COVID-19 Lockdown Exit Analysis
24th Mar 2022

Lockdown Exit

Vaccine Passports Redundant as More Inoculated, Star Chief Says

Vaccine passports will probably become redundant as more people are inoculated against Covid, and efforts to create a common standard are stymied by differing entry requirements, the head of the world's biggest airline alliance said. "There's no way that this has been integrated in one place," Star Alliance Chief Executive Officer Jeffrey Goh said in an interview in Singapore. "If you look to the future, if we were all vaccinated, or if we were all 90% vaccinated, why would you get a vaccination certificate? There will come to a point where maybe you don't really need this." Efforts to create a vaccine passport to make travel easier have faced challenges because governments initially didn't recognize some vaccines, Goh said. Airlines and governments also use many different technology platforms, making it difficult to find a common standard, he said.

https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-03-24/vaccine-passports-redundant-as-more-inoculated-star-chief-says

Biden's Covid Team Warns on Lack of Funds Ahead of Meeting

President Joe Biden's Covid-19 team warned that a lack of funding could leave the U.S. unprepared to administer fourth doses of vaccine as administration officials prepared to meet with Senate Democrats on the issue later Wednesday. Health and Human Services Secretary Xavier Becerra, budget director Shalanda Young and Biden's coronavirus coordinator Jeff Zients are expected to attend the meeting, according to a White House official who requested anonymity to give details that aren't public. The push comes after the administration failed to secure around $15 billion in additional funding as part of an omnibus spending bill Biden signed earlier this month. Republicans demanded that new coronavirus funds be offset by canceling spending in other areas, while House Democrats scuttled a bipartisan proposal to repurpose aid to states. That led to the proposal being stripped from the fiscal 2022 spending package enacted last week.

https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-03-23/biden-s-covid-team-warns-on-lack-of-funds-ahead-of-meeting

Moderna says its COVID-19 vaccine safe for children as young as six months old after 'successfully' completing clinical trial

Moderna announced Wednesday morning that it has successfully completed clinical trials for its COVID-19 vaccine in children as young as six months old and soon plan to submit data to regulators to get its jab approved.

https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-10643553/Moderna-says-COVID-19-vaccine-safe-children-young-six-months-old.html

S Africa eases COVID restrictions for vaccinated travellers

Article reports that South Africa, the country in Africa worst affected by coronavirus, has relaxed some of its remaining COVID-19 restrictions, dropping mandatory negative results for inbound fully-vaccinated travellers, a move expected to boost tourism. On Tuesday, President Cyril Ramaphosa made the announcement to scale down restrictions – imposed since March 2020 – as new infection rates slow and death rates decline. "Travellers entering South Africa will need to show proof of vaccination or a negative PCR test not older than 72 hours," said Ramaphosa. Previously all travellers entering the country were required to produce a costly negative PCR test. Inside the country, vaccinated individuals or those that have a negative test result will be allowed back into

sporting stadiums and music and theatre shows – which will be permitted to operate at half capacity.
https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/3/23/s-africa-eases-covid-curbs-scraps-pcr-tests-for-jabbed-travelers

Indonesia's annual holiday exodus to go ahead this year as COVID cases ease
Indonesia will lift a ban on domestic travel during the Muslim holiday season of Eid al-Fitr in early May, President Joko Widodo said on Wednesday, after banning the annual tradition for two years during the pandemic. The decision to allow the annual exodus after the holy month of Ramadan is the latest in a series of measures aimed at easing COVID-19 restrictions and reviving Southeast Asia's largest economy. Indonesia, a country of 270 million, banned the mass travel known locally as 'mudik' in early 2020 as it scrambled to contain the spread of coronavirus along with the rest of the world.
https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/indonesias-annual-holiday-exodus-go-ahead-this-year-covid-cases-ease-2022-03-23/

New Zealand sports to welcome back crowds as COVID rules eased
New Zealand sports will welcome full-capacity crowds when COVID-19 rules ease this weekend after a bruising period for revenues. New Zealand capped crowds at 100 people for outdoor events while battling an outbreak of the Omicron variant, but will lift the curbs from Saturday, along with the need for fans to wear masks, the government said on Wednesday. "While Omicron is transmissible the natural ventilation of an outdoor seating reduces the risk," Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said.
https://www.reuters.com/lifestyle/sports/new-zealand-sports-welcome-back-crowds-covid-rules-eased-2022-03-23/

U.K.'s Lockdown Anniversary Marked by Another Virus Surge
Two years ago, Prime Minister Boris Johnson locked down the U.K., instructing people to stay at home and imposing sweeping restrictions in a desperate effort to slow the surging coronavirus. Today, lockdowns are history. But Covid-19 remains. In recent weeks, cases have risen anew, driven by the highly infectious omicron BA.2 subvariant. On Wednesday, the government reported more than 100,000 new cases -- far above levels during the first wave in 2020, when testing was less widespread. The number has averaged almost 80,000 over the past two weeks, based on reporting-date figures.
https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-03-23/u-k-s-lockdown-anniversary-marked-by-another-virus-surge

UK Covid Test Contracts: National Audit Office Finds Inadequate Record-Keeping
When the pandemic hit, ministers were forced to act quickly to scale up testing capacity – working with the private sector to secure the necessary services and supplies, according to the National Audit Office (NAO). As part of these efforts, between January 2020 and December 2021, the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) and Public Health England (PHE) awarded 22 contracts to health company Randox, or its strategic partner, Qnostics Ltd, with a maximum value of £776.9 million, the watchdog said. By value, almost all the contracts were for the provision of Covid testing services, with less than 1% (£6.9 million) for the provision of testing-related goods, it added. The NAO found that 60% of the total value of the contracts (£463.5 million) was awarded directly without competition, under emergency procurement rules.
https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-03-24/uk-covid-test-contracts-national-audit-office-finds-inadequate-record-keeping

Moderna’s Covid-19 Vaccine Works Safely in Young Children, Company Says
Moderna Inc.’s Covid-19 vaccine safely induced robust immune responses in children ages 6 months to 5 years in a new study, the company said, though the shot had modest efficacy against the Omicron variant. Moderna said Wednesday the vaccine’s efficacy against symptomatic infections was 43.7% in children ages 6 months to 2 years, and 37.5% in children ages 2 to 5. The efficacy rates were lower than seen during adult testing, which took place before Omicron emerged, but

comparable to the real-world effectiveness of two doses of Moderna's vaccine found among adults during the Omicron wave.
https://www.wsj.com/articles/modernas-covid-19-vaccine-works-safely-in-young-children-company-says-11648036800?mod=hp_lead_pos4

NHS under pressure from new Covid wave across England, says Chris Whitty
The NHS is coming under "significant" pressure amid a rise in Covid cases in virtually every area of England, the chief medical officer has warned, with hospitalisations likely to continue increasing at least until April. Prof Chris Whitty said the mounting numbers of people becoming infected was likely to be largely driven by the new Omicron variant, BA.2. The sharp resurgence of the coronavirus underlined that the crisis "is not over", Whitty added. Speaking at the annual conference of the Local Government Association and the Association of Directors of Public Health, Whitty also said those hoping for an "end point" should not expect one, with coronavirus likely to remain a threat to public health for decades.
https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/23/nhs-under-pressure-from-new-covid-wave-across-england-says-chris-whitty

Exit Strategies

COVID-19 restrictions are lifting, but unvaccinated Canadians still can't board planes or trains
Canada's vaccine mandate — which took effect in November 2021 to boost vaccination rates — prevents unvaccinated Canadians from boarding a commercial plane or train in Canada to both domestic and international destinations. Now that COVID-19 restrictions are fast disappearing, some unvaccinated Canadians question why the federal government still maintains the mandate.
https://www.cbc.ca/news/business/unvaccinated-travel-canada-1.6393668

Hong Kong schools need 90 per cent student jab rate to resume full-day classes
Schools must ensure 90 per cent of their students have received at least two vaccine shots against Covid-19 if they hope to resume whole-day lessons in the classroom next month, Hong Kong's education minister has announced. Confirming a previous Post report, Secretary for Education Kevin Yeung Yun-hung also said that all teachers and school staff must have received at least two vaccine doses before returning to campus, unless they had a valid medical exemption.
https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/health-environment/article/3171485/coronavirus-hong-kong-schools-must-have-90-cent

A tale of two Covid Americas: can the US unite behind a pandemic strategy?
With US health authorities braced for another potential Covid-19 wave, likely to be fueled by the subvariant of Omicron known as BA.2, the country is still deeply divided over its approach to its pandemic future – even as restrictions have been relaxed across all states. Since scientists recorded the first case of the Sars-CoV-2 virus in the US just over two years ago, politicization has been a hallmark of the American pandemic experience.
https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/mar/23/us-divided-pandemic-covid-vaccines

'A new beginning': New Zealand to drop Covid vaccine passes and mandates
New Zealand will do away with vaccine passes and vaccine mandates for some of the workforce in early April, in a major loosening of the country's tough Covid-19 restrictions. The prime minister, Jacinda Ardern, announced the changes on Wednesday morning, citing high vaccination rates, better data to identify which environments are high risk, and modelling that suggests the country's Omicron outbreak would peak in early April.
https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/23/a-new-beginning-new-zealand-to-drop-covid-vaccine-passes-and-mandates

Polish government to lift more COVID-19 restrictions despite expert concerns

In Poland, the government wants to lift more pandemic restrictions although medical experts are concerned about not enough people being vaccinated against COVID-19 for the country to develop herd immunity and the mass arrival of unvaccinated Ukrainians. Health Minister Adam Niedzielski told the media on 17 March that he had recommended that Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki abolish the mask-wearing obligation in buildings.

https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/short_news/polish-government-to-lift-more-covid-19-restrictions-despite-expert-concerns/

Ministers urged to ensure Covid-19 testing remains free for NHS staff

The NHS Confederation is leading a call for ministers to provide clarity over Covid-19 testing requirements for NHS staff and for access to free tests to remain in place for the workforce, especially for those who are patient-facing. The concerns from organisations representing NHS staff come as Covid-19 rates across the UK continue to spike, with hospital admissions also on the rise.

https://www.nursingtimes.net/news/coronavirus/ministers-urged-to-ensure-covid-19-testing-remains-free-for-nhs-staff-22-03-2022/

South Africa's Ramaphosa eases COVID-19 restrictions to lift economy

South African President Cyril Ramaphosa said restrictive COVID-19 regulations that have weighed on the nation's struggling economy for two years would be removed on Wednesday, with the national state of disaster also to end soon. The state of disaster currently regulates the country's COVID-19 rules and has been in place since the onset of the pandemic in March 2020. Its extension last week until April 15 drew criticism from businesses hard hit by its measures.

https://www.cnbcafrica.com/2022/south-africas-ramaphosa-eases-covid-19-restrictions-to-lift-economy/

Mexico sticking to plan to package Russian COVID-19 vaccine

Mexico is sticking to its plan to package domestically the Russian COVID-19 vaccine Sputnik V because health matters are separate from political conflicts, President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador said. In October, state-run vaccine company Birmex signed an agreement with the Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF), which markets Sputnik V, to package the product in Mexico. "We're going to continue with our plan, commitments made are kept," said the president, who has ruled out imposing economic sanctions against Russia for its invasion of Ukraine.

https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/mexico-sticking-plan-package-russian-covid-19-vaccine-2022-03-22/

U.S. travel industry urges White House to lift COVID restrictions, mask mandate

The U.S. Travel Association urged the White House to lift COVID-19 travel restrictions and repeal a mandate requiring masks on airplanes and in other transit modes by April 18, according to a letter seen by Reuters. In a letter to Dr. Ashish Jha, the incoming White House COVID response coordinator, the group called for an immediate end to the pre-departure testing requirement for all fully vaccinated inbound international persons and ending the mask mandate by April 18 "or announcing a plan and timeline to repeal the federal mask mandate within the subsequent 90 days."

https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-travel-industry-urges-white-house-lift-covid-restrictions-mask-mandate-2022-03-22/

Hong Kong hopes to 'resolve' COVID flight-ban rule as cases ease

Hong Kong is looking to resolve a problem over a ban on airlines which bring in COVID-positive passengers as it eases travel curbs that have sealed off the city for two years, its leader said on Wednesday. The government said this week a ban on flights from nine countries - Canada, India, Pakistan, Nepal, Britain, the United States, France, Australia and the Philippines - would be lifted on April 1 but it was not clear if airlines would face a two-week ban if they bring in infected people, as is currently the case.

https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/hong-kong-hopes-resolve-coronavirus-flight-ban-rule-frustration-grows-2022-03-23/

As Asian hot spots battle Omicron, US eyes supply of 4th vaccine doses

A handful of Asian countries that were hit later by Omicron variant surges are in different phases of their outbreaks, with South Korea seeing a possible peak. In US developments, White House officials—bracing for a possible fresh spike in infections—warned that current funding shortfalls could block the government from buying enough COVID-19 vaccine for fourth doses for the general population.

https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2022/03/asian-hot-spots-battle-omicron-us-eyes-supply-4th-vaccine-doses

Partisan Exits

Judge among 156 New York officials who could lose their jobs within days for refusing to take vaccine

A judge is one of more than 150 New York court employees who face potential firing or other punishments over their refusal to take the coronavirus vaccine. The New York Daily News reports that Justice Jenny Rivera of the state's Court of Appeals is among four judges who are still refusing to take the coronavirus vaccine. Ms Rivera was appointed to the state's highest court by former Governor Andrew Cuomo in 2013. The state's Office of Court Administration can't fire the judges, but they can be referred to the Commission on Judicial Conduct for their refusal to comply with the state's vaccine mandate.

https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/judge-new-york-coronavirus-vaccine-b2041714.html

New York City mayor set to lift vaccine mandate on athletes, performers - report

New York Mayor Eric Adams is set to lift the city's COVID-19 vaccine mandate for performers and professional athletes as early as this week, Politico reported on Wednesday, a rule that has come under growing criticism by local sports teams. The mandate, imposed by former Mayor Bill de Blasio, is part of a larger order that all private-sector workers in New York City must show proof of vaccination, pro athletes included. Politico reported that Adams was expected to lift those restrictions, among the harshest in the United States, during a news conference on Thursday.

https://www.reuters.com/lifestyle/sports/new-york-city-mayor-set-lift-vaccine-mandate-athletes-performers-report-2022-03-23/

Scientific Viewpoint

Moderna says its coronavirus vaccine for young children is safe, but efficacy is a more complicated picture

Vaccine maker Moderna announced Wednesday its two-dose pediatric coronavirus vaccine was safe in young children, toddlers and babies in a study. But the effectiveness of the shot in children 6 months to 5 years old was more of a mixed picture because of the challenge presented by the highly transmissible omicron variant. In a trial of the vaccine, the shot met the main criteria the company and regulators had defined for success, generating immune defenses equivalent to or better than those that protected young adults before the omicron variant emerged, according to a Moderna news release. But in the face of omicron, the immune defenses mustered by two doses in adults were less robust, particularly in preventing infections — and the same pattern was seen in children, with vaccine efficacy of about 40 percent.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2022/03/23/moderna-says-its-coronavirus-vaccine-young-children-is-safe-efficacy-is-more-complicated-picture/

Study examines the effectiveness of remdesivir in a pill form for COVID-19

Scientists at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill are testing remdesivir in a pill form to

understand how effective it is for treating COVID-19. Remdesivir is an RNA polymerase inhibitor that disrupts the production of viral RNA, preventing the multiplication of SARS-CoV-2; it has been given to half of all hospitalised patients with the disease. It works by blocking the machinery the virus needs to make copies of itself and spread throughout the body. The scientists explored whether a pill form of remdesivir could be developed and the benefits that it could provide. Currently, remdesivir is administered intravenously, however, an oral version of this medication could extend its benefits to outside the hospital.
https://www.healtheuropa.eu/study-examines-the-effectiveness-of-remdesivir-in-a-pill-form-for-covid-19/114301/

Covid-19 pandemic could lead to rise in global TB cases, expert warns

The Covid-19 pandemic could lead to a rise in tuberculosis infections around the world as some patients will have gone undiagnosed amid the crisis, an expert has warned. Dr Laura Cleghorn, of the University of Dundee, said there is a “pressing need” to develop new treatments for illness which some wrongly think of as a “disease of yesteryear”. The University’s Drug Discovery Unit (DDU) has received a $5 million (£3.8 million) grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to speed up the delivery of drug candidates. The primary focus of the work, which will take place over three years, will be on tuberculosis (TB), however, researchers will also work on developing treatments for malaria and future viral pandemic diseases.
https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/bill-melinda-gates-foundation-university-of-dundee-dundee-b2042078.html

S.Korea gives emergency approval for adult use of Merck's COVID pills - Yonhap

South Korea's drug safety agency said on Wednesday that it has decided to give emergency approval for the use of Merck & Co Inc's COVID-19 treatment pill for adults, the Yonhap news agency reported. The molnupiravir tablet, branded as Lagevrio, is the second oral antiviral to be authorised in South Korea after Pfizer Inc's Paxlovid. Lagevrio will only be allowed for patients who are aged 18 or older and not pregnant but cannot not use injection medications and the highly effective Paxlovid, the report said.
https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/skorea-gives-emergency-approval-adult-use-mercks-covid-pills-yonhap-2022-03-23/

Novavax says its COVID vaccine gets India authorisation for teens

Novavax Inc said on Tuesday its COVID-19 vaccine has got emergency-use authorization from the Drugs Controller General of India for children aged 12 to 17 years. The authorization is a global first for the age group for the vaccine, which is manufactured and marketed in India by the Serum Institute of India under the brand name Covovax. Novavax last month said its vaccine was 80% effective against COVID-19 in a late-stage trial testing the shot in 2,247 teens aged 12 to 17 years.
https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/novavax-says-its-covid-vaccine-gets-india-authorisation-teens-2022-03-22/

COVID vaccine maker Moderna flags Japan ambition with sumo sponsorship

Moderna Inc is sponsoring sumo flags in its first such promotion in Japan, as the COVID-19 vaccine maker seeks to wrestle market share from compatriot Pfizer Inc. The U.S. firm's introduction to the broader Japanese public was set back after some of its doses last year were found to be contaminated, although it has clawed back market share since with the help of a government-endorsed programme. Now, as the government plans a fourth-dose vaccination programme, Moderna is looking to sumo to boost its public appeal as it seeks to expand beyond COVID-19 shots.
https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/covid-vaccine-maker-moderna-flags-japan-ambition-with-sumo-sponsorship-2022-03-23/

Lawsuit says India's Emcure stole COVID-19 vaccine secrets for IPO

Seattle biopharma company HDT Bio Corp has sued Indian generic drugmaker Emcure Pharmaceuticals Ltd in U.S. court for allegedly stealing RNA-delivery technology to use in its

COVID-19 vaccine. HDT's lawsuit, filed Monday in Seattle federal court, also said Emcure was planning to go public in India based on the stolen technology, and misappropriated trade secrets that HDT licensed to an Emcure subsidiary. The lawsuit adds to a growing number of recent intellectual-property disputes involving Pfizer, Moderna, and others over the use of mRNA technology in COVID-19 vaccines.
https://www.reuters.com/legal/government/lawsuit-says-indias-emcure-stole-covid-19-vaccine-secrets-ipo-2022-03-22/

Antibodies in children last at least 6 months after COVID; SK Bioscience vaccine shows promise vs Omicron

The following is a summary of some recent studies on COVID-19. They include research that warrants further study to corroborate the findings and that has yet to be certified by peer review. Antibodies in kids after COVID last 6 months or more Most children and adolescents with COVID-19 antibodies after SARS-CoV-2 infection usually still have the antibodies in their blood more than half a year later, new data shows. Starting in October 2020, researchers in Texas recruited 218 subjects between the ages of 5 and 19. Each provided three blood samples, at three-month intervals. More than 90% were unvaccinated when they enrolled in the study.
https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/most-unvaccinated-children-lack-antibodies-after-covid-gsk-vaccine-shows-promise-2022-03-21/

Moderna to seek regulatory approval for COVID shot for very young children

Moderna Inc said on Wednesday it will ask regulators to authorize its COVID-19 vaccine in children younger than 6 years old based on data showing it generated a similar immune response to adults in its clinical trial. The Omicron variant of COVID-19 was predominant during Moderna's pediatric trial, and the drugmaker said two doses were around 38% effective in preventing infections in 2 to 5 year olds and 44% effective for children 6 months to under 2 years old. It said these figures were consistent with the lower effectiveness against Omicron seen in adults who had received two doses of its vaccine.
https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/moderna-seek-regulatory-approval-covid-shot-very-young-children-2022-03-23/

Risk of type 2 diabetes rises after COVID; organ transplant from donors who had COVID likely safe

The following is a summary of some recent studies on COVID-19. They include research that warrants further study to corroborate the findings and that has yet to be certified by peer review. Type 2 diabetes risk rises after COVID-19 People may be at increased risk for developing diabetes for up to a year after a diagnosis of COVID-19, according to two studies. One study used data from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to track more than 181,000 adults with COVID-19 for a year after recovery
https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/risk-type-2-diabetes-rises-after-covid-organ-transplant-donors-who-had-covid-2022-03-23/

COVID-19 in pregnancy tied to poor maternal outcomes, preterm birth, fetal death

In the first study, published in JAMA Internal Medicine, Kaiser Permanente Northern California researchers analyzed the electronic medical records of 43,886 pregnant women who delivered from Mar 1, 2020, to Mar 16, 2021. Average patient age was 30.7 years, 33.8% were White, 28.4% were Hispanic, 25.9% were Asian or Pacific Islander, 6.5% Black, 0.3% American Indian or Alaska Native, and 5% were multiracial or of another race. Among these women, 1,332 (3.0%) tested positive for COVID-19 from 30 days before conception to 7 days after delivery. Infected women were more likely than their uninfected peers to be younger and Hispanic and to have had multiple babies, a higher neighborhood deprivation index, and obesity or chronic high blood pressure. Before universal

COVID-19 testing of pregnant women admitted for delivery was implemented in the healthcare system in December 2020, the positivity rate was 1.3%, compared with 7.8% after.
https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2022/03/covid-19-pregnancy-tied-poor-maternal-outcomes-preterm-birth-fetal-death

Coronavirus Resurgence

WHO blames rising Covid cases in Europe on curbs lifted too soon

Several European countries lifted their coronavirus restrictions too soon, the World Health Organization (WHO) has said, and as a result are now witnessing sharp rises in infections probably linked to the new, more transmissible BA2 subvariant. Hans Kluge, director of the WHO's Europe region, said countries including Germany, France, Italy and Britain had lifted their Covid curbs "brutally – from too much to too few". Infections are rising in 18 out of the region's 53 countries, he said. Kluge told journalists in Moldova on Tuesday that more than 5.1 million new cases – often linked to the BA2 variant, which experts say is about 30% more contagious – and 12,496 deaths have been reported in the region over the past seven days.
https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/22/rising-covid-cases-europe-curbs-lifted-too-soon-world-health-organisation

Queensland authorities monitor spread of COVID-19 BA.2 Omicron sub-variant after jump in cases

Queensland health authorities say they are "concerned" about the increasing spread of COVID-19 as the state recorded a more than 15 per cent rise in new case numbers in a day. The state recorded 10,476 new known cases in the latest reporting period, compared to 8,881 yesterday. It is the highest daily jump in cases since January 29. Seven more COVID-related deaths were recorded. There are 252 people being treated in hospital for symptoms, including seven in intensive care.
https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-03-23/qld-coronavirus-covid19-cases-spike/100920902

Hong Kong reports 12240 new COVID-19 cases

Hong Kong reported 12,240 new cases of COVID-19 on Wednesday, down from more than 14,000 the previous day, as the city starts to ease some of the world's most stringent restrictions that have triggered an exodus of people and hurt business. The government reported 205 new deaths.
https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/hong-kong-reports-12240-new-covid-19-cases-2022-03-23/

WHO: COVID-19 cases rise for 2nd straight week, deaths fall

Article reports that the number of new coronavirus cases globally increased by 7% in the last week, driven by rising infections in the Western Pacific, even as reported deaths from COVID-19 fell, the World Health Organization said. There were more than 12 million new weekly cases and just under 33,000 deaths, a 23% decline in mortality, according to the U.N. health agency's report on the pandemic issued late Tuesday. Confirmed cases of the virus had been falling steadily worldwide since January but rose again last week, due to the more infectious omicron variant and the suspension of COVID-19 protocols in numerous countries in Europe, North America and elsewhere. Health officials have said repeatedly that omicron causes milder disease than previous versions of the coronavirus and that vaccination, including a booster, appears highly protective.
https://www.independent.co.uk/news/ap-world-health-organization-geneva-hans-kluge-europe-b2042060.html

COVID-19: Soaring virus-related absences in England's state schools could 'seriously damage' exam grades, headteachers say

Levels of COVID-related pupil absences in state schools in England have more than tripled, leading to concerns over how it may impact grades. In total, 201,600 pupils were off for COVID-related reasons on 17 March, up from 45,100 on 3 March, the latest government figures show. The rate of

COVID-linked absences rose to 2.5% of students on 17 March, up from 0.7% on 3 March. The rising COVID cases have prompted concerns from headteachers about the potential impact absences will have on grades.
https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-soaring-virus-related-absences-in-englands-state-schools-could-seriously-damage-exam-grades-headteachers-say-12572784

Covid-19: 'Vaccine tracers' brought in as county Covid rate trebles
A team of "vaccine tracers" have been brought in as the number of Covid infections in a county almost trebled in three weeks. Latest data shows more than 11,045 cases were recorded in Hertfordshire in the seven days to 16 March, representing a rate of 923.7 per 100,000 of the population. It is almost three times the 328.6 case rate recorded on 28 February. The new team aims to boost vaccination levels across the county. Hertfordshire's director of public health Jim McManus warned that the case rate had changed "quite dramatically" in recent weeks, with cases increasing in most age groups, including the more vulnerable over-60s, the Local Democracy Reporting Service said.
https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-beds-bucks-herts-60849265

A third of U.S. COVID now caused by Omicron BA.2 as overall cases fall
About one-in-three COVID-19 cases in the United States are now caused by the BA.2 Omicron sub-variant of the coronavirus, according to government data on Tuesday that also showed overall infections still declining from January's record highs. Despite the rise of the extremely contagious sub-variant also seen in other countries, U.S. health experts say a major wave of new infections here appears unlikely. U.S. COVID-19 infections have receded sharply since January, although a resurgence in parts of Asia and Europe have raised concerns that one will follow in the United States given previous patterns during the two years of the pandemic.
https://www.reuters.com/world/us/omicron-sub-variant-ba2-makes-up-349-covid-variants-us-cdc-2022-03-22/

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https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/hong-kong-reports-12240-new-covid-19-cases-2022-03-23/

S.Korea's total COVID cases top 10 million as crematoria, funeral homes overwhelmed
Article reports that South Korea's total coronavirus infections topped 10 million, or nearly 20% of its population, authorities said on Wednesday, as surging severe cases and deaths increasingly put a strain on crematories and funeral homes nationwide. The country has been battling a record COVID-19 wave driven by the highly infectious Omicron variant even as it largely scrapped its once aggressive tracing and quarantine efforts and eased social distancing curbs. The Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency (KDCA) reported 490,881 cases for Tuesday, the second highest daily tally after it peaked at 621,205 on March 16. The total caseload rose to 10,427,247, with 13,432 deaths, up 291 a day before.
https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/skoreas-total-covid-cases-top-10-million-crematoria-funeral-homes-overwhelmed-2022-03-23/

New Lockdown

Shanghai denies lockdown rumours as daily COVID infections near 1000
Authorities in the Chinese city of Shanghai have denied rumours of a city-wide lockdown after a sixth straight increase in daily asymptomatic coronavirus cases pushed its count to record levels despite a campaign of mass testing aimed at stifling the spread. The latest outbreak in China's wealthy

commercial hub remains tiny by global standards. But its testing campaign, with many people locked in residential compounds for days, is part of Beijing's national "dynamic clearance" policy to stamp out flare-ups as quickly as possible.
https://www.reuters.com/world/china/china-reports-2667-new-covid-cases-march-22-vs-2338-day-earlier-2022-03-23/

Chinese steelmaking hub Tangshan enters lockdown as COVID cases rise

China's top steelmaking city Tangshan implemented a temporary lockdown on Tuesday to avoid further cases of COVID-19 as infections surged, the local government said in a statement. Residents should not leave their houses or buildings except for tests or emergencies pending further announcement, the government said. Tangshan reported 15 confirmed locally transmitted cases from March 19-22, and 79 asymptomatic cases, while Hebei province, where Tangshan is located, had 331 confirmed cases and 2,454 asymptomatic cases as of March 22, data from the provincial health authority showed.
https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/chinese-steelmaking-hub-tangshan-enters-lockdown-covid-cases-rise-2022-03-23/