

Connecting Communities for COVID19 News

19th Nov 2021

Isolation Tips

Germany to limit public life for the unvaccinated

Germany will limit large parts of public life in areas where hospitals are becoming dangerously full of COVID-19 patients to those who have either been vaccinated or have recovered from the illness, Chancellor Angela Merkel said on Thursday. The move is necessary to tackle a "very worrying" fourth wave of the pandemic that is overburdening hospitals, she said. "Many of the measures that are now needed would not have been needed if more people were vaccinated. And it isn't too late to get vaccinated now," Merkel said.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/german-region-hardest-hit-by-covid-surge-plans-partial-lockdown-report-2021-11-18/>

Belgium extends mask use, enforces home working as COVID-19 spikes

Belgium tightened its coronavirus restrictions on Wednesday, mandating wider use of masks and enforcing work from home, as cases spiked in the country's fourth COVID-19 wave. From Saturday, all people in indoor venues such as cafes and restaurants will need to wear a mask unless seated and the rule will apply to those aged 10 or older. The previous age threshold was 12. Nightclubs may have to test their guests if they want to let them dance mask-free. People wanting to eat in a restaurant or go to the theatre already must present a COVID pass, showing vaccination, a negative test or recent recovery.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/belgium-extends-mask-use-enforces-home-working-covid-19-spikes-2021-11-17/>

Austria's focus shifts to full lockdown as COVID-19 cases keep rising

Pressure on Austria's government to impose a full COVID-19 lockdown grew on Thursday as its worst-hit provinces said they would adopt the measure for themselves since infections are still rising despite the current lockdown for the unvaccinated. Roughly 66% of Austria's population is fully vaccinated, one of the lowest rates in western Europe. Its infections are among the highest on the continent, with a seven-day incidence of 971.5 per 100,000 people. As winter approaches, cases have surged across Europe, prompting governments to consider reimposing unpopular lockdowns. The Netherlands has imposed a partial lockdown that applies to all, but Austria has sought not to impose extra restrictions on the fully vaccinated.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/austrian-covid-19-cases-keep-rising-provinces-prepare-full-lockdown-2021-11-18/>

Portugal's Madeira Island Imposes Curbs on Unvaccinated People

The Portuguese island of Madeira will impose new restrictions on unvaccinated residents and visitors amid a surge in coronavirus cases across Europe. People who have not been vaccinated will be banned from attending public events such as concerts from Saturday, Miguel Albuquerque, the president of Madeira's regional government, said in a televised press conference on Thursday. Unvaccinated people are allowed to attend mass or go to the supermarket as long as they show a negative Covid-19 test. The use of masks will become mandatory in public spaces. Mass testing will also be carried out on a weekly basis to try to contain the spread of the virus, Albuquerque said.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-11-18/portugal-s-madeira-island-imposes-curbs-on-unvaccinated-people>

Greece Is the Latest European Country to Restrict the Unvaccinated

Greece will tighten restrictions on people unvaccinated against the coronavirus as rising cases and hospitalizations strain the nation's health systems. It joins Germany, Austria and other European countries in attempting to pressure more people into getting their inoculations. "Even those who are still hesitant can change their minds by listening to what the unvaccinated who get sick have to say," Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis said in a televised national address on Thursday. Almost nine out of every 10 people in Greek ICUs with Covid-19 are unvaccinated, he said.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-11-18/greece-is-the-latest-european-country-to-restrict-unvaccinated>

Hygiene Helpers

Australia's Political Capital Is Almost Completely Vaccinated

Almost all eligible citizens in Australia's "Bush Capital" have had at least one dose of Covid-19 vaccine and it is expected to reach full inoculation next month, a milestone that shows just how fast the nation has overcome a slow start to its vaccination rollout. Canberra, one of a number of highly vaccinated cities in the Asia-Pacific region, achieved the feat by relying on education and access to get its citizens to embrace the rollout, according to Andrew Barr, the chief minister of the Australian Capital Territory which oversees the city. Data show the city's vaccination rate is at 96.8% for eligible people aged 12 and over. In terms of first doses, it's given more than its population size as estimated by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. Barr says the real figure is likely to be around 99.9%, with just a few hundred people remaining unvaccinated. He expects a similar threshold for full inoculation to be reached by mid-December.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-11-18/in-australia-s-political-capital-almost-everyone-is-vaccinated>

Dutch start coronavirus vaccine booster campaign with the over 80s

The Netherlands started its coronavirus booster vaccination campaign on Thursday, with the over 80s and hospital staff first in line for the top-up jab. The government had planned to roll out the campaign in December but brought it forward two weeks under pressure from both MPs and healthcare experts. Under current government strategy, everyone over the age of 60 will be invited for a booster jab, as will everyone living in residential care and front-line staff. The government decided to back booster jabs following reports which show the efficacy of vaccines does go down among older people over time. Some 44% of current coronavirus hospital patients have been vaccinated but by far the majority are over the age of 70.

<https://www.dutchnews.nl/news/2021/11/dutch-start-coronavirus-vaccine-booster-campaign-with-the-over-80s/>

Community Activities

Ardern's Covid lockdown finds favour as New Zealand watches Sydney's Delta disaster

The loudest overseas critics of its elimination approach have been mostly greeted with bemusement or defiance. New Zealanders have consistently supported even the toughest anti-Covid measures. About 80% rated the government's Covid-19 response as overall good, according to polling commissioned by the Spinoff in February, and 59% rated the response as "excellent". The satirical hashtag #NZhellhole, which pokes fun at some of the more hysterical reactions to NZ lockdowns, was again trending on Wednesday. "If [overseas commentators] are surprised then they haven't been paying attention," says Dr Siouxsie Wiles, one of the country's prominent epidemic communicators. In New Zealand, Wiles says, "the vast majority of people understand what we are up against, and are supportive of our response."

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/aug/18/arderns-covid-lockdown-finds-favour-as-new-zealand-watches-sydney-delta-disaster>

Rollout of third Covid jabs in England condemned as 'shambolic'

A "shambolic" rollout of third Covid vaccinations has left an unknown number of immunocompromised people still without proper protection going into winter, and in other cases

even given the wrong type of injection, a leading charity has said. Blood Cancer UK said poor planning and confusing messaging meant “many thousands” of people with weakened immune systems might have missed out, leaving them at greater risk of serious consequences if they catch Covid. In a lengthy statement, the charity said NHS England had repeatedly failed to acknowledge the problem, while Sajid Javid, the health secretary, incorrectly said more than six weeks ago that the “vast, vast majority” of eligible people had already been invited for a third jab.

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/nov/18/rollout-third-covid-jabs-england-condemned-shambolic>

Working Remotely

Workers 'fearful of impact of remote working on their careers'

Working from home may damage an employee's career prospects, a new study has revealed. Remote workers in Northern Ireland believe they will feel isolated and miss out on social connections, and more than a third worry there will be "employer bias" for in-person workers. And younger professionals cite fears around presenteeism, favouritism, reduced earning potential and poor career advancement so long as they aren't making regular commutes to the workplace. The findings come as part of a survey of 1,800 workers

<https://www.irishnews.com/business/2021/11/18/news/workers-fearful-of-impact-of-remote-working-on-their-careers--2511272/>

Virtual Classrooms

Push for more online learning as universities pin hopes on 2024 recovery

NSW universities expect student enrolment numbers to return to pre-pandemic levels by 2024. University of NSW vice-chancellor Ian Jacobs said Australian universities could educate millions of students overseas with online courses. He said the world and Australia would be better placed with 85 per cent of people having some form of tertiary education. “I’d love to see online embraced in a massive way by Australian universities. Australia can be genuinely educating millions and millions of people around the world, who can’t access a good quality education, through using online technology.”

<https://www.theage.com.au/national/nsw/push-for-more-online-learning-as-universities-pin-hopes-on-2024-recovery-20211118-p59a5d.html>

Public Policies

Prospects of Intellectual-Property Waiver on Covid-19 Vaccines Fade

An agreement to waive the intellectual-property rights underpinning Covid-19 vaccines—a prospect poor countries have hoped would ease supplies to the developing world—is becoming increasingly unlikely, say people familiar with the situation, with the U.S. not acting to bridge disagreements between developing world countries and those opposing such a measure. In May, the Biden administration said it would support temporarily suspending patents and other IP linked to the shots to allow developing countries to produce the Covid-19 vaccines created by big drug companies. The U.S. was under pressure to help get vaccines to poor countries, which have suffered severe shortages. Confirmed deaths from Covid-19 in the developing world have far outstripped those in rich countries this year.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/prospects-of-intellectual-property-waiver-on-covid-19-vaccines-fade-11637251190>

Canada to authorize use of Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine for children -source

Canada will announce as expected on Friday it is authorizing the use of Pfizer Inc's COVID-19 vaccine for children aged 5 to 11, a government source said on Thursday. The decision will make it the first shot for young children in Canada. Officials had made clear for weeks that the decision would be favorable, noting that incidences of COVID-19 are now highest in those under 12. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said last month that Ottawa had signed a deal with Pfizer to quickly receive

2.9 million doses of the vaccine once it was approved.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/canada-authorize-use-pfizers-covid-19-vaccine-children-source-2021-11-12/>

India allows export of 20 mln Novavax vaccine doses to Indonesia -document, source

India has approved the export of 20 million doses of the Novavax COVID-19 vaccine made by the Serum Institute of India (SII) to Indonesia, according to a government document seen by Reuters and a government source.

<https://www.reuters.com/markets/asia/india-allows-export-20-mln-novavax-vaccine-doses-indonesia-document-source-2021-11-18/>

Macron says France will not need to lockdown non-vaccinated people as COVID spreads

France does not need to follow those European countries imposing COVID-19 lockdowns on unvaccinated people, because of the success of its health pass in curbing the virus' spread, President Emmanuel Macron said. Europe has again become the epicentre of the pandemic, prompting some countries including Germany and Austria to reintroduce restrictions in the run-up to Christmas and causing debate over whether vaccines alone are enough to tame COVID-19.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/macron-says-france-will-not-need-lockdown-non-vaccinated-people-covid-spreads-2021-11-18/>

U.S. to buy 10 mln courses of Pfizer's COVID-19 pill for \$5.3 bln

Pfizer Inc said the U.S. government would pay \$5.29 billion for 10 million courses of its experimental COVID-19 antiviral drug, as the country rushes to secure promising oral treatments for the disease. The deal is for around twice as many treatment courses as Merck & Co Inc has agreed to supply the United States under its contract. The price for the Pfizer pill is nearly 25% lower at roughly \$530 per course, compared with about \$700 for Merck's.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/us-govt-buy-10-mln-courses-pfizers-covid-19-pill-529-bln-2021-11-18/>

EU assesses GSK-Vir COVID-19 antibody therapy for authorisation

European health regulator said on Thursday it was assessing a marketing authorisation application for GSK-Vir Biotechnology's, monoclonal antibody treatment for COVID-19 and could give its opinion within two months. The drug, sotrovimab, branded as Xevudy was already under a speedy review by the European Medicines Agency (EMA), and GSK's application makes the drug the fourth application currently under EU lenses for the treatment of COVID-19.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/eu-assessing-gsk-vir-monoclonal-antibody-covid-19-treatment-2021-11-18/>

Florida GOP limits vaccine mandates, flouting White House

Florida Republicans approved a sweeping bill Wednesday to hobble coronavirus vaccine mandates in businesses, rejecting claims that they were sacrificing public health to hand Gov. Ron DeSantis a win in his fight against White House virus rules. Lawmakers in the GOP-controlled statehouse expedited the measure, along with a package of virus bills, after hours of debate in which Republicans maintained they were protecting workers from onerous mandates by the federal government. "If you want to get a vaccine, you can get a vaccine. If you don't want to get a vaccine, you can choose not to get a vaccine," said Sen. Danny Burgess, a Republican. "That's the entire purpose of this bill, trusting Floridians and allowing us to make that choice for ourselves."

<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-health-florida-public-health-ron-desantis-126f725978a0bc6cf53b15f23a660f2d>

Maintaining Services

Spain expands booster shot programme as COVID-19 cases rise

Spain is now offering third doses of COVID-19 vaccines to people aged 60 and over, expanding the booster shot programme from the previous age threshold of 70 as infections rise, Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said on Wednesday. Spain has fully vaccinated 79% of its population, and started the campaign to administer booster shots last month, including for cancer patients, nursing home residents and other vulnerable groups.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/spain-expands-booster-shot-programme-covid-19-cases-rise-2021-11-17/>

Greece calls up private doctors as COVID-19 cases surge

Greece on Thursday ordered private sector doctors in five regions in the north of the country to assist its health system as it grapples with a surge in COVID-19 infections. The government had called on private sector doctors to help out earlier this month, as Greece's public hospitals and intensive care wards have been overwhelmed by rising infections in recent weeks. The requisition order, published in the official government gazette, is effective for a month.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/greece-calls-up-private-doctors-covid-19-cases-surge-2021-11-18/>

Dutch weigh options to slow rising COVID-19 infections among children

Virologists in the Netherlands have proposed extending holidays over Christmas to slow a surge in COVID-19 cases among children that has forced half of schools nationwide to send classes home, but the government said it wanted to keep them open. The National Institute for Health (RIVM) reported a record number of over 110,000 cases in the week to Nov. 16, an increase of 44% from the previous seven days. The strongest rise was among children aged 4-12.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/dutch-weigh-options-slow-rising-covid-19-infections-among-children-2021-11-18/>

Healthcare Innovations

New Reconstruction Points to Animal Origins for Covid-19

A scientist known for investigating viral origins has reconstructed the first known weeks of the Covid-19 pandemic, adding to a growing body of evidence that the virus behind it jumped from infected animals to humans rather than emerging from laboratory research. In a paper published Thursday in the academic journal Science, Michael Worobey concludes a wholesale seafood market in Wuhan, China, where live mammals were sold is very likely to be the site of the origin of the pandemic. The precise role of the Huanan market in the pandemic has been debated by scientists. Dr. Worobey, an evolutionary biologist at the University of Arizona who previously unearthed clues about the origins of the 1918 pandemic flu and HIV, showed that most of the known Covid-19 cases in December 2019 had a direct or indirect link to the Huanan market. These infected people worked at the market, visited it, had contact with someone who was there or lived nearby, he found by piecing together genetic data, reports and accounts of early patients.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/new-reconstruction-points-to-animal-origins-for-covid-19-11637262041>

AstraZeneca's antibody drug over 80% effective at preventing Covid, trial shows

The data showed that patients given a single injection of the antibody treatment were 83% less likely to develop symptomatic cases of the coronavirus than participants who were given a placebo. Around 2% of the world's population is thought to be at risk of not responding well to Covid-19 vaccines, according to AstraZeneca. In a separate trial, patients with mild-to-moderate Covid-19 who were given one dose of AZD7442 within three days of developing symptoms had their risk of developing severe disease reduced by 88%.

<https://www.cnn.com/2021/11/18/astrazeneca-antibody-drug-83percent-effective-at-preventing-covid-trial.html>

UK study suggests Delta subvariant less likely to cause symptoms

A subvariant of Delta that is growing in Britain is less likely to lead to symptomatic COVID-19 infection, a coronavirus prevalence survey found, adding that overall cases had dropped from a peak

in October. The Imperial College London REACT-1 study, released on Thursday, found that the subvariant, known as AY.4.2, had grown to be nearly 12% of samples sequenced, but only a third had "classic" COVID symptoms, compared with nearly a half of those with the currently dominant Delta lineage AY.4. Two-thirds of people with AY.4.2 had "any" symptom, compared with more than three-quarters with AY.4.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/uk-study-suggests-delta-subvariant-less-likely-cause-symptoms-2021-11-18/>

Mask-wearing cuts Covid incidence by 53%, says global study

Mask-wearing is the single most effective public health measure at tackling Covid, reducing incidence by 53%, the first global study of its kind shows. Vaccines are safe and effective and saving lives around the world. But most do not confer 100% protection, most countries have not vaccinated everyone, and it is not yet known if jabs will prevent future transmission of emerging coronavirus variants. Globally, Covid cases exceeded 250 million this month. The virus is still infecting 50 million people worldwide every 90 days due to the highly transmissible Delta variant, with thousands dying each day. Now a systematic review and meta analysis of non-pharmaceutical interventions has found for the first time that mask wearing, social distancing and handwashing are all effective measures at curbing cases - with mask wearing the most effective.

https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/17/wearing-masks-single-most-effective-way-to-tackle-covid-study-finds?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other