

# COVID-19 Lockdown Exit Analysis

## 17th Feb 2022

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### Lockdown Exit

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#### **BioNTech plans modular vaccine factories in Africa**

German vaccine maker BioNTech, which developed the first widely approved shot against COVID-19 together with Pfizer, unveiled plans Wednesday to establish manufacturing facilities in Africa that would boost the availability of much-needed medicines on the continent. The modular design presented at a ceremony in Marburg, Germany, consists of shipping containers fitted with the equipment necessary to make the company's mRNA-based vaccine, save for the final step of putting doses into bottles, a process known as fill and finish. "Our goal is to enable mRNA production on all continents," BioNTech CEO Ugur Sahin told The Associated Press. BioNTech has been criticized by some campaign groups for refusing to suspend its vaccine patents and let rivals manufacture the shots as part of an effort to make them more widely available, especially in poor countries. The company argues that the process of making mRNA vaccines is difficult and it prefers to work with local partners to ensure consistent quality of the shots worldwide.

<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-business-health-europe-germany-2b228eeefb59ba253a636c03d303a2f2>

#### **Swiss government lifts nearly all COVID-19 restrictions**

Switzerland will lift almost all its coronavirus pandemic restrictions from midnight, the government said on Wednesday, as fears waned that a spike in infections fuelled by the Omicron variant would overwhelm the health care system. The government said only the requirement to wear masks on public transport and while visiting healthcare facilities would remain in force temporarily after the changes, which end nearly two years of restrictions on public life. "The light on the horizon is very visible," President Ignazio Cassis told a news conference in Bern, although he added the government was ready to reimpose curbs if needed.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/swiss-government-decides-lift-nearly-all-covid-19-restrictions-2022-02-16/>

#### **Companies revert to more normal operations as COVID wanes**

For the first time in two years for many people, the American workplace is transforming into something that resembles pre-pandemic days. Tyson Foods said Tuesday it was ending mask requirements for its vaccinated workers in some facilities. Walmart and Amazon — the nation's No. 1 and 2 largest private employers respectively — will no longer require fully vaccinated workers to don masks in stores or warehouses unless required under local or state laws. Tech companies like Microsoft and Facebook that had allowed employees to work fully remote are now setting mandatory dates to return to the office after a series of fits and starts. "There has been a sharp decline in COVID-19 cases across the country over the past weeks," Amazon told workers in a memo.

<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-health-pandemics-f78e81ca7e93e03141250e78a7d70ebb>

### Exit Strategies

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#### **EU set to bin 25 million more vaccine doses than it has donated to Africa this year**

The European Union has been accused of perpetuating "vaccine apartheid", as new analysis suggested it could soon be forced to throw away some 25 million more coronavirus vaccine doses than it has donated to African nations so far in 2022. Close to 55 million doses held in the EU are set to expire at the end of February, according to data shared with the People's Vaccine Alliance and

published on the eve of a Brussels summit of African and European leaders. This considerably outstrips the roughly 30 million doses donated to African nations between 1 January and 8 February, figures also collated by health analytics firm Airfinity suggest.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/health/covid-vaccine-doses-eu-africa-b2016000.html>

### **The US is lagging on booster shots compared to other western countries**

The United States has a booster shot problem. As other nations hurtle ahead in their Covid-19 vaccination programs, lagging uptake in the US of the third vaccine is concerning public health experts. As of Sunday, uptake of the third shot in the United Kingdom (55.4% of the total population), Germany (55%), France (51.1%) and Canada (44%) dwarfed the US figure of 27.6%, according to Our World in Data. Evidence showing high rates of protection against the virus from three doses, and an Omicron variant-fueled surge in cases in the US, has struggled to convince the American public to take the third shot, CNN's Jacqueline Howard reports. According to CNN analysis of US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) data, the pace of booster doses going into arms is the lowest it has been in months.

<https://www.cnn.com/2022/02/16/world/coronavirus-newsletter-intl-02-16-22/index.html>

### **COVID-19 vaccines in Africa: Drug companies undermine plans**

Since June 2021, the WHO has been coordinating a messenger ribonucleic acid (mRNA) vaccine technology transfer hub in South Africa. The hub is important because it will increase the availability of mRNA vaccines, including those for COVID-19, in Africa, which currently has access to very few vaccines, compared with areas of the Global North. In a new investigation, the journalBMJTrusted Source has revealed that a consultancy hired by the vaccine manufacturer BioNTech has attempted to undermine the new mRNA hub by lobbying the South African government against the venture.

<https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/drug-industry-undermining-who-plans-for-vaccine-manufacture-in-africa>

### **Clinically extremely vulnerable will no longer be offered Covid guidance by Government as restrictions end**

The Government is set to end all guidance for millions of people previously considered “clinically extremely vulnerable” as part of plans to start living with Covid, it has learned. Around 3.7 million people in England were identified as clinically extremely vulnerable at the start of the pandemic and told to “shield” themselves from the heightened risk of Covid infection. People on the shielding list were offered specific guidance telling them to stay at home and avoid face-to-face contact during the first wave of coronavirus infections and subsequent national lockdowns

<https://inews.co.uk/news/clinically-extremely-vulnerable-no-longer-covid-guidance-government-restrictions-end-1463069>

### **Singapore resumes border reopening after pause due to Omicron outbreak**

Singapore will expand quarantine-free travel to Hong Kong, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates this month, its health ministry said on Wednesday, resuming border reopening after a pause due to an outbreak of the coronavirus. The city-state will also restore and increase quotas under its vaccinated travel programme, which had been reduced in December to deal with the Omicron variant. Singapore will streamline border measures for all travellers, and remove an entry approval requirement for eligible residents who are long-term pass holders, the ministry said, making it easier for expatriates to travel.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/singapore-expand-quarantine-free-travel-programme-after-omicron-freeze-2022-02-16/>

### **Omicron surge was more deadly in Japan after booster delay, critics say**

A Japanese government delay in rolling out COVID-19 booster shots left it more vulnerable than other rich countries when the Omicron variant brought a surge of deaths, say experts, local governments and a former vaccine czar. The issue could mean political trouble for Prime Minister

Fumio Kishida as nearly 30% of the population is aged 65 or older, and so at greater risk from the coronavirus without the protection of the booster. Kishida's predecessor stepped down after widespread criticism of his handling of the pandemic and the prime minister's ruling party faces an important test with an upper house election this year.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/japan-posts-record-daily-covid-deaths-new-infections-slow-2022-02-16/>

### **Biden admin seeks \$30 bln more from Congress to fight COVID -sources**

The Biden administration is seeking \$30 billion in additional funds from Congress to fight the COVID-19 pandemic to bolster vaccines, treatments, testing supply, and research, according to sources familiar with the matter. The \$30 billion request includes \$17.9 billion for vaccines and therapeutics, two sources familiar with it said. Administration officials and congressional staff have been in talks about the issue, a Department of Health and Human Services spokesperson confirmed on Tuesday.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/biden-administration-seeks-30-bln-more-congress-fight-covid-19-sources-2022-02-15/>

### **U.S. CDC eases warnings for cruises as new COVID infections fall**

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on Tuesday eased its warnings for cruise ships by a notch from the highest level, seven weeks after it advised Americans against going on cruises. The health agency made the decision to reduce the warning to level three from four in response to a decline in onboard COVID-19 cases, but still recommended that people who were not up to date with vaccines avoid cruises. The CDC in December increased the warning to level four due to the rapid spread of the Omicron variant that also forced cruise operators to cancel sailings.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-cdc-eases-warnings-cruises-new-covid-infections-fall-2022-02-15/>

### **Austria to lift most COVID-19 restrictions by March 5**

Austria will lift most of its remaining COVID-19 restrictions by March 5, including scrapping an earlier closing time of midnight for bars and restaurants and allowing nightclubs to reopen, Chancellor Karl Nehammer said on Wednesday. The government said the steps were being taken cautiously with daily new infections hovering below their record peak and a manageable situation in hospitals due to the smaller incidence of severe cases in the latest wave of the coronavirus, dominated by the highly contagious Omicron variant. The easing of curbs as Omicron has proven to be milder than earlier variants will deepen doubt about whether the government will implement a recently enacted law making vaccination against COVID-19 compulsory - the first such measure in the European Union.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/austria-lift-most-covid-19-restrictions-by-march-5-2022-02-16/>

### **Exclusive: Short AstraZeneca shelf life complicates COVID vaccine rollout to world's poorest**

The relatively short shelf life of AstraZeneca Plc's COVID-19 vaccine is complicating the rollout to the world's poorest nations, according to officials and internal World Health Organization documents reviewed by Reuters. It is the latest headache to plague the COVAX vaccine-sharing project, co-led by the WHO and aimed at getting shots to the world's neediest people. Initially, poorer countries and COVAX lagged richer countries in securing vaccine supplies, as wealthier nations used their financial might to acquire the first available doses.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/exclusive-short-astrazeneca-shelf-life-complicates-covid-vaccine-rollout-worlds-2022-02-16/>

### **Scotland to offer COVID vaccines to all 5-11 year olds**

Britain said on Wednesday it would offer COVID-19 vaccines to all 5-11 year olds, widening the rollout of vaccines in children in a decision that has been taken more slowly than in some other countries. Announcing the move, health minister Sajid Javid said he had accepted advice from

experts who argued that vaccinating young children would help protect against future waves of the coronavirus. Britain has offered COVID-19 shots to vulnerable children, but has been slower than the likes of the United States, Canada, Ireland and Israel in making a broad offer of shots to all 5- to 11-year-olds.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/scotland-offer-covid-vaccines-all-5-11-year-olds-2022-02-16/>

### **S. Korea to give out rapid tests as omicron shatters record**

South Korea will distribute free coronavirus rapid test kits at schools and senior care facilities starting next week as it weathers an unprecedented wave of infections driven by the fast-moving omicron variant. Health officials on Wednesday reported its highest daily jump in coronavirus infections with 90,443 new cases, shattering the previous one-day record set on Tuesday by more than 33,000 cases. The figure represents more than a 20-fold increase from the levels seen in mid-January, when omicron emerged as the country's dominant strain, and some experts say the country could see daily cases of around 200,000 in March. While experts say omicron appears less likely to cause serious illness or death compared to the delta variant, which rattled the country in December and early January, hospitalizations have been creeping up amid the greater scale of outbreak.

<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-health-business-pandemics-seoul-439624ee5ee50c9ef45609a2c93648a4>

### **Germany to chart way out of coronavirus restrictions**

Chancellor Olaf Scholz is conferring with Germany's 16 state governors Wednesday to map a way out of coronavirus restrictions as official figures show new infections beginning to drift downward. Germany saw infections caused by the omicron variant, which is highly contagious but generally causes milder illness than previous variants, surge later than in several other European countries. Officials have attributed this to restrictions that include curbs on private gatherings, the closure of night clubs and requirements for people to show proof of vaccination or recovery to enter restaurants and bars.

<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-technology-health-europe-germany-debcb0f99594ea9decd244070c28096>

### **Netherlands to lift most COVID restrictions this month**

The Netherlands will lift almost all its restrictions against COVID-19 by February 25 as cases and hospitalisations fall, the health minister has said. Bars, restaurants and nightclubs will go back to pre-pandemic opening hours and social distancing and face masks will no longer be obligatory in most places. However, visitors will need to show proof of either vaccination, a recent recovery from COVID-19 or a negative coronavirus test. The Dutch government had imposed some of Europe's toughest restrictions in December after a surge in Omicron cases but has since been lifting them in stages. "The country will open again," Health Minister Ernst Kuipers told a news conference on Tuesday. "We will go back to normal closing times we had before corona, you don't have to keep 1.5 metres away any more," he added.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/2/15/netherlands-to-end-of-covid-19-curbs-by-february-25>

## **Partisan Exits**

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### **Air Force officer can avoid coronavirus vaccination for now, federal judge rules**

A federal judge on Tuesday ordered the Air Force to let an officer stay unvaccinated against the coronavirus temporarily, without penalties, making her the first in the branch to receive a court injunction that excuses her from a military-wide vaccine mandate. Although the military has granted hundreds of medical exemptions to service members, it has been much stricter about religious exemptions, which the officer had unsuccessfully requested. Last month, a federal court sided with 35 Navy sailors who had sued the Biden administration to grant them religious exemptions, and the Marines granted the military's first such exemptions.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2022/02/16/air-force-coronavirus-vaccine-religion-injunction/>

### **Canadian government wants to quickly clear COVID protest blockades in Ottawa**

Police in the Canadian capital Ottawa on Wednesday started warning truck drivers blockading the downtown core that they should depart or face arrest, part of a promised crackdown to end a three-week-old protest over COVID restrictions. "You must leave the area now. Anyone blocking streets ... (is) committing a criminal offense and you may be arrested," read leaflets handed out by police to truckers. "You must immediately cease further unlawful activity." Police also started ticketing some of the hundreds of vehicles blocking the downtown core.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/canadian-government-wants-quickly-clear-covid-protest-blockades-ottawa-2022-02-16/>

### **New Zealand COVID vaccine protesters defy police ultimatum to leave parliament**

An anti-vaccine mandate protest outside New Zealand's parliament swelled in numbers on Wednesday, with hundreds of people ignoring a warning from police that their vehicles would be towed away if they did not leave voluntarily. Inspired by truckers' demonstrations in Canada, protesters have blocked several roads around Wellington's 'Beehive' parliament for nine days with trucks, vans and motorcycles, and camped out on the lawns in front of the distinctive building. "There has been an influx of protesters at Parliament today, including children. However, the crowd had been orderly," Assistant Police Commissioner Richard Chambers told reporters, estimating there were about 450 vehicles blocking the site.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/new-zealand-covid-vaccine-protesters-defy-police-ultimatum-leave-parliament-2022-02-16/>

### **Djokovic 'wrong' to refuse vaccine, top sport doctor says**

A top orthopaedic surgeon who helped re-open sporting and cultural events as lockdown restrictions lifted said he disagreed with Novak Djokovic's decision not to get vaccinated. Professor James Calder, who worked with Public Health England and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport to enable sports to return after lockdown, said it must have been "a really tough decision" for the athlete but said it was "wrong". The medic made the remarks after collecting an OBE at Windsor Castle on Tuesday.

<https://www.msn.com/en-gb/sport/tennis/djokovic-wrong-to-refuse-vaccine-top-sport-doctor-says/ar-AATTmjF>

## **Scientific Viewpoint**

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### **The COVID-19 pandemic is 80% likely to be in its final stages, says Moderna CEO Stéphane Bancel**

Moderna CEO Stéphane Bancel thinks it very likely that Omicron's relative mildness indicates the final stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, even if the coronavirus will likely stick around forever like the flu. "I think this is a reasonable scenario," he told CNBC Wednesday. "The way I think about it, there's an 80% chance that as Omicron evolves or SARS-CoV-2 virus evolves, we are going to see less and less virulent viruses." Conversely, he warned, there's also a 20% likelihood that we will still see a new mutation of the coronavirus that is more virulent, as the virus is "really unpredictable." Less than six weeks ago, Bancel said it was likely people would need second boosters in the coming fall, due to waning efficacy of the first dose. On Wednesday, he again referred to the need for annual boosters, but only for high-risk people such as the over-fifties and those with significant comorbidity factors.

<https://fortune.com/2022/02/16/covid-pandemic-end-stages-moderna-stephane-bancel-afrigen-who-tedros/>

### **Covid: How new drugs are finally taming the virus**

"Two years ago we had nothing," says Dr Matthias Schmid, head of infectious diseases at the RVI, who treated the UK's first Covid patient at the end of January 2020. "Now we have a range of

treatments available which reduce the severity and prevent death in a huge number of patients." They include the cheap anti-inflammatory steroid dexamethasone, the first drug proven to save the lives of people seriously ill with Covid, which was discovered through a ground-breaking NHS trial. "It's feeling more normal for us," says Dr Miriam Baruch, intensive care medicine consultant. "It's really nice that we can train our doctors for the variety of patients that we get."

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-60390187>

### **COVID-19: New combination of antivirals may be an effective treatment**

Researchers from the University of Pennsylvania identified a combination of antiviral drugs they believe to be effective against the SARS-CoV-2 virus. The combination includes the experimental drug brequinar with either the approved drug remdesivir or the approved drug molnupiravir. The research group has so far only tested the drug combination in human respiratory cells and mice. Scientists plan for further research exploring other drug combinations and testing through clinical trials.

<https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/antiviral-drug-combo-may-be-effective-against-covid-19>

### **UK to revamp biosecurity strategy in wake of Covid-19**

The UK is revamping its approach to biosecurity after Covid-19 exposed major shortcomings in its ability to respond to biological threats, including the coronavirus pandemic. The new approach will update Britain's last biological security strategy, published in 2018, which warned of the need to "co-ordinate" government actions better and for a "truly comprehensive approach" to meet biological risks, including pandemics. It also follows a highly critical assessment by a parliamentary committee which found that Covid-19 "exposed profound shortcomings" in Britain's approach to biosecurity.

<https://www.ft.com/content/f4fb0be9-16f8-42de-9bd6-cdcbf82de469>

### **Merck struggles to win European approval for Covid antiviral pill**

The European Medicines Agency is unlikely to grant conditional marketing authorisation to Merck's Covid-19 antiviral pill this month as it grapples with "problematic" data. It is "possible" that the oral Covid drug molnupiravir will not receive approval at all, one of the people said. The EMA declined to comment on its ongoing review. Merck's drug raised fresh hopes and sent shares in the company rallying late last year after early data from a late-stage trial suggested that it cut in half the risk of death and hospitalisation. But a subsequent analysis revealed its efficacy to be lower than previously thought, at 30 per cent. The US FDA has given its approval but restricted its use. France cancelled its order for the drug amid efficacy concerns.

<https://www.ft.com/content/2cf0b6cc-b07b-4ff9-a833-42eb1798a576>

### **Covid-19: Omicron-specific vaccine trials launched in UK as volunteers needed**

Volunteers from around the UK are being recruited to take part in a new study for an Omicron booster jab. Led by vaccine giants Moderna, the study will include around 3,000 participants. The jab, which is one of the world's first to specifically tackle the Omicron variant, will be trialed at a number of locations throughout the UK. Research - led by a team based at St George's, University of London - will be conducted through a partnership between Moderna and the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR). The study will see half of the volunteers receive the new Omicron jab, with the other half injected with the regular Moderna booster. Levels of Covid immunity drop several months after a booster dose is administered.

<https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/lifestyle/health-fitness/covid-19-omicron-specific-vaccine-26244516>

### **BioNTech says it won't challenge vaccine copying in Africa**

BioNTech's co-founder and top executive said the vaccine maker has no plans to enforce its intellectual property rights should organisations in Africa strike out on their own to produce unauthorised versions of the company's shot. "Our goal is not to keep others from using our

technology. Our goal is rather to actively see to it that our technology is available on all continents as safely and as widely as possible," CEO Ugur Sahin told Reuters TV on Wednesday when asked whether he would pursue breaches of patents or patents pending in Africa.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/biotech-pledges-african-access-its-future-cancer-drugs-2022-02-16/>

### **COVID vaccination during pregnancy helps protect babies after birth -U.S. study**

Vaccinating pregnant women against the coronavirus may help prevent COVID-19 hospitalizations in infants after they are born, especially if the expecting mothers got the shots later in their pregnancy, U.S. researchers reported on Tuesday. The findings shed light on whether the benefits of vaccination during pregnancy extend to infants who would be too young to receive vaccines. Researchers from several pediatric hospitals and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) looked at children under six months old between July 2021 and January 2022.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/covid-vaccination-during-pregnancy-helps-protect-babies-after-birth-us-study-2022-02-15/>

### **UK health agency says long COVID less common in the vaccinated**

Long COVID is less likely to affect vaccinated people than unvaccinated people, a new review of 15 studies by the UK Health Security Agency released on Tuesday has concluded. UKHSA said the people who received two doses of Pfizer-BioNTech, AstraZeneca or Moderna vaccine, or one dose of the single-shot J&J vaccine, were around half as likely to develop symptoms of long COVID compared to the unvaccinated. "These studies add to the potential benefits of receiving a full course of the COVID-19 vaccination," said Dr Mary Ramsay, head of immunisation at UKHSA.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uk-health-agency-says-long-covid-less-common-vaccinated-2022-02-15/>

### **Coronaviruses are 'clever': Evolutionary scenarios for the future of SARS-CoV-2**

In the ongoing struggle of SARS-CoV-2's genes versus our wits, the virus that causes Covid-19 relentlessly probes human defenses with new genetic gambits. New variants of this coronavirus with increasing transmissibility have sprung up every few months, a scenario that is likely to continue. Some experts believe that the pandemic appears to be on an evolutionary slide toward becoming endemic, a "new normal" in which humans and the virus co-exist, as we currently do with influenza. But coronaviruses are clever. While an endemic resolution may be in sight, SARS-CoV-2 could still shock the human species with a devastating evolutionary leap. Here are four possible scenarios, each taken directly from the known evolutionary playbook of coronaviruses.

<https://www.statnews.com/2022/02/16/coronaviruses-are-clever-evolutionary-scenarios-for-the-future-of-sars-cov-2/>

### **Covid-19 is not a marathon**

A brief survey of pilot fatigue and workload-related issues indicates that the people who staff ICUs are under far more prolonged and intense stress than pilots, with fewer and more limited mitigation options. Given the stakes, shouldn't health care and research workers have something like the load-management guidelines that air crews have? What do the coaches and managers of elite athletes know that health care leaders don't know? Legendary coaches like John Wooden, Vince Lombardi, and Bill Bowerman kept practices short, paid attention to recovery, and were constantly asking what they could simplify and stop doing. They also saw themselves as teachers who turned the actual competition over to the athletes and did not micromanage from the sidelines.

<https://www.statnews.com/2022/02/16/covid-19-is-not-a-marathon/>

## **Coronavirus Resurgence**

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### **Child Covid-19 hospitalizations rose amid Omicron, especially among children too young to be vaccinated**

Covid-19 hospitalization rates among children increased as Omicron replaced Delta as the

predominant coronavirus variant in the United States, especially among those under 5, who are not eligible to be vaccinated, according to a study published Tuesday by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. At their peak, weekly pediatric Covid-19 hospitalization rates were four times higher during a period of Omicron dominance than during a period of Delta dominance. Children younger than 5 saw the largest increase, with hospitalization rates that were more than five times higher during Omicron than during Delta.

<https://www.cnn.com/2022/02/15/health/covid-hospitalizations-children-unvaccinated/index.html>

### **Average of new U.S. coronavirus cases falls below delta peak**

The seven-day average of new coronavirus infections in the United States has fallen to a number not seen since the delta surge of last summer began to die down, though cases remain higher than during much of the pandemic. The country had an average of 153,029 cases per day as of Monday, according to tracking by The Washington Post. That's lower than the highest seven-day average during the delta variant surge, the 165,187 recorded on Sept. 1. It is also a sharp decline from the pandemic high of 807,897 reached Jan. 22. Although case counts are lower than in December and January, when the even more contagious omicron variant sent infections soaring, they remain elevated.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2022/02/15/covid-omicron-variant-live-updates/>

### **COVID: New cases decline by 19% worldwide, deaths stabilise**

The number of new COVID-19 cases worldwide has dropped by 19 percent in the past week, while recorded deaths remain stable, according to the World Health Organization's (WHO) latest report on the coronavirus pandemic. The United Nations' health agency said late on Tuesday that "just over 16 million new cases and just under 75,000 new deaths were reported" globally during the week of February 7 to February 13. The Western Pacific was the only region to report an increase in new weekly cases, a rise of about 19 percent. Southeast Asia recorded a drop of about 37 percent, the biggest decrease across the six WHO regions. The biggest number of new COVID-19 cases was seen in Russia. Cases there and elsewhere in Eastern Europe doubled in recent weeks, driven by a surge of the hugely infectious Omicron variant. Meanwhile, the number of deaths rose by 38 percent in the Eastern Mediterranean region and by about one-third in the Western Pacific, according to the WHO's weekly report.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/2/16/covid-new-cases-decline-by-19-worldwide-deaths-stabilise>

### **Beijing Olympics organiser says 2 new COVID cases detected among personnel on Feb 15**

The Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics Organizing Committee said on Wednesday that two new COVID-19 cases were detected among games-related personnel on Feb. 15. One of the cases was found among new airport arrivals, according to a notice on the Beijing 2022 official website. Another case was among those already in the "closed loop" bubble that separates all event personnel from the public, the notice said.

<https://www.reuters.com/lifestyle/sports/beijing-olympics-organiser-says-2-new-covid-cases-detected-among-personnel-feb-2022-02-16/>

### **Singapore reports one-day record of 19179 local COVID cases**

Singapore reported a record 19,179 local coronavirus infections on Tuesday. The city-state has recorded 191,882 cases of the virus over the last 28 days, but 99.7% of them had no or mild symptoms. Of Tuesday's local cases, 16,102 were detected through antigen rapid tests (ART). They are assessed to have no or mild symptoms and carry low risk.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/singapore-reports-one-day-record-19179-local-covid-cases-2022-02-16/>

### **Eastern Chinese industrial hub reports COVID cases for 2nd day**

The Chinese industrial hub Suzhou on Wednesday reported new COVID-19 cases for a second day, and authorities further restricted highway access while ramping up testing, having already detected

cases of the highly contagious Omicron variant. The city in the eastern province of Jiangsu reported 18 domestically transmitted cases with confirmed symptoms for Tuesday, up from eight a day earlier, the data from the National Health Commission (NHC) showed. The case number is small compared with many outbreaks overseas, but Suzhou government, in line with the national policy to contain outbreaks as quickly as possible, has quarantined thousands of people, closed various entertainment businesses and urged residents to reduce trips to outside the city.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/china/eastern-chinese-industrial-hub-reports-covid-cases-2nd-day-2022-02-16/>

### **Xi tells Hong Kong's leaders to control COVID as infections spiral**

China's President Xi Jinping has told Hong Kong's leaders that their "overriding mission" was to stabilise and control a worsening COVID-19 outbreak, pro-Beijing media reported, as infected patients lay in beds outside overwhelmed hospitals. The daily tally of COVID infections in the global financial hub rose to more than 40 times the level at the start of February as health authorities reported a record 4,285 confirmed new infections on Wednesday, and another 7,000 preliminary positive cases. The directive from Xi ramps up pressure on Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam a day after she said her government's response to the outbreak had been unsatisfactory, with hospitals and medical staff unable to cope.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/xi-tells-hong-kongs-leaders-control-covid-infections-spiral-2022-02-16/>

### **S.Korea's daily COVID-19 count tops 90000, basketball league halted**

South Korea's daily count of new coronavirus cases topped 90,000 for the first time, driven to a record by the fast-spreading Omicron variant that has seen daily tallies nearly double in just a week. The 90,443 cases reported for Tuesday represent a drastic surge from the 57,177 recorded by the Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency (KDCA) a day before. The surge has seen the virus spread through Korean business and society, and the men's basketball and volleyball leagues on Wednesday halted their season as dozens of players tested positive for COVID-19.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/skorea-reports-record-90443-covid-cases-daily-count-doubles-week-2022-02-16/>

### **England's COVID-19 prevalence edges lower - ONS**

England's COVID-19 prevalence was 1 in 20 people in the week ending Feb. 12, the Office for National Statistics said on Wednesday, slightly lower than the 1 in 19 recorded the previous week.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/englands-covid-19-prevalence-edges-lower-ons-2022-02-16/>

### **As COVID-19 ebbs in US, parts of Europe light up**

COVID-19 cases continue to decline in the United States, including a substantial drop in children, as mask mandates continue to make news. In Eastern Europe, however, the Omicron variant continues to cause challenges, especially in regions with low vaccine uptake. Nearly 300,000 pediatric COVID-19 cases were reported last week, down sharply from a peak of 1,150,000 the week ending Jan 20, the American Academy of Pediatrics said in its latest weekly update. However, it added that cases in children remain extremely high and are still above the peak of the Delta surge.

<https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2022/02/covid-19-ebbs-us-parts-europe-light>