

Connecting Communities for COVID19 News

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Isolation Tips

Covid-19: Majority in NI 'want to keep working from home'

A majority of workers in Northern Ireland would like to work from home even after pandemic restrictions are fully lifted, a survey has suggested. YouGov surveyed 1,000 local workers online during August, weighted to give a representative sample of adults in work. It was carried out for the Chartered Institute of Personnel & Development. The survey suggests that of those working fully from home, only 3% wanted to return to their office full time.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-59208583>

Hygiene Helpers

Don't wait on vaccine rules, White House tells companies amid legal fight

The White House on Monday urged employers to go ahead and push worker vaccinations, as legal challenges to President Joe Biden's vaccine rule work their way through the courts. A U.S. federal appeals court issued a stay Saturday freezing the Biden administration's efforts to require COVID-19 vaccines for workers at U.S. companies with at least 100 employees or weekly tests, citing "grave statutory and constitutional" issues with the rule. The ruling from the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals comes after numerous Republican-led states filed legal challenges against the new rule, which is set to take effect on Jan 4.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/dont-wait-vaccine-rules-white-house-tells-companies-amid-legal-fight-2021-11-08/>

Singapore to start charging Covid patients who are 'unvaccinated by choice'

Singapore will no longer pay the Covid-19 medical bills for people "unvaccinated by choice", the government said, as the country grapples with a surge in cases. The government currently covers the full Covid medical costs for all Singaporeans, as well as permanent residents and long-term visa holders, unless they test positive soon after returning home from overseas. However from 8 December, the government said it will "begin charging Covid-19 patients who are unvaccinated by choice".

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/09/singapore-to-start-charging-covid-patients-who-are-unvaccinated-by-choice>

Vaccine Mandate News: Covid Vaccine to Be Mandatory for NHS England Workers

Frontline National Health Service workers in England must be fully vaccinated against Covid-19 by April 2022, the U.K. government announced. Health Secretary Sajid Javid told Parliament on Tuesday the move was necessary to protect patients and other NHS staff. It follows a separate decision by the government to make vaccines compulsory for care home workers from Nov. 11. Only those frontline NHS workers who can prove they have had two coronavirus vaccinations can be employed, Javid said. Staff who don't work face to face with patients or are medically exempt will not face mandatory shots.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-11-09/covid-19-vaccines-made-mandatory-for-nhs-workers-in-england>

U.S. judge upholds United Airlines' COVID-19 vaccine mandate for employees

A U.S. federal judge on Monday ruled United Airlines Holdings Inc can impose a COVID-19 vaccine mandate on its employees that only provides unpaid leave for workers who are exempted for

medical or religious reasons. U.S. District Judge Mark Pittman in Fort Worth, Texas, rejected arguments by employees that the airline was improperly putting them in an "impossible position" by forcing them to choose a vaccine or unpaid leave.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/us-judge-upholds-united-airlines-covid-19-vaccine-mandate-2021-11-08/>

WHO warns of shortage of 1-2 bln COVID vaccine syringes

There could be a shortage of one to two billion syringes needed to administer COVID-19 vaccinations in 2022 which could also impact routine immunisations and undermine needle safety, the World Health Organisation warned on Tuesday. National health authorities should plan their needs well in advance to avoid the "hoarding, panic buying and type of situation" seen early in the pandemic with the lack of personal protective equipment, WHO expert Lisa Hedman said.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/who-warns-shortage-1-2-bln-covid-vaccine-syringes-2021-11-09/>

Community Activities

Covid-19 vaccine debate takes a strange turn

The Covid-19 vaccine debate is getting weird. On Twitter, Texas Republican Sen. Ted Cruz accused Big Bird of pushing "Government propaganda...for your 5 year old!" after the Muppet tweeted about getting the shot in his wing. CNN aired a special on Saturday with "Sesame Street" to explain the vaccine to children ages 5-11, who are now eligible to get the shot. Watch Rosita, a green Muppet, overcome her fear and bravely get her first Covid-19 vaccine dose.

<https://www.cnn.com/2021/11/08/politics/covid-vaccine-debate-what-matters/index.html>

Boeing U.S. worker vaccine exemption requests top 11000 -sources

The number of Boeing Co employees seeking a vaccine exemption on religious or medical grounds has reached more than 11,000 - or nearly 9% of its U.S. workforce - a level many times higher than executives initially estimated, people familiar with the matter told Reuters. The widespread reluctance has left executives scrambling for a strategy that keeps employees safe and complies with President Joe Biden's vaccine mandate for federal contractors, but avoids an exodus of engineering and factory labor, the people said.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/exclusive-boeing-us-worker-vaccine-exemption-requests-top-11000-sources-2021-11-08/>

U.S.-Mexico border reopens after 20 months of COVID shutdown

There were fewer crossings at the Mexico-United States border than expected on Monday as it reopened to nonessential travel following a 20-month closure due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with many residents staying home to avoid potential chaos. Officials in the Mexican border city of Tijuana said people did not make the most of restrictions being lifted along the 2,000-mile (3,200-km) border due to fears of being caught in traffic.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/us-mexico-border-reopens-after-20-months-covid-disruption-2021-11-08/>

Thousands protest in New Zealand against COVID-19 rules

New Zealand beefed up security measures at its parliament on Tuesday as thousands of people gathered to protest against COVID-19 vaccine mandates and government lockdowns aimed at controlling the pandemic. All but two entrances to the parliament building, known as the Beehive, were closed off in unprecedented security measures, as mostly unmasked protesters marched through central Wellington and congregated outside parliament. While the demonstration was peaceful, many people were seen holding signs and placards with messages like "Freedom" and "Kiwis are not lab rats" and shouting slogans as they demanded the government roll back compulsory vaccination and lift restrictions.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/thousands-protest-new-zealand-against-covid-19-vaccine-mandate-2021-11-09/>

Working Remotely

As companies look to bring remote workers back to the office, a writer asks: Why?

Many millions of people, especially those in white-collar jobs, have been working from home for the past 20 months. It's a radical change in the nature of work. And despite predictions and surveys, no one knows for sure how long it will last or what the future of work will look like. But writer Anne Helen Petersen says that on the other side of the pandemic, there's a chance work will rotate more around people's lives instead of the other way around. Petersen is the co-author, with Charlie Warzel, of the upcoming book *Out of Office: The Big Problem and Bigger Promise of Working from Home*. The evidence is mixed, but many employees say they're able to be more productive working from home than they were in the office. At the same time, there's value in being able to collaborate in person.

<https://www.npr.org/sections/coronavirus-live-updates/2021/11/09/1053793602/future-of-work-author-says-its-time-to-ask-if-offices-are-worth-it>

Airbnb Adds New Tools in Bet Remote Work Is Here to Stay

Airbnb is rolling out new features, including verified internet speeds at hosts' homes and options to search for listings up to a year in advance, as the vacation-rental company bets that remote work and flexible travel is here to stay. The more than 50 new features, announced a day after U.S. borders reopened to foreign tourists, are part of Chief Executive Officer Brian Chesky's vision of a new golden age of travel that was born in the Covid-era, where work and leisure blend together as companies move away from an office-centric lifestyle.

<https://finance.yahoo.com/news/airbnb-adds-tools-bet-remote-161500501.html>

Virtual Classrooms

The educator's imperative: creating intentional inclusivity in the digital classroom

Online teaching is about more than just the right technology. It is about building an inclusive online learning environment through relational and humanistic approaches that welcome diversity of all types. Diversity, equity and inclusion cannot begin and end as statements of principle - they must be carried out through actions by educators in the classroom. What may seem like small gestures, when undertaken with authenticity, will support an online learning environment that enables everyone to feel invited in and recognised.

<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/campus/educators-imperative-creating-intentional-inclusivity-digital-classroom>

The nightmare of online learning: Here's what I've learned as a teacher. It's not pretty.

We have learned - hopefully, once and for all - that no digital teaching tool can replace a talented, experienced, committed, hard-working teacher with at least the basic administrative support in a reasonably safe, clean and well-lit classroom. Much as some of us perfected our online teaching chops, it was never the same; it was hardly close. If we didn't already know how much kids need to be around each other, we know now, especially those of us who are parents too. But not all students missed what is for them the chaotic crush of school. Many found solace in being away from us. For some kids, being isolated at home was an upgrade from the social isolation or bullying they had to contend with at school - and from which the educators in their lives failed to protect them. We need to do a lot better at creating a positive learning environment for all students.

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/voices/2021/11/08/online-learning-nightmare-students-teachers/6286418001/>

Public Policies

APEC affirms stand against vaccine nationalism, driven to manage climate change

Members of Asia-Pacific trade group APEC have reiterated a "strong stance" against vaccine nationalism to support the region's recovery from the pandemic and are committed to tackle climate change, host New Zealand said on Wednesday. New Zealand's Minister of Foreign Affairs Nanaia Mahuta and Minister of Trade Damien O'Connor said all 21 Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) member countries had contributed to the region's pandemic response and work towards progress on trade.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/apec-affirms-stand-against-vaccine-nationalism-driven-manage-climate-change-2021-11-09/>

U.S. government to buy \$1 billion worth of Merck's COVID-19 pill

The U.S. government will buy another \$1 billion worth of the COVID-19 pill made by Merck & Co Inc and partner Ridgeback Biotherapeutics, the companies said on Tuesday. The government in June agreed to buy 1.7 million courses of molnupiravir for \$1.2 billion and is now exercising options to buy 1.4 million more. That brings the total secured courses to 3.1 million and worth \$2.2 billion. Merck said the government has the right to buy 2 million more courses as part of the contract.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-government-buy-14-mln-more-courses-mercks-covid-19-pill-2021-11-09/>

French president Macron: rise of Covid incidence rate is worrying

French President Emmanuel Macron said on Tuesday that those aged 65 and older will need to present proof of a COVID-19 booster shot from mid-December for health passes that give access to restaurants, trains and planes to remain valid. Besides, the third shot, so far available only for people older than 65 and the vulnerable, will from early December also be available for the 50-64 age group, Macron said in a televised address.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/french-president-macron-rise-covid-incidence-rate-is-worrying-2021-11-09/>

Costa Rica announces nationwide mandate requiring coronavirus vaccinations for children

Costa Rica has made coronavirus vaccinations a requirement for all people under the age of 18, in what experts say is one of the world's broadest mandates to immunize children against the virus. The Health Ministry in the Central American nation said Friday that the vaccinations would be included with other mandatory shots against chickenpox, polio and the human papillomavirus, or HPV. It said that the measure was taken to "safeguard" the best interests of the children and that parents and legal guardians were responsible for ensuring minors are vaccinated in a "timely manner."

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/11/08/costa-rica-vaccine-children/>

Yukon declares state of emergency over COVID-19

The Yukon government has declared a state of emergency, announcing new health regulations aimed at curbing the spread of COVID-19, including a proof-of-vaccination requirement set to take effect on Saturday. The declaration came after the territory reported 80 new COVID-19 infections diagnosed over a three-day period between Friday and Monday, for a total of 169 active cases. The territory says it is moving rapidly to implement a proof-of-vaccination system for a range of settings, including restaurants, ticketed events, fitness facilities and personal services businesses, as well as faith-based and cultural gatherings. It says the new measures also include mandatory masks in all indoor public settings and outdoor public settings where physical distancing isn't possible, as well as capacity limits on different types of indoor and outdoor gatherings.

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/yukon-covid-19-cases-whitehorse-elementary-outbreak-1.6242108>

Amid spike in cases, EU to shortly approve first COVID antibody drugs - sources

EMA to approve Regeneron-Roche cocktail of monoclonal antibodies. EU agency to authorise also Celltrion's antibody therapy. Full marketing authorisations expected this week - source

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/exclusive-amid-spike-cases-eu-shortly-approve-first-covid-antibody-drugs-sources-2021-11-09/>

U.S. FDA lifts clinical hold on Inovio's COVID-19 vaccine trial

Inovio Pharmaceuticals Inc said on Tuesday the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) had lifted a partial clinical hold on late-stage trial of its COVID-19 vaccine within the country. Inovio said it now has the authorization to proceed with the trial after 14 months, sending its shares up 4.6% before the bell. The FDA last year in September put the final-stage trial on hold as it sought more information from the company, including details on a delivery device used to inject genetic material into cells.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-fda-lifts-clinical-hold-inovios-covid-19-vaccine-trial-2021-11-09/>

Maintaining Services

In vaccine-wary Latvia, bodies pile up in hospital morgue

In an inconspicuous building of the main hospital in the Latvian city of Daugavpils, bags containing the bodies of dead COVID-19 patients lie on the ground of a makeshift morgue, held here as city gravediggers clear space for new graves. Latvia, one of the least vaccinated countries in the European Union, is facing its most severe outbreak of COVID-19 yet. In Daugavpils, where vaccine uptake is especially low, deaths have soared.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/vaccine-wary-latvia-bodies-pile-up-hospital-morgue-2021-11-09/>

New vaccine campaigns target rural Americans to address disparities

In the United States, there is a renewed campaign to vaccinate rural Americans due to the stark difference in Covid-19 cases and deaths among those living in less-populated areas compared with towns and cities. Rural residents are now twice as likely to die from Covid-19 as Americans in metropolitan areas. Yet rural areas tend to lag at least 10% behind metropolitan areas when it comes to vaccination – and this hesitancy is exacerbating already existing health issues. “Rural populations are older, they’re sicker and they’re poorer,” said Fred Ullrich, research analyst at the RUPRI Center for Rural Health Policy Analysis and co-author of a report on Covid’s disproportionate burden on rural communities.

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/nov/09/covid-vaccine-campaign-rural-americans>

Bangladesh's Beximco to sell first generic version of Merck COVID-19 pill

A Bangladeshi drugmaker will soon begin selling the world's first generic version of Merck's COVID-19 pill, molnupiravir, which has been touted as a potential game-changer in the fight against the pandemic. Beximco Pharmaceuticals will first sell generic molnupiravir in Bangladesh before considering exports based on global regulatory approvals, it said on Tuesday. The generic version has received emergency use authorisation from Bangladesh's drug regulators.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/asian-firm-beximco-sell-generic-version-merck-covid-19-pill-2021-11-09/>

Morgues, hospitals struggle with COVID-19 deaths in Romania

The morgue in Romania’s main hospital has no space for the dead any more. In a stark illustration of the human cost of the coronavirus surge sweeping the nation, bodies of COVID-19 victims, wrapped in black plastic bags, line a hallway of the hospital in the capital, Bucharest. Hundreds of people have been dying each day for the past two months in Romania. The country has been among the hardest-hit in the current virus onslaught raging through Central and Eastern European nations, where far fewer people have been vaccinated than in Western Europe.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/11/9/morgues-hospitals-struggle-with-covid-19-deaths-in-romania>

Global COVID-19 total tops 250 million infections

At a World Health Organization (WHO) media briefing on Nov 4, the group's COVID-19 technical lead,

Maria Van Kerkhove, PhD, said virus activity is rising in places where it shouldn't be—in countries with ample vaccine and tools to fight the pandemic. She urged world leaders and health officials to channel their grief and anger over the pandemic's grim totals into actions to bring transmission under control and cut severe impacts and deaths. "The trajectory of the pandemic is in our hands. It has always been in our hands. What happens now and into 2022 is up to us," she said. In Europe, currently the world's main hot spot, Russia's week-long work stoppage designed to curb virus transmission has ended, but cases are still near record daily highs. Meanwhile, Germany's 7-day incidence rate climbed to its highest level of the pandemic, according to the latest update from the Robert Koch Institute. Health officials are facing the prospect of postponing some surgeries, and some regions are already transferring patients to cope with increased burden on hospitals from COVID-19 patients.

<https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2021/11/global-covid-19-total-tops-250-million-infections>

Healthcare Innovations

New data from Texas suggests unvaccinated people are 20 times more likely to die from COVID-19

The Texas Department of State Health Services released a report that analyzed COVID-19 cases and deaths starting from Jan. 15 through Oct. 1. The report initially found that unvaccinated people were 40 times more likely to die from COVID-19 between Jan. 15 and Oct. 1. But as the unvaccinated population shrunk, between Sept. 4 and Oct. 1 that number dropped to 20 times more likely to die.

<https://thehill.com/changing-america/well-being/580804-new-data-suggests-unvaccinated-people-are-20-times-more-likely-to>

Covid-19 drove deaths up 16% in OECD countries and hit mental health, too, report finds

The Covid-19 pandemic caused a 16% rise in expected deaths among the 38 members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, hitting overall life expectancy in 24 out of 30 members, the organization said Tuesday. Life expectancy fell the most in Spain and the United States, the group said, with the United States losing 1.6 years of life per capita on average over the year and a half of the pandemic so far, and Spain losing 1.5 years, the OECD said. "COVID 19 contributed, directly and indirectly, to a 16% increase in the expected number of deaths in 2020 and the first half of 2021 across OECD countries," the group said in its report.

<https://www.cnn.com/2021/11/09/health/oecd-covid-report/index.html>

Analysis: COVID-19 pills are coming, but no substitute for vaccines, disease experts say

Oral antiviral pills from Merck & Co and Pfizer Inc have been shown to significantly blunt the worst outcomes of COVID-19 if taken early enough, but doctors warn vaccine hesitant people not to confuse the benefit of the treatments with prevention afforded by vaccines. While 72% of American adults have gotten a first shot of the vaccine, according to a Kaiser Family Foundation poll, the pace of vaccination has slowed, as political partisanship in the United States divides views on the value and safety of vaccines against the coronavirus.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/covid-19-pills-are-coming-no-substitute-vaccines-disease-experts-say-2021-11-08/>

Australia's NSW says unvaccinated 16 times more likely to die from COVID-19

Unvaccinated people are 16 times more likely to end up in intensive care units or die from COVID-19, Australia's New South Wales state said in a report, with officials urging people to get inoculated as Australia begins to live with the coronavirus. The data from New South Wales (NSW) health department out late on Monday showed only 11% of people out of 412 who died from the Delta outbreak over four months through early October were fully vaccinated. The average age of those deaths was 82. Only around 3% of people in intensive care units had two doses, while more than 63% of the 61,800 cases detected between June 16 and Oct. 7 were unvaccinated.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/australias-nsw-says-unvaccinated-16-times-more-likely-die-covid-19-2021-11-09/>