

# Connecting Communities for COVID19 News

## 18th Feb 2022

---

### Isolation Tips

---

#### **Coronavirus restrictions ease across Europe despite high case rates**

France's nightclubs reopen for the first time in three months on Wednesday and the Netherlands returns to "almost normal" from next Friday, as European countries continue to lift their coronavirus curbs despite relatively high infection numbers. Groups may also play to standing audiences in French concert venues, customers in bars and cafes will be allowed to eat and drink while standing at the counter and cinemagoers and train passengers can snack during their film or journey. "The skies seem finally to be clearing," said the French government's official spokesperson, Gabriel Attal, adding that restrictions "can be lifted according to schedule" but urging people to continue to exercise caution and restraint.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/16/coronavirus-restrictions-ease-across-europe-despite-high-case-rates>

#### **Switzerland lifts almost all COVID-19 restrictions**

The Swiss government will lift nearly all pandemic restrictions from midnight Thursday, amid confidence that COVID-19 infection rates had been successfully uncoupled from hospitalizations. People in Switzerland will no longer have to show COVID certificates in restaurants, bars or other venues like theaters and concert halls. But self-isolation for those infected with COVID-19 will remain in force until the end of March, as will the requirement to wear masks while visiting health care facilities and on public transport.

<https://www.politico.eu/article/switzerland-lifts-almost-all-covid-19-restrictions/>

#### **Portugal drops most COVID-19 rules as Omicron ebbs**

As an Omicron-fuelled wave of infections ebbs, Portugal said on Thursday it would drop most of its remaining coronavirus rules, including the requirement to show the COVID-19 digital pass to stay at hotels or a negative test to enter nightclubs. "This is a very important moment," Cabinet Minister Mariana Vieira da Silva told a news conference. "This is another a step towards a return to normal life." The new measures will come into force in the next few days, Vieira da Silva said, as they need still the final stamp of approval from the president.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/portugal-drops-most-covid-19-rules-omicron-ebbs-2022-02-17/>

#### **Germany Moves to Unwind Covid Curbs as Pandemic Risks Subside**

Germany will reopen nightclubs and ease restrictions on stores and restaurants as part of a three-step plan to unwind pandemic-related restrictions, joining the wave of countries scaling back emergency measures. Europe's largest economy aims to lift most curbs by March 20, taking a more cautious approach than many of its neighbors. The move was agreed on Wednesday after talks with Chancellor Olaf Scholz and state leaders and comes just days after Germany posted record infection levels. Germany's outbreak started to recede in recent days and the improving outlook prompted calls from across the political spectrum to follow countries like the U.K., Ireland and Denmark in easing restrictions.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-02-16/germany-moves-to-unwind-covid-curbs-as-pandemic-risks-subside>

#### **Japan set to announce easing of strict border measures**

Article reports that Japan will ease border controls imposed to counter the pandemic, Prime Minister

Fumio Kishida said on Thursday, softening measures that have been among the strictest imposed by wealthy nations and have been slammed by business and educators. About 150,000 foreign students have been kept out of Japan, along with workers desperately needed by an ageing nation with a shrinking population, prompting warnings of labour shortages and damage to its international reputation

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/japan-set-announce-easing-strict-border-measures-2022-02-17/>

## **Hygiene Helpers**

---

### **China's 'Zero-Covid' Policy Holds Lessons for Other Nations**

Ever since China adopted its policy of stamping out every Covid-19 infection, outsiders have wondered whether it could last. With each new, more infectious variant, "zero Covid" has required more vigilant and frequent crackdowns on daily activity. And yet it has lasted. And seen from inside China, the results are remarkable. Foreigners in Beijing for the Olympics may be confined to a dystopian bubble in constant fear of being quarantined. But outside the bubble, life in the city looks close to normal with stores, museums and offices operating and subway and road traffic in line with this time of year in 2019. Americans only now are moving on from the coronavirus. Most Chinese did so back in 2020.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/chinas-zero-covid-policy-holds-lessons-for-other-nations-11645033130>

### **Rapid COVID-19 home tests surge in India, experts flag risks**

On New Year's Eve, the Indian government wrote to states encouraging them to promote the use of COVID-19 home tests, especially for people who are experiencing symptoms, in a bid to avoid straining local health systems. During last year's delta-driven surge, an explosion in cases overwhelmed hospitals and testing labs. But last month, as new infections fueled by the omicron variant skyrocketed, so did the number of people testing themselves at home across India. In the first 20 days of January, around 200,000 people shared their test results with India's health agency – a 66-fold increase compared to all of 2021. The strategy apparently worked. Those testing positive with speedy, though less accurate tests were told to self-isolate at home, allowing hospital beds to remain available for the most vulnerable.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/india-new-delhi-covid-people-pcr-test-b2017010.html>

## **Community Activities**

---

### **Hundreds of Aussie mining workers set to lose jobs over vaccine mandate**

Hundreds of BHP workers across Australia are being forced to quit or lose their jobs after the mining giant won a legal challenge to enforce its COVID-19 vaccine mandate. The company expects up to 700 employees, or 3 per cent of its staff, will choose not to be vaccinated, effectively leaving the business, The Australian reports. The rule came into place from January 31 after unions lost a legal challenge fighting the mandate. Under BHP workplace rules, anyone who does not show proof of vaccination will not be permitted on sites and their positions are currently under review. Unvaccinated contractors will also be unable to work with BHP. The mining giant has joined other major Australian companies, such as Bunnings, Qantas and Telstra to implement the measures.

<https://www.9news.com.au/national/coronavirus-update-hundreds-of-bhp-workers-to-lose-jobs-over-vaccine-mandate/5e1884b0-215b-418a-82c7-7aae69720ab4>

### **US parents of under-fives clamor for off-label use over Covid vaccine delays**

When providers sign an agreement to provide Covid-19 vaccine shots, they also agree not to give the vaccine off-label, or use it for purposes other than what it was approved to do. In this case, the Moderna vaccine is approved for adults aged 18 and up, and the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine is approved for those aged 16 and up. But the vaccines are still under emergency use authorizations for younger patients. Providers who give off-label vaccinations in the US may not be protected by legislation that keeps them from being held liable in the case of a rare adverse event.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/17/under-five-covid-vaccine-parents-off-label-use>

### **The last of Canada's Covid-19 demonstrations may end soon as Ottawa police warn of consequences of staying**

A nearly three-week protest in Ottawa over mandated Covid-19 precautions in Canada may be approaching its end as police tell demonstrators to either leave immediately or face legal consequences. "You must leave the area now," the Ottawa Police Service said in a statement to protesters Wednesday. "Anyone blocking streets or assisting others in the blocking (of) streets, are committing a criminal offence and you may be arrested." Many demonstrators have vowed to hold out for as long as necessary, and the federal government has moved to enact emergency powers to freeze financial support of the protests despite opposition in Parliament. Beginning with a group of truckers arriving in Ottawa in late January objecting to a vaccine mandate, the protest has morphed into a general airing of grievances against all Covid-19 safety protocols.

<https://www.cnn.com/2022/02/17/americas/canada-trucker-protests-covid-thursday/index.html>

### **Fake COVID-19 vaccination certificates used by Australians to beat mandates and enter venues**

Unvaccinated Australians are using fake certificates to gain entry to venues the government banned them from at the beginning of this month. The services were first identified late last year, but they are gaining prominence in online forums among people opposed to vaccine mandates in Australia. The ABC has seen one such website, hosted in Russia, that generates highly convincing fakes. It includes an animation that mimics the green tick and a moving Australian coat of arms, and a clock supposedly counting down the time from login.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-02-17/fake-covid-19-vaccination-certificates-used-to-beat-jab-mandates/100839824>

### **How to move: exercising after having Covid-19**

The Omicron variant has caused an avalanche of Covid-19 cases in Australia in the past months. While most people who catch the disease experience mild symptoms, many report feeling short of breath and sluggish for weeks afterward. "It's normal to feel tired after a viral infection, and everyone's recovery is different," says Janet Bondarenko, a senior respiratory physiotherapist at Alfred hospital in Melbourne. "But the severity of your Covid illness doesn't necessarily predict whether you will have those lingering symptoms." The coronavirus can damage various organs, causing ongoing fatigue, says Dr Robert Newton, professor of exercise medicine at Edith Cowan University. "The cardiorespiratory system can't deliver oxygen to the working muscles efficiently. So what was a light to moderate intensity activity previously feels quite vigorous now."

<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2022/feb/17/how-to-move-exercising-after-having-covid-19>

### **Covid Survivors Deal With Mental-Health Issues Months After Infection**

Early Covid-19 survivors were at higher risk of anxiety, depression and a raft of other mental health problems up to a year after their infections, according to a large U.S. study that widens the scope of the pandemic's economic and societal impact. Even patients who were never sick enough to be hospitalized for Covid were still 68% more likely than their non-infected counterparts to be diagnosed with a sleep disorder, 69% more likely to have an anxiety disorder, and 77% more likely to have a depressive disorder. The relative risk of developing the conditions was significantly higher still in patients hospitalized for Covid, and translates into dozens of additional mental health conditions for every 1,000 coronavirus cases.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-02-16/mental-health-scars-stay-with-survivors-long-after-covid-battle>

### **Working Remotely**

---

**Transiting into a fully remote role? Here's what you might need to start**

The readiness to switch up work format and ensure that business processes continue despite limitations is now more important than ever. It thus comes as no surprise that many companies are moving towards a hybrid working arrangement, where employees can work either from home or in the office when required. This gives flexibility for employees to develop a workspace best suited for them, opening up a world of opportunities where one can choose to work beside a pool, at the beach, inside a cafe, overseas or elsewhere.

<https://uk.news.yahoo.com/transiting-into-fully-remote-role-need-start-064028509.html>

### **The Hybrid Work Model Is on the Rise — Here's How to Find Work From Home Jobs**

As many employers who went fully remote start to dip their toes into the water of attempting to bring their entire workforce back to the office, many are opting for the kind of flexibility a hybrid model gives in the short-term — part-time return, part-time work from home. But late last year, a report showed that nearly two-thirds of employees working remotely in the U.S. would prefer their positions stay work-from-home. The hybrid model might not be here forever, as more executives and companies get antsy about bringing everyone back for in-person work. So if you want to continue working from home, you might just have to search for (and secure) a job that was designed to be done remotely.

<https://www.rollingstone.com/product-recommendations/lifestyle/how-to-make-money-from-home-1300775/>

## **Virtual Classrooms**

---

### **Ontario school boards required to offer remote learning option for 2022-2023**

Ontario will require school boards to offer virtual learning as an option for one more school year. Government officials say they are making investments to make schools safe for in-person learning, but given the evolving nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, they want to offer parents one more year of choice. The province is announcing its funding amounts for the next school year today, including \$26.1 billion to school boards amounting to \$13,059 per student, an increase from the previous year.

<https://globalnews.ca/news/8627813/ontario-remote-learning-schools-2022-2023-standardized-tests/>

## **Public Policies**

---

### **Moderna's Covid-19 vaccine gets authorisation in Australia for children**

Moderna has reported that its Covid-19 vaccine, Spikevax (mRNA-1273), obtained provisional registration from the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) in Australia for active immunisation to prevent Covid-19 in children of the age six to 11 years. The authorised dosage of the messenger ribonucleic acid (mRNA) vaccine is a 50µg dose to be administered as a two-dose regimen. Spikevax was analysed in the ongoing, observer-blind, randomised, placebo-controlled, expansion Phase II KidCOVE clinical trial.

<https://www.pharmaceutical-technology.com/news/moderna-vaccine-australia-children/>

### **South Africa's health regulator allows use of Merck COVID treatment pill**

South Africa's government said it was not planning to buy Merck's COVID-19 treatment pill molnupiravir on Thursday for cost reasons, despite the drug gaining approval from the country's health regulator. Molnupiravir and a rival antiviral pill from Pfizer called Paxlovid have demonstrated efficacy in trials of adults with COVID-19 who are at high risk of serious illness and are now both in use. Countries around the world are negotiating prices with Merck and Pfizer. The U.S. government is paying \$700 for each course of molnupiravir, but generic drugmakers will make cheap versions in a deal aimed at giving access to poorer nations

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/south-africas-health-regulator-approves-merck-covid-treatment-pill-2022-02-17/>

## **Maintaining Services**

---

## **Covid-19 news: 5-to-11-year-olds in England to get vaccines from April**

Children aged between five and 11 in England will be able to get a covid jab. All five to 11-year-olds in England will be offered a low-dose Pfizer/BioNTech coronavirus vaccine. It follows months of deliberations by the Joint Committee on Vaccines and Immunisation (JCVI). The JCVI reportedly decided that vaccinating children in this age group is beneficial, but of less benefit than for older age groups. This is partly because children are less likely to become severely ill from covid-19 and also because many children have already caught the virus. However, vaccinating children soon should prevent a certain number from developing severe illness in future waves of infection. The JCVI estimates that vaccinating one million children will prevent 98 hospitalisations if the next covid wave is severe, and about 17 hospitalisations if the next wave is relatively mild like omicron.

<https://www.newscientist.com/article/2237475-covid-19-news-5-to-11-year-olds-in-england-to-get-vaccines-from-april/>

## **'Game-Changer' Pfizer Pill Is Easier to Find as Omicron Fades Away**

As the omicron wave peaked in the U.S. last month, the first-line treatment for high-risk patients with early Covid dangled out of reach for most. Only a trickle of the new Paxlovid pill from Pfizer Inc. was reaching hospitals and pharmacies. Now, as cases plummet nationwide and the company continues to deliver hundreds of thousands of doses ordered by the federal government to pharmacies, Paxlovid is starting to look downright plentiful. Doctors and health officials in New York, Boston, Colorado and other areas where the omicron wave has receded report that supply seems to be meeting the softening demand. "We've seen such a rapid decline in Covid cases that it's not as needed anymore," said Asif Merchant, who chairs the Massachusetts Medical Society's committee on geriatrics. "Having the availability three or four weeks ago would have made a tremendous amount of difference."

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-02-16/-game-changer-pfizer-pill-easier-to-get-as-omicron-fades-away>

## **Healthcare Innovations**

---

### **Hybrid immunity offers increased protection that is longer-lasting against Covid-19 reinfection, studies show**

Pfizer/BioNTech's Covid-19 mRNA vaccine provides an added layer of protection against reinfection for people who have been previously infected with Covid-19, as well as increased immune durability over time, according to two studies published Wednesday in the New England Journal of Medicine. The studies offer more insight into the concept of hybrid immunity: when previously infected people, who have "natural immunity," then get vaccine-acquired immunity. One of the studies, conducted out of Israel, found that amongst people who had recovered from Covid-19 infections, reinfections were over four times more common in those who did not receive vaccines than in those who did after the primary infection.

<https://www.cnn.com/2022/02/16/health/hybrid-immunity-studies/index.html>

### **Omicron Sub-Variant BA.2 No More Severe Than First Strain: South African Study**

The rapidly spreading omicron BA.2 subvariant doesn't cause significantly more severe disease than the original version, according to a South African study that appears to allay fears it causes harsher illness. Patients infected with the new subvariant suffered from similar rates of severe disease and hospitalization as those with the original omicron strain, according to researchers from the country's National Institute for Communicable Diseases that analyzed data from a large hospital group and the government laboratory service, looking at almost 100,000 cases. The emergence of BA.2 has caused widespread concern as it appears to be even more transmissible than the original omicron strain that was first identified in South Africa and has since spread around the world, leading to waves of infections in the U.S., Europe and elsewhere. The study indicates that, like the original version, BA.2 is relatively mild in comparison with earlier dominant strains, such as delta.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-02-16/study-shows-omicron-sub-variant-no-more-severe-than-first-strain>

