production problems - source

Novavax is delaying signing a contract to supply its COVID-19 vaccine to the European Union, an EU official involved in the talks told Reuters, as the U.S. biotech company warned it was struggling to source some raw materials. Prolonging the talks might further complicate the EU's vaccination plans as the bloc had planned to sign a deal early this year for at least 100 million doses of Novavax's vaccine, with an option for another 100 million. The EU official, who asked not to named as the talks are confidential, said the company had postponed signing a deal for weeks, citing legal issues in meetings with the bloc's vaccine negotiators. "They are slowing down the process of finishing the contract," the official, who attended the meetings, told Reuters.

https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-eu-novavax-exclusi/exclusive-novavax-delays-eu-vaccine-supply-deal-amid-production-problems-source-idUSKBN2BH2GY

Denmark prolongs suspension of AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine

Denmark prolongs suspension of AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine

Danish officials decided Thursday to prolong their suspension of the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine by three weeks while they continue evaluating a potential link with blood clots even though European Union regulators who looked into the issue have cleared the vaccine for use. Denmark's decision "was made on the basis of presumed side effects," Tanja Erichsen of the Danish Medicines Agency said during a news conference. "It can't be ruled out that there is a connection between the vaccine and the very rare blood clot cases," she said.

https://www.independent.co.uk/news/denmark-prolongs-suspension-of-astrazeneca-covid19-vaccine-denmark-astrazeneca-european-medicines-agency-copenhagen-european-union-b1822337.html

EU turns up heat on Astrazeneca as new COVID-19 wave surges

EU turns up heat on Astrazeneca as new COVID-19 wave surges

EU leaders voiced frustration on Thursday over a massive shortfall in contracted deliveries of AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccines, as a third wave of infections surged across Europe. With inoculation programmes running far behind those of Britain and the United States, the bloc's executive warned that vaccine exports by the British-Swedish company would be blocked until it delivers the shots it promised to the EU. "We have to and want to explain to our European citizens that they get their fair share," European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen told a news conference after a video-conference summit of the European Union's leaders. "The company has to catch up, has to honour the contract it has with the European member states, before it can engage again in exporting vaccines," she said.

https://www.reuters.com/article/us-eu-summit/eu-turns-up-heat-on-astrazeneca-as-new-covid-19-wave-surges-idUSKBN2BH1MJ

Merkel says British coronavirus variant more dangerous to children

Merkel says British coronavirus variant more dangerous to children

A variant of the coronavirus first detected in Britain, and now spreading in Germany, is more dangerous to young people, Chancellor Angela Merkel said on Wednesday. "The British mutant, and this is the difference with the spring, is proven to be more dangerous in children and young people so we need to put the protection of schools more front and centre than with the original virus," she told lawmakers.

https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-health-coronavirus-germany-merkel-idUKKBN2BG20J

Experts: 3-foot rule in schools problematic in light of COVID variants

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued updated guidance on school reopening,

saying that 3 feet, not 6 feet, of physical distancing between students was sufficient in most elementary schools—regardless of the level of community spread of COVID-19. At the same time that CDC officials were updating school policy, they were also warning that B117, a variant strain 50% more transmissible than the wild-type virus, would likely become the dominant strain in the United States by April. In some states, such as Florida and California, the variant, which was first detected in the United Kingdom, already accounts for 25% of cases.
https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2021/03/experts-3-foot-rule-schools-problematic-light-covid-variants

Pakistan extends school closures amid third wave of coronavirus
Pakistan's government has ordered educational institutions in 18 high-risk districts to remain closed until April 11, the education minister said, as the country continues to battle a third wave of coronavirus infections. Speaking to the press in the capital Islamabad on Wednesday, Education Minister Shafqat Mahmood said the decision to extend closures first ordered on March 15 had been taken as virus infection numbers had stayed high.
https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/3/25/pakistan-extends-school-closures-amid-coronavirus-third-wave

Finland proposes home lockdown for Helsinki residents for first time during pandemic

Finland proposes home lockdown for Helsinki residents for first time during pandemic
The Finnish government on Wednesday proposed locking down residents of five cities, including the capital Helsinki, and only allowing people to leave their homes for limited reasons, to curb rising coronavirus infections and hospitalisations. The lockdown, which would be the first time Finland confines people to their homes during the COVID-19 pandemic, is subject to a parliamentary vote and assessment by the constitutional law committee.
https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-finland/finland-proposes-home-lockdown-for-helsinki-residents-for-first-time-during-pandemic-idUSKBN2BG2YZ

India Locks Down Some Towns as Coronavirus Cases Hit Five-Month High

India Locks Down Some Towns as Coronavirus Cases Hit Five-Month High
Authorities ordered people indoors in some towns in western India as the number of new coronavirus infections hit 53,476 infections overnight, the highest in five months, data showed on Thursday. Cases have surged across several states in since late February, following a near-full reopening of the economy and flouting of safety measures such as the wearing of face masks and social distancing, health officials say. More than half the new infections were reported from western Maharashtra state, home to financial capital Mumbai, where millions have returned to work in offices and factories. The local government imposed a full lockdown for ten days in the worst-affected towns Nanded and Beed following a cabinet meeting, an official said.
https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2021-03-25/indias-daily-covid-19-infections-rise-to-five-month-high

France may extend COVID restrictions to three other regions, including Lyon

France may extend COVID restrictions to three other regions, including Lyon
France may widen its COVID-19 restrictions to three other regions, including the Rhone region which houses the major city of Lyon, the government said on Wednesday, lengthening a list of high-risk zones including Paris where curbs have been tightened. Government spokesman Gabriel Attal said the COVID-19 situation was worsening everywhere in the country, and that it was vital that more people in France worked from home to curb the spread of the virus.
https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-france-workers/france-may-extend-covid-restrictions-to-three-other-regions-including-lyon-idUSKBN2BG254

AstraZeneca asks for certification of Dutch vaccine plant

AstraZeneca asks for certification of Dutch vaccine plant
AstraZeneca has asked the EU's drug regulator to certify a Dutch plant producing doses of the

Oxford/AstraZeneca coronavirus vaccine, according to Health Commissioner Stella Kyriakides. The comments were reported by Reuters on Wednesday night, and confirmed by a Commission spokesperson Thursday. The factory operated by Halix has been producing doses already, but it requires the approval of the European Medicines Agency before the vaccines can be distributed throughout the bloc.
https://www.politico.eu/article/astrazeneca-asks-for-certification-of-halix-vaccine-plant-in-netherlands/

'Double mutant': What are the risks of India's new Covid-19 variant

'Double mutant': What are the risks of India's new Covid-19 variant
A new "double mutant" variant of the coronavirus has been detected from samples collected in India. Scientists are checking if the variant, where two mutations come together in the same virus, may be more infectious or less affected by vaccines.
https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-56517495