

# Connecting Communities for COVID19 News

## 22nd Jan 2021

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### Isolation Tips

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#### **Having plants at home improved psychological well-being during lockdown**

An international study coordinated by the Research Group for Urban Nature and Biosystems Engineering (NATURIB) from the University of Seville's School of Agricultural Engineering emphasises that having plants at home had a positive influence on the psychological well-being of the dwelling's inhabitants during COVID-19 lockdown. Researchers from the Hellenic Mediterranean University (Greece), the Federal Rural University of Pernambuco (Brazil) and the University of Genoa (Italy) participated in the study along with representatives from the University of Seville. This study, published in the scientific journal Urban Forestry and Urban Greening, evaluated the role played by plants at home during the first COVID-19 lockdown.

[https://www.eurekalert.org/pub\\_releases/2021-01/uos-hpa012021.php](https://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2021-01/uos-hpa012021.php)

#### **Sick of lockdown? Fancy some culture? Here are the best events online this week**

A few suggestions to Irish readers and others for cultural highlights online this week

<https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/sick-of-lockdown-fancy-some-culture-here-are-the-best-events-online-this-week-1.4463120>

### Hygiene Helpers

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#### **COVID-19 misinformation: scientists create a 'psychological vaccine' to protect against fake news**

Anti-vaccination groups are projected to dominate social media in the next decade if left unchallenged. To counter their viral misinformation at a time when COVID-19 vaccines are being rolled out, our research team has produced a "psychological vaccine" that helps people detect and resist the lies and hoaxes they encounter online. The World Health Organization expressed concern about a global misinformation "infodemic" in February 2020, recognising that the COVID-19 pandemic would be fought both on the ground and on social media. That's because an effective vaccine roll out will rely on high vaccine confidence, and viral misinformation can adversely affect that confidence, leading to vaccine hesitancy. We recently published a large study which found that higher belief in misinformation about the virus was consistently associated with a reduced willingness to get vaccinated.

<https://theconversation.com/covid-19-misinformation-scientists-create-a-psychological-vaccine-to-protect-against-fake-news-153024>

#### **Follow lockdown rules or face punishment, says UK interior minister**

British interior minister Priti Patel warned those who break COVID-19 lockdown rules that they faced punishment by police, announcing a new 800 pound (\$1,097.36) fine for those who attend house parties. "My message is clear: If you don't follow these rules, then the police will enforce them," Patel told a news conference. "Police officers are now moving more quickly to hand out fines when they encounter breaches."

<https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/follow-lockdown-rules-or-face-punishment-says-uk-interior-minister/ar-BB1cYdtW>

#### **Another 65 pharmacies join COVID-19 vaccination programme**

A further 65 pharmacy-led sites will begin administering COVID-19 vaccinations over the coming

days, but “many more” pharmacies are keen to offer their service, sector leaders say. The 65 additional sites – which include pharmacy teams operating from a mosque, pop-up Odeon and Village Hotel sites operated by Pharmacy2U and the Manchester Whalley Range Tennis and Cricket Club, run by Wilbraham Pharmacy – join the initial six pharmacies that went live last week (January 14).

<https://www.chemistanddruggist.co.uk/news/another-65-pharmacies-join-covid-19-vaccination-programme>

### **France may follow Germany in making clinical masks mandatory**

Medical-grade face masks rather than cloth coverings could become mandatory in a number of European countries to help contain the rapid spread of highly contagious Covid variants first identified in the UK and South Africa. Angela Merkel and the leaders of Germany’s 16 states agreed on Tuesday that either single-use surgical FFP1 masks or more protective FFP2 filtering facepiece respirators should be worn in the workplace, on public transport and in shops.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jan/20/france-may-follow-germany-in-making-clinical-masks-mandatory>

### **New Covid strain: Australian city lifts ban on wearing mask indoors**

People living in Australia's third-largest city of Brisbane will no longer need to wear a mask in indoor venues from Friday onwards as the state of Queensland announced that it has managed to bring the local spread of a mutant Covid-19 strain under control. "From 1 am tomorrow we will be back to having amongst the lowest restrictions in our economy in the country - this is great news for business, great news for tourism, and great for the people of Queensland to celebrate," Xinhua news agency quoted the state's Health Minister Yvette D'Ath as saying on Thursday. As of Thursday, Queensland continues to record zero local cases, allowing the authorities to further ease the pandemic restrictions. Queensland Premier Anastacia Palaszczuk attributed the result to the state's "go hard and go quickly" strategy.

<https://www.msn.com/en-ae/news/other/new-covid-strain-australian-city-lifts-ban-on-wearing-mask-indoors/ar-BB1cXi9l>

## **Community Activities**

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### **This is what will happen to Covid-19 when the pandemic is over**

After months of not knowing how the Covid-19 pandemic would end, we now have some answers. Vaccines that came even faster and work even better than anticipated are the light at the end of this very dark, long tunnel – the beginning of the end is in sight. But the virus is unlikely to go away for good. The global race to vaccinate as many people as possible will usher in a new phase of our fight against Covid-19, yet there is little chance it will deliver a knockout blow. In the long run, what started as a global pandemic may become yet another example of humankind learning to live alongside a deadly virus.

<https://www.wired.co.uk/article/covid-19-pandemic-over>

### **Coronavirus: Emmanuel Macron promises more support for students in France**

French university students have protested against the financial and psychological effects of the lockdown. The French president has promised to allow a very limited return to campus. French President Emmanuel Macron on Thursday pledged more support for students affected by university closures. Students had protested on Wednesday against campus closures as part of coronavirus restrictions, calling for a resumption of in-person teaching. They rallied against the financial and psychological effects of the lockdown.

<https://www.msn.com/en-xl/news/other/coronavirus-emmanuel-macron-promises-more-support-for-students-in-france/ar-BB1cXRrj>

### **Wealthy UK flyers opt for private jets to evade Covid and lockdowns**

Wealthy flyers in the UK are opting for private jets and charter flights to evade Covid-19 and beat

sudden lockdowns, data shows. While the number of commercial flights from the UK has dropped by three-quarters since the start of the pandemic, private flights are down only 42% compared with 2019, according to the aviation consultancy WingX. In August, demand for private jets was back to 93% of normal levels, while scheduled flights were down 65%. Another rebound was seen around Christmas, with private flights operating at around 70% of pre-pandemic levels in December.

<https://www.theguardian.com/business/2021/jan/21/wealthy-uk-flyers-opt-for-private-jets-to-evade-covid-and-lockdowns>

### **Research finds people more likely to follow Covid rules when friends and family do**

New research has shown that people are more likely to follow Covid-19 restrictions based on what their friends do, rather than their own principles. Research led by the University of Nottingham carried out in partnership with experts in collective behaviour from British, French, German and American universities shows how social influence affects people's adherence to government restrictions. The researchers found that the best predictor of people's compliance to the rules was how much their close circle complied with the rules, which had an even stronger effect than people's own approval of the rules. The research published in British Journal of Psychology highlights a blindspot in policy responses to the pandemic. It also suggests that including experts in human and social behaviour is crucial when planning the next stages of the pandemic response, such as how to ensure that people comply with extended lockdowns or vaccination recommendations.

[https://www.eurekalert.org/pub\\_releases/2021-01/uon-rfp011921.php](https://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2021-01/uon-rfp011921.php)

### **Remember normal? Pfizer and BioNTech join with health groups to remind us—and promote COVID-19 vaccine safety**

Remember hugging, playing with grandchildren, kissing people goodbye and sharing exciting news with family in person? While COVID-19 has kiboshed those things, Pfizer and BioNTech want to remind people about them—and how they'll be possible again with vaccines. The Comirnaty vaccine makers, together with a coalition of health organizations, recently debuted an awareness campaign aimed at shoring up confidence in the new COVID-19 shots. The 25- to 30-second videos are real takes of real people—found online and then licensed with consent for the digital campaign, which launched last week on social media. Future plans include a move to local TV.

<https://www.fiercepharma.com/marketing/pfizer-and-biontech-join-health-groups-to-promote-covid-19-vaccine-safety>

### **Wuhan bustles a year after world's first coronavirus lockdown**

Barriers still enclose Wuhan's notorious seafood market -- one of the few immediate reminders the city was once the epicentre of the coronavirus pandemic that has transformed the world. Otherwise, the new normal in the central Chinese city of 11 million is much like the old reality; cars buzz down highways, sideways bustle with shoppers and public transport and parks are busy

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/china/wuhan-bustles-a-year-after-worlds-first-coronavirus-lockdown/articleshow/80381375.cms>

### **Tennis-Anderson urges players to show more respect for Australia's COVID-19 fight**

Former U.S. Open and Wimbledon finalist Kevin Anderson appealed to players at the Australian Open to show more respect for the local community's fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, following a chorus of complaints about quarantine conditions in Melbourne. As many as 72 players are confined to their hotel rooms for two weeks and unable to train for the Feb. 8-21 Grand Slam after passengers on three charter flights tested positive for the novel coronavirus. Complaints by some players over the severity of the health measures, food quality and even mice infestations in their rooms have sparked a backlash in Australia, which has many citizens stranded overseas due to pandemic-linked border restrictions. Novak Djokovic was panned after writing to Tennis Australia chief Craig Tiley to ask for reduced isolation periods and having players moved to "private houses with tennis courts".

<https://www.reuters.com/article/healthcoronavirus-tennis-ausopen/tennis-anderson-urges-players-to-show-more-resp>

[ect-for-australias-covid-19-fight-idUSL1N2JW0WD](#)

### **Good news for shot-makers: COVID-19 vaccine confidence leaps to 69%, Harris Poll finds**

Americans are back on the COVID-19 vaccine bandwagon. Sixty-nine percent now plan to get a COVID-19 vaccine, close to the previous high of 73% in April, according to the latest data from The Harris Poll. At the lowest point in October, vaccine skepticism had far more Americans hesitating: Just 58% said they would get a vaccine. That's good news for vaccine makers—and at least a little better news for public health officials, who say a minimum 75% of the population will need to be vaccinated to stop COVID-19. That percentage has been moving upwards of late; Anthony Fauci, M.D., director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), recently admitted the goal may need to move as high as 90% to truly halt the U.S. outbreak.

<https://www.fiercepharma.com/marketing/covid-19-vaccine-confidence-ticks-up-intent-to-get-a-vaccine-near-pandemic-start-harris>

## **Working Remotely**

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### **The difficult truths about working from home**

While the pandemic has exacerbated inequalities for many with disabilities, the widespread adoption of home working has in fact delivered benefits for many disabled employees. For those who can work from home, the lack of a commute has made a significant difference for some employees with physical disabilities by, for example, removing challenges around travel. Breaks can be taken in an environment specifically adapted for the individual, which can reduce fatigue and pain levels. For some neurodiverse employees, their home environment offers reduced noise and distractions which can affect concentration as compared to an office. Yet despite the positives, the pandemic has of course brought a raft of additional challenges and concerns for disabled employees, not simply connected to health

[https://www.heraldscotland.com/business\\_hq/19026301.difficult-truths-working-home/](https://www.heraldscotland.com/business_hq/19026301.difficult-truths-working-home/)

### **'I've never met my team but have lunch with them weekly'**

Food has traditionally been a fundamental part of our working days, presenting an opportunity to take time away from the desk or production line, and socialise with colleagues. You could go to the staff canteen, or perhaps to a local cafe, pub or restaurant - to talk shop, have a gossip, or perhaps deliberately chat about anything but work. But with a third of UK workers now working from home again in the latest lockdowns, the work lunch as we know it has changed dramatically over the past year. Even making a cup of tea in the office kitchen presents a potential health hazard these days. And with many of us staying at home, work canteens have been closed, and town and city centre food outlets have shut up shop and axed staff.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-55716899>

### **Making Remote Work Sustainable For 2021 And Beyond**

The longer we work remotely, the more we like it. Now, almost a year after being begrudgingly forced to evacuate our offices, the thought of going back to a daily commute and dismal cubicle is tough to stomach. In fact, recent surveys are revealing that nearly 70% of U.S. workers are requesting to continue working remotely after the pandemic is over. Such staggering demand is forcing employers to adopt remote work permanently in order to retain and attract their talent. From fully-remote to hybrid work models, flexibility is the new normal. But are businesses ready to operate this way forever?

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/laurelfarrer/2021/01/21/making-remote-work-sustainable-for-2021-and-beyond/>

## **Virtual Classrooms**

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### **Impact of virtual learning on children's eyesight**

In Canada, Dina Pugliese speaks with Dr. Ivy Koh, optometrist at Specs and Spines Optometry and

Chiropractic, about how online learning and computer screens strain your eyes and how parents can identify if they're children are struggling with their eyes.

<https://toronto.citynews.ca/video/2021/01/21/impact-of-virtual-learning-on-childrens-eyesight/>

### **Rural students facing internet problems with virtual learning**

In Canada, Upper Grand District School Board (UGDSB) students will soon be returning to classroom based learning following their second round of virtual, remote classes. While the change to virtual learning for some students living within town hasn't been a large issue, those who live in rural areas are facing problems due to poor internet connection. Similar to their response last spring the UGDSB has provided students and families with Chromebooks and other devices, internet support, as well as printed packages and asynchronous learning options.

<https://ca.news.yahoo.com/rural-students-facing-internet-problems-192810505.html>

### **Covid-19: More Northern Ireland special schools limit pupil attendance**

In Northern Ireland, more special schools have said their pupils can only attend part time for two days a week on a temporary basis. The Education Minister, Peter Weir, decided on 5 January that special schools should remain open for all pupils. Some parents of pupils with special educational needs had previously warned of the damaging impact of school closures on their children during the lockdown from March to June 2020. Attendance data published by the Department of Education (DE) has shown that a significant number of pupils and staff have not been able to attend special schools since the start of the new term in January.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-55741981>

## **Public Policies**

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### **India allows commercial export of COVID-19 vaccines from Friday; first stop brazil, morocco**

India has allowed commercial export of COVID-19 vaccines being manufactured in the country from Friday. Brazil and Morocco will be the first two countries that are getting the commercial contracted supplies of 20 lakh doses each with flights leaving at 4.15 am IST and 8 am IST, respectively on Friday. Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro had written Prime Minister Narendra Modi for COVID-19 vaccines. In a letter, he had said, "Brazilian government has launched the National Immunization Program against COVID-19" and "Among the vaccines selected by the Brazilian government, are those from the Indian company Bharat Biotech Internacional Limited (Covaxin) and AstraZeneca at the University of Oxford (Covishield), also produced by the Serum Institute of India."

<https://zeenews.india.com/india/india-allows-commercial-export-of-covid-19-vaccines-from-friday-first-stop-brazil-morocco-2337135.html>

### **US to join global coronavirus vaccine program**

Dr. Anthony Fauci says U.S. President Joe Biden on Thursday will order the United States to support projects to deploy COVID-19 vaccines, diagnostics and therapeutics to people in need around the world. Fauci also says the United States will cease reducing U.S. staff counts at the World Health Organization and will pay its financial obligations to it. Fauci, Biden's top medical adviser on the pandemic, told the WHO's executive board that the president will issue a directive Thursday that shows the United States' intent to join the COVAX Facility, a project to deploy COVID-19 vaccines to people in need around the world — whether in rich or poor countries. Fauci also said the United States would support the "ACT Accelerator" — an umbrella effort including COVAX that also focuses on distributing diagnostic tools and therapeutics for the coronavirus to countries around the world.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/us-to-join-global-coronavirus-vaccine-program-anthony-fauci-vaccines-joe-biden-people-world-health-organization-b1790537.html>

### **Biden inheriting nonexistent coronavirus vaccine distribution plan and must start 'from**

### **scratch,' sources say**

Newly sworn in President Joe Biden and his advisers are inheriting no coronavirus vaccine distribution plan to speak of from the Trump administration, sources tell CNN, posing a significant challenge for the new White House. The Biden administration has promised to try to turn the Covid-19 pandemic around and drastically speed up the pace of vaccinating Americans against the virus. But in the immediate hours following Biden being sworn into office on Wednesday, sources with direct knowledge of the new administration's Covid-related work told CNN one of the biggest shocks that the Biden team had to digest during the transition period was what they saw as a complete lack of a vaccine distribution strategy under former President Donald Trump, even weeks after multiple vaccines were approved for use in the United States. "There is nothing for us to rework. We are going to have to build everything from scratch," one source said.

<https://www.cnn.com/2021/01/21/politics/biden-covid-vaccination-trump/index.html>

### **UK PM Johnson says too early to say when national lockdown will end**

It is too early to say when the national COVID lockdown in England will end, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said on Thursday, adding that persistently high infection levels demonstrated how infectious a new variant was. "I think it's too early to say when we'll be able to lift some of some of the restrictions," Johnson told broadcasters. "What we're seeing in the ONS data, in the REACT survey, we're seeing the contagiousness of the new variant that we saw arrive just before Christmas. There's no doubt it does spread very fast indeed."

<https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-britain-johnson-idUSL9N2DM01Q>

### **Merkel: Germany's tough COVID-19 lockdown beginning to pay off**

Chancellor Angela Merkel called it encouraging at a press conference on Thursday that the COVID-19 surge in Germany was beginning to ease. "This shows that the tough cutbacks that people in Germany have had to endure for weeks are starting to pay off and it basically shows that the effort is worth it," she said. The number of daily COVID-19 infections was below the previous week's level and increased by 20,398 on Thursday, according to Robert Koch Institute

<https://www.thestar.com.my/news/world/2021/01/22/merkel-germany039s-tough-covid-19-lockdown-beginning-to-pay-off>

### **Spanish Government Refuses To Authorise Earlier Curfew Or Full Lockdown**

The Spanish government once again stood firm on Wednesday in refusing to bow to the pressure being exerted by regional administrations to allow the start of the night-time curfew to be brought forward to 20.00 in an effort to bring coronavirus infection rates down, despite 15 of the 17 Autonomous Communities requesting that this modification be made to the conditions of the current national state of emergency.

[https://murciatoday.com/spanish\\_government\\_refuses\\_to\\_authorise\\_earlier\\_curfew\\_or\\_full\\_lockdown\\_1552160-a.html](https://murciatoday.com/spanish_government_refuses_to_authorise_earlier_curfew_or_full_lockdown_1552160-a.html)

### **Lebanon extends total lockdown by two weeks**

Lebanon has prolonged a total lockdown by two weeks to stem an unprecedented rise in coronavirus cases and protect its collapsing health sector. The strict restrictions include a round-the-clock curfew and limit grocery shopping to home deliveries. "The total lockdown is extended to February 8, 5 am," the Higher Defence Council, Lebanon's top security body, said in a statement.

<https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20210121-lebanon-extends-total-lockdown-by-two-weeks>

### **Boris Johnson refuses to rule out lockdown lasting to the summer amid claims he is willing to keep Covid curbs longer to make sure it is the last national squeeze of pandemic**

Boris Johnson today refused to rule out the brutal lockdown lasting until the summer amid claims he is willing to keep curbs longer to ensure it is the last national squeeze. The PM insisted it is 'too early to say' whether the restrictions will stay in place for months longer - despite cases falling by more

than a fifth on last week and hopes rising that the most vulnerable groups will be vaccinated by mid-February, with a record 366,919 jabs administered in 24 hours. Mr Johnson also delivered a stark message that the new coronavirus strain is 'much more contagious', repeating his plea for people to stay at home and obey the rules.

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-9172621/Boris-Johnson-refuses-rule-lockdown-lasting-SUMMER.html>

### **China is back in emergency mode, racing to contain COVID surge before holiday**

China is rushing to build a massive quarantine camp with more than 4,000 isolation suites in Hebei Province, a region just outside Beijing at the center of a resurgent coronavirus epidemic. Ahead of a holiday that normally sparks the biggest mass-movement of humans on the planet, authorities have put tens of millions of people under strict lockdown in a bid to stem the spread of COVID-19 a year after it first surfaced. The new isolation center spans more than 108 acres on the outskirts of Shijiazhuang city, the provincial capital of Hebei Province, which surrounds Beijing. It will temporarily house close contacts and secondary contacts of confirmed COVID-19 patients so they can be kept under medical observation for any signs of infection.

<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/covid-china-surge-lockdown-hebei-lunar-new-year-holiday/>

### **Malaysia extends lockdown in capital and other states until February**

Malaysia on Thursday extended restrictions on movement in the capital Kuala Lumpur and five states until Feb. 4 as part of a lockdown to combat a surge in coronavirus infections. The Health Ministry has confirmed that COVID-19 cases are accelerating within the community in many states, Security Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob said in a statement. This week, the government placed six other states under a two-week lockdown. Essential sectors including plantations, manufacturing and construction are allowed to operate but state and international borders remain closed.

<https://news.trust.org/item/20210121100749-ji2fa>

### **Hungary gives initial approval for AstraZeneca and Sputnik V vaccines**

Hungary's drug regulator has given initial approval for use of Britain's AstraZeneca and Russia's Sputnik V vaccines against the coronavirus, Prime Minister Viktor Orban's chief of staff said on Thursday, confirming media reports. Foreign Minister Peter Szijjarto was travelling to Moscow for talks about the Sputnik V vaccine later on Thursday, Gergely Gulyas told a briefing. If he secures a shipment deal with Russia, Hungary would be the first European Union member to receive the Sputnik V shot, underlining Budapest's rush to lift coronavirus lockdown measures in order to boost the economy, even though the EU's medicines regulator has yet to green-light the Russian vaccine. The European Medicines Agency (EMA) has also not approved the vaccine developed by AstraZeneca and Oxford University in Britain but a decision is expected on Jan. 29.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-hungary-vaccine/update-1-hungary-gives-initial-approval-for-astra-zeneca-and-sputnik-v-vaccines-idUSL1N2JWORE>

### **Sweden extends pandemic curbs amid tentative signs of slowing outbreak**

Sweden extended distance learning for high school students and told public employees to continue to work from home, renewing measures to limit the spread of the coronavirus pandemic despite signs that infections are beginning to slow. Sweden has avoided the kind of lockdown seen across much of Europe, but has gradually tightened restrictions after being hit by a second wave of COVID-19 infections in autumn last year. Those measures seem to be bearing fruit with authorities cautiously optimistic that, in some parts of the country, the situation is improving. The government said it nevertheless needed to extend many of the measures aimed at social distancing.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-sweden/sweden-extends-pandemic-curbs-amid-tentative-signs-of-slowing-outbreak-idUSKBN29Q0SE>

## **Maintaining Services**

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## **U.K. Hospitals Struggle to Cope With a New Coronavirus Variant**

As a new and more contagious variant of the coronavirus pounds Britain's overstretched National Health Service, health care workers say the government's failure to anticipate a wintertime crush of infections has left them resorting to ever more desperate measures. Hundreds of soldiers have been dispatched to move patients and equipment around London hospitals. Organ transplant centers have stopped performing urgent operations. Doctors have trimmed back the level of oxygen being given to patients to save overloaded pipes.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/21/world/europe/uk-hospitals-covid-variant.html>

## **11,000 COVID-19 vaccine doses to arrive in Estonia next week**

Based on the data of the Ministry of Social Affairs, in total 10,950 doses of both Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna vaccines, should arrive in Estonia next week. Ministry of Social Affairs' media advisor Eva Lehtla told ERR that on Monday (January 25), 9,750 doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine will arrive in Estonia and 1,200 doses of Moderna vaccine. Lehtla said the first Moderna doses arrived last week and there were also 1,200 of them. While AstraZeneca's vaccine had not been approved yet, Lehtla said, according to the current information, the European Medicines Agency should give its evaluation of the vaccine by January 29.

<https://news.err.ee/1608080842/11-000-covid-19-vaccine-doses-to-arrive-in-estonia-next-week>

## **Israel coronavirus cases soar even as it pushes on with vaccine drive**

Coronavirus infections in Israel are soaring among those yet to be vaccinated, straining hospitals and forcing the government to extend a strict lockdown even as the country continues its breakneck vaccination drive.

<https://www.ft.com/content/80b3c8f7-7af7-4491-ad4a-d3056b46753e>

## **Covid-19 vaccine batch testing speeds up, giving more proof ministers can't blame all hold-ups on supply chain**

Britain's medical regulators have managed to speed up the process of approving individual batches of the Covid-19 vaccine with not a single batch failing the test, it can reveal. Ministers have repeatedly said that supply of jabs is the current "rate-limiting factor" in the vaccine roll-out – meaning that supply is the one issue which dictates the maximum pace at which the NHS can administer doses, rather than staffing or logistics. They specifically pointed to batch approvals as one of the major hold-ups. The National Institute for Biological Standards and Control (NIBSC), part of the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency (MHRA), is responsible for testing the Pfizer and Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccines which are provided in batches of up to half a million doses each. This process initially took as long as three weeks per batch but has been streamlined to four days.

<https://www.msn.com/en-gb/news/world/covid-19-vaccine-batch-testing-speeds-up-giving-more-proof-ministers-can-e-2-80-99t-blame-all-hold-ups-on-supply-chain/ar-BB1cXWDP>

## **All overweight D.C. residents will get priority for the coronavirus vaccine. Experts are skeptical.**

The District plans to give priority for coronavirus vaccines to the broadest possible swath of people with preexisting health conditions — a decision that will make hundreds of thousands eligible for scarce doses of the vaccine and that some public health experts say might not make medical sense. The plan, the details of which were confirmed by vaccine director Ankoor Shah, would offer vaccines to people whose weight and medical history would not qualify them for early access to the vaccine in almost any state in the country. D.C. Health Director LaQuandra Nesbitt told members of the D.C. Council last week that she decided to open up vaccine access, possibly as soon as February, to such a large group in the hope of quickly vaccinating anyone who might suffer the worst outcomes if they contract the virus.

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/dc-politics/dc-vaccine-overweight-smokers/2021/01/20/bd6cb53c-5a74-11eb-a976-bad6431e03e2\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/dc-politics/dc-vaccine-overweight-smokers/2021/01/20/bd6cb53c-5a74-11eb-a976-bad6431e03e2_story.html)

### **Scotland considers streamlining Covid-19 vaccine delivery for GPs**

Calls from Scottish GPs for the coronavirus vaccine distribution process to be streamlined are to be considered by ministers, amid fears supplies are not getting to surgeries quickly enough. The British Medical Association (BMA) is pressing the Scottish Government to allow GPs to order their supplies directly, claiming the current system is too bureaucratic. It has asked Professor Alison Strath, the interim Chief Pharmaceutical Officer, to consider reforming the process so doctors can bypass health boards when ordering vaccines.

<https://inews.co.uk/news/scotland/scotland-streamlining-covid-19-vaccine-delivery-gps-839943>

### **Spain's Covid immunization drive dogged by line-jumping politicians and other irregularities**

Concern is rising in Spain over the number of individuals who have jumped the line to receive the Covid-19 vaccine. The list includes several mayors, a regional health chief and family members of medical workers. In these cases, the vaccine was administered even though the person did not belong to the first priority group of the ongoing campaign: residents and staff of care homes, other healthcare workers and people with serious disabilities. In some instances, this was due to a misunderstanding, and in others, the individuals jumped the line "to build confidence" in the vaccine or because there were "leftover doses."

<https://english.elpais.com/society/2021-01-21/spains-covid-immunization-drive-dogged-by-line-jumping-politicians-and-other-irregularities.html>

### **Coronavirus vaccine tracker: How many Canadians are vaccinated against COVID-19?**

Nearly a year into the coronavirus pandemic, Canada has launched the largest mass vaccination program in its history. And Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has promised that every Canadian — nearly 40 million people across 10 provinces and three territories — who wants to be inoculated against COVID-19 will be able to do so by September 2021. To keep track of it all, Global News has launched this project to keep track of: How many Canadians have been vaccinated each day How many people in each province have been vaccinated How Canada's vaccination efforts compare with the rest of the world

<https://globalnews.ca/news/7583050/covid-19-vaccine-tracker-coronavirus-canada/>

### **'Five dead' in devastating fire at world's biggest coronavirus vaccine facility**

As many as five people have been killed in a fire at the site of the world's largest coronavirus vaccine manufacturer, according to reports. Plumes of smoke could be seen rising from the Serum Institute of India (SII) today. Millions of doses of the Covidshield vaccine, developed by AstraZeneca and Oxford University, are being produced at the plant. Initial reports suggested that there had been no casualties but Adar Poonawalla, SII's CEO, confirmed there had been "some loss of life" in a statement. He said: "Upon further investigation we have learnt that there has unfortunately been some loss of life at the incident.

<https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/world-news/huge-fire-breaks-out-worlds-23358741>

### **Jumping Covid-19 vaccine queue is 'morally reprehensible' says top NHS doctor**

It is "morally reprehensible" to try to jump the queue for the Covid-19 vaccine, a senior NHS director has said. Brits have reportedly been securing appointments for coronavirus vaccinations through links to the NHS booking system shared on WhatsApp and social media. The Evening Standard found people had secured jabs through the loophole which should go to the elderly and vulnerable. And today Dr Vin Diwakar, NHS England regional medical director for London said they were denying vulnerable people a "life-saving vaccine". He told a Downing Street press conference: "People are being called in priority order so that we can vaccinate those most at risk of serious illness first. "That

is why I was horrified to hear reports that some unscrupulous people have used links shared with them to try and falsely book a vaccination appointment.

<https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/politics/jumping-covid-19-vaccine-queue-23362683>

### **Australia posts zero virus cases; state premier calls for 'Pacific bubble'**

Australia recorded a fourth day of zero coronavirus cases on Thursday, prompting the chief of the country's most populous state to call for a special travel "bubble" with Pacific island nations. New South Wales has reined in an outbreak in mid-December that prompted a strict lockdown in Sydney's Northern Beaches, while broader social distancing rules and mandatory mask wearing were imposed for the rest of the city. Signaling those restrictions were set to be eased next week, Premier Gladys Berejiklian told the Sydney Morning Herald newspaper the federal government should consider establishing a travel arrangement with the Pacific. "There is no reason why we shouldn't aim to travel to New Zealand or some of the Pacific Islands well within the next 12 months," Berejiklian said. The comments come after Australia's chief medical officer Paul Kelly cautioned about restarting international travel, given the country was in an "envious position" compared to most of the world.

<https://japantoday.com/category/world/australia-posts-zero-virus-cases-state-chief-calls-for-'pacific-bubble'>

### **Covid-19: Two weeks' notice for England's school return and warning over infection levels**

Parents will know a fortnight in advance when their children will return to schools in England, Education Secretary Gavin Williamson says. Telling BBC Breakfast he wants pupils back in classrooms at "the earliest possible opportunity", he says he's "not able to exactly say" when schools will reopen but the "key criteria" will be whether pressure on the NHS was lifting

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-55745725>

### **Air New Zealand's first quarantine-free flight lands in Auckland**

The first quarantine-free flight in 10 months has landed in Auckland with friends and family ready to greet passengers from the Cook Islands with an emotional welcome. The Air New Zealand flight landed at Auckland Airport shortly after 11am with a small gathering of family and friends waiting in the arrivals area.

<https://www.nzherald.co.nz/business/air-new-zealands-first-quarantine-free-flight-lands-in-auckland/ESMTDMRBUVMZIVOF6KTZMRGDJQ/>

### **Covid-19 vaccine supply is running low. Here's how Biden hopes to fix that**

The Biden administration is willing to consider almost anything to boost the nation's dwindling supply of Covid-19 vaccines. A new strategy document released Thursday, totaling nearly 200 pages, offers the first clear list of the options President Biden has before him, though it doesn't specifically say he'll actually take all of the steps. On the list are some controversial ideas, like cutting the amount of vaccine being administered to each American. He's also made it clear he wants to utilize the Defense Production Act to ramp up production of key supplies, and some more straightforward options like buying more doses.

<https://www.statnews.com/2021/01/21/covid-19-vaccine-supply-biden-hopes-to-fix-that/>

## **Healthcare Innovations**

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### **Lilly: Drug can prevent COVID-19 illness in nursing homes**

Drugmaker Eli Lilly said Thursday its antibody drug can prevent COVID-19 illness in residents and staff of nursing homes and other long-term care locations. It's the first major study to show such a treatment may prevent illness in a group that has been devastated by the pandemic. Residents and staff who got the drug had up to a 57% lower risk of getting COVID-19 compared to others at the same facility who got a placebo, the drugmaker said. Among nursing home residents only, the risk

was reduced by up to 80%. The study involved more than 1,000 residents and staff at nursing homes and other long-term care locations like assisted living homes. The vast majority tested negative at the start of the study. Some were assigned to get the drug, which is given through an IV, and others got placebo infusions.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/lilly-drug-can-prevent-covid19-illness-in-nursing-homes-covid19-illness-study-eli-lilly-residents-b1790746.html>

### **Will Britain's vaccine drive be enough to end Covid crisis? UK WON'T achieve herd immunity through jab rollout, study claims as SAGE warns lockdown may be needed until MAY ...**

University of East Anglia (UEA) study found Kent strain too infectious for herd immunity with current vaccines. But goal of vaccination scheme is to prevent the most vulnerable from falling sick or dying, not eradicate virus. SAGE scientists said today at current pace, most draconian curbs need to remain in place until May at least

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-9171483/Herd-immunity-not-achievable-UK-vaccinated.html>

### **England's third lockdown shows 'no evidence of decline' in Covid rates, study says**

A third national lockdown in England appears to have had little impact on the rising rate of coronavirus infections, according to the findings of a major study, with “no evidence of decline” in the prevalence of the virus during the first 10 days of tougher restrictions. The closely watched REACT-1 study, led by Imperial College London, warned that health services would remain under “extreme pressure” and the cumulative number of deaths would increase rapidly unless the prevalence of the virus in the community was reduced substantially. Prime Minister Boris Johnson said the latest figures were “appalling” and warned, “There are still tough weeks to come.”

<https://www.cnn.com/2021/01/21/covid-englands-third-lockdown-sees-no-evidence-of-decline-in-cases.html>

### **Combo monoclonal antibody drugs may lower coronavirus loads**

Mildly to moderately ill COVID-19 adult outpatients given a combination of the monoclonal antibodies bamlanivimab and etesevimab early in the disease had significantly lower viral loads at day 11 than those who received a placebo, but a similar effect was not seen in those given bamlanivimab alone, a study published today in JAMA finds. Bamlanivimab manufacturer Eli Lilly sponsored the double-blind phase 2/3 BLAZE-1 clinical trial, which involved 533 COVID-19 patients at 49 US medical centers. The goal was to assess the antispikes neutralizing antibodies' effects on viral loads of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, at 11 days and clinical outcomes at 29 days.

<https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2021/01/combo-mono-clonal-antibody-drugs-may-lower-coronavirus-loads>

### **Eli Lilly says its monoclonal antibody prevented Covid-19 infections in clinical trial**

Eli Lilly said Thursday that its monoclonal antibody prevented Covid-19 infections in nursing home residents and staff in a clinical trial, the first time such a treatment has been shown to prevent infection. Lilly released the results in a press release, although it said that it would publish the data in a research paper as quickly as possible. In November, the antibody, bamlanivimab, was authorized for emergency use by the Food and Drug Administration in treating patients with Covid who are at risk of more severe disease. An antibody cocktail made by the biotechnology firm Regeneron has also been authorized.

<https://www.statnews.com/2021/01/21/eli-lilly-says-its-mono-clonal-antibody-prevented-covid-19-in-clinical-trial/>

### **Moderna's COVID-19 given to first Japanese volunteer as Takeda starts trial**

Moderna Inc's COVID-19 vaccine was administered to the first test subject in Japan on Thursday, its distributor said, a critical step toward securing enough shots to inoculate the nation's population. Takeda Pharmaceutical Co announced the start of a combined phase I and II study of 200 adult volunteers in Japan. The government has purchased 50 million doses of the vaccine, enough for 25

million people, contingent on its regulatory approval.

[https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-japan-moderna-idUSKBN29Q0NI?taid=60096240947f630001ccd5ed&utm\\_campaign=trueAnthem:+Trending+Content&utm\\_medium=trueAnthem&utm\\_source=twitter](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-japan-moderna-idUSKBN29Q0NI?taid=60096240947f630001ccd5ed&utm_campaign=trueAnthem:+Trending+Content&utm_medium=trueAnthem&utm_source=twitter)