

Connecting Communities for COVID19 News

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Isolation Tips

Shanghai sweats over small, but stubborn COVID outbreak already hampering economy

Anxiety levels rose along with temperatures in Shanghai on Wednesday, as medical workers sweated beneath their hazmat suits while administering compulsory mass testing for COVID-19 in a city that recently emerged from a painful two-month lockdown. China's commercial hub is battling an outbreak that has seen dozens of new infections recorded daily for the past week, and though the numbers are relatively low it has unnerved many among the city's 25 million people, after their ordeal in April and May.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/china/shanghai-sweats-over-small-nagging-covid-outbreak-already-damaging-economy-2022-07-13/>

Hygiene Helpers

Free Covid booster doses for 18-59 age group from July 15 at govt centres

People in the 18-59 age group can get free precaution doses of the Covid vaccine at government vaccination centres under a 75-day special drive likely to begin from July 15, the government said on Wednesday. The drive, aimed at boosting the administration of Covid precaution doses, will be held as part of the government's Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav to celebrate the 75th anniversary of India's Independence, it said. Information and Broadcasting Minister Anurag Thakur told reporters the Union Cabinet has approved the proposal to mark the 75th anniversary of India's Independence.

https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/free-covid-booster-doses-for-18-59-age-group-from-july-15-at-govt-centres-122071300671_1.html

Covid-19: Free masks and RATs but traffic light setting expected to stay orange

The Government is expected to make it easier to get free masks and rapid antigen tests (RATs), with concerns many cases of Covid-19 are going untested and unreported. Covid-19 Response Minister Dr Ayesha Verrall is set to announce an update to the Government's Covid-19 plan and guidelines on Thursday afternoon. Stuff understands Verrall will outline plans for the Government to provide free masks and Covid-19 tests. Verrall had already outlined plans to deliver 50 free masks to every school child in years 4-7.

<https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/health/coronavirus/300636560/covid19-free-masks-and-rats-but-traffic-light-setting-expected-to-stay-orange>

New format of digital COVID-19 certificate to be available Thursday

Taiwan will start offering on Thursday a new format of its digital COVID-19 vaccination certificate, which can be used in countries including the United States, Canada, Japan, and Australia, the Central Epidemic Command Center (CECC) said Wednesday. The new format follows the SMART Health Cards framework launched by the Vaccination Credential Initiative (VCI), which Taiwan joined on May 20, CECC official Pang Yi-ming said at a press briefing. According to the VCI website, SMART Health Cards are issued by the governments of 24 U.S. states and territories, Canada, Japan, and Sydney, Australia, among others.

<https://focustaiwan.tw/society/202207130014>

S. Korea expands booster shots as COVID-19 cases creep up

Health officials in South Korea are expanding booster shots to adults 50 and over as COVID-19 cases

creep up again across the country. The 40,226 new cases reported Wednesday marked the country's highest daily jump in more than two months, although hospitalizations and deaths remain stable. Baek Gyeongran, South Korea's top infectious disease expert, attributed the rising case counts to people's waning immunities following vaccinations and prior infections and a major removal of social distancing measures since April as the nation wiggled out of an omicron surge. Health workers are also witnessing a "rapid spread" of BA.5, which is seen as the most transmissible variant of omicron yet, Baek said.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/ap-covid-seoul-b2121930.html>

WHO says COVID-19 remains a global health emergency

The World Health Organization said on Tuesday that COVID-19 remains a global emergency, nearly 2-1/2 years after it was first declared. The Emergency Committee, made up of independent experts, said in a statement that rising cases, ongoing viral evolution and pressure on health services in a number of countries meant that the situation was still an emergency. Cases reported to WHO had risen by 30% in the last fortnight, although increased population immunity, largely from vaccines, had seen a "decoupling" of cases from hospitalisations and deaths, the committee's statement said.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/who-says-covid-19-remains-global-health-emergency-2022-07-12/>

Community Activities

Get COVID-19 booster now if eligible, ECDC boss urges

Countries should start boosting older people a second time with COVID-19 shots, the head of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) said on Wednesday, stressing that waiting for new variant vaccines in the fall could be too late. "The risk for people is now," said Andrea Ammon, director of the ECDC, referencing the sharp rise in COVID-19 cases in the European Union driven by the Omicron BA.4 and BA.5 strains. "If I get offered this vaccine now, I will take it now," she told members of the European Parliament's special committee on COVID-19. She underlined that the existing vaccines continue to offer protection against severe disease and death against these variants.

<https://www.politico.eu/article/andrea-ammon-coronavirus-europe-covid-19-booster-now-if-eligible-ecdc-boss-urges/>

Adapted, two-strain vaccines to lift COVID protection - EU official

Adapted versions of established mRNA COVID-19 vaccines that address two variants in one shot will soon offer people better protection than vaccines that are now available, a European health official said on Wednesday. Moderna and the BioNTech-Pfizer alliance are working on vaccines based on a combination of the original Wuhan virus and an Omicron subvariant. Referred to as bivalent shots, these are planned for use in the autumn vaccination campaign.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/adapted-two-strain-vaccines-lift-covid-protection-eu-official-2022-07-13/>

NHS awarded George Cross for efforts shown during the COVID-19 pandemic

The NHS has been awarded the George Cross by Her Majesty The Queen in recognition of the dedicated service of healthcare workers that includes their 'courage, compassion and dedication' during the COVID-19 pandemic. The George Cross, which is given in recognition of 'acts of the greatest heroism or of the most courage in circumstances of extreme danger', has only been bestowed to a collective group of people twice before, most recently in 1999. May Parsons, the nurse who administered the first COVID-19 vaccination in the world, joined NHS chief executive Amanda Pritchard to attend the presentation on 12 July - exactly one week after the NHS's birthday. The pair were joined by Pritchard's counterparts, Caroline Lamb from NHS Scotland and Judith Paget from NHS Wales, along with Peter May, permanent secretary at the Department of Health and chief executive of Health and Social Care Northern Ireland.

https://www.pmlive.com/pharma_news/nhs_awarded_george_cross_for_efforts_shown_during_the_covid-19_pandemic

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Australia athletes barred from other Commonwealth Games venues over COVID risk

Australian athletes will be banned from supporting their team mates at other Commonwealth Games events at Birmingham due to the risk of COVID-19 transmission, team chef de mission Petria Thomas said. They will also have to wear face masks when not in their rooms or exercising at the July 28 - Aug. 8 Games as part of team health protocols. "Our primary focus is that we can get our athletes to the starting line and they are performance ready," Thomas told News Corp media on Wednesday.

<https://www.reuters.com/lifestyle/sports/australia-athletes-barred-other-commonwealth-games-venues-over-covid-risk-2022-07-13/>

Working Remotely

Working from home to become normal, PwC Taiwan says

Working from home is likely to become a regular arrangement even though the world is increasingly emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic, PricewaterhouseCoopers Taiwan told a forum in Taipei. PwC's US arm has introduced a permanent remote working model for its 40,000 employees, who need to travel to the office three days per month or less, for key meetings or training courses, PwC Taiwan human resources head Alan Lin said.

<https://taipeitimes.com/News/biz/archives/2022/07/14/2003781707>

Hybrid work could mean employers are overlooking disabled staff

Disabled employees are concerned they will lose out on opportunities at work due to working remotely. New research from The Work Foundation found 70% of disabled workers said it would negatively impact their physical or mental health if their employer did not allow them to work remotely. However, a majority (70%) of those with multiple impairments or conditions in the research said they felt opportunities to stretch and grow at work would go to those in the office instead.

<https://www.hrmagazine.co.uk/content/news/hybrid-work-could-mean-employers-are-overlooking-disabled-staff>

Why CEOs are so WTF about WFH

At a sinner debate for NYSE, after one CEO asked a question about the merits of hybrid work, the conversation became highly emotive. A show of hands revealed most CEOs disliked the policy of remote working. Another showed most were only getting their staff into the office for two days a week at best. As the debate raged, it turned this economics dinner into something more like a communal corporate therapy session. "It's the biggest single issue," the boss of a Midwest industrial group forlornly admitted.

<https://www.ft.com/content/8a3f1fa7-8c0c-4068-b0d9-f12c84f0b8d6>

More professionals interested in companies that offer work-from-home indefinitely

More professionals are looking for jobs at companies offering permanent remote work, reveals a survey by BridgeLabz, a marketplace for deep tech talent. About 91.47% of the participants said they are interested in joining the company offering remote work indefinitely, 48.81% of respondents prefer working remotely, and 27.78% prefer the hybrid model, says the Work Model Preferences survey

<https://www.peplematters.in/news/employee-engagement/more-professionals-interested-in-companies-that-offer-work-from-home-indefinitely-34551>

Virtual Classrooms

Children Exercise After 2 Years of Remote Learning

A new study Trusted Source by researchers from University College Dublin, Ireland, looked at more than 1,000 data sources detailing changes in child and adolescent behavior during pandemic

lockdowns. The study, published by JAMA Pediatrics, concludes that “a considerable reduction in physical activity has occurred.” “Thus, targeted public health initiatives are urgently needed. As UNICEF recognized in the early stages of the pandemic, formal reactivation strategies are required to avert the potentially irreversible harms that are being caused to a lost generation of youth,” they added.

<https://www.healthline.com/health-news/how-parents-can-get-kids-exercising-again-after-2-years-of-remote-learning>

Study: Pandemic-era remote learning hit English-language learners especially hard

The abrupt transition to online learning at the beginning of the pandemic was especially harmful to English-language learners in U.S. schools, a new report finds. The report, released Monday by UnidosUS, the nation’s largest Latino civil rights organization, found that the COVID-19 pandemic had a disproportionate impact on most Latino students, but especially on those learning English.

<https://www.axios.com/2022/07/12/pandemic-remote-school-english-learners-effects>

Public Policies

FDA Authorizes Novavax’s Covid-19 Vaccine

U.S. health regulators have authorized the use of Novavax Inc.’s Covid-19 vaccine, providing a new option that works differently than the two leading vaccines, but at a time when overall demand for vaccines and boosters is low. The Food and Drug Administration said Wednesday that adults 18 years and older may receive Novavax’s vaccine. The Novavax vaccine, given as two doses three weeks apart, could become available soon if the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention signs off in the coming days. The authorization gives adults “another option that meets the FDA’s rigorous standards for safety, effectiveness and manufacturing quality needed to support emergency-use authorization,” FDA Commissioner Robert M. Califf said.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/fda-authorizes-novavaxs-covid-19-vaccine-11657743595>

UK Government Seeks to Block Disclosures to the Covid Inquiry

The UK government is trying to block disclosures to the inquiry investigating its handling of the Covid-19 pandemic, according to people with knowledge of the discussions. Officials have asked the government’s top lawyer, Sir James Eadie QC, to assess how much information the administration has to provide to the inquiry about its policy discussions during the pandemic, the people said. Eadie, who is responsible for advising the government on issues of the highest national importance, has advised the Cabinet to limit the scope of information provided to the inquiry and warned ministers they are likely to face vast claims for damages from families of Covid victims.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-07-13/uk-government-seeks-to-block-disclosures-to-the-covid-inquiry>

Government braces to fund 'substantial' number of Covid-19 vaccine liabilities

The government is bracing to fund a “substantial” number of liabilities relating to negative impacts from Covid-19 jabs, having spent more than £34bn on the vaccine rollout so far. The Department of Health and Social Care told vaccine manufacturers at the start of the programme that it would cover future claims against producers for any adverse effects of their vaccines which “may add to the cost of the programme in the long term”, according to a Public Account Committee report today. As of the beginning of the month, 1,984 vaccine-related damages claims have been received by the NHS Business Services Authority, which describes itself as an arm’s length body of the Department of Health and Social Care, managing over £35bn of NHS spend annually,

<https://www.cityam.com/government-braces-to-fund-substantial-number-of-covid-19-vaccine-liabilities/>

Maintaining Services

Three million people in England yet to get a Covid jab

Three million people remain unvaccinated against Covid as MPs call for renewed push on vaccine roll out. The Public Accounts Committee warned on Wednesday many of the unvaccinated individuals

are “young city-dwellers” with just five cities accounting for a quarter of those not jabbed. MPs warned people remain at risk of death and hospitalisation, calling for the NHS and public health authorities to “redouble” efforts on vaccinations.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/health/millions-unvaccinated-covid-jab-b2122105.html>

Healthcare Innovations

Expert review shows AstraZeneca’s COVID-19 vaccine is ‘equally effective’ as mRNA vaccines

AstraZeneca’s (AZ) COVID-19 vaccine, Vaxzevria, and the available mRNA COVID-19 vaccines provide ‘equally effective’ protection against hospitalisation and death, an expert review of data from 79 real-world studies has revealed. Infectious disease experts from Asia reviewed data from the VIEW-hub database on vaccine use and impact, developed by John Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and the International Vaccine Access Center. The findings from the study were reported by Expert Review of Vaccines. The findings shows that Vaxzevria and the BNT162b2 and mRNA-1273 mRNA COVID-19 vaccines offer an ‘equivalent degree’ of protection against hospitalisation (91-93%) and death (91-93%) following two doses, regardless of age.

https://www.pmlive.com/pharma_news/expert_review_shows_astrazenecas_covid-19_vaccine_is_equally_effective_as_mrna_vaccines_1452198

Covid vaccine 66 per cent less effective at preventing infection than it was just two months ago, expert says

Covid cases have hit record levels in the UK, yet the vaccine is less effective at preventing infection than at any time since it was introduced, according to a leading virus modeller. The degree of protection a jab gives against getting a Covid infection has tumbled from about 30 per cent two months ago to about 10 per cent today, according to Professor Karl Friston, of University College London. This is largely because the new dominant Omicron subvariants, BA.4 and BA.5, are much better at evading immunity built up by vaccinations than their predecessor, BA.2, he says.

<https://inews.co.uk/news/science/covid-vaccine-less-effective-preventing-infection-1739071>

How long after catching Covid can you become reinfected and when should you get your booster?

People may become reinfected with Covid-19 as early as 28 days after recovering from the virus, according to the latest advice from the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee. Previously, reinfection was defined as a case occurring more than 12 weeks after an initial infection. The committee said the Omicron subvariants BA.4 and BA.5 “are associated with increased immune escape and we are likely to see rates of reinfection rise among those who have previously been infected with an earlier Covid-19 variant, and those who are up to date with their vaccinations”.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jul/13/how-long-after-catching-covid-can-you-become-reinfected-and-when-should-you-get-your-booster>