COVID-19 Lockdown Exit Analysis

28th Oct 2021

- **Slovenia eyes possible lockdown as COVID-19 infections surge** - Health Minister Janez Poklukar said hospital beds have been filling up as the country logged the highest number of daily cases since January
- **Facebook is having a tougher time managing vaccine misinformation than it is letting on, leaks suggest** - internal Facebook documents suggest a disconnect between what the company has said publicly about its overall response to Covid-19 misinformation and some of its employees' findings concerning the issue.
- **Merck strikes deal for global access to COVID-19 medication** - US drugmaker Merck has announced a deal that could see generic versions of its experimental oral COVID-19 treatment for people infected with the disease widely distributed in poorer countries.
- **Novavax Covid vaccine submitted to UK regulator for approval** - The final data on the Novavax Covid vaccine has been submitted to the UK regulator for approval. The firm behind the vaccine said it anticipates a 'positive decision' following the completion of its rolling regulatory submission
- **Breakthrough infections can lead to long COVID; genes may explain critical illness in young, healthy adults** - 'the research team reported on medRxiv on Tuesday ahead of peer review, previous vaccination does not appear to protect against several previously documented outcomes of COVID-19 such as long COVID features, arrhythmia, joint pain, Type 2 diabetes, liver disease, sleep disorders, and mood and anxiety disorders.'
- **Bulgaria hits record high daily coronavirus cases, hospitals stretched** - Bulgaria's tally of coronavirus infections has risen by 6,813 in the past 24 hours, a record daily increase as the European Union's least vaccinated country grapples with a fourth wave of the pandemic, official data showed on Wednesday.
- **China doubles down on COVID-zero strategy** - China is doubling down on its strategy of strict enforcement of testing and quarantine measures when or wherever an outbreak rears its head. In the north west region at the moment but likely to pop up anywhere at any time.
- **COVID-19: NHS Test and Trace failed in its 'main objective', highly-critical report from committee of MPs finds** - NHS Test and Trace has failed to achieve its 'main objective' of helping break chains of COVID transmission and allowing people to return to normality despite being given an 'eye-watering' amount of money, a highly-critical report from MPs has said.
- **Coronavirus infections at U.S. meat plants far higher than previous estimates - House subcommittee** - Cases and deaths from COVID-19 among workers at the leading U.S. meatpacking plants were three times as high as previously estimated, according to a report by the House Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis seen by Reuters.
- **German would-be coalition backs ending COVID state of emergency** - Germany's pandemic-related state of emergency looks set to expire next month after the three political parties in talks to form the next government said on Wednesday they did not support extending it.

Lockdown Exit

WHO: Europe had most COVID-19 cases, deaths over last week

Europe stood out as the only major region worldwide to report an increase in both coronavirus cases and deaths over the last week, with double-digit percentage increases in each, the U.N. health agency said Wednesday. The World Health Organization said new COVID-19 cases in its 53-country European region, which stretches as far east as former Soviet republics in Central Asia, recorded an

18% increase in COVID-19 cases over the last week — a fourth straight weekly increase for the area. In WHO's weekly epidemiological report on COVID-19, Europe also saw a 14% increase in virus-related deaths. That amounted to more than 1.6 million new cases and over 21,000 new deaths.
https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-europe-health-asia-united-nations-5a6b92e1c6f1f80f00446572eb33afe1

Slovenia eyes possible lockdown as COVID-19 infections surge

Slovenia's health minister on Wednesday warned that the country could face a nightmare scenario if it does not contain the virus outbreak raging in the small Alpine nation and other low-vaccination countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Health Minister Janez Poklukar said hospital beds have been filling up as the country logged the highest number of daily cases since January. With more than 3,000 confirmed infections in the past 24 hours, Poklukar said a lockdown is looming. "While we watched with fear at neighboring Italy at the start of the epidemic, we are now at a turning point because of low vaccination rates and we could easily have a Bergamo scenario," Poklukar said, evoking the hardest-hit Italian city last year.
https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-business-health-europe-eastern-europe-286faa66504839255cef66ace3a9a558

Romanian senate rejects COVID-19 health pass, lower house votes next

Romanian senators narrowly rejected a bill on Wednesday requiring medical staff, public sector workers and those of large privately-owned firms to hold a COVID-19 health pass, but parliament's lower house has the final say and could revive it. The bill, introduced by centrist lawmakers and designed to boost vaccine uptake, was two votes short of the required majority to pass.
https://www.reuters.com/world/romanian-senate-rejects-covid-19-health-pass-lower-house-votes-next-2021-10-27/

Sweden to extend COVID booster shots to all aged 65 or above

Sweden will start offering COVID-19 booster shots to people aged 65 or older as well as many care workers and plans to gradually extend the third jabs to most Swedes in the coming months, the government said on Wednesday. The booster shots of mRNA vaccine will be gradually extended to cover all people in the Nordic country aged 16 or older during the winter and spring, Health Minister Lena Hallengren told a news conference.
https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/sweden-offer-covid-booster-shots-all-aged-65-or-above-health-minister-2021-10-27/

Covid-19 UK: Top Government adviser hints No10 could drop mass testing from January

Professor Lucy Chappell says mass testing could be ditched in January next year Department of Health chief scientific adviser says system is being reconsidered Professor Andrew Pollard called for testing in schools to be ditch this winter. But with 74.8 per cent of over 16s now fully vaccinated, the Prime Minister has revealed when the borders will finally come down. He told Parliament on Wednesday: 'By the end of the year, Mr Speaker, I fully anticipate that we'll be able to achieve seeing international visitors, including backpackers, Mr Speaker, who are double-vaccinated, being able to come back to Australia.'
https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10132887/Covid-19-UK-Government-adviser-hints-No10-drop-mass-testing-January.html

Covid-19 borders: Tourists WILL be back to Australia before the end of year, says Scott Morrison

Tourists will be able to enter Australia without quarantine by the end of the year - but they must be double vaccinated, Scott Morrison has announced. Australia's international border has been closed since March 2020 to reduce the spread of coronavirus and the country has been alone among democratic nations in banning its own citizens from leaving. The move has helped reduce the impact of Covid-19, which has only claimed 1,669 lives in Australia, compared with 140,000 in the UK and

739,000 in the US.
https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10134761/Covid-19-borders-Tourists-Australia-end-year-says-Scott-Morrison.html

Plan C strategy to tackle Covid-19 has been discussed, Government adviser says
A potential “Plan C” Covid-19 lockdown has “been mentioned” in Government but no details have been confirmed, a scientific advisor said. Boris Johnson has set out a winter strategy for tackling Covid-19, should the number of cases rise to a point of concern , known as Plan B. This would see the reintroduction of compulsory face masks in indoor public places, a return to working from home and the use of vaccine passports to get into certain events.
https://inews.co.uk/news/politics/covid-plan-c-restrictions-lockdown-government-advisor-1269720

COVID-19: NHS Test and Trace failed in its 'main objective', highly-critical report from committee of MPs finds
NHS Test and Trace has failed to achieve its "main objective" of helping break chains of COVID transmission and allowing people to return to normality despite being given an "eye-watering" amount of money, a highly-critical report from MPs has said. According to the Public Accounts Committee (PAC), the programme's outcomes have been "muddled" and a number of its goals have been "overstated or not achieved". Test and Trace was developed at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic to test the public and trace the contacts of positive coronavirus cases.
https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-nhs-test-and-trace-failed-in-its-main-objective-highly-critical-report-from-committee-of-mps-finds-12445501

Americas COVID cases are down, vaccine inequity still a problem
New coronavirus cases and deaths in the Americas have reached the lowest levels in more than a year, the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) said, but access to COVID-19 vaccines, remains a challenge. PAHO Assistant Director Jarbas Barbosa on Wednesday said the Americas reported more than 800,000 new infections and 18,000 deaths during the past seven days – a drastic decrease from previous weeks. “We have reason to be optimistic, but we must remain vigilant,” Barbosa said during a regular virtual news briefing. Many of the Caribbean islands are seeing decreases in new infections, Barbosa said, including Cuba, a nation that had for months been battling an intense outbreak of the disease. The downward trend in COVID-19 infections comes amid advances in vaccination campaigns across the region. But, PAHO officials said, gaps remain and many countries especially, those with low vaccination rates, remain at risk of more outbreaks.
https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/10/27/americas-covid-cases-are-down-vaccine-inequity-still-a-problem

Coronavirus infections at U.S. meat plants far higher than previous estimates -House subcommittee
Cases and deaths from COVID-19 among workers at the leading U.S. meatpacking plants were three times as high as previously estimated, according to a report by the House Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis seen by Reuters. The subcommittee surveyed major meatpackers Tyson Foods, JBS USA, Cargill, National Beef, and Smithfield Foods, which together control over 80% of the beef market and 60% of the pork market in the United States. At those companies’ plants, worker cases of COVID-19 totaled 59,147 and deaths totaled 269, based on counts through January of this year, according to the report which was expected to be released later on Wednesday.
https://news.yahoo.com/coronavirus-infections-u-meat-plants-140441584.html

Exit Strategies

Australia to lift outbound travel ban for vaccinated residents from next week
All fully-vaccinated Australian citizens and permanent residents will be able to leave the country without a special exemption from Nov. 1, authorities said on Wednesday, as Australia eases

coronavirus restrictions amid a rise in vaccination rates. Australians have been unable to travel abroad for more than 18 months without a government waiver, while thousands of fully-vaccinated residents living abroad have been unable to return due to a cap on arrivals to slow the spread of COVID-19.
https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/australia-drugs-regulator-approves-booster-doses-pfizer-covid-19-vaccine-2021-10-26/

Province of British Columbia to offer COVID-19 booster shots to all residents
British Columbia will begin offering COVID-19 vaccine booster shots to everyone over the age of 12 from January, officials said on Tuesday, becoming the first major Canadian province to significantly widen eligibility for boosters. People over the age of 70 as well as indigenous people over 12 will be invited to book shots sooner than the new year, said Dr. Bonnie Henry, the province's medical officer of health. Residents of long term and assisted living are already eligible.
https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/province-british-columbia-offer-covid-19-booster-shots-all-residents-2021-10-27/

German would-be coalition backs ending COVID state of emergency
Germany's pandemic-related state of emergency looks set to expire next month after the three political parties in talks to form the next government said on Wednesday they did not support extending it. The state of emergency that enabled the federal and state government to impose measures like lockdowns and curfews without a parliamentary vote is set to lapse on Nov. 25 unless parliament agrees to extend it.
https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/german-would-be-coalition-backs-ending-covid-state-emergency-2021-10-27/

U.S. administers over 415 mln doses of COVID-19 vaccines - CDC
The United States has administered 415,012,026 doses of COVID-19 vaccines in the country as of Tuesday morning and distributed 504,584,715 doses, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said. Those figures are up from the 414,302,192 vaccine doses the CDC said had gone into arms by Oct. 25 out of 503,418,475 doses delivered. The agency said 220,648,845 people had received at least one dose while 190,793,100 people were fully vaccinated as of 6:00 a.m. ET on Tuesday.
https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-administers-over-415-mln-doses-covid-19-vaccines-cdc-2021-10-26/

After FDA nod, Israel gears up to start vaccinating 5- to 11-year-olds
Prime Minister Naftali Bennett was slated to meet Wednesday with top health officials to weigh moving toward approving the Pfizer COVID vaccine for children ages 5-11. The meeting, which will include Health Minister Nitzan Horowitz and the ministry’s top coronavirus advisers, comes after a panel at the US Food and Drug Administration voted Tuesday evening to endorse giving low doses of the Pfizer vaccine to children. The FDA’s advisory panel voted unanimously, with one abstention, that the vaccine’s benefits in preventing COVID-19 in that age group outweigh any potential risks — including a heart-related side effect that’s been very rare in teens and young adults who get a much higher dose.
https://www.timesofisrael.com/pm-bennett-to-convene-advisers-on-vaccinating-5-to-11-year-olds/

COVID-19: Over 80,000 12 to 15-year-olds have booked vaccinations in England
More than 80,000 children aged between 12 and 15 have booked to receive their COVID-19 vaccinations in England. Some 2.5 million letters will be sent out this week inviting parents to book a jab for their child through the national booking service. And more than 100 existing vaccination centres have opened their doors for this age group. While vaccines have been available to 12 to 15-year-olds in England since 20 September, the rollout has so far mostly taken place in schools.
https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-over-80-000-12-to-15-year-olds-have-booked-vaccinations-in-england-12445630

Vaccine for children ages 5 to 11 could be available as soon as the first week of November

An independent panel of vaccine experts said Tuesday that the Food and Drug Administration should grant emergency authorization to administer the Pfizer-BioNTech coronavirus vaccine to children 5 to 11 years old. The decision comes amid a nationwide effort to make vaccines available to this group of 28 million children by the first week of November, according to the Biden administration.
https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2021/10/26/covid-delta-variant-live-updates/

Pregnant women are being turned away from UK Covid vaccine clinics, experts warn

Pregnant women are being turned away from Covid vaccine clinics despite clinical advice, experts have warned as they urged ministers to ramp up efforts to reach unvaccinated groups. Members of the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) told the Guardian that efforts to increase booster jab uptake will not be sufficient to prevent more deaths and hospitalisations, and that ministers must prioritise reaching those who have had no jabs. In particular they urged a focus on pregnant women as only about 15% in the UK have been fully vaccinated. Among all over-12s, the figure is 79%.
https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/oct/26/pregnant-women-are-being-turned-away-from-covid-vaccine-clinics-experts-warn

Singapore convicts Chinese couple of Covid-19 contact tracing offences

Chinese national Hu Jun tested positive for Covid-19 in January last year, nine days after arriving in Singapore from Wuhan to spend Lunar New Year with his family. He and his wife Shi Sha were on Tuesday convicted of withholding contact tracing information.
https://www.scmp.com/news/asia/southeast-asia/article/3153837/singapore-convicts-chinese-couple-covid-19-contact-tracing

Enforcement of indoor vaccine mandates proves uneven in US

Go out for a night on the town in some U.S. cities and you might find yourself waiting while someone at the door of the restaurant or theater closely inspects your vaccination card and checks it against your photo ID. Or, conversely, you might be waved right through just by flashing your card. How rigorously vaccination requirements are being enforced varies from place to place, even within the same state or city. Proof of vaccination is required in several American cities to get into restaurants and bars, enjoy a concert or a play, catch a movie or go to a ballgame. Ticket agents dutifully ascertain the vaccination status of everyone passing through the turnstile at pro sports venues in some cities from Seattle and New York, and restaurant hosts do the same in many places.
https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-entertainment-lifestyle-business-honolulu-192126066b9721d16b1d2b879774792f

Partisan Exits

Head of New York City firefighters union says members 'insulted' by vaccine mandate

The head of the New York City firefighters union said on Wednesday he had instructed unvaccinated members to keep working, even though they feel "insulted" by Mayor Bill de Blasio's order to show proof of a COVID-19 vaccination by Friday or be placed on unpaid leave. "I have told my members that if they choose to remain unvaccinated, they must still report for duty," Andrew Ansbro, president of the Uniformed Firefighters Association, told a news conference.
https://www.reuters.com/world/us/head-new-york-city-firefighters-union-says-members-insulted-by-vaccine-mandate-2021-10-27/

Miami private school scraps policy to send home vaccinated students after funding threatened

A Miami private school known for its aggressive stance against coronavirus vaccines is abandoning

an attendance policy that would have forced students to stay home for 30 days after each dose. Centner Academy reversed course less than two weeks after announcing the controversial policy, spurred by a letter from the Florida Department of Education warning that the pre-K-8 private school could lose state funding if it pursued the post-vaccination attendance plan.
https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2021/10/26/centner-attendance-policy/

Facebook is having a tougher time managing vaccine misinformation than it is letting on, leaks suggest

Facebook has touted the resources it has dedicated to tackling Covid-19 and vaccine misinformation, even scolding US President Joe Biden for his harsh criticism of the company's handling of the issue. In doing so, it claimed that "more than 2 billion people have viewed authoritative information about COVID-19 and vaccines on Facebook, which is more than any other place on the internet." But internal Facebook (FB) documents suggest a disconnect between what the company has said publicly about its overall response to Covid-19 misinformation and some of its employees' findings concerning the issue.
https://www.cnn.com/2021/10/26/tech/facebook-covid-vaccine-misinformation/index.html

Colorado lawsuit tests religious exemptions to COVID vaccine mandates

The doctor, one of the protagonists of this story, is a pediatric intensive care specialist in Colorado Springs working with some of the sickest children in the state. She’s unvaccinated against COVID-19, despite both state and employer mandates requiring vaccination. In one telling of this tale, the doctor is the hero, a devoutly religious person who has made a moral choice consistent with those beliefs and is being unconstitutionally punished for them. In another telling, the doctor is the villain, using her religion as cover for a personal belief that is recklessly endangering her patients and colleagues. Both versions of the story are contained within the pleadings of an ongoing lawsuit in federal court in Denver that challenges the University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus’s vaccination requirement for physicians and medical students.
https://coloradosun.com/2021/10/27/coronavirus-vaccine-mandate-religious-exemption/

My daughter was bullied at school for having the Covid jab. No wonder UK take-up is low

I’m worried that part of the reason for a slow uptake of the vaccine among 12 to 15-year-olds is that their issues around it are not being addressed adequately: there’s a sense that they are just being tacked on at the end of the successful adult rollout. They need to be addressed directly and clearly, and their concerns listened to. I’ve seen a lot of “what I need to know about my child and the vaccine” articles for parents in recent weeks, but there don’t seem to be many equivalents for 12 to 15-year-olds to read themselves. Reels and videos on social media help, particularly those made by people in the same age group, but surely there needs to be more official – and factchecked – dedicated communications for teens who may have concerns about the vaccine.
https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/oct/27/daughter-bullied-school-covid-jab-government-campaign

Test and trace failed to curb Covid-19 infection rates despite ‘eye-watering’ spending, watchdog says

The test and trace programme failed to break the chain of Covid-19 transmission despite being awarded “eye-watering” sums – billions of which have not been spent – MPs have said. NHS Test and Trace (NHST&T) did not prevent national lockdowns or reduce the number of Covid-19 cases, a report by the Public Accounts Committee argued. The system was allocated a budget of £37bn over two years – 20 per cent of annual health spending – but underspent by nearly £9bn in the first year, with much of the testing and contact tracing capacity left unused.
https://inews.co.uk/news/politics/covid-19-test-trace-failed-report-1269753

Scientific Viewpoint

Breakthrough infections can lead to long COVID; genes may explain critical illness in young, healthy adults

The persistent syndrome of COVID-19 after-effects known as long COVID can develop after "breakthrough" infections in vaccinated people, a new study shows. Researchers at Oxford University in the UK reviewed data on nearly 20,000 U.S. COVID-19 patients, half of whom had been vaccinated. Compared to unvaccinated patients, people who were fully vaccinated - and in particular those under age 60 - did have lower risks for death and serious complications such as lung failure, need for mechanical ventilation, ICU admission, life-threatening blood clots, seizures, and psychosis. "On the other hand," the research team reported on medRxiv on Tuesday ahead of peer review, "previous vaccination does not appear to protect against several previously documented outcomes of COVID-19 such as long COVID features, arrhythmia, joint pain, Type 2 diabetes, liver disease, sleep disorders, and mood and anxiety disorders."

https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/breakthrough-infections-can-lead-long-covid-genes-may-explain-critical-illness-2021-10-27/

Flu jabs may aid COVID-19 patients who need surgery

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 have yet to be certified by peer review. Flu-vaccinated COVID-19 patients have easier surgeries. COVID-19 patients who require surgery appear to face fewer complications if they have previously been vaccinated against the flu, new data suggest. In a preliminary study that has not yet undergone peer review, researchers analyzed outcomes after various types of surgery on nearly 44,000 COVID-19 patients worldwide, half of whom had received a flu vaccine in the previous six months

https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/flu-jabs-may-aid-covid-19-patients-who-need-surgery-2021-10-25/

Novavax Covid vaccine submitted to UK regulator for approval

The final data on the Novavax Covid vaccine has been submitted to the UK regulator for approval. The firm behind the vaccine said it anticipates a "positive decision" following the completion of its rolling regulatory submission to the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA). More than 15,000 people took part in the phase 3 Novavax trial at various hospital sites across the UK. Novavax said its application for conditional marketing authorisation (CMA) marks the first submission for authorisation of a protein-based coronavirus vaccine in the UK.

https://www.standard.co.uk/news/uk/novavax-covid-vaccine-mhra-uk-use-b962798.html

Pfizer to seek Japan approval for children's COVID-19 vaccinations

U.S. pharmaceutical giant Pfizer Inc. is in talks with Japan to apply for approval to administer its COVID-19 vaccine to children aged 5 to 11, sources close to the matter said Wednesday. The revelation came a day after a U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) panel of independent experts voted in favor of issuing emergency use authorization for the vaccine to be administered to children in that age group. If submitted, Japan’s Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare plans to promptly review the application, according to the sources. Pfizer’s COVID-19 vaccine, jointly developed with German partner BioNTech SE, is currently available free of charge to people aged 12 and older in Japan, where it has been approved for use.

https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2021/10/27/national/science-health/pfizer-vaccine-children-2/

Novavax Files for Authorization of its COVID-19 Vaccine in the United Kingdom

Filing marks first protein-based COVID-19 vaccine submitted to MHRA for authorization. All modules required for regulatory review, including CMC data, are now complete. Submission based on Phase 3 data from ~45K patients demonstrating high efficacy and well-tolerated safety, including against variants Submissions to additional global regulatory authorities including EU, Canada and Australia

expected soon
https://markets.businessinsider.com/news/stocks/novavax-files-for-authorization-of-its-covid-19-vaccine-in-the-united-kingdom-1030905089

Merck strikes deal for global access to COVID-19 medication
US drugmaker Merck has announced a deal that could see generic versions of its experimental oral COVID-19 treatment for people infected with the disease widely distributed in poorer countries. The global Medicines Patent Pool (MPP), which is backed by the United Nations, said on Wednesday it had signed a voluntary licensing agreement with Merck to facilitate affordable worldwide access for its antiviral medicine molnupiravir.
https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2021/10/27/merck-strikes-deal-for-global-access-to-covid-19-medication

Nine in 10 UK adults likely to still have Covid-19 antibodies
Around nine in 10 adults in all parts of the UK continue to have Covid-19 antibodies, new figures suggest. The estimates range from 90.0% in Wales to 92.2% in England, with 90.8% for Northern Ireland and 91.3% for Scotland. The presence of coronavirus antibodies suggests someone has had the infection in the past or has been vaccinated. It takes between two and three weeks after infection or vaccination for the body to make enough antibodies to fight the virus.
https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/uk/nine-in-10-uk-adults-likely-to-still-have-covid-19-antibodies-40988763.html

Merck agrees to let other drug makers make its COVID pill
Pharmaceutical company Merck agreed to allow other drug makers to produce its COVID-19 pill, in a move aimed at helping millions of people in poorer countries get access to the potentially life-saving drug, a United Nations-backed public health organization said on Wednesday. The Medicines Patent Pool said in a statement that it had signed a voluntary licensing agreement for molnupiravir with Merck and its partner Ridgeback Biotherapeutics. The agreement will allow the Medicines Patent Pool to grant further licenses to qualified companies who are approved to make the drug. Neither drug maker will receive royalties under the agreement for as long as the World Health Organization deems COVID-19 to be global emergency. Molnupiravir is the first pill that has been shown to treat the disease.
https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-technology-business-public-health-health-ddde9854faee530d6c4bc435f3e6da74

In a groundbreaking move, Merck and the Medicines Patent Pool ink a licensing deal for a Covid-19 pill
In a notable bid to widen access to Covid-19 remedies, Merck (MRK) has agreed to license its widely anticipated antiviral pill to the Medicines Patent Pool, which in turn can now strike deals with other manufacturers to provide versions of the drug to 105 low and middle-income countries. The deal builds on a separate agreement that Merck made with eight generic companies that licensed the pill, which is called molnupiravir, in order to make knock-off copies for the same group of countries. The arrangement with the Medicines Patent Pool, however, means that still more manufacturers can now strike so-called sub-licensing deals, which would presumably increase availability more rapidly.
https://www.statnews.com/pharmalot/2021/10/27/merck-patents-covid-pandemic-molnupiravir/

3 takeaways from the emergence of the 'Delta Plus' coronavirus variant
Yet another version of the coronavirus is getting global attention, this one dubbed AY.4.2. It appears that it could be slightly more transmissible than the Delta variant — a marginal difference that experts say is more of a headache than a devastating gamechanger in the scope of the pandemic. Still, the emergence of AY.4.2 offers lessons about the ongoing evolution of the pathogen. AY.4.2 has caused some alarm because its prevalence is building up in the United Kingdom, where it's even gained ground on the remarkably transmissible Delta variant. It now accounts for about 10% of

sequenced virus samples in England. Scientists are still trying to determine what, if any, competitive advantage the newer form of the virus has over Delta, and there are a number of possible explanations for AY.4.2's increasing frequency.
https://www.statnews.com/2021/10/27/3-takeaways-from-the-emergence-of-the-delta-plus-coronavirus-variant/

WHO advisors say COVID-19 pandemic far from over
After reviewing the latest COVID-19 developments last week, the World Health Organization (WHO) emergency committee said the pandemic is far from over, though countries are making progress in rolling out vaccines and treatments. The group of outside advisors met on Oct 22 by video conference for the ninth time and unanimously agreed that the situation still warrants a public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC), which was declared on Jan 30, 2020. The group typically meets every 3 months or more often as needed.
https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2021/10/who-advisors-say-covid-19-pandemic-far-over

Coronavirus Resurgence

Russia reports record COVID-19 daily death toll
Russia on Wednesday reported 1,123 new COVID-19 deaths, its highest one-day toll of the pandemic amid a surge in cases that has forced officials to partially reimpose some lockdown measures. The coronavirus task force also said it had recorded 36,582 new coronavirus cases in the last 24 hours, including 5,789 in Moscow. Russia will go into a nationwide workplace shutdown in the first week of November, and the capital Moscow will reimpose a partial lockdown from Thursday, with only essential shops like pharmacies and supermarkets allowed to remain open
https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-reports-record-covid-19-daily-death-toll-2021-10-27/

NSW records 304 COVID-19 cases as new law targeting anti-vaxxers come into effect
NSW has introduced a new law stopping people from using fake vaccine certificates after the state recorded 304 new local cases of COVID-19. As of today it is now illegal to present a fake proof of vaccination when attempting to enter venues in NSW. Health Minister Brad Hazzard signed off on the amendment to the public health order yesterday after concerns about people procuring forged certificates. Security experts have warned the federal government's COVID-19 vaccination certificates can be forged within 10 minutes as people can alter or copy versions of the certificates and then change the name shown.
https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-10-27/nsw-records-304-covid19-cases/100571360

High Covid-19 case rates are 'partly down to more tests'
Do not "bash the UK" for its high Covid-19 case rates compared with other countries, the director of the Oxford Vaccine Group has said, as some of the difference is simply because of more testing. Professor Sir Andrew Pollard told MPs that while transmission rates were clearly high, comparisons with other nations did not take into account different testing regimens. This might partly explain why UK case rates are four times those in Germany and eight times those in France. "If you look across western Europe, we have about ten times more tests done each day than some other countries per head of population," Pollard told the Commons science and technology committee. "We do have a lot of transmission at the moment but it's not
https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/high-covid-19-case-rates-are-partly-down-to-more-tests-ccfdm0x5r

China's growing COVID-19 outbreak tests vulnerable border towns
China has reported nearly 250 locally transmitted cases of COVID-19 since the start of the current outbreak 10 days ago, with many infections in remote towns along porous international borders in the country's northwest. China had 50 new local cases for Oct. 26, the highest daily count since Sept. 16, official data showed on Wednesday. The overall number is tiny versus many clusters outside the country. It is also modest compared with more than 1,200 local cases reported during

China's July-August outbreak and the more than 2,000 cases in January during the last winter.
https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/chinas-growing-covid-19-outbreak-tests-vulnerable-border-towns-2021-10-27/

Bulgaria hits record high daily coronavirus cases, hospitals stretched

Bulgaria's tally of coronavirus infections has risen by 6,813 in the past 24 hours, a record daily increase as the European Union's least vaccinated country grapples with a fourth wave of the pandemic, official data showed on Wednesday. The virus has killed 124 people in the past 24 hours, according to the figures, bringing the total death toll to 23,440. More than 7,300 people were in COVID-19 wards as hospitals across the Balkan country struggled to deal with the inflow of coronavirus patients amid a shortage of medical staff.
https://www.reuters.com/world/bulgaria-hits-record-high-daily-coronavirus-cases-hospitals-stretched-2021-10-27/

Sturgeon: Cop26 does pose threat of increased Covid-19 infection

Nicola Sturgeon has announced almost £500 million of further funding to help in the fight against Covid – as she warned that the Cop26 international climate conference "inevitably" poses a risk of increased transmission of the virus. With delegates from across the world now starting to arrive in Scotland ahead of the UN climate summit, the Scottish First Minister said the coronavirus situation remained "fragile". While cases in Scotland had been declining, Ms Sturgeon said this had now levelled off, with the most recent figures showing a "slight increase".
https://www.standard.co.uk/news/uk/nicola-sturgeon-first-minister-cop26-scotland-glasgow-b962646.html

New Lockdown

Russians opt for foreign beach breaks over COVID curbs

Facing the toughest restrictions since the early months of the pandemic, many Russians have decided that now is an ideal time to fly off for a foreign beach holiday instead of hunkering down at home. Workplaces across Russia are due to close in the first week of November for paid "non-working days" to slow the relentless spread of COVID-19. Russia on Wednesday reported 1,123 new COVID-19 deaths, its highest one-day toll of the pandemic so far.
https://www.reuters.com/world/russians-opt-foreign-beach-breaks-over-covid-curbs-2021-10-27/

China doubles down on COVID-zero strategy

An expansive compound of buildings covering the equivalent of 46 football pitches was recently erected on the outskirts of Guangzhou, China's bustling southern metropolis. The sprawling complex of three-storey buildings contains some 5,000 rooms and is the first of what is expected to be a chain of quarantine centres built by the Chinese government to house people arriving from overseas as it forges ahead with its zero-tolerance approach to COVID.
https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/10/27/china-doubles-down-on-covid-zero-strategy