

Connecting Communities for COVID19 News

5th Oct 2021

Isolation Tips

New Zealand drops COVID-19 elimination strategy under pressure from Delta

New Zealand on Monday abandoned its long-standing strategy of eliminating coronavirus amid a persistent Delta outbreak, and will instead look to live with the virus and control its spread as its vaccination rate rises. The Pacific nation was among just a handful of countries to bring COVID-19 cases down to zero last year and largely stayed virus-free until an outbreak of the highly infectious Delta variant in mid-August frustrated efforts to stamp out transmission. "With this outbreak and Delta the return to zero is incredibly difficult," Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern told a news conference in a major policy shift.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/new-zealand-extends-auckland-lockdown-eases-some-curbs-2021-10-04/>

Hygiene Helpers

The US is turning a corner in its fight against Covid-19, Fauci says. But it's still too early to let our guard down

As Covid-19 numbers gradually improve, health experts have an urgent message: Don't get cocky and relax. "We can't get overconfident. Every time we do and we put our guard down ... we get another surge with another variant," said Dr. Jorge Rodriguez, a viral researcher and internal medicine physician. "So yes, things are better. But they're far from over." On average, 107,312 new cases were reported each day over the past week, according to data from Johns Hopkins University, the lowest since August 5.

<https://www.cnn.com/2021/10/04/health/us-coronavirus-monday/index.html>

New York's largest health care provider fires 1,400 unvaccinated employees.

Northwell Health, New York State's largest health care provider, announced on Monday that it had fired 1,400 of its employees who refused to get vaccinated against the coronavirus, according to a spokesman, Joe Kemp. New York's effort to require the state's more than 650,000 hospital and nursing home workers to get vaccinated went into effect last week, prompting tens of thousands of employees who had held out to get their shots. But others filed a flurry of lawsuits, and courtrooms across the state are determining when and how to allow exemptions to the mandate. So far the number of workers in New York who have walked away from their jobs is relatively small, and not likely to result in the staff shortages that have imperiled harder-hit parts of the country during the Delta variant's rise.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/04/nyregion/northwell-employees-fired.html>

N.Y.C.'s Teacher Vaccine Mandate Prompts Thousands of Last-Minute Shots

New York's requirement that virtually everyone who works in the city's public schools be vaccinated against the coronavirus compelled thousands of Department of Education employees to get at least one dose of a vaccine in the past week, leading to extremely high vaccination rates among educators, Mayor Bill de Blasio said Monday. About 95 percent of all full-time school employees have received at least one dose of a coronavirus vaccine, the mayor said, including 99 percent of principals, 96 percent of teachers and 94 percent of non-education staff. Roughly 43,000 doses total have been administered since the mandate was announced in late August, including more than 18,000 shots that were given to staff members since Sept. 24.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/04/nyregion/vaccine-mandate-teachers-nyc.html>

Israel requires COVID-19 booster shots for stricter "green pass"

Israel on Sunday piled pressure on its vaccinated citizens to get a booster shot by making only those who received their third dose of the COVID-19 vaccine eligible for a "green pass" allowing entry to restaurants, gyms and many other venues. Israel was an early adopter of Pfizer/BioNtech booster shots -- administering them to members of risk groups in July and by the end of August to anyone above the age of 12. Its campaign is being watched closely by other countries. The new green pass is being issued to those who received three shots or recently recovered from COVID-19, replacing a previous system that required just two shots. It raises the bar for what the government considers full immunization

<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/israel-requires-covid-19-booster-shots-stricter-green-pass-2021-10-03/>

More community colleges are mandating coronavirus vaccination

One by one, Maryland's community colleges are starting to require students to get vaccinated against the coronavirus — months after the state university system adopted a sweeping vaccine mandate. But Virginia's community colleges are not requiring student vaccination. Instead, they are encouraging it. That includes Northern Virginia Community College, where the first lady, Jill Biden, teaches English on the Alexandria campus. The difference between policies in the neighboring states illustrates a quiet debate that has been unfolding nationally among the public two-year colleges. These schools, hit hard by enrollment drops during the pandemic, have been slower on the whole to embrace vaccine mandates than four-year colleges and universities.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2021/10/04/community-colleges-covid-vaccine-mandates/>

Community Activities

Doctors grow frustrated over COVID-19 denial, misinformation

The COVID-19 patient's health was deteriorating quickly at a Michigan hospital, but he was having none of the doctor's diagnosis. Despite dangerously low oxygen levels, the unvaccinated man didn't think he was that sick and got so irate over a hospital policy forbidding his wife from being at his bedside that he threatened to walk out of the building. Dr. Matthew Trunsky didn't hold back in his response: "You are welcome to leave, but you will be dead before you get to your car," he said. Such exchanges have become all-too-common for medical workers who are growing weary of COVID-19 denial and misinformation that have made it exasperating to treat unvaccinated patients during the delta-driven surge. The Associated Press asked six doctors from across the country to describe the types of misinformation and denial they see on a daily basis and how they respond to it.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/people-covid-facebook-americans-dna-b1931996.html>

HS: Majority of Finns don't accept refusing coronavirus vaccine on principle

A clear majority of Finns do not approve of people who refuse to get vaccinated against the coronavirus on principle, finds a poll by Helsingin Sanomat. Almost two-thirds (63%) of the poll respondents viewed that refusing to get vaccinated on principle was unacceptable and over one-quarter (27%) that doing so was acceptable. Understanding for the decision was limited especially among older respondents, with over 80 per cent of over 70-year-olds saying refusing on principle is unacceptable. Roughly a half of under 30-year-olds estimated that it is acceptable and 41 per cent that it is unacceptable to turn down the vaccine on principle.

<https://www.helsinkitimes.fi/finland/finland-news/domestic/20092-hs-majority-of-finns-don-t-accept-refusing-coronavirus-vaccine-on-principle.html>

Working Remotely

Google's regional pay cuts for employees who work from home may backfire

Many companies that employ the estimated 13 percent of US workers who are still working from home due to the pandemic expect to open their offices back up in January. Google is one of several

notable tech companies, including Facebook and Twitter, that has enacted controversial plans to lower pay for remote workers who've moved away from the expensive areas where their headquarters are located. But there are signs these policies may backfire. While potential repercussions for cutting workers' pay may not be immediate, humans are highly susceptible to loss aversion — losses are more painful than gains are pleasurable — and pay cuts could cause workers to either leave or resent the company. Alienating your existing workforce is always a bad idea, but it's especially bad when tech companies are already struggling to find the workers they need.

<https://www.vox.com/recode/22691275/googles-remote-work-home-pay-cut-location-real-estate>

Irish workers fear pay cuts for working remotely

More than half of Irish workers are concerned that choosing remote working will create inequality and impact their career progression, a new survey has found. Of those workers who fear there will be a negative impact, almost 40% are concerned that they would be asked to take a pay cut if they work remotely full time and 60% worry that it could impact their career progression. The survey found that 52% are fearful that they will be forgotten about during meetings if they choose to work remotely full time, with 48% worried their employer will consider their decision to work remotely a reflection of their commitment to the company.

<https://www.irishexaminer.com/business/economy/arid-40712342.html>

Virtual Classrooms

Back in the classroom, teachers are finding pandemic tech has changed their jobs forever

Millions of teachers across the U.S. are in their second year of teaching either in-person, online or both — depending on the state, city and district they live in. Like many other professions, teachers' jobs have become increasingly complex due to the pandemic. This year, many students are back in the classroom, but teachers have to constantly adapt if there is virus exposure. There aren't specific guidelines on how best to teach students using the many technologies that are available. Teachers are also struggling to keep students engaged while learning new tech tools that are required to make online classes successful.

<https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/us/back-in-the-classroom-teachers-are-finding-pandemic-tech-has-changed-their-jobs-forever/ar-AAP2FjB>

Japan, HK academics say virtual learning no match for real thing

While online classes have become the norm amid the COVID-19 pandemic, academics from Japan and Hong Kong believe that online classes cannot truly be a substitute for face-to-face learning despite the merits of technology in communicating with students. "Learning does not take place in the classroom, it happens outside the classroom, on campus where students can interact," among themselves and with teachers, Oussouby Sacko, president of Kyoto Seika University, said in a webinar. Sacko said professors at his university in western Japan have struggled to teach, for example, art-related courses online, and students were also losing their interest in attending classes. To motivate the students, Sacko has introduced a hybrid system of direct interactive sessions between teachers and students once a week and online classes on other days.

<https://japantoday.com/category/national/japan-h.k.-academics-say-virtual-learning-no-match-for-real-thing>

Public Policies

GSK to supply 10000 doses of COVID-19 drug to Canada

London-based drugmaker GlaxoSmithKline PLC said on Monday it signed a deal to supply 10,000 doses of its COVID-19 monoclonal antibody therapy to the Canadian government. "With the emergence of variants of concern across the country, in particular the Delta variant, new therapies like sotrovimab are important to treating the disease in its early stages," said Ranya El Masri, head of government affairs and market access for GSK Canada. The drug, sotrovimab, developed in partnership with Vir Biotechnology Inc was approved by Canada in July to treat mild to moderate

COVID-19 patients, above 12 years of age, who are at high risk for progressing to hospitalization or death.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/gsk-supply-10000-doses-covid-19-drug-canada-2021-10-04/>

EU regulator backs Pfizer vaccine booster for all adults after 6 months

Europe's drugs regulator on Monday advised that healthy adults can receive a third, booster dose of the BioNTech/Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine six months after the second dose. The European Medicines Agency's medicines committee said the recommendation was based on data from a study of 18 to 55-year-olds, showing an increase in antibodies after a third shot. Data has shown that immunity wanes with the vaccines currently in use, and appears to wane more quickly with the BioNTech/Pfizer jab. The EMA also said that people with severely weakened immune systems may be given a booster dose of either the BioNTech/Pfizer or Moderna jabs just 28 days after their second dose. While there is no direct evidence linking antibody levels to stronger protection in those with weakened immune systems, "it is expected that the extra dose would increase protection at least in some patients," the EMA said.

<https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-regulator-backs-pfizer-vaccine-booster-for-all-adults-after-6-months/>

Global trade is accelerating, but poorer countries need vaccines to keep up, the W.T.O. says.

Global trade recovered from its pandemic lows faster than anticipated in the first half of 2021 and is set to grow more quickly than expected next year, lifting global growth forecasts, the World Trade Organization said Monday. The W.T.O. now forecasts global merchandise trade to grow 10.8 percent in 2021, up from the 8 percent it forecast in March, as the flow of goods recovers from last year's slump. Global trade is expected to rise 4.7 percent in 2022 as the growth rate approaches its prepandemic trend, the W.T.O. said. That trade growth has not been equal as a result of the pandemic, the group said, with developing regions in particular lagging behind because of lower vaccination rates, and supply chain disruptions continuing to weigh on trade in some areas.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/04/business/wto-global-trade-forecasts-vaccine.html>

Covid-19 Treatment News: What Drugs, Medicines Are Available for Coronavirus?

In the battle against the Covid-19 pandemic, vaccines have emerged as the weapon of choice. Prevention of disease is always preferable to treatment, and in this case, vaccines have proven far more targeted and effective than the few Covid therapies that have emerged so far. Several, including some that received emergency-use authorization from regulators, have lost favor or been discarded as the struggle goes on to understand the coronavirus that causes Covid and how it impacts cells, tissues and ultimately the human body. While the list of disappointments is long, some treatments have been shown to work, although more research is needed to provide effective therapy for severely ill patients.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-02-05/why-reports-of-drugs-for-coronavirus-are-premature-quicktake>

Pfizer, Moderna Boosters Win EU Approval for Vulnerable

A European Union advisory committee endorsed extra shots of Pfizer Inc.'s Covid-19 vaccine for all adults, as well as extra doses of Moderna Inc.'s for those with severely weakened immune systems. Those ages 18 and older can get a third dose of the Pfizer vaccine, developed with BioNTech SE, at least six months after their second shot, the European Medicines Agency said in a statement Monday. For the immunocompromised, extra doses of Pfizer or Moderna can be given at least 28 days after the second. The recommendation on the Pfizer shot is slightly broader than in the U.S., where it's been recommended for those ages 65 or older, those in long-term health-care facilities and those ages 50 to 64 with underlying medical conditions. "Studies showed that an extra dose of these vaccines increased the ability to produce antibodies against the virus that causes Covid-19 in

organ transplant patients with weakened immune systems,” the EMA said. “It is expected that the extra dose would increase protection at least in some patients.”

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-10-04/eu-drug-panel-backs-boosters-of-pfizer-moderna-for-vulnerable>

Thailand joins Asian nations in rush to buy Merck's COVID-19 pill

Thailand's government is in talks with Merck & Co (MRK.N) to buy 200,000 courses of its experimental antiviral pill for COVID-19 treatment, the latest Asian nation to scramble for supplies of the drug after lagging behind Western countries for vaccines. Somsak Akksilp, director-general of the Department of Medical Services, told Reuters that Thailand is currently working on a purchasing agreement for the antiviral drug, known as molnupiravir. South Korea, Taiwan and Malaysia said they are also in talks to buy the potential treatment, while the Philippines, which is running a trial on the pill, said it hopes its domestic study would allow access to the treatment.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/thailand-talks-with-merck-200000-courses-anti-covid-pills-2021-10-04/>

Johnson & Johnson to Seek F.D.A. Authorization for Booster Shot

Johnson & Johnson is planning to ask federal regulators early this week to authorize a booster shot of its coronavirus vaccine, according to officials familiar with the company's plans. The firm is the last of the three federally authorized vaccine providers to call for extra injections, amid mounting evidence that at least the elderly and other high-risk groups need more protection. Federal officials have become increasingly worried that the more than 15 million Americans who received the Johnson & Johnson vaccine face too much risk of severe Covid-19. The Food and Drug Administration on Friday scheduled a meeting on Oct. 15 of its expert advisory committee to discuss whether to grant emergency use authorization of a booster shot of Johnson & Johnson's vaccine. That is part of a broader effort by the government to shore up the protection provided by all three vaccines. Regulators last month authorized a booster shot for many recipients of Pfizer-BioNTech's vaccine and are contemplating doing the same this month for recipients of Moderna's.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/04/us/politics/johnson-vaccine-booster-coronavirus.html>

Maintaining Services

Coronavirus: BioNTech CEO says new vaccine will be needed in 2022

The CEO of BioNTech, the company that paired with Pfizer to develop a COVID-19 vaccine, told The Financial Times on Sunday that a new vaccine formula will probably be needed by the middle of next year, as new variants to the virus are likely to emerge. Ugur Sahin, who co-founded BioNTech, said that the variants seen now are not so different from the original virus as to evade the protection that the current vaccine offers. However, Sahin warns that new variants will emerge that will be able to evade vaccines and booster shots. “This year [a different vaccine] is completely unneeded,” he said. “But, by mid-next year, it could be a different situation.”

<https://www.kiro7.com/news/trending/coronavirus-biontech-ceo-says-new-vaccine-will-be-needed-2022/7FEPKI5EWBBQXCUVSKATDCD5WE/>

Signs of encouragement as US sees drop in Covid cases and hospitalizations

The United States has seen a dramatic drop in the number of Covid-19 cases and hospitalizations in recent weeks, a trend that epidemiologists see as an encouraging sign that the Delta wave of the virus has peaked nationally. The seven-day average of daily new cases in America dropped from about 151,000 on 14 September to about 106,000 on 29 September, a 29% decrease, according to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/oct/04/us-covid-coronavirus-cases-hospitalizations-drop>

Largest COVID-19 PCR provider announces expansion of ‘cube’ labs

The UK's largest laboratory diagnostics company, Randox, has announced a nationwide expansion of

ten new adaptive 'cube' laboratories across Great Britain, with facilities that provide a rapid and cost-effective model to expand laboratory provision.

http://www.pharmatimes.com/news/largest_covid-19_pcr_provider_announces_expansion_of_cube_labs_1379782

Pregnant Women Benefit from Getting the COVID-19 Vaccination

The number of women who were pregnant and also hospitalized for COVID-19 increased from 10% to 15% in late August 2021 and early September 2021, which is more than double the percentages of a year earlier, results of a study posted in the American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology show. "If they are exposed and infected, they run a higher risk of severe illness from this most recent Delta variant," Emily Adhikari, MD, medical director of perinatal infectious diseases at Parkland Health and Hospital System, said in a statement. "Pregnant women should get immunized as soon as possible." Investigators found that these findings are the first objective evidence of the number and severity of illness in pregnant individuals alongside the spike in the Delta variant.

<https://www.pharmacytimes.com/view/pregnant-women-benefit-from-getting-the-covid-19-vaccination>

Senegal records fewest daily COVID-19 cases since outbreak began

Senegal on Monday logged only two new daily COVID-19 infections, the lowest number since the pandemic reached the country and two months after the rate of new cases hovered at record highs, the health ministry said on Monday. "Two cases were recorded today, the lowest ever recorded," said health ministry spokesperson Ngone Ngom. "They were in the past seven, 10 cases, but from the top of my head I think this is the lowest." While the number of COVID-19 infections has been relatively low in Senegal compared with elsewhere, the West African nation is emerging from its deadliest wave yet. Twenty thousand of its 73,800 cases and 250 of its 1,860 deaths were recorded in July alone.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/senegal-records-fewest-daily-covid-19-cases-since-outbreak-began-2021-10-04/>

COVID-19: Amber list and UK's traffic light system for international travel scrapped as rules simplified

The UK's traffic light system for travel has been scrapped and replaced with just two categories - countries on the red list and everywhere else. The number of countries on the red list - currently 54 - is expected to be cut to as few as nine, with places such as South Africa, and Mexico expected to become available to quarantine-free travel. People arriving in the UK fully vaccinated against COVID-19 - and everyone under 18 - will also see changes.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-uks-traffic-light-system-for-international-travel-is-scrapped-12425623>

Healthcare Innovations

Italian studies show COVID-19 shots less effective in immunocompromised

COVID-19 vaccines are less effective on people with weakened immune systems, three small Italian studies show, which the studies' researchers say highlight the need to deploy booster shots for this group of vulnerable people. The studies show that, on average, 30% of immunocompromised patients do not develop immunity to the virus after vaccination. The remaining 70% respond to the vaccine, especially after the second dose, but to a lesser extent than healthy people and with differences from group to group, the Bambino Gesù Hospital in Rome, which conducted the three small studies, said in a statement on Monday.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/italian-studies-show-covid-19-shots-less-effective-immunocompromised-2021-10-04/>

How Merck's antiviral pill could change the game for COVID-19

A new drug by Merck significantly reduces the risk of hospitalisation and death in people who take it early in the course of their COVID-19 illness, according to the interim results of a major U.S. study released last week. It is the first oral antiviral found to be effective against this coronavirus. People

who took this drug, called molnupiravir—four pills twice a day for five days—within five days of showing symptoms were about half as likely to be hospitalised as those taking the placebo. They were also less likely to die, with eight deaths in the placebo group reported within a month of treatment and none in those who received the medicine.

<https://www.nationalgeographic.co.uk/science-and-technology/2021/10/how-mercks-antiviral-pill-could-change-the-game-for-covid-19>