

Connecting Communities for COVID19 News

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Isolation Tips

Thailand to resume quarantine waiver for arrivals from February

Thailand will resume its 'Test & Go' quarantine waiver for vaccinated arrivals from Feb. 1, its coronavirus task force said, in response to slowing COVID-19 infections. The scheme was suspended a month ago after only seven weeks due to the rapid global spread of the Omicron variant and uncertainty about vaccine effectiveness against it. The policy requires visitors to test on arrival and again five days later, while agreeing to have their whereabouts tracked, spokesperson Taweessin Wisanuyothin told a briefing.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/thailand-resume-quarantine-waiver-vaccinated-arrivals-feb-2022-01-20/>

Hygiene Helpers

U.S. to require COVID vaccines for essential workers crossing borders

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is announcing Thursday it is requiring that non-U.S. essential workers such as truck drivers and nurses who are crossing land borders be fully vaccinated against COVID-19, effective Saturday. The Biden administration first announced in October that effective Nov. 8 it would again allow non-essential foreign visitors to travel from Canada and Mexico into the U.S. across land borders if they were vaccinated. The U.S. land borders with Canada and Mexico had been closed to non-essential travel for 20 months because of COVID-19 concerns.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-require-covid-vaccines-essential-workers-crossing-borders-2022-01-20/>

Austria set to make COVID shots compulsory after bill clears parliament

Austria's lower house of parliament passed a bill on Thursday making COVID-19 vaccinations compulsory for adults as of Feb. 1, bringing Austria closer to introducing the first such sweeping coronavirus vaccine mandate in the European Union. Faced with a stubbornly high number of vaccine holdouts and a surge in infections, the government said in November it was planning the mandate. Since then it has raised the age as of which the mandate will apply, to 18 from 14.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/austria-introduces-lottery-covid-vaccine-incentive-2022-01-20/>

US begins offering 1B free COVID tests, but many more needed

For the first time, people across the U.S. can log on to a government website and order free, at-home COVID-19 tests. But the White House push may do little to ease the omicron surge, and experts say Washington will have to do a lot more to fix the country's long-troubled testing system. The website, COVIDTests.gov, allows people to order four at-home tests per household, regardless of citizenship status, and have them delivered by mail. But the tests won't arrive for seven to 12 days, after omicron cases are expected to peak in many parts of the country. The White House also announced Wednesday that it will begin making 400 million N95 masks available for free at pharmacies and community health centers.

<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-science-business-health-bda6ac442be3d753407cfa0d52cd81d3>

Taiwan to mandate COVID vaccination proof for entertainment venues

Taiwan will mandate the use of passes that provide proof of COVID-19 vaccination for entry into entertainment venues, the government said on Thursday, as it seeks to reduce infection risks while tackling a small rise in domestic Omicron cases. The Central Epidemic Command Centre said that

from Friday entry into venues including bars and night clubs would require proof of full vaccination, either by showing a physical vaccine card or a new digital card.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/taiwan-mandate-covid-vaccination-proof-entertainment-venues-2022-01-20/>

Wearing a mask on planes DOES cut risk of COVID spreading, study finds

Study used simulation to test how far virus-laden droplets could travel and infect. They then compared it to real world flights where passengers had caught Covid. Their model was 80 per cent right in predicting who did and didn't get the virus. In one flight, the team found masks would have cut Covid infections from 12 to 1.

https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10419559/Wearing-masks-planes-DOES-cut-risk-Covid-spreading-study-confirms.html?ito=social-twitter_mailonline

Community Activities

Czech anti-coronavirus vaccine folk singer dies after deliberately getting infected with Covid-19, son says

A Czech folk singer who was opposed to having a coronavirus vaccine has died after deliberately contracting the virus, according to her son. Hana Horká, of the folk band Asonance, died Sunday at the age of 57 after intentionally exposing herself to the virus at home while her son and husband were sick, according to CNN Prima News. Horká wanted to infect herself so she could be "done with Covid," her son, Jan Rek, said.

<https://www.cnn.com/2022/01/20/europe/czech-singer-death-deliberate-covid-infection-intl/index.html>

Novak Djokovic's Australian Visa Challenge Failed Due to Antivaccine Stance

Novak Djokovic's last-ditch effort to defend his Australian Open title by having his visa reinstated failed because a court accepted that people, especially youngsters, could emulate the tennis icon's opposition to being vaccinated. On Thursday, a panel of three judges at Australia's federal court said they upheld a decision by immigration minister Alex Hawke to cancel the visa of the men's tournament's top seed partly because Djokovic's presence in Australia had already created unrest, including a Jan. 11 protest involving the player's supporters. Djokovic was deported from Australia on Sunday after the court decided earlier in the day that Hawke acted lawfully when he canceled Djokovic's visa two days earlier, citing public interest.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/novak-djokovics-australian-visa-challenge-failed-due-to-antivaccine-stance-11642663221>

Austria Starts Lottery to Boost Support for Obligatory Vaccine

Austrian lawmakers were set to pass the European Union's first law making coronavirus vaccinations mandatory as other member states ease restrictions in the latest wave of the pandemic. The parliament's lower house was set to approve the policy on Thursday with additional support from most deputies in two opposition groups. Only the far-right Freedom Party rejects the plan.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-20/austria-adds-incentives-to-first-vaccine-mandate-rule-in-eu>

Cheap version of Merck COVID pill to be made for poorer nations

Nearly 30 generic drugmakers in Asia, Africa and the Middle East will make cheap versions of Merck & Co's COVID-19 pill, under a landmark U.N.-backed deal to give poorer nations wider access to a drug seen as a weapon in fighting the pandemic. Merck's early greenlight to production of its antiviral pill molnupiravir by other companies during the pandemic is a rare example in the pharmaceutical sector, which usually protects its patented treatments for longer periods.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/merck-covid-pill-molnupiravir-be-produced-by-27-drug-makers-2022-01-20/>

Florida suspends health official who urged staff to get vaccinated

A top Florida public health official has been put on administrative leave as officials investigate whether he violated a state ban by emailing employees about their low vaccination rate against COVID-19 and urging them to get shots. Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, a Republican widely believed to be planning a run for the U.S. presidency, in November signed a law banning schools, businesses and government entities from requiring vaccination against COVID-19, drawing condemnation from health experts and Democratic leaders.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/florida-suspends-health-official-who-urged-staff-get-vaccinated-2022-01-19/>

The pandemic is birthing billionaires and killing the poor

We enter 2022 witnessing the biggest increase in billionaire wealth since records began. A billionaire was created every 26 hours during this pandemic. The wealth of the world's 10 richest men alone has doubled, rising at a rate of \$15,000 per second. But COVID-19 has left 99 percent of humanity worse off. Our malaise is inequality. Inequality of income is now a stronger indicator of whether you will die from COVID-19 than age. In 2021, millions of people died in poorer countries with scant access to vaccines as pharmaceutical monopolies, protected by rich countries, throttled their supply. We minted new vaccine billionaires on the backs of denying billions of people access to vaccines.

[aljazeera.com/opinions/2022/1/19/the-pandemic-is-birthing-billionaires-and-killing-the-poor](https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2022/1/19/the-pandemic-is-birthing-billionaires-and-killing-the-poor)

Working Remotely

Remote Working Surges as Criteria for More Jobseekers in U.K.

More jobseekers in Britain are looking to work remotely, a survey showed, indicating that the shift away from office work may outlast the pandemic. Indeed, a job search website, said 10% of its advertisements now offer remote work as an option and about 2.4% of all searches by potential candidates, up 10-fold from 2019. Britain had one of the biggest increases in remote working during the pandemic and in the share of vacancies offering it as an option, Indeed said, citing its own research and work by the OECD. Those posts were disproportionately concentrated in higher-paying, non-client facing roles.

<https://www.bloombergquint.com/onweb/remote-working-surges-as-criteria-for-more-jobseekers-in-u-k>

More of us than ever want jobs that we can do remotely, says study

Even as we come out of the pandemic, the trend for remote work is likely to continue. New research from Indeed suggests that interest in roles that can be done remotely is higher than ever in the UK, showing more of us are prioritising increased flexibility. The proportion of job searches on Indeed by candidates looking for remote work has risen tenfold since before the pandemic, with the UK seeing one of the biggest rise in vacancies offering remote work out of all countries. One in ten job adverts now offer remote working options – nearly four times more than did so pre-Covid.

<https://metro.co.uk/2022/01/20/more-of-us-than-ever-want-jobs-that-we-can-do-remotely-says-study-15951020/>

How Gen Z Feels about Remote Work Will Surprise You

For most Americans, working remotely over the last three years has been a huge adjustment, but what about the recent graduates who have never stepped foot in an office? Gen Z, which accounts for people born between 1997 and 2012, includes those who graduated from college in 2019, 2020, or 2021. Many of them have only known remote work. One in five or 20% of Gen Z employees have never worked in person. The big question is what effect this will have on their ability to develop as employees? Is it putting them behind in finding mentors, learning new skills, or networking with other professionals? What does this mean for their careers and the future of work? What does Gen Z think about all this?

<https://www.hrexchangegenetwork.com/employee-engagement/articles/how-gen-z-feels-about-remote-work-will-surprise-you>

Could The New Hybrid Workplace Turn Some Women Into Second-Class Employees?

Many of the workplace trends of 2020 and 2021 will continue into 2022. Not only does the Omicron variant remind us that Covid-19 is not going away anytime soon, but our ideas about work are changing and, in some cases, permanently. One trend likely to remain for some time is the emergence of the hybrid workplace—with employees being given the optionality to work in the office and remotely. The freedom to be able to continue working remotely is being billed as a boon for women, allowing them to craft their own solutions to the increasingly difficult challenge of work-life balance. But what if choosing to work remotely brings a degree of freedom but also comes at a cost? What if women (and others opting for remote work) sacrifice career opportunities in the process?

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/nazbeheshti/2022/01/20/could-the-new-hybrid-workplace-turn-some-women-into-second-class-employees/>

Virtual Classrooms

Flint schools extends virtual learning period indefinitely

Flint students will remain at home indefinitely starting next week, as the school district today announced that it will not be returning to the classroom on Jan. 24. The decision to continue virtual learning comes from Superintendent Kevelin Jones, who made the call to go virtual to begin the new year after winter break. “While this decision was not made easily, it is necessary for the greater health of our community,” Jones wrote in a statement to parents. “To lower the transmission number, and to keep it low, we must actively continue distance learning until further notice,” Jones said.

<https://www.mlive.com/news/flint/2022/01/flint-schools-extends-virtual-learning-period-indefinitely.html>

How to fund 3 must-have classroom tech tools

Classroom technology is essential, and nothing made that more obvious than the COVID-19 pandemic that forced learning to go virtual and hybrid. Technology upgrades help make students feel included and achieve their full potential. But funding for classroom tech tools is always a challenge. Funding challenges aren’t impossible to solve, however. Join a panel of experts who, during this eSchool News webinar, will explore the most relevant technologies to help you upgrade your district’s classrooms and enhance learning for all students.

<https://www.eschoolnews.com/2022/01/20/how-to-fund-3-must-have-classroom-tech-tools/>

Public Policies

Novavax becomes Australia’s 5th approved COVID-19 vaccine

Novavax’s COVID-19 vaccine on Thursday became the fifth coronavirus vaccine approved for use in Australia. The country has ordered 51 million doses of the U.S.-manufactured vaccine, supplied under the brand Nuvaxovid, for its population of 26 million. Pfizer, AstraZeneca and Moderna vaccines are already in use in Australia. Johnson and Johnson’s Janssen vaccine is also approved but the government has not bought any. The Novavax vaccine will be available to unvaccinated Australians aged 18 years and older but will not be used as a booster for the 95% of the population aged 16 and older who have already received a vaccine. “There are some individuals, notwithstanding a massive take up of vaccination in this country, who have been waiting for Novavax, and it’s great that it’s finally been approved,” said chief regulator John Skerritt, head of the Therapeutic Goods Administration.

<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-health-australia-coronavirus-vaccine-8b13860c4c6422182349fb1381323e31>

Europe considers new COVID-19 strategy: accepting the virus

With one of Europe’s highest vaccination rates and its most pandemic-battered economies, the Spanish government is laying the groundwork to treat the next infection surge not as an emergency but an illness that is here to stay. Similar steps are under consideration in neighboring Portugal and in Britain. The idea is to move from crisis mode to control mode, approaching the virus in much the

same way countries deal with flu or measles. That means accepting that infections will occur and providing extra care for at-risk people and patients with complications.

<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-boris-johnson-health-europe-spain-1ab95ea43fa30bcb36f068c9a8664d12>

Drugmakers Sign Pacts to Widen Access to Merck's Covid Pill

More than two dozen generic-drug manufacturers have agreed to produce low-cost versions of Merck & Co.'s Covid-19 pill, a key step in bringing virus-fighting tools to lower-income countries that have struggled to get vaccines. Companies in Bangladesh, China, India, Kenya, South Africa, Vietnam and other countries signed pacts to supply more than 100 low- and middle-income nations, the United Nations-backed Medicines Patent Pool said Thursday.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-20/drugmakers-sign-pacts-to-widen-access-to-merck-s-covid-pill>

Indonesia to Propose New Global Health Agency at G20 Summit

Indonesia will propose the creation of a new global health agency when leaders meet at the Group of 20 Summit. The agency would set up standard operating procedures for international travel and health protocols, as well as procure vaccines and ensure access and investment in medical equipment and medicines for developing countries, President Joko Widodo said in a statement at the World Economic Forum event

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-20/indonesia-to-propose-new-global-health-agency-at-g20-summit>

New Zealand Won't Resort to Lockdowns When Omicron Arrives

New Zealand will tighten Covid-19 restrictions when the omicron variant hits but won't resort to lockdowns, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said. When omicron starts to spread in the community, the country will move to "red" from "orange" in its Covid protection framework, which will see gathering limits of 100 imposed on events, social distancing in hospitality venues and greater use of face masks, Ardern told reporters. However, "we won't use lockdowns," she said.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-20/new-zealand-won-t-resort-to-lockdowns-when-omicron-arrives>

Vaccine group Gavi says additional \$5.2 bln needed to ensure supply

The chairman of the Gavi vaccine alliance, Jose Manuel Barroso, said that an additional \$5.2 billion is needed to continue to deliver vaccines at scale. Speaking at a news briefing, Barroso said it was critical to continue to keep up the pace of vaccine supply through the COVAX global vaccine-sharing programme, as more than 3 billion people in the world have yet to receive their first dose. Gavi Chief Executive Seth Berkley said there was a need to raise the additional funds in the next three months to establish a pandemic pool of a minimum 600 million additional doses, strengthen countries' delivery systems, and finance ancillary costs for syringes and transport.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/vaccine-group-gavi-says-additional-52-bln-needed-ensure-supply-2022-01-19/>

Western Australia state to stay shut as Omicron stalks the east

Australia will remain a divided nation with the vast mining state of Western Australia cancelling plans to reopen its borders on Feb. 5 citing health risks from a surge in the Omicron COVID-19 variant in eastern states. Australia's most populous state New South Wales (NSW) on Friday reported its deadliest day of the pandemic. NSW reported 46 deaths of patients with COVID-19 including one infant, while Victoria state saw 20 lives lost. Yet, a drop in hospitalisations in both states did offer hope the latest outbreak might have peaked.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/western-australia-state-stay-shut-omicron-stalks-east-2022-01-20/>

Maintaining Services

Hong Kong to shut secondary schools from Monday over COVID fears

Hong Kong will suspend face-to-face teaching in secondary schools from Monday until after the approaching Lunar New Year, authorities said, because of a rising number of coronavirus infections in several schools in the Chinese-ruled territory. The government halted classes in primary schools and kindergartens early this month, and imposed curbs, such as a ban on restaurant dining after 6 p.m. and the closure of venues such as gyms, cinemas and beauty salons.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/hong-kong-shuts-secondary-schools-over-covid-fears-2022-01-20/>

France to unveil timetable for easing COVID restrictions

France will unveil a timetable for easing COVID-19 restrictions later on Thursday, government spokesman Gabriel Attal said, though he cautioned the wave of Omicron infections tearing through the country had not reached its peak. Attal said France's new vaccine pass rules would help allow a softening of rules even as the incidence rate of infections continues to increase.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/france-unveil-timetable-easing-covid-restrictions-2022-01-20/>

Ontario schools reopening amid calls for more COVID measures

Schoolchildren in Canada's most populous province are going back to their classrooms this week, after many parents said they were left scrambling to respond to the Ontario government's decision earlier this month to delay in-person learning. Ontario Premier Doug Ford announced on January 3 that the province would push back the planned return to in-person classes from January 5 to January 17 due to rising COVID-19 infections and hospitalisations linked to the Omicron variant.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2022/1/19/ontario-schools-reopening-amid-calls-more-covid-measures>

A Million Vaccine Shots Tossed in Indonesia on Short Expiry Date

More than a million Covid-19 vaccine shots expired in Indonesia before they could be given out, as most of them were donated with a short shelf life. Of the 1.1 million doses that were thrown out, about 98% were donated just one to three months away from expiry, Health Minister Budi Gunadi Sadikin said in parliament.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-20/a-million-vaccine-shots-tossed-in-indonesia-on-short-expiry-date>

New Mexico asks National Guard to teach as COVID shuts schools

New Mexico asked National Guard members and state employees to volunteer as substitute teachers to keep schools and daycare centers open during a surge in COVID-19 infections. State employees and Guard members who take up the call to teach will get their usual pay and be considered on administrative leave or active duty, respectively, according to Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/new-mexico-asks-national-guard-teach-covid-shuts-schools-2022-01-20/>

Healthcare Innovations

COVID-19: New 'game-changing' X-ray technology developed which can detect coronavirus in minutes

Experts in Scotland have developed groundbreaking Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology which is capable of accurately diagnosing COVID-19 in just a few minutes, much quicker than a PCR test. The research, by the University of the West of Scotland (UWS), uses X-ray technology, comparing scans to a database of around 3,000 images, belonging to patients with COVID-19, healthy individuals and people with viral pneumonia. It then uses an AI process, an algorithm typically used to analyse visual imagery, to make a diagnosis.

<https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-new-game-changing-x-ray-technology-developed-which-can-detect-coronavirus-in-minutes-12520697>

Swiss researchers launch trial for COVID "patch" vaccine

Swiss medical researchers said on Wednesday they have launched an early-stage study to test a next-generation COVID-19 vaccine candidate which would be administered via an arm patch, the latest to look at alternative methods of giving injections. Unlike conventional vaccines that stimulate antibody production, the new PepGNP-Covid19 vaccine candidate focuses on T-cells, which are responsible for cellular immunity, to eliminate cells infected by the virus and prevent it from replicating.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/swiss-researchers-launch-trial-covid-patch-vaccine-2022-01-19/>

Valneva says early studies show COVID-19 vaccine effective against Omicron

French biotech firm Valneva said that preliminary studies showed that three doses of its inactivated COVID-19 vaccine candidate neutralised the Omicron variant of the disease. All of the serum samples tested presented neutralizing antibodies against the ancestral virus and Delta variant, it said, while 87% of samples did so against the Omicron variant. "We are extremely pleased with these results," said Chief Medical Officer Juan Carlos Jaramillo in a statement, noting that these added to an earlier Phase III trial that showed improved immune response with two doses of the VLA2001 candidate.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/valneva-says-early-studies-show-covid-19-vaccine-effective-against-omicron-2022-01-19/>

Prior Covid-19 Infection Offered Better Protection Than Vaccination During Delta Wave

Surviving a previous infection provided better protection than vaccination against Covid-19 during the Delta wave, federal health authorities said, citing research showing that both the shots and recovery from the virus provided significant defense. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said Wednesday that data from 1.1 million Covid-19 cases in California and New York last year showed people who were unvaccinated and hadn't previously contracted Covid-19 faced a far greater risk than both people who had gotten the shots and people who had been infected. The data on testing, cases and immunization was collected between May and November, as the Delta variant emerged and became dominant in the U.S., before the more-infectious Omicron variant began to spread widely. The hospitalization data came from more than 50,000 people in just California.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/prior-covid-19-infection-offered-better-protection-than-vaccination-during-delta-wave-11642619009>