

Connecting Communities for COVID19 News

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Isolation Tips

New York City rolls back its COVID restrictions

Fact check: Phony images masquerading as CNN coverage go viral amid war... Ukrainian woman weds Chicago fiancé ahead of return home New York City has become the latest and largest city in the U.S. to announce it's dropping most of its COVID-19 restrictions as the Omicron surge continues to wind down. Starting Monday, businesses will no longer be required to ask for vaccination cards, and masks will no longer be mandated in public schools for children ages 5 and older. "We have to get our economy back on track," Mayor Eric Adams said on Friday. The city, which was once considered the epicenter of the pandemic, now has a positivity rate of only 1.6% over a 7-day average. In neighboring New Jersey, Governor Phil Murphy announced he is lifting the statewide public health emergency — which includes a mask mandate for schools and day care centers.

<https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/us/new-york-city-rolls-back-its-covid-restrictions/ar-AAUD4fC>

Belgium to lift most coronavirus measures Monday

Belgium will lift most coronavirus restrictions at the start of next week, shifting its pandemic barometer to Code Yellow, Prime Minister Alexander De Croo announced Friday. Wearing masks will still be recommended but will only remain mandatory for anyone from the age of 12 in health care establishments and in public transport. Masks will no longer be mandatory in schools. Belgium's Covid Safe Ticket — providing proof of vaccination, recovery, or of a negative test — will no longer be required in the hospitality sector or to attend events. Starting March 11, Belgium's travel rules will also change. Notably, travelers coming to Belgium will only be required to complete a Passenger Locator Form if they are arriving from a country not on the so-called white list of countries deemed safe.

<https://www.politico.eu/article/belgium-lift-most-coronavirus-measures/>

Hygiene Helpers

Why are vaccination rates still low in some countries?

Why are COVID-19 vaccination rates still low in some countries? Limited supplies remain a problem, but experts say other challenges now include unpredictable deliveries, weak health care systems and vaccine hesitancy. Most countries with low vaccination rates are in Africa. As of late February, 13 countries in Africa have fully vaccinated less than 5% of their populations, according to Phionah Atuhebwe, an officer for the World Health Organization's regional office for Africa. Other countries with extremely low vaccination rates include Yemen, Syria, Haiti and Papua New Guinea. For most of last year, developing nations were plagued by a lack of supplies. Rich countries were hoarding doses and many countries didn't have the facilities to make their own vaccines. COVAX — an initiative to distribute vaccines equally around the world — faltered in delivering shots.

<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-health-middle-east-africa-lifestyle-1f2c92d6a306819c363c87661dc7818d>

Community Activities

Trucks, RVs and cars flock to Washington area to protest COVID restrictions

More than a thousand large trucks, recreational vehicles and cars are gathering on the outskirts of Washington as part of a protest against COVID-19 restrictions that threatens to roll on the U.S. capital in the coming days. The so-called "People's Convoy," which originated in California and has

drawn participants from around the country, is calling for an end to all pandemic-related restrictions. It was inspired by demonstrations last month that paralyzed Ottawa, Canada's capital city
<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/trucks-rvs-cars-flock-washington-area-protest-covid-restrictions-2022-03-05/>

COVID and the Russian invasion: Ukraine's dual crisis

Most of us could be forgiven for thinking there were glimmers of light at the end of a very long pandemic tunnel. We are not out of the pandemic yet, but with vaccines, advances in therapeutics and a wealth of knowledge on how the COVID-19 virus works and spreads, things have been improving. However, Russia's recent invasion of Ukraine has opened up a dark chapter, one which will likely drive COVID infections up – not just in Ukraine but in surrounding countries. And history tells us warzones can provide the ideal conditions for infectious diseases to spread. Distracted government institutions, faltering health services, and the congregation of large numbers of vulnerable people, alongside environmental degradation, can create the perfect storm of conditions for an outbreak of a catastrophic infectious disease.

<https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/covid-and-the-russian-invasion-ukraine-e2-80-99s-dual-crisis/ar-AAUv7s1>

Half of Insured Americans Owe Medical Debt, Boosted by Covid

More than half of Americans have medical debt -- whether they have health insurance or not. A recent survey of 1,250 U.S. adults found that 56% owe health-related debt and almost one in six people with medical bills aren't currently paying it off. A large chunk of the debt came from Covid-19 treatment and testing, according to the poll conducted by Affordable Health Insurance.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-03-04/half-of-insured-americans-owe-medical-debt-boosted-by-covid>

Most EU women blame COVID pandemic for spike in gender violence -poll

Nearly three out of four European Union women think the COVID-19 pandemic has spurred an increase in physical and psychological violence against them, according to a Eurobarometer poll published on Friday. The poll, commissioned by the European Parliament ahead of Women's Day on March 8, shows 77% of women in the EU think the pandemic caused a rise in gender violence in their countries, with nine in 10 respondents in Greece and Portugal saying so.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/most-eu-women-blame-covid-pandemic-spike-gender-violence-poll-2022-03-04/>

The evolving post-COVID U.S. job market in five charts

In the two years since the COVID-19 pandemic upended the U.S. economy, the labor market has rebounded far faster than most had predicted after roughly 22 million jobs were wiped out in the space of two months in the spring of 2020. As remarkable as the rebound has proven to be, the comeback from the low point in April 2020 has not been evenly spread across industries and demographic groups, with restaurant employment, for instance, still in a deep hole and the share of Black women with jobs trailing the recovery in other groups.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/evolving-post-covid-us-job-market-five-charts-2022-03-04/>

Life in South Asia returns to normal as COVID cases decline

Shoppers buy produce at an open air market in Ahmedabad, India, Thursday, March 3, 2022. Slowly but steadily, life in South Asia is returning to normal, and people hope the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic is behind them. Experts are optimistic that the omicron surge, which brought relatively low levels of death, has reinforced immunity from vaccines, which are widespread in the region. Slowly but steadily, life in South Asia is returning to normal, and people hope the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic is behind them. Experts are optimistic that the omicron surge, which brought relatively low levels of death, has reinforced immunity from vaccines, which are widespread in the region. The markets are crowded again. Traffic is jamming the roads. Migrant workers have returned to the cities. And young people are back at schools and universities — many of them for the first time in years. It isn't quite how things were before the COVID-19 pandemic — mask mandates still

exist in some places — but with infections steadily declining, life in South Asia is returning to a sense of normalcy. The mental scars from last year's delta-driven surge persist — especially in India, where health systems collapsed and millions likely died — but across the region high vaccination rates and hope that the highly contagious omicron variant has helped bolster immunity are giving people reasons to be optimistic.

<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-health-business-pandemics-infectious-diseases-08b9fb1b55d77b7657f48245c29b9885>

Working Remotely

New offices for the hybrid era? Many companies are on board

If you build a shiny new office building, will your employees show up to work in it? Many U.S. companies are banking on it because they believe working in person is better for collaboration and training young employees. So even though most employees are still working from home offices and dining room tables today, some companies are willing to spend big on showplace headquarters. Businesses recognize there is a place for offices despite the fact that they plan to give workers more flexibility to work from home and might see cost savings from limiting their real estate holdings.

<https://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/offices-hybrid-era-companies-board-83269722>

Twitter Employees Can Work From Home 'Forever' Or 'Wherever You Feel Most Productive And Creative'

In a Tweet, Parag Agrawal, the new CEO of Twitter, who took over from Jack Dorsey, announced that he'd continue the option of working remotely "forever," as other tech companies are calling for workers to return to the office. Twitter will reopen its offices starting the middle of March. Employees will still be allowed to work remotely or come into an office if they'd prefer that choice. Agrawal wrote, "Business travel is back effective immediately, and all global Twitter offices will open starting on March 15. Decisions about where you work, whether you feel safe traveling for business, and what events you attend, should be yours." He added, "Wherever you feel most productive and creative is where you will work and that includes WFH full-time forever."

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/jackkelly/2022/03/05/twitter-employees-can-work-from-home-forever-or-wherever-you-feel-most-productive-and-creative/>

Virtual Classrooms

Virtually the same?: Online higher education in the post Covid-19 era

For this special section for the British Journal of Education Technology on the future of online higher education in the post-covid-19 era, we called for research papers to analyse and reflect on the lessons and experiences universities, East and West, have gained over the period of the ongoing pandemic. We intended that the special section would also explore the implications for the future of online university education.

<https://bera-journals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/bjet.13211>

Western University's new 5G connection 'a game changer' in virtual learning

A new 5G network, exponentially faster than anything that has come before, is being touted as "a game changer" by Western officials who say they are the first university in Canada to have the technology. The internet upgrade will pave the way for a more immersive experience for students trying to learn online, among other things, officials there say. "Western is the only university in Canada that has a fully functional 5G network up and running," said Peter White, Western executive director of government relations and strategic partnerships.

<https://lfpres.com/news/local-news/westerns-5g-connection-a-game-changer-in-virtual-learning>

Public Policies

U.S. waives COVID test for Americans leaving Russia, Belarus

The United States is waiving a requirement for negative COVID-19 tests from Americans leaving Belarus or Russia to travel home, the State Department said on Thursday. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said it would exercise its discretion to allow travel by U.S. citizens, permanent residents and holders of valid immigrant visas who were in either country by a Feb. 28 cut-off date.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/us-waives-covid-test-americans-leaving-russia-belarus-2022-03-04/>

Maintaining Services

Hong Kong retail chains ration staples to curb COVID panic buying

Two of Hong Kong's largest consumer retail chains started rationing some food and drug items on Friday to curb panic buying that has plagued the city over the past week amid fears of a citywide lockdown as COVID-19 cases soar. Health authorities reported 52,523 new COVID-19 cases on Friday and 136 deaths. This compares with about 100 infections at the start of February and a clean three-month streak of zero cases before the end of December.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/hong-kong-retail-chains-ration-staples-curb-covid-panic-buying-2022-03-04/>

Ministry of Health urges caution over dropping Covid-19 case numbers

In New Zealand, there were 15,161 new community cases today, more than 3500 fewer than yesterday's total of 18,833. On Friday, it was 22,527. It is the third day running that case numbers have fallen. Covid-19 Modelling Aotearoa project leader Dion O'Neale said the shift to Rapid Antigen Tests and focus on personal responsibility in reporting cases could be throwing numbers off. Urging caution, the ministry said: "The variation in reporting numbers each day means that the rolling average of cases gives a more reliable indicator of testing trends. The seven-day rolling average of cases is today 17,272, up from 16,687 yesterday".

<https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/462835/ministry-of-health-urges-caution-over-dropping-covid-19-case-numbers>

Hong Kong Mortuaries Bring in Mobile Fridges as Deaths Surge

Hong Kong's mortuaries are so overwhelmed they're deploying mobile refrigeration units to store bodies, as scenes reminiscent of the early days of the pandemic play out amid the city's worst Covid-19 wave yet. Photos taken at the Fu Shan Public Mortuary show four refrigerated units in a car park. Nearby, bags of ice are stacked next to an empty coffin. Hong Kong's resources are straining under the pressure of a record outbreak that's pushed its death rate to one of the highest in the world. Fatalities have been concentrated in the under-vaccinated elderly, and the spread of the virus to more than 750 care facilities – including those that are home to disabled residents – has sparked concerns of worse to come.

https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-03-04/hong-kong-mortuaries-bring-in-mobile-fridges-as-deaths-surge?utm_source=google&utm_medium=bd&cmpid=google

Healthcare Innovations

Almost a third of people report lingering symptom 6-12 months after COVID-19 -study

Almost a third of people report at least one ongoing symptom between 6 and 12 months after their coronavirus infection, a survey of 152,000 people in Denmark has found. The study includes one of the largest groups yet of people who were not hospitalised with COVID, and followed them for longer than other major studies, the researchers from Denmark's State Serum Institute (SSI) said. The questionnaire-based study suggested that the most commonly reported long-term symptoms were changes in sense of smell and taste, as well as fatigue.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/almost-third-people-report-lingering-symptom-6-12-months-after-covid-19-study-2022-03-04/>

Covid-19 update: Omicron strain 40% more lethal than flu

The global Covid death toll has passed 5.9 million, with a figure of 5,972,661 according to researchers at Johns Hopkins University. Meanwhile, infections have continued past 440 million to a world wide figure of 440,182,504. The Omicron strain of Covid-19 is at least 40% more lethal than seasonal flu, according Japanese scientists, underscoring the potential danger of lifting pandemic curbs too quickly and underestimating the virus's ongoing health risks. Rates of anxiety and depression rose by about 25% worldwide in the first year of Covid, another indication of the widespread harm on mental health inflicted by the pandemic. Young people were at the greatest increased risk of suicide and self-harm, and women bore the brunt of the emotional and psychological burden, according to a report from the World Health Organization

<https://www.pharmaceutical-technology.com/news/covid-omicron-more-lethal-than-flu/>

Arthritis drug could help save Covid patients - study

A drug used to treat rheumatoid arthritis could help to save the lives of patients with severe Covid, researchers have found, and they say its benefits can be seen even when it is used on top of other medications. Experts involved in the Randomised Evaluation of Covid-19 Therapy (Recovery) trial say baricitinib, an anti-inflammatory drug taken as a tablet, can reduce the risk of death from severe Covid by about a fifth. However, they add that when the impact of other medications used alongside the drug are also taken into account, the risk of death could be lowered by well over 50% - although the figure will vary from patient to patient.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/03/arthritis-drug-could-help-save-covid-patients-study>