

Connecting Communities for COVID19 News

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Isolation Tips

New Zealand lifts most vaccine mandates as Omicron outbreak nears peak

New Zealand's government said on Wednesday it would lift vaccine mandates for a number of sectors including teaching and police from April 4 as the current COVID-19 outbreak nears its peak.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/new-zealand-lifts-most-vaccine-mandates-omicron-outbreak-nears-peak-2022-03-23/>

Hygiene Helpers

Italian study shows ventilation can cut school COVID cases by 82%

An Italian study published on Tuesday suggests that efficient ventilation systems can reduce the transmission of COVID-19 in schools by more than 80%. An experiment overseen by the Hume foundation think-tank compared coronavirus contagion in 10,441 classrooms in Italy's central Marche region. COVID infections were steeply lower in the 316 classrooms that had mechanical ventilation systems, with the reduction in cases more marked according to the strength of the systems. With applications guaranteeing a complete replacement of the air in a classroom 2.4 times in an hour, infections were reduced by 40%.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/italian-study-shows-ventilation-can-cut-school-covid-cases-by-82-2022-03-22/>

Hong Kong Data Show Benefit to Third Shot of Sinovac in Preventing Omicron Deaths

New study of the city's continuing Covid-19 outbreak underscores the importance of booster shots for the Chinese vaccine

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/hong-kong-data-show-benefit-to-third-shot-of-sinovac-in-preventing-omicron-deaths-11647952641>

Covid-19: Fourth vaccine dose potentially on the cards for health workers, at-risk people

Officials are looking into the possibility of rolling out a fourth dose of Covid-19 vaccine for vulnerable and high risk groups. Director-General of Health Dr Ashley Bloomfield announced he would this week receive advice on a fourth shot specifically for those at highest risk of Covid-19 illness: older people, and those with pre-existing conditions. He said he also asked whether the offer should be extended to other groups, such as the health workforce, who were among the first to receive boosters

<https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/health/coronavirus/300547077/covid19-fourth-vaccine-dose-potentially-on-the-cards-for-health-workers-atrisk-people>

Clues to Covid-19's Next Moves Come From Sewers

At a sewage treatment plant on a sliver of land in Boston Harbor, trickles of wastewater are pumped into a plastic jug every 15 minutes. Samples from the jugs, analyzed at a lab in nearby Cambridge, Mass., are part of the growing effort to monitor the Covid-19 virus in wastewater across the U.S. On Deer Island in Boston, readings from the system covering 2.4 million people have recently shown virus readings leveling off after a steep decline from this winter's Omicron-driven rise. In some areas, levels of the virus may be edging higher.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/clues-to-covid-19s-next-moves-come-from-sewers-11647941403>

Community Activities

'Refuse quarantine!': frustrations mount as China replays COVID controls

Article reports that in footage shared on social media last week, a crowd of people in the northeastern Chinese city of Shenyang bang against the windows of a clothing market as they shout in frustration at the announcement of yet another round of COVID-19 tests. Though the local government quickly urged people not to "spread rumours" about the incident, the response from netizens was immediate. "Refuse quarantine!" said one. "Many people have awoken to the truth," said another. "It's actually over," said a netizen posting on WeChat under the username "Jasmine Tea". "The common cold is more serious than this... The testing agencies want this to go on. The vaccine companies want to inoculate forever."

<https://www.reuters.com/world/china/refuse-quarantine-frustrations-mount-china-replays-covid-controls-2022-03-22/>

Covid's Fifth Wave Shows Us How to Live With the Virus

Covid cases are on the rise in several European countries. Upticks are visible again in France, Italy and the U.K. Infection rates in both Austria and Germany eclipse previous waves of the virus (based on cases per million). China is grappling with new highs in terms of case counts. The U.S. may soon follow. This fifth wave of the virus is likely to be mercifully short-lived in many areas, but the picture varies around the world. This divergence gives us something of a report card on the efficacy of the Covid policies in place.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2022-03-22/covid-s-fifth-wave-shows-us-how-to-live-with-the-omicron-virus-subvariant>

Working Remotely

Work From Home: Small Home Office Inspiration for Redesign

One of the best things about working remotely is the flexibility aspect, yet it can also be a distracting affair unless you find an organized space to call your own. If your home has no room for a separate office, there are still plenty of ways to set aside a dedicated workspace. Check out this small home office inspiration to help you get organized and boost your productivity.

<https://www.newsanyway.com/2022/03/22/work-from-home-small-home-office-inspiration-for-redesign/>

Returning to the office: How these employees pushed back

Many companies have been working remotely on and off since March 2020, and despite the rise of the Delta and Omicron variants, many companies have recently expected employees to return to the office. But throughout the pandemic, office employees have found benefits of remote work that they don't want to give up: There's no commute, you can exercise during breaks and eat healthier when there's not an office lunch involved, and your schedule is more yours to make time for what's important to you, like picking your child up from school or starting and finishing work earlier. They're joining a movement called the Great Resignation — a wave of workers quitting their jobs after realizing they want better.

<https://www.businessinsider.com/returning-to-the-office-how-these-employees-pushed-back-2022-3>

Virtual Classrooms

How colleges and universities are reimagining remote learning

The COVID-19 pandemic has not only accelerated trends towards online learning, but it also has broadened the types of people who want targeted skills training. These tools can help prepare them for jobs of the future. However, the ideal model has yet to be developed, as remote learning needs can vary dramatically from person to person. Across the sector, private universities and colleges are seeking outside assistance and advice from organizations such as IFC to help improve online learning offerings.

<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/03/reimagining-remote-learning/>

Staff absences due to Covid could spark return of remote learning, council warns

Edinburgh City Council, Fife Council and Dumfries and Galloway Council all said remote learning may

have to be considered as the pandemic continues to rip through teachers and pupils. Director of education for Dumfries and Galloway council, Gillian Brydson, said individual classes or year groups could face the return to online learning despite the easing of restrictions. This is due to rising case numbers, she said, leading to “very challenging” situations for “a number of our schools and early years settings”.

<https://www.scotsman.com/news/politics/staff-absences-due-to-covid-could-spark-return-of-remote-learning-council-warns-3620379>

Public Policies

Biden Administration to Stop Reimbursing Hospitals for Covid-19 Care for Uninsured

Some people without health insurance will begin getting bills for Covid-19 treatments and testing after the Biden administration on Tuesday starts winding down a federal program that reimburses providers for virus-related care for the uninsured and that officials say is running out of funds. The White House says it will end the reimbursement program, which started under the Trump administration and also pays hospitals and other healthcare providers for things such as administering Covid-19 vaccines to uninsured people, by the end of April because it is running out of money. The administration and hospitals are urging lawmakers to approve more funding for the program.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/biden-administration-to-stop-reimbursing-hospitals-for-covid-19-care-for-uninsured-11647955166>

No funds to buy fourth Covid vaccine dose for all Americans, White House warns

White House officials say that there are no funds to buy a potential fourth dose of the Covid-19 vaccine for all Americans. The Washington Post reports that while the Biden administration has enough doses to provide Americans over the age of 65 with a fourth shot of the vaccine but orders cannot be placed for more to cover other age groups unless Congress passes a stalled \$15bn funding package. Doses have also already been secured for children under the age of five should those shots be deemed necessary by regulators.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/fourth-covid-vaccine-shot-us-b2041347.html>

Coronavirus: Cabinet discusses fourth dose amid surge in cases

In Cyprus, the Cabinet approved the administration of a Covid booster jab to children aged 12 and over and the rollout of a fourth vaccine dose to those aged 70 and over and the immunocompromised. Following the administration of an mRNA booster jab to severely immunosuppressed children aged 12 and over at the end of February, the council of ministers approved its administration to all teenagers as long as six months have elapsed since the latest dose.

<https://cyprus-mail.com/2022/03/22/coronavirus-cabinet-discusses-fourth-dose-amid-surge-in-cases/>

Pfizer, Unicef Strike Covid-19 Pill Deal

Pfizer plans to sell to the United Nations Children’s Fund up to four million treatment courses of its Covid-19 pill Paxlovid, which will go to 95 low- and middle-income countries, as part of the company’s effort to expand access to the pill beyond wealthy countries. Pfizer said that Afghanistan, Pakistan and Zimbabwe are among the countries where Unicef will distribute the easy-to-use pill. A Pfizer spokeswoman said the company is charging Unicef a “not-for-profit price,” but declined to disclose it.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/pfizer-unicef-strike-covid-19-pill-deal-11647945900>

Maintaining Services

France sees biggest jump in COVID cases since early February

France saw the biggest jump in new COVID-19 cases since February, health ministry data showed on

Tuesday, with 180,777 new infections over 24 hours, and hospital numbers also rose for the third consecutive day. The new cases brought the cumulative number of registered infections to 24.3 million as the resumption of classes following two weeks of school holidays marked a sharp resurgence of the epidemic. The seven-day moving average of new cases rose further to just under 99,000, where it had been from end-December till mid-February, driven by the contagious Omicron variant of the novel coronavirus.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/france-sees-biggest-jump-covid-cases-since-early-february-2022-03-22/>

SA Premier says COVID-19 case numbers to jump in a 'significant way' with elective surgeries already cancelled

South Australian health officials quietly reintroduced a pause on some elective surgeries just one day before last Saturday's election, new Premier Peter Malinauskas has revealed. The ban was introduced but not announced amid a rise in the state's COVID numbers, with Mr Malinauskas warning new government modelling showed cases were set to "escalate in a rather significant way". He said the elective surgery ban impacted all non-urgent overnight elective surgery in public hospitals. "Needless to say, I was rather disappointed and somewhat shocked to learn that an elective surgery ban has now been reinstated in some instances here in South Australia," he said.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-03-22/sa-covid19-case-numbers-to-jump-in-a-significant-way/100928606>

Covid school absences triple in two weeks as 202,000 pupils off sick or isolating in England

The number of pupils missing school in England because of Covid-19 has more than tripled in two weeks. Figures from the Department for Education show that last Thursday, 202,000 state school pupils were not in class because of reasons related to Covid, up from 58,000 pupils on 3 March. Among these students, there were 16,000 pupils with a suspected Covid case and 159,000 with a confirmed case.

<https://inews.co.uk/news/number-children-missing-school-england-covid-19-1532184>

Covid-19 update: 'Risky to assume that the pandemic is over' - McKee

Europe faces a revival of a revival of virus risks as cases spread rapidly, accelerated by the emergence of the more-transmissible BA.2 Omicron strain. Germany is now setting fresh records for infection rates almost daily, while Austria has also reached new highs and cases in the Netherlands have doubled since lifting curbs on Feb. 25. "The messaging from politicians is encouraging many people who were taking precautions to mix with others," says Martin McKee, professor of public health at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. "It does seem very courageous, and indeed risky, to assume that the pandemic is over."

<https://www.pharmaceutical-technology.com/news/covid-pandemic-not-over/>

Healthcare Innovations

Research dispels myth that COVID-19 vaccines cause infertility, but misinformation persists

Some sources of misinformation claim that the COVID-19 vaccines cause male sterility. For this to be true, the vaccines would have to damage sperm quality, drastically reduce sperm count or interfere with the mechanisms inherent in male ejaculation. Quality clinical evidence has demonstrated that none of these parameters are affected by the vaccine, so men are not being made sterile. A study in Florida recruited around 45 men and compared their sperm measures before and after receiving a COVID-19 vaccine. Interestingly, the study found that men who received the vaccine had more sperm, greater semen volume, and sperm more able to move around and fertilize an egg. Pregnancy can be an exciting time but can also provoke worry about the safety of anything that enters the body, including vaccines. Fortunately, the COVID-19 vaccines are safe during pregnancy.

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2022-03-dispels-myth-covid-vaccines-infertility.html>

New research proves benefit of vaccination after recovery from COVID-19

When our immune system comes into contact with the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus, it fights back and produces antibodies. A similar immune response is triggered by Corona vaccines. However, there is still little data available on the strength and durability of immune protection. A team led by Prof. Carsten Watzl from the Leibniz Research Centre for Working Environment and Human Factors Institute for Occupational Research (IfADo), in cooperation with the Max Planck Institute of Molecular Physiology (MPI) and the Klinikum Dortmund, has now been able to detect high levels of neutralizing antibodies in test persons even 300 days after a coronavirus infection with the original variant of the coronavirus.

<https://www.news-medical.net/news/20220322/New-research-proves-benefit-of-vaccination-after-recovery-from-COVID-19.aspx>

Covid-19 news: Infection linked to higher risk of developing diabetes

Covid-19 linked to a 46 per cent increased risk of type 2 diabetes. People who have had covid-19 within the past year may be more at risk of developing type 2 diabetes for the first time or being prescribed medication to manage their blood sugar levels. Ziyad Al-Aly at the VA Saint Louis Health Care System in the US and his colleagues reviewed the medical records of 181,280 individuals who tested positive for covid-19 between March 2020 and September 2021, using data from the US Department of Veterans Affairs. The team compared the number of new diabetes cases among these veterans with that of more than 8 million people who had no evidence of a covid-19 infection. None of the participants had diabetes at the start of the study. Covid-19 was linked to a 46 per cent higher risk of developing type 2 diabetes or requiring blood-sugar-lowering medication, even among people with a mild or asymptomatic covid-19 infection. Type 2 diabetes occurs when the body cannot make enough insulin or the hormone that is produced does not work properly. SARS-CoV-2 virus may inflame insulin-producing cells, decreasing their efficiency, Al-Aly told The Washington Post.

<https://www.newscientist.com/article/2237475-covid-19-news-infection-linked-to-higher-risk-of-developing-diabetes/>

AstraZeneca COVID drug neutralises Omicron sub-variants in lab study

Data from the latest study by Washington University in the United States showed the therapy reduced the amount of virus detected in samples - viral load - of all tested Omicron sub-variants in mice lungs, AstraZeneca said. The study has yet to be peer reviewed. Evusheld was tested against the BA.1, BA.1.1, and BA.2 sub-variants of Omicron and it was also shown in the study to limit inflammation in the lungs - a critical symptom in severe COVID-19 infections. "The findings further support Evusheld as a potential important option to help protect vulnerable patients such as the immunocompromised who could face poor outcomes if they were to become infected with COVID-19," John Perez, head of Late Development, Vaccines & Immune Therapies at AstraZeneca, said.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/astrazeneca-antibody-cocktail-retains-activity-against-omicron-subvariants-2022-03-21/>

Most unvaccinated children lack antibodies after COVID; SK Bioscience vaccine shows promise vs Omicron

The following is a summary of some recent studies on COVID-19. They include research that warrants further study to corroborate the findings and that has yet to be certified by peer review. Antibodies in kids after COVID last 6 months or more Most children and adolescents with COVID-19 antibodies after SARS-CoV-2 infection usually still have the antibodies in their blood more than half a year later, new data shows. Starting in October 2020, researchers in Texas recruited 218 subjects between the ages of 5 and 19

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/most-unvaccinated-children-lack-antibodies-after-covid-gsk-vaccine-shows-promise-2022-03-21/>

Coronavirus may double severe complications in pregnancy

Article reports that the study was published in JAMA Internal Medicine on March 21. An analysis of records for 43,886 pregnant individuals during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic found that the 1,332 who had a coronavirus infection during pregnancy had more than double the risk of negative outcomes compared with individuals without the virus. "These findings add to the growing evidence that having COVID-19 during pregnancy raises risks of serious complications," explained lead author Assiamira Ferrara, MD, PhD, a senior research scientist and associate director of the women's and children health section in the Kaiser Permanente Division of Research. "Coupled with the evidence that the COVID-19 vaccines are safe during pregnancy, these findings should aid patients in understanding the risks of perinatal complications and the need for vaccination," said Dr. Ferrara. "This study supports the recommendation for vaccination of pregnant individuals and those planning conception."

<https://www.eurekalert.org/news-releases/946860>