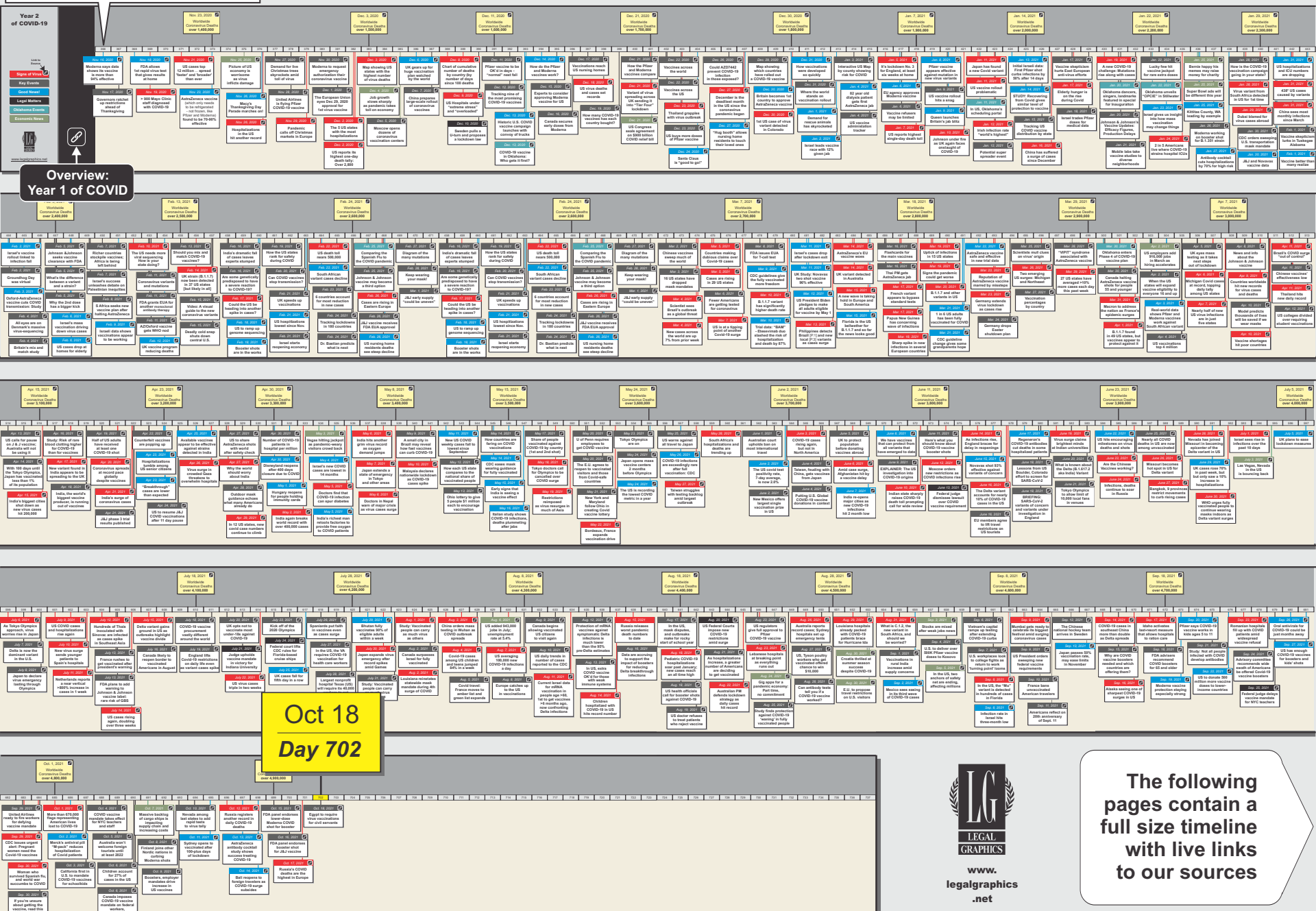
Number of days since first sign of virus

Overview: Year 2 of COVID



The following pages contain a full size timeline with live links to our sources

LEGAL GRAPHICS

www.legalgraphics.net

Year 2 of COVID-19

Link to Source

- Signs of Virus
- Key Events
- Good News!
- Legal Matters
- Oklahoma Events
- Economic News

LEGAL GRAPHICS

www.legalgraphics.net

Overview: Year 1 of COVID

Number of days since first sign of virus

366 | 367 | 368 | 369 | 370 | 371 | 372 | 373

Nov. 23, 2020

Worldwide Coronavirus Deaths **over 1,400,000**

Nov. 16, 2020

Moderna says data shows its vaccine is more than 94% effective

Nov. 17, 2020

Governors ratchet up restrictions ahead of Thanksgiving

Nov. 18, 2020

FDA allows 1st rapid virus test that gives results at home

Nov. 19, 2020

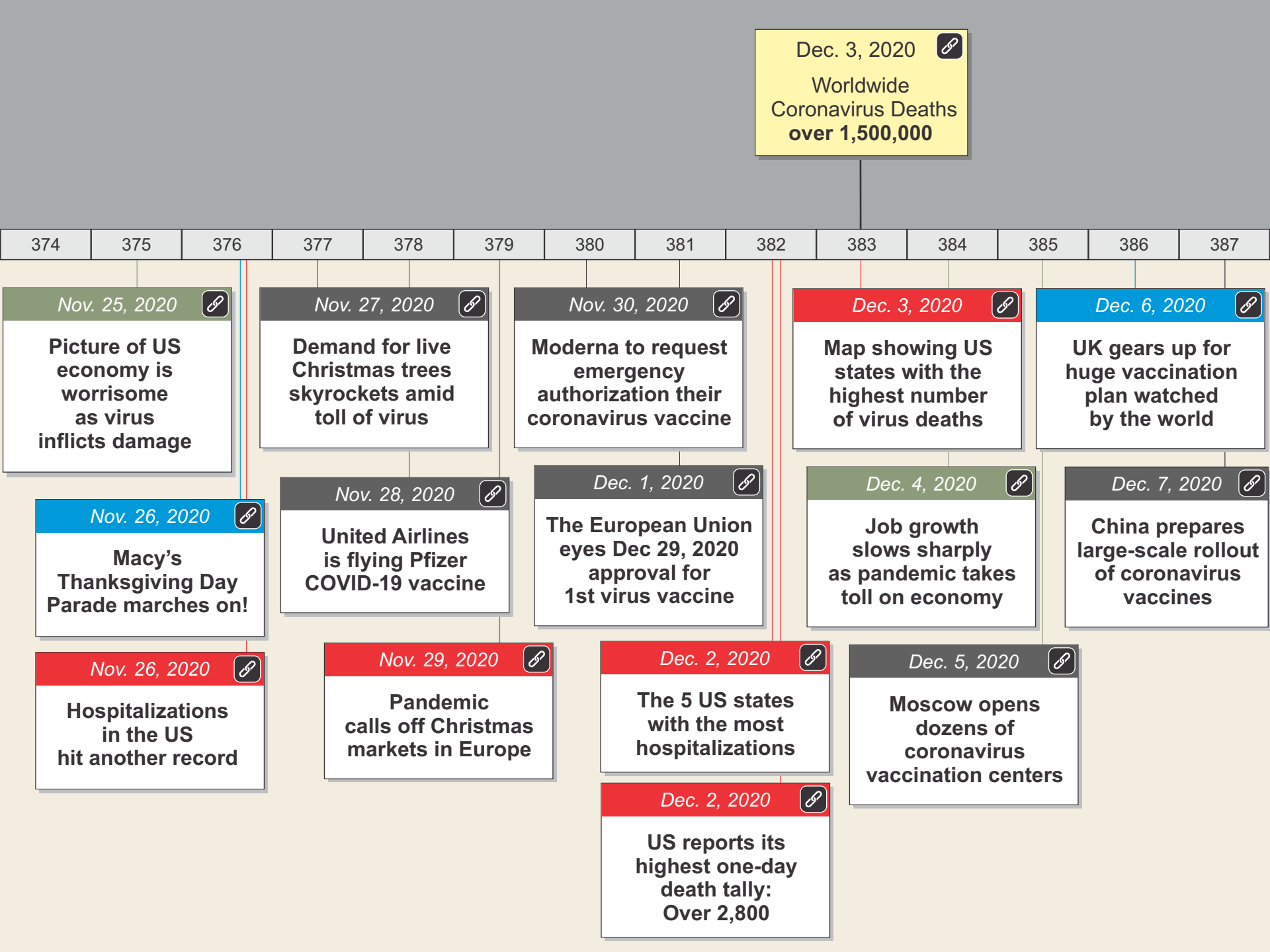
> 900 Mayo Clinic staff diagnosed with COVID-19

Nov. 21, 2020

US cases top 12 million ... spread 'faster' and 'broader' than ever

Nov. 23, 2020

AstraZeneca vaccine (which only needs to be refrigerated - not frozen, like Pfizer and Moderna) **found to be 70-90% effective**


Dec. 3, 2020
Worldwide Coronavirus Deaths over 1,500,000
374
375
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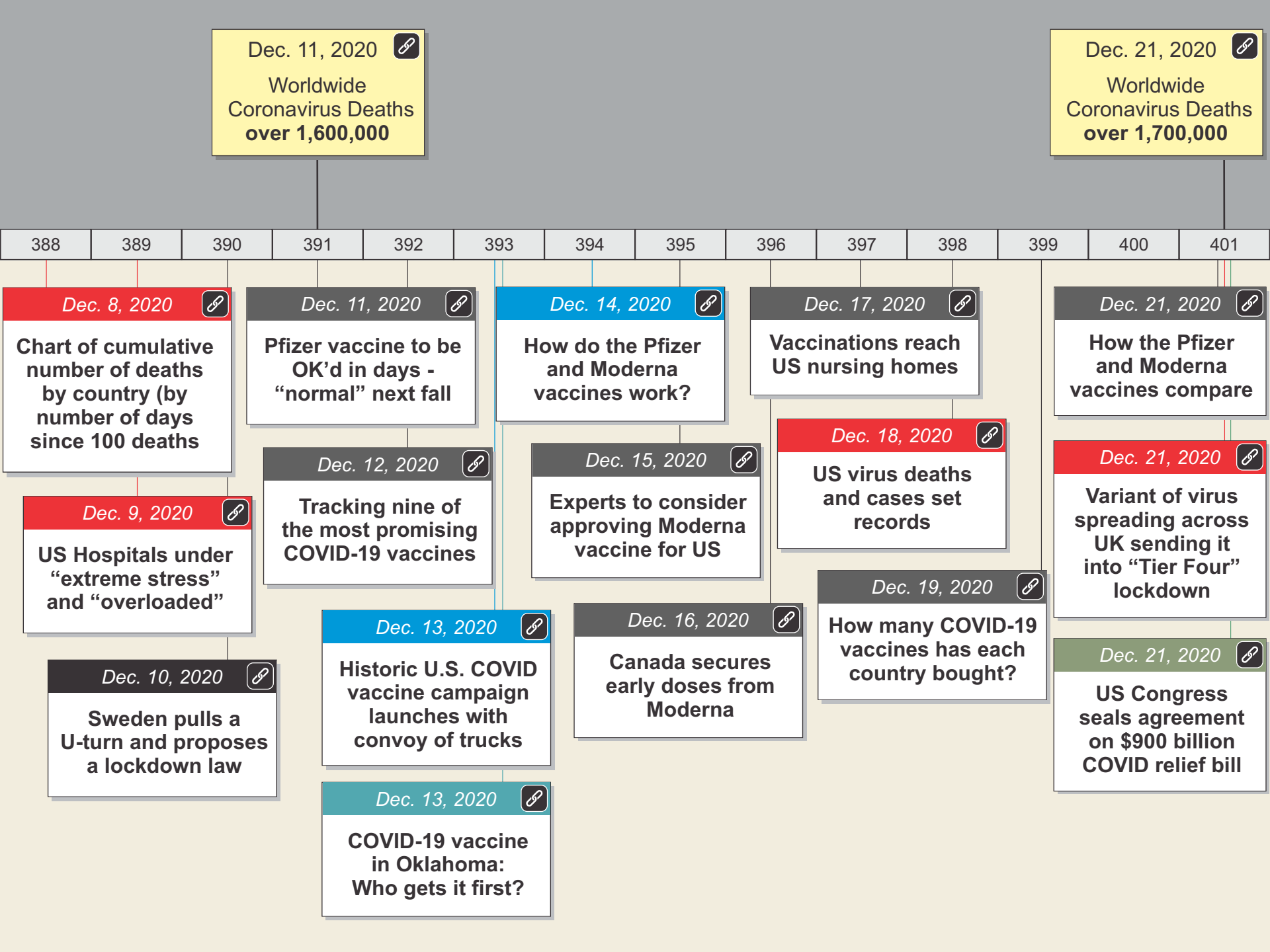
387
Nov. 25, 2020
Picture of US economy is worrisome as virus inflicts damage
Nov. 26, 2020
Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade marches on!
Nov. 26, 2020
Hospitalizations in the US hit another record
Nov. 27, 2020
Demand for live Christmas trees skyrockets amid toll of virus
Nov. 28, 2020
United Airlines is flying Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine
Nov. 29, 2020
Pandemic calls off Christmas markets in Europe
Nov. 30, 2020
Moderna to request emergency authorization their coronavirus vaccine
Dec. 1, 2020
The European Union eyes Dec 29, 2020 approval for 1st virus vaccine
Dec. 2, 2020
The 5 US states with the most hospitalizations
Dec. 2, 2020
US reports its highest one-day death tally: Over 2,800
Dec. 3, 2020
Map showing US states with the highest number of virus deaths
Dec. 4, 2020
Job growth slows sharply as pandemic takes toll on economy
Dec. 5, 2020
Moscow opens dozens of coronavirus vaccination centers
Dec. 6, 2020
UK gears up for huge vaccination plan watched by the world
Dec. 7, 2020
China prepares large-scale rollout of coronavirus vaccines


Dec. 11, 2020
Worldwide Coronavirus Deaths over 1,600,000
Dec. 21, 2020
Worldwide Coronavirus Deaths over 1,700,000
388
389
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395
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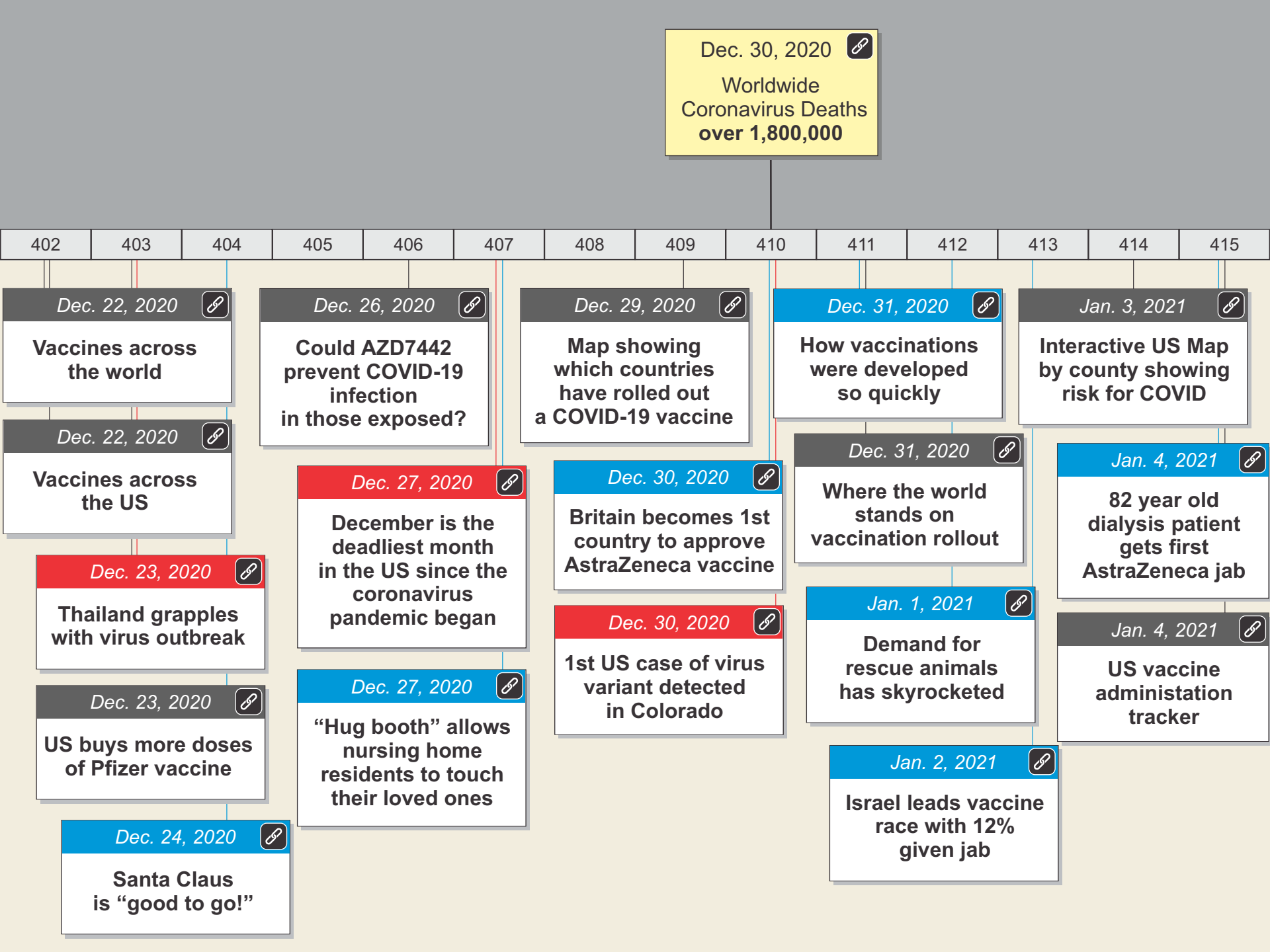
397
398
399
400
401
Dec. 8, 2020
Chart of cumulative number of deaths by country (by number of days since 100 deaths
Dec. 9, 2020
US Hospitals under "extreme stress" and "overloaded"
Dec. 10, 2020
Sweden pulls a U-turn and proposes a lockdown law
Dec. 11, 2020
Pfizer vaccine to be OK'd in days - "normal" next fall
Dec. 12, 2020
Tracking nine of the most promising COVID-19 vaccines
Dec. 13, 2020
Historic U.S. COVID vaccine campaign launches with convoy of trucks
Dec. 13, 2020
COVID-19 vaccine in Oklahoma: Who gets it first?
Dec. 14, 2020
How do the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines work?
Dec. 15, 2020
Experts to consider approving Moderna vaccine for US
Dec. 16, 2020
Canada secures early doses from Moderna
Dec. 17, 2020
Vaccinations reach US nursing homes
Dec. 18, 2020
US virus deaths and cases set records
Dec. 19, 2020
How many COVID-19 vaccines has each country bought?
Dec. 21, 2020
How the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines compare
Dec. 21, 2020
Variant of virus spreading across UK sending it into "Tier Four" lockdown
Dec. 21, 2020
US Congress seals agreement on $900 billion COVID relief bill


Dec. 30, 2020
Worldwide Coronavirus Deaths over 1,800,000
402
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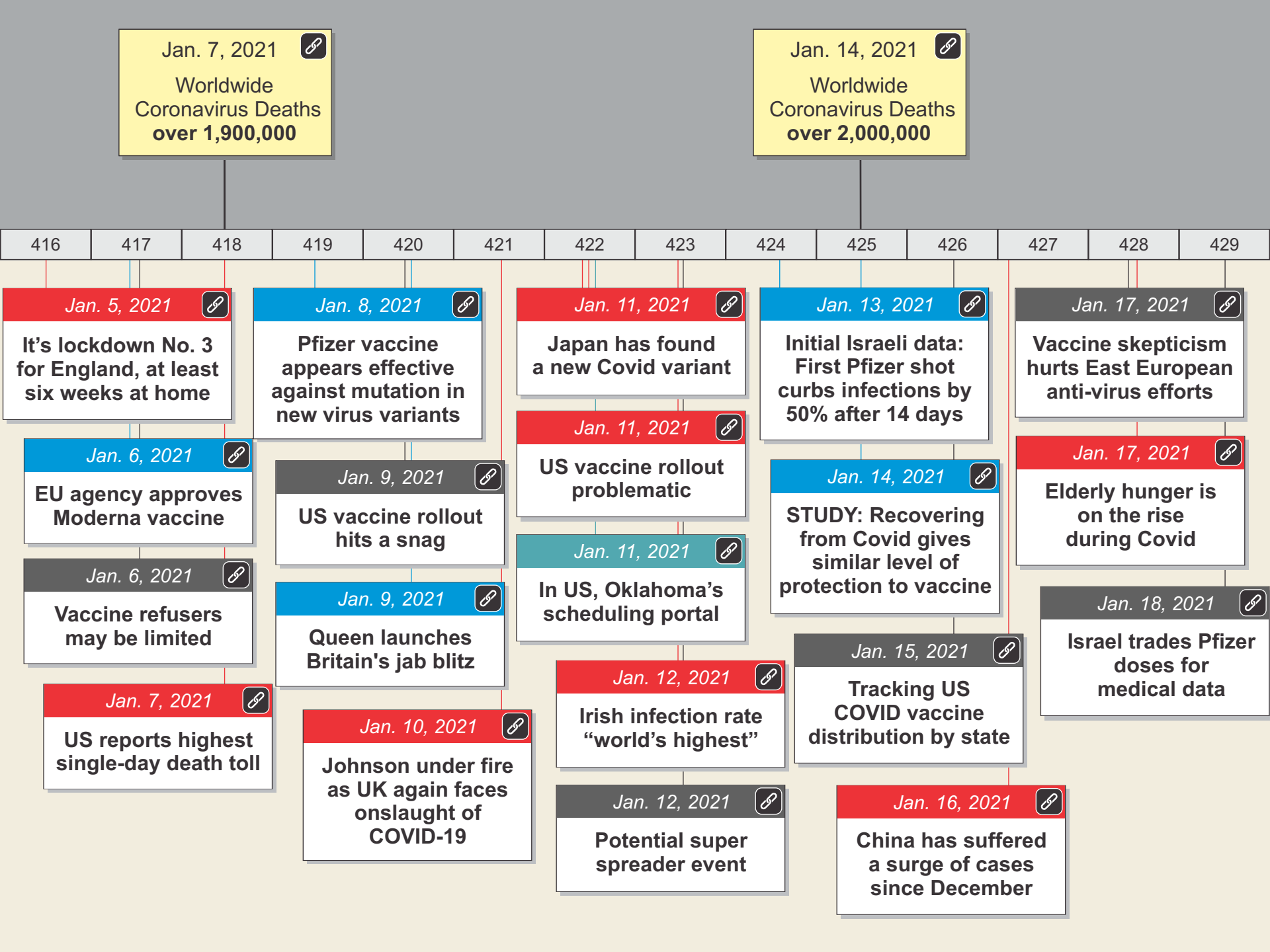
Dec. 22, 2020
Vaccines across the world
Dec. 22, 2020
Vaccines across the US
Dec. 23, 2020
Thailand grapples with virus outbreak
Dec. 23, 2020
US buys more doses of Pfizer vaccine
Dec. 24, 2020
Santa Claus is "good to go!"
Dec. 26, 2020
Could AZD7442 prevent COVID-19 infection in those exposed?
Dec. 27, 2020
December is the deadliest month in the US since the coronavirus pandemic began
Dec. 27, 2020
"Hug booth" allows nursing home residents to touch their loved ones
Dec. 29, 2020
Map showing which countries have rolled out a COVID-19 vaccine
Dec. 30, 2020
Britain becomes 1st country to approve AstraZeneca vaccine
Dec. 30, 2020
1st US case of virus variant detected in Colorado
Dec. 31, 2020
How vaccinations were developed so quickly
Dec. 31, 2020
Where the world stands on vaccination rollout
Jan. 1, 2021
Demand for rescue animals has skyrocketed
Jan. 2, 2021
Israel leads vaccine race with 12% given jab
Jan. 3, 2021
Interactive US Map by county showing risk for COVID
Jan. 4, 2021
82 year old dialysis patient gets first AstraZeneca jab
Jan. 4, 2021
US vaccine administation tracker


Jan. 7, 2021
Worldwide Coronavirus Deaths over 1,900,000
Jan. 14, 2021
Worldwide Coronavirus Deaths over 2,000,000
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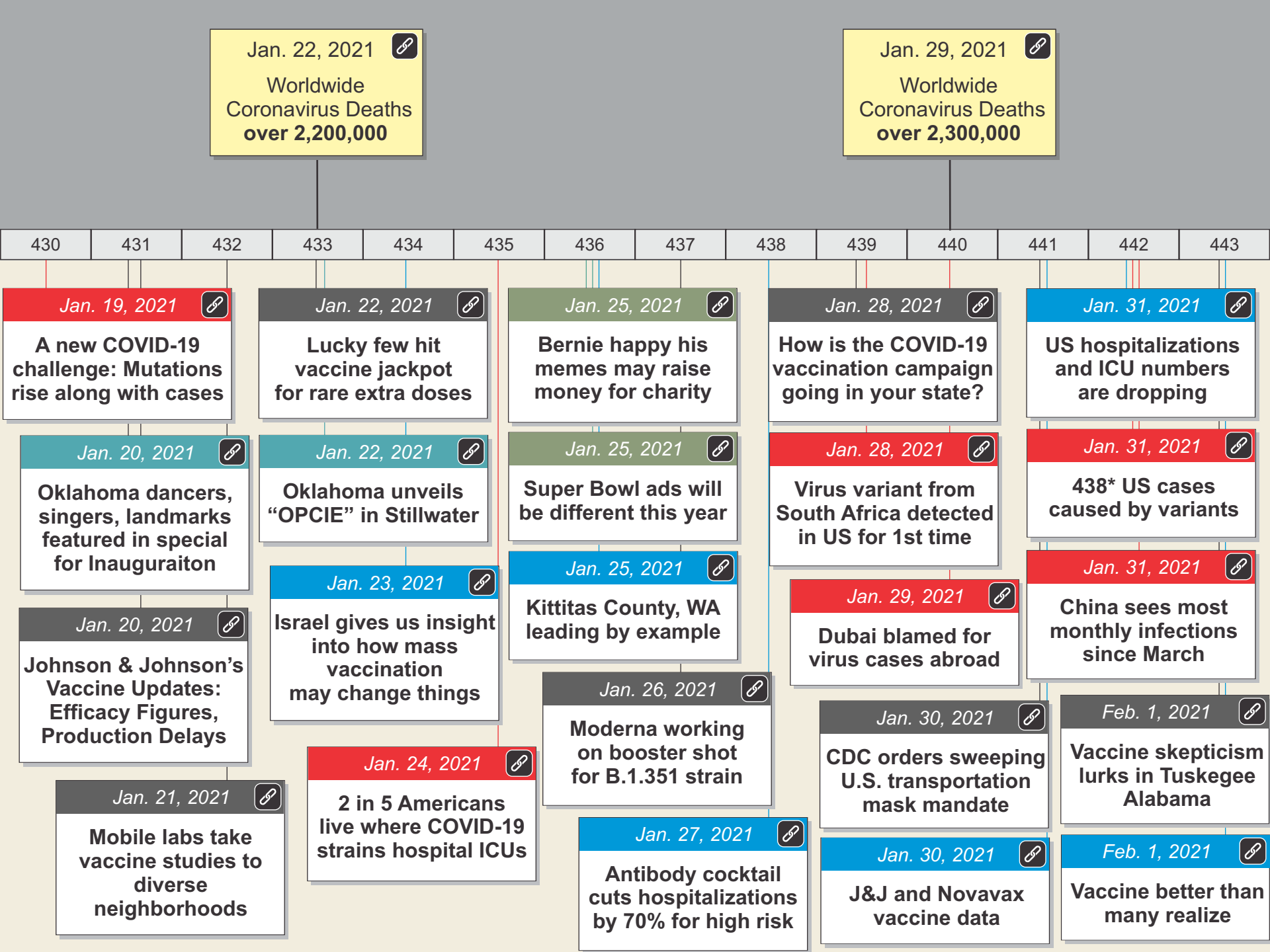
Jan. 5, 2021
It's lockdown No. 3 for England, at least six weeks at home
Jan. 6, 2021
EU agency approves Moderna vaccine
Jan. 6, 2021
Vaccine refusers may be limited
Jan. 7, 2021
US reports highest single-day death toll
Jan. 8, 2021
Pfizer vaccine appears effective against mutation in new virus variants
Jan. 9, 2021
US vaccine rollout hits a snag
Jan. 9, 2021
Queen launches Britain's jab blitz
Jan. 10, 2021
Johnson under fire as UK again faces onslaught of COVID-19
Jan. 11, 2021
Japan has found a new Covid variant
Jan. 11, 2021
US vaccine rollout problematic
Jan. 11, 2021
In US, Oklahoma's scheduling portal
Jan. 12, 2021
Irish infection rate "world's highest"
Jan. 12, 2021
Potential super spreader event
Jan. 13, 2021
Initial Israeli data: First Pfizer shot curbs infections by 50% after 14 days
Jan. 14, 2021
STUDY: Recovering from Covid gives similar level of protection to vaccine
Jan. 15, 2021
Tracking US COVID vaccine distribution by state
Jan. 16, 2021
China has suffered a surge of cases since December
Jan. 17, 2021
Vaccine skepticism hurts East European anti-virus efforts
Jan. 17, 2021
Elderly hunger is on the rise during Covid
Jan. 18, 2021
Israel trades Pfizer doses for medical data


Jan. 22, 2021
Worldwide Coronavirus Deaths over 2,200,000
Jan. 29, 2021
Worldwide Coronavirus Deaths over 2,300,000
430
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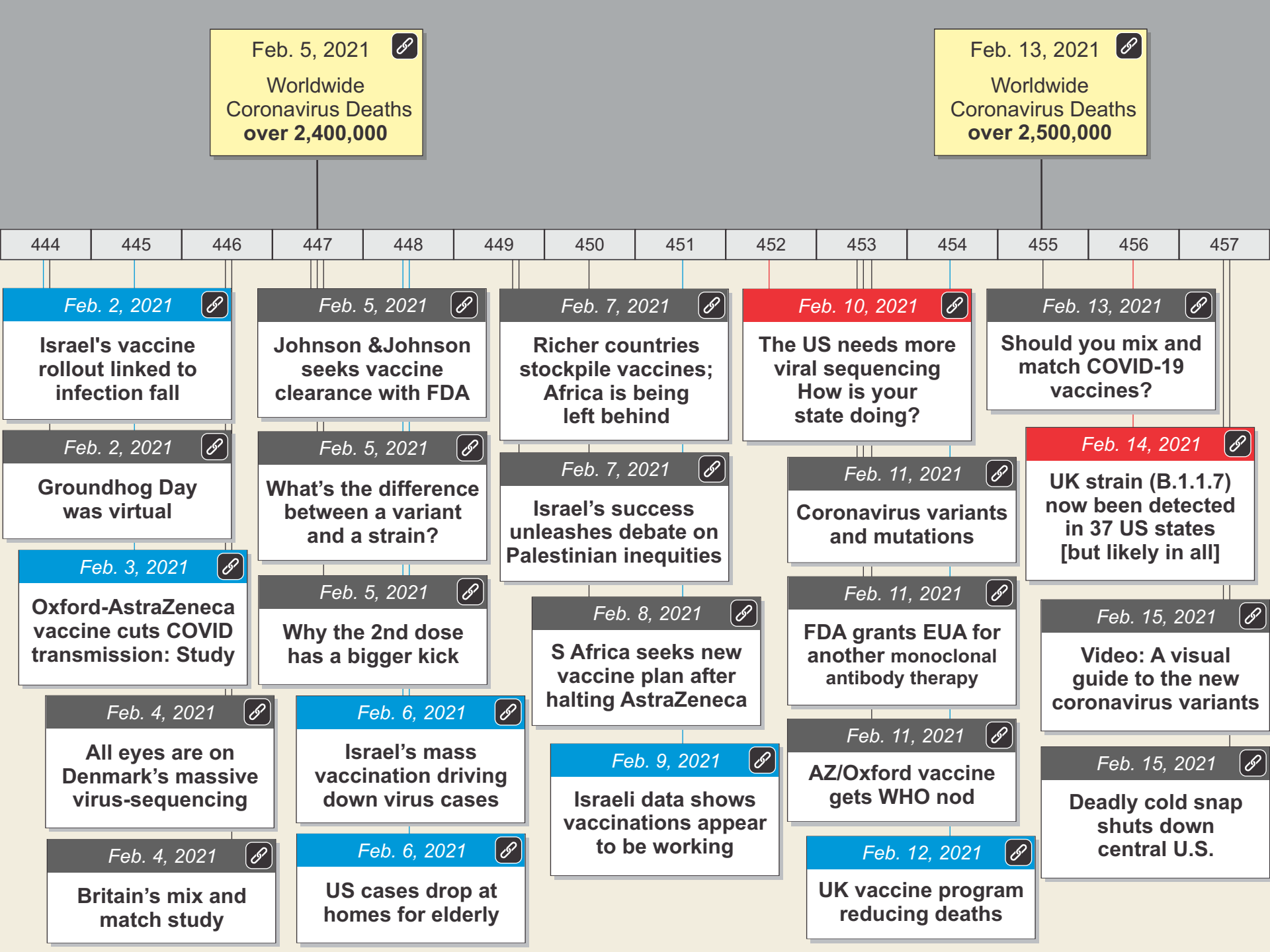
Jan. 19, 2021
A new COVID-19 challenge: Mutations rise along with cases
Jan. 20, 2021
Oklahoma dancers, singers, landmarks featured in special for Inauguraiton
Jan. 20, 2021
Johnson & Johnson's Vaccine Updates: Efficacy Figures, Production Delays
Jan. 21, 2021
Mobile labs take vaccine studies to diverse neighborhoods
Jan. 22, 2021
Lucky few hit vaccine jackpot for rare extra doses
Jan. 22, 2021
Oklahoma unveils "OPCIE" in Stillwater
Jan. 23, 2021
Israel gives us insight into how mass vaccination may change things
Jan. 24, 2021
2 in 5 Americans live where COVID-19 strains hospital ICUs
Jan. 25, 2021
Bernie happy his memes may raise money for charity
Jan. 25, 2021
Super Bowl ads will be different this year
Jan. 25, 2021
Kittitas County, WA leading by example
Jan. 26, 2021
Moderna working on booster shot for B.1.351 strain
Jan. 27, 2021
Antibody cocktail cuts hospitalizations by 70% for high risk
Jan. 28, 2021
How is the COVID-19 vaccination campaign going in your state?
Jan. 28, 2021
Virus variant from South Africa detected in US for 1st time
Jan. 29, 2021
Dubai blamed for virus cases abroad
Jan. 30, 2021
CDC orders sweeping U.S. transportation mask mandate
Jan. 30, 2021
J&J and Novavax vaccine data
Jan. 31, 2021
US hospitalizations and ICU numbers are dropping
Jan. 31, 2021
438* US cases caused by variants
Jan. 31, 2021
China sees most monthly infections since March
Feb. 1, 2021
Vaccine skepticism lurks in Tuskegee Alabama
Feb. 1, 2021
Vaccine better than many realize


Feb. 5, 2021
Worldwide Coronavirus Deaths over 2,400,000
Feb. 13, 2021
Worldwide Coronavirus Deaths over 2,500,000
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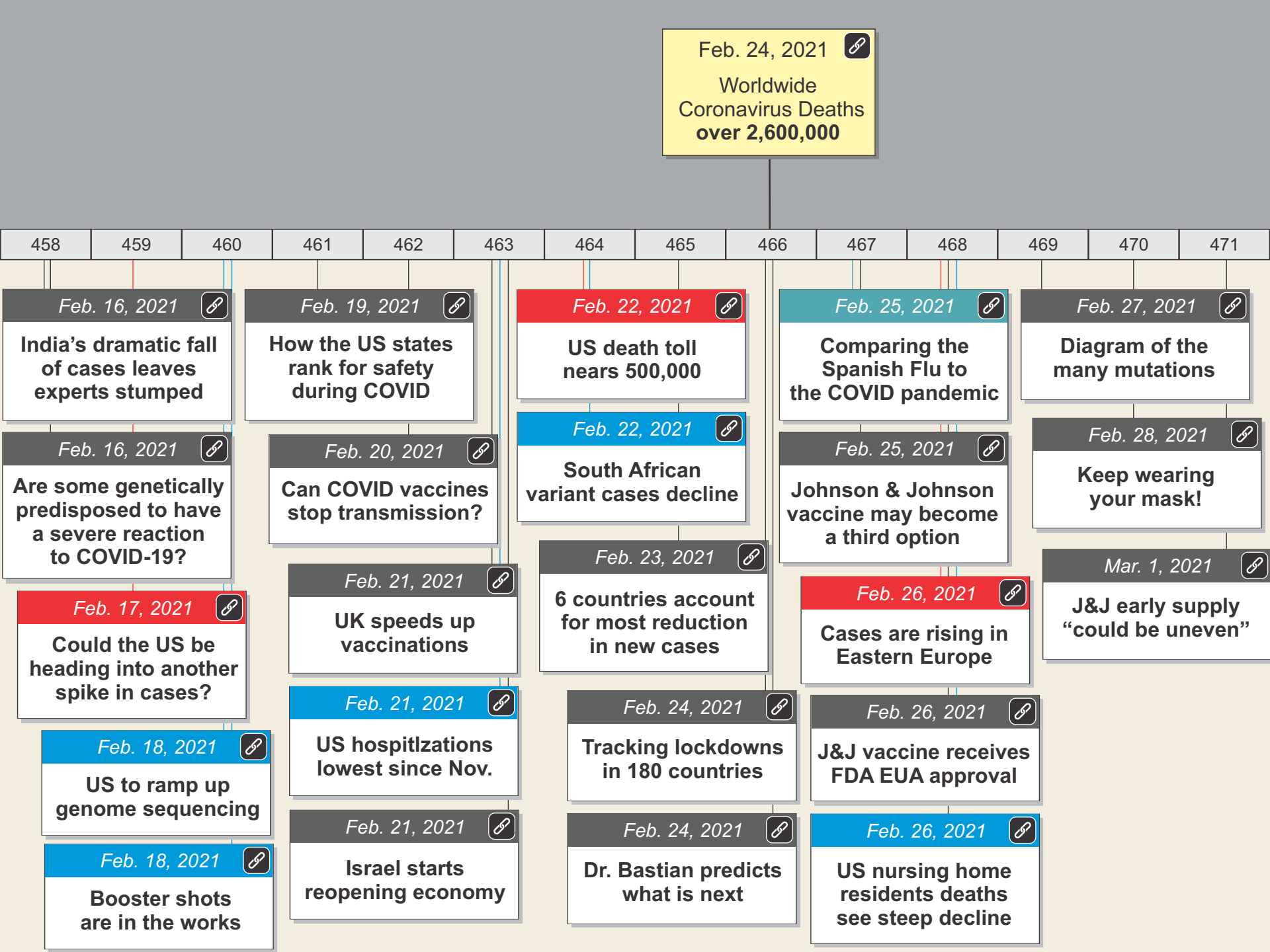
Feb. 2, 2021
Israel's vaccine rollout linked to infection fall
Feb. 2, 2021
Groundhog Day was virtual
Feb. 3, 2021
Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine cuts COVID transmission: Study
Feb. 4, 2021
All eyes are on Denmark's massive virus-sequencing
Feb. 4, 2021
Britain's mix and match study
Feb. 5, 2021
Johnson &Johnson seeks vaccine clearance with FDA
Feb. 5, 2021
What's the difference between a variant and a strain?
Feb. 5, 2021
Why the 2nd dose has a bigger kick
Feb. 6, 2021
Israel's mass vaccination driving down virus cases
Feb. 6, 2021
US cases drop at homes for elderly
Feb. 7, 2021
Richer countries stockpile vaccines; Africa is being left behind
Feb. 7, 2021
Israel's success unleashes debate on Palestinian inequities
Feb. 8, 2021
S Africa seeks new vaccine plan after halting AstraZeneca
Feb. 9, 2021
Israeli data shows vaccinations appear to be working
Feb. 10, 2021
The US needs more viral sequencing How is your state doing?
Feb. 11, 2021
Coronavirus variants and mutations
Feb. 11, 2021
FDA grants EUA for another monoclonal antibody therapy
Feb. 11, 2021
AZ/Oxford vaccine gets WHO nod
Feb. 12, 2021
UK vaccine program reducing deaths
Feb. 13, 2021
Should you mix and match COVID-19 vaccines?
Feb. 14, 2021
UK strain (B.1.1.7) now been detected in 37 US states [but likely in all]
Feb. 15, 2021
Video: A visual guide to the new coronavirus variants
Feb. 15, 2021
Deadly cold snap shuts down central U.S.


Feb. 24, 2021
Worldwide Coronavirus Deaths over 2,600,000
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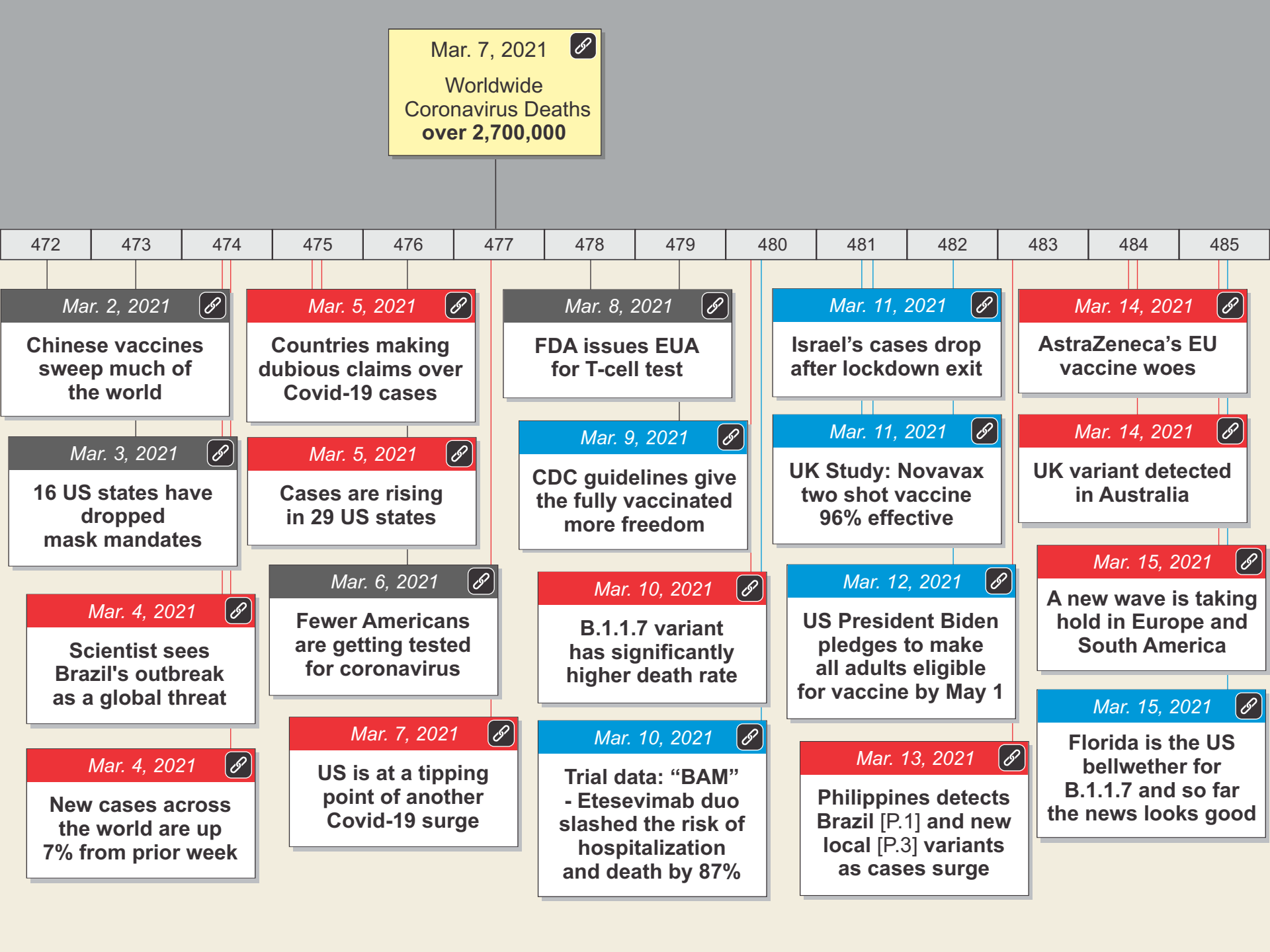
Feb. 16, 2021
India's dramatic fall of cases leaves experts stumped
Feb. 16, 2021
Are some genetically predisposed to have a severe reaction to COVID-19?
Feb. 17, 2021
Could the US be heading into another spike in cases?
Feb. 18, 2021
US to ramp up genome sequencing
Feb. 18, 2021
Booster shots are in the works
Feb. 19, 2021
How the US states rank for safety during COVID
Feb. 20, 2021
Can COVID vaccines stop transmission?
Feb. 21, 2021
UK speeds up vaccinations
Feb. 21, 2021
US hospitlzations lowest since Nov.
Feb. 21, 2021
Israel starts reopening economy
Feb. 22, 2021
US death toll nears 500,000
Feb. 22, 2021
South African variant cases decline
Feb. 23, 2021
6 countries account for most reduction in new cases
Feb. 24, 2021
Tracking lockdowns in 180 countries
Feb. 24, 2021
Dr. Bastian predicts what is next
Feb. 25, 2021
Comparing the Spanish Flu to the COVID pandemic
Feb. 25, 2021
Johnson & Johnson vaccine may become a third option
Feb. 26, 2021
Cases are rising in Eastern Europe
Feb. 26, 2021
J&J vaccine receives FDA EUA approval
Feb. 26, 2021
US nursing home residents deaths see steep decline
Feb. 27, 2021
Diagram of the many mutations
Feb. 28, 2021
Keep wearing your mask!
Mar. 1, 2021
J&J early supply "could be uneven"


Mar. 7, 2021
Worldwide Coronavirus Deaths **over 2,700,000**
472
473
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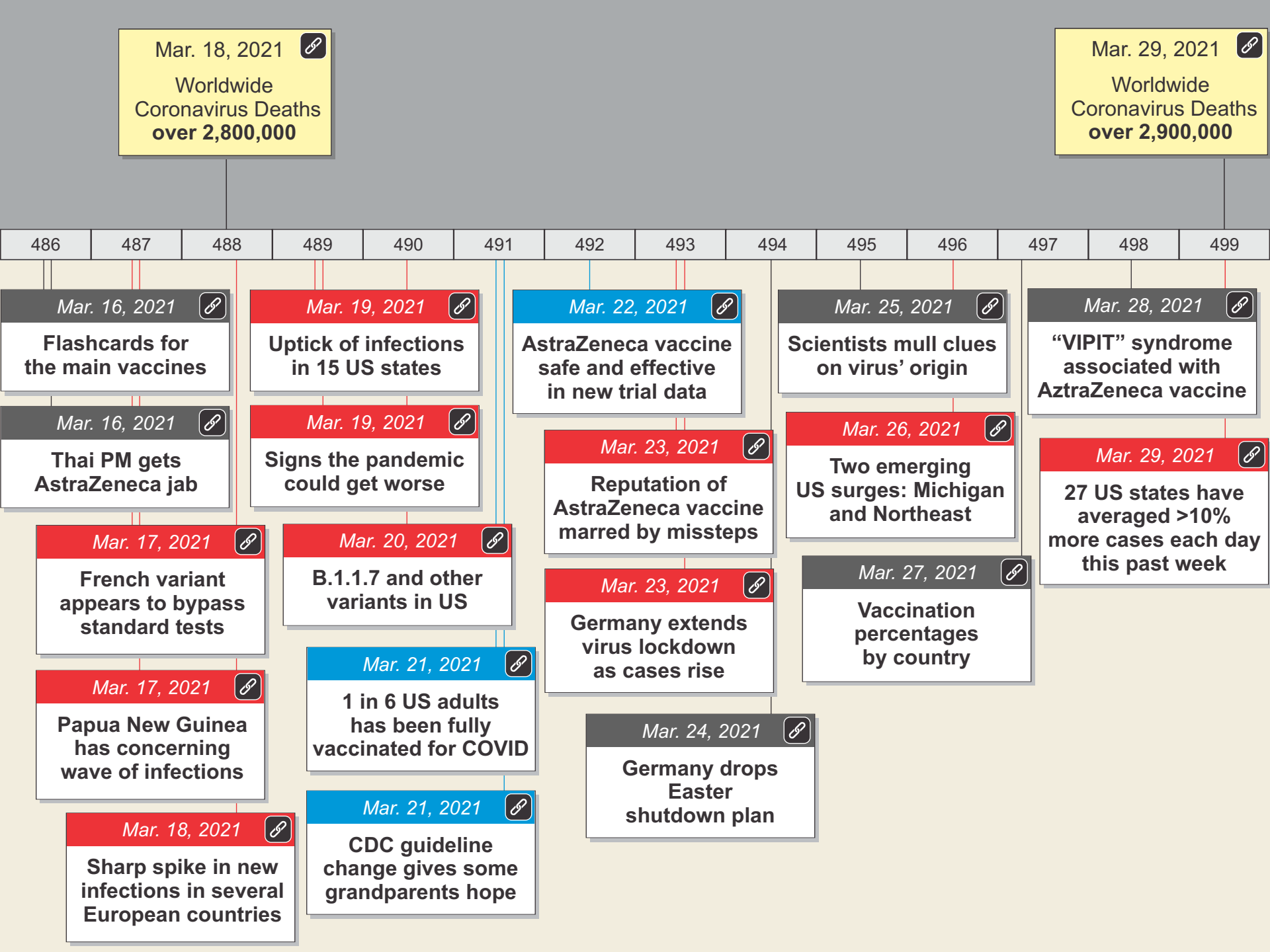
485
Mar. 2, 2021
Chinese vaccines sweep much of the world
Mar. 3, 2021
16 US states have dropped mask mandates
Mar. 4, 2021
Scientist sees Brazil's outbreak as a global threat
Mar. 4, 2021
New cases across the world are up 7% from prior week
Mar. 5, 2021
Countries making dubious claims over Covid-19 cases
Mar. 5, 2021
Cases are rising in 29 US states
Mar. 6, 2021
Fewer Americans are getting tested for coronavirus
Mar. 7, 2021
US is at a tipping point of another Covid-19 surge
Mar. 8, 2021
FDA issues EUA for T-cell test
Mar. 9, 2021
CDC guidelines give the fully vaccinated more freedom
Mar. 10, 2021
B.1.1.7 variant has significantly higher death rate
Mar. 10, 2021
Trial data: “BAM” - Etesevimab duo slashed the risk of hospitalization and death by 87%
Mar. 11, 2021
Israel’s cases drop after lockdown exit
Mar. 11, 2021
UK Study: Novavax two shot vaccine 96% effective
Mar. 12, 2021
US President Biden pledges to make all adults eligible for vaccine by May 1
Mar. 13, 2021
Philippines detects Brazil [P.1] and new local [P.3] variants as cases surge
Mar. 14, 2021
AstraZeneca’s EU vaccine woes
Mar. 14, 2021
UK variant detected in Australia
Mar. 15, 2021
A new wave is taking hold in Europe and South America
Mar. 15, 2021
Florida is the US bellwether for B.1.1.7 and so far the news looks good


Mar. 18, 2021
Worldwide Coronavirus Deaths over 2,800,000
Mar. 29, 2021
Worldwide Coronavirus Deaths over 2,900,000
486
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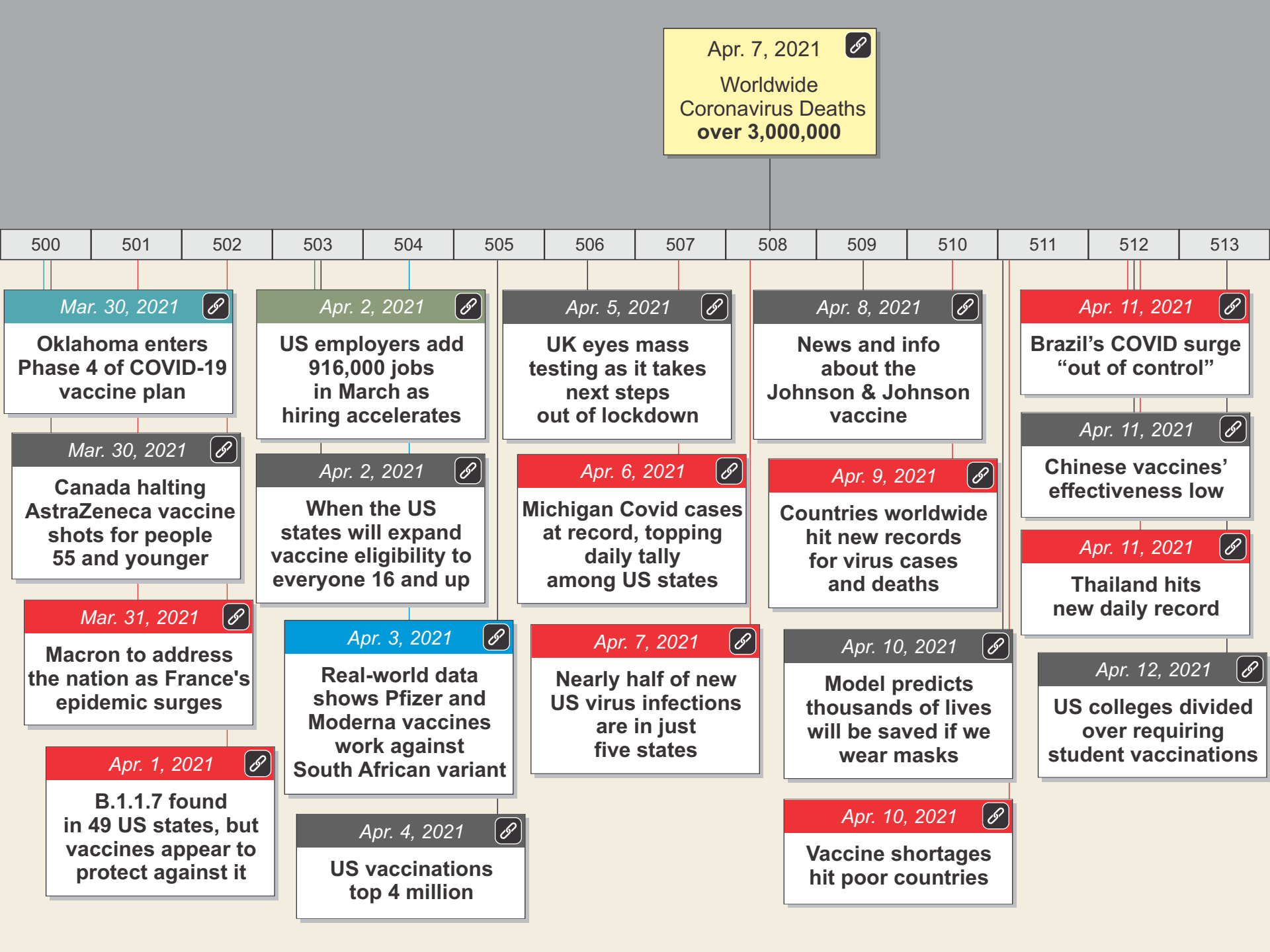
Mar. 16, 2021
Flashcards for the main vaccines
Mar. 16, 2021
Thai PM gets AstraZeneca jab
Mar. 17, 2021
French variant appears to bypass standard tests
Mar. 17, 2021
Papua New Guinea has concerning wave of infections
Mar. 18, 2021
Sharp spike in new infections in several European countries
Mar. 19, 2021
Uptick of infections in 15 US states
Mar. 19, 2021
Signs the pandemic could get worse
Mar. 20, 2021
B.1.1.7 and other variants in US
Mar. 21, 2021
1 in 6 US adults has been fully vaccinated for COVID
Mar. 21, 2021
CDC guideline change gives some grandparents hope
Mar. 22, 2021
AstraZeneca vaccine safe and effective in new trial data
Mar. 23, 2021
Reputation of AstraZeneca vaccine marred by missteps
Mar. 23, 2021
Germany extends virus lockdown as cases rise
Mar. 24, 2021
Germany drops Easter shutdown plan
Mar. 25, 2021
Scientists mull clues on virus' origin
Mar. 26, 2021
Two emerging US surges: Michigan and Northeast
Mar. 27, 2021
Vaccination percentages by country
Mar. 28, 2021
"VIPIT" syndrome associated with AztraZeneca vaccine
Mar. 29, 2021
27 US states have averaged >10% more cases each day this past week


Apr. 7, 2021
Worldwide Coronavirus Deaths over 3,000,000
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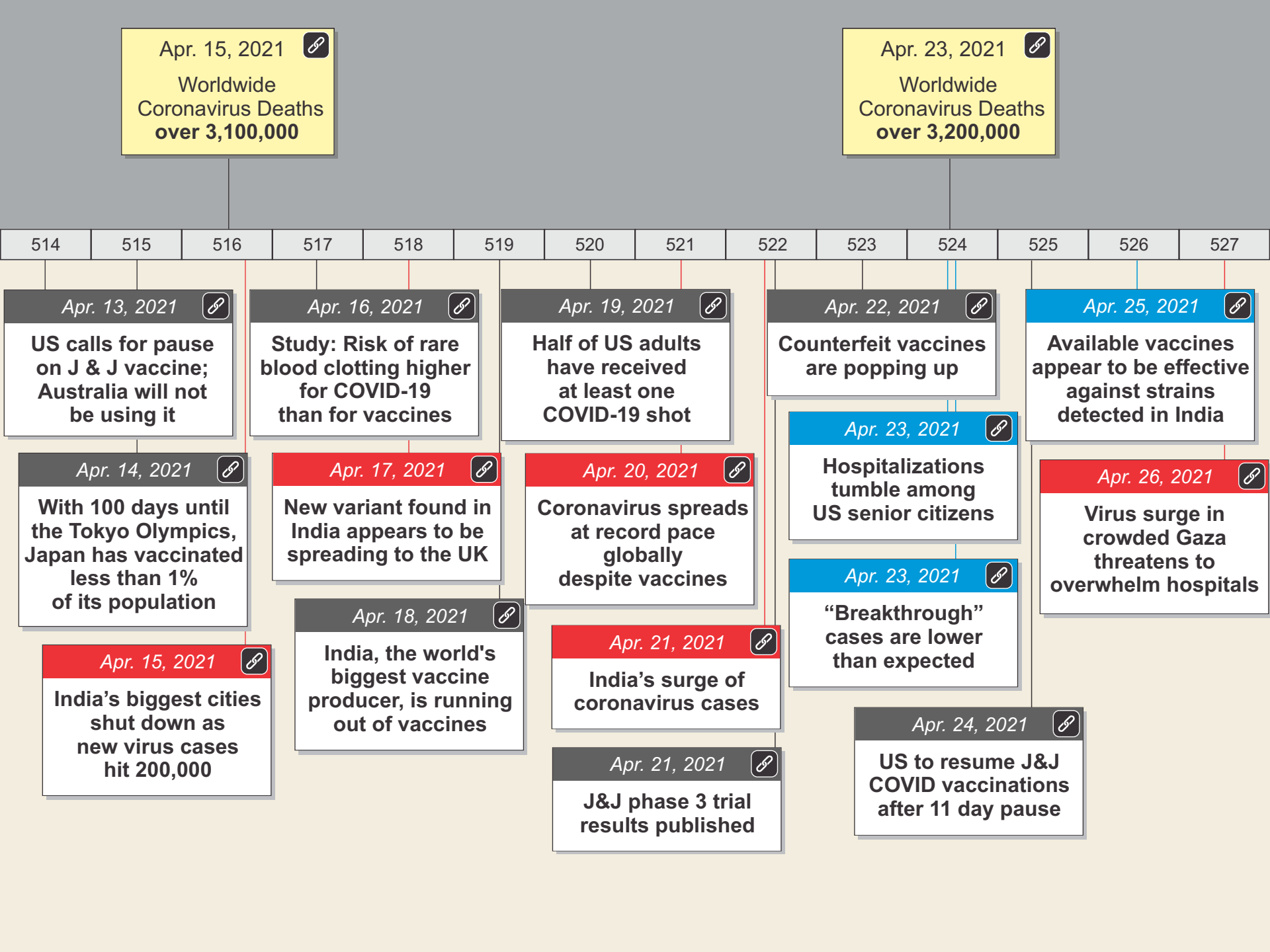
Mar. 30, 2021
Oklahoma enters Phase 4 of COVID-19 vaccine plan
Mar. 30, 2021
Canada halting AstraZeneca vaccine shots for people 55 and younger
Mar. 31, 2021
Macron to address the nation as France's epidemic surges
Apr. 1, 2021
B.1.1.7 found in 49 US states, but vaccines appear to protect against it
Apr. 2, 2021
US employers add 916,000 jobs in March as hiring accelerates
Apr. 2, 2021
When the US states will expand vaccine eligibility to everyone 16 and up
Apr. 3, 2021
Real-world data shows Pfizer and Moderna vaccines work against South African variant
Apr. 4, 2021
US vaccinations top 4 million
Apr. 5, 2021
UK eyes mass testing as it takes next steps out of lockdown
Apr. 6, 2021
Michigan Covid cases at record, topping daily tally among US states
Apr. 7, 2021
Nearly half of new US virus infections are in just five states
Apr. 8, 2021
News and info about the Johnson & Johnson vaccine
Apr. 9, 2021
Countries worldwide hit new records for virus cases and deaths
Apr. 10, 2021
Model predicts thousands of lives will be saved if we wear masks
Apr. 10, 2021
Vaccine shortages hit poor countries
Apr. 11, 2021
Brazil's COVID surge "out of control"
Apr. 11, 2021
Chinese vaccines' effectiveness low
Apr. 11, 2021
Thailand hits new daily record
Apr. 12, 2021
US colleges divided over requiring student vaccinations


Apr. 15, 2021
Worldwide Coronavirus Deaths over 3,100,000
Apr. 23, 2021
Worldwide Coronavirus Deaths over 3,200,000
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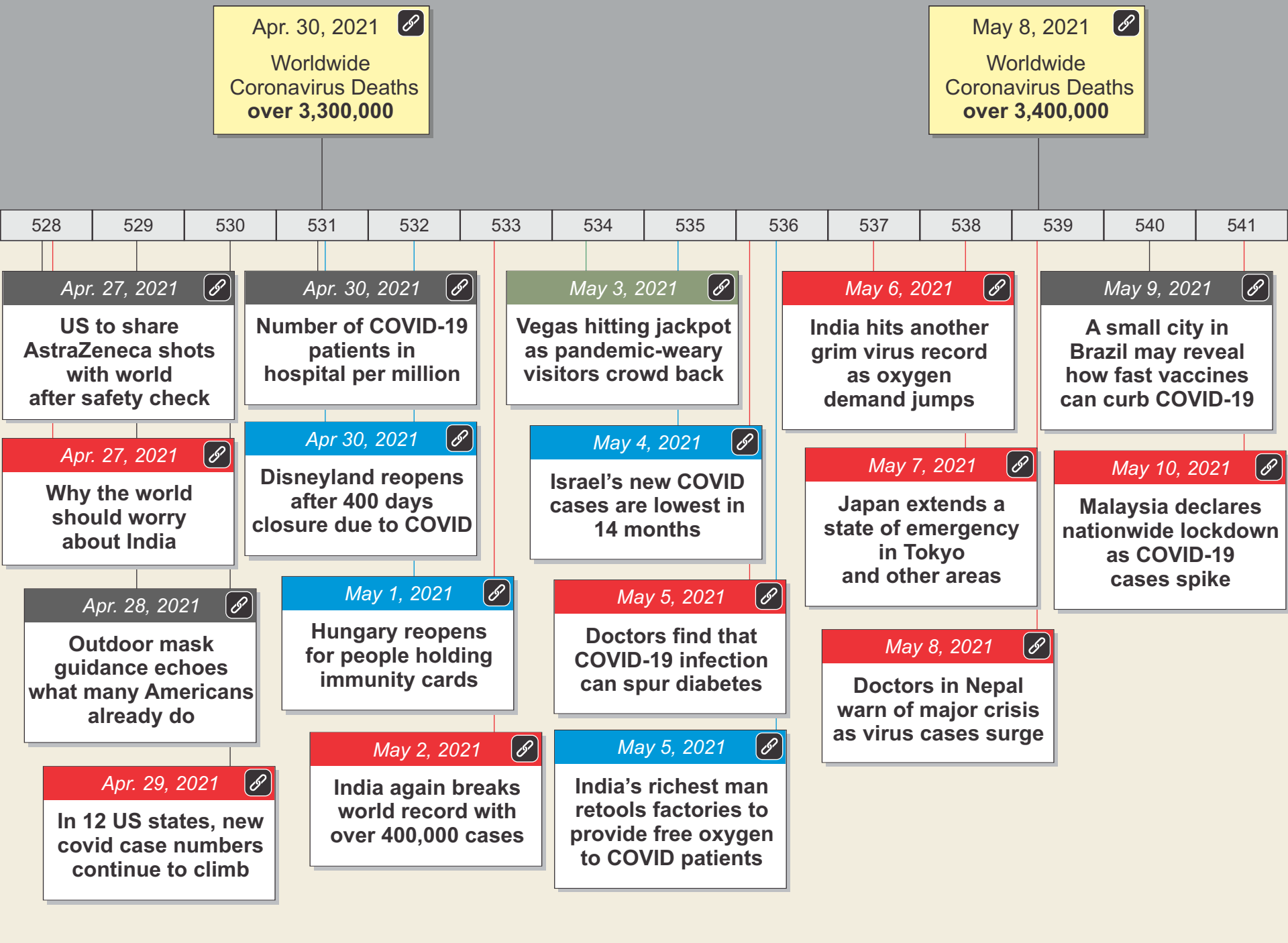
527
Apr. 13, 2021
US calls for pause on J & J vaccine; Australia will not be using it
Apr. 14, 2021
With 100 days until the Tokyo Olympics, Japan has vaccinated less than 1% of its population
Apr. 15, 2021
India's biggest cities shut down as new virus cases hit 200,000
Apr. 16, 2021
Study: Risk of rare blood clotting higher for COVID-19 than for vaccines
Apr. 17, 2021
New variant found in India appears to be spreading to the UK
Apr. 18, 2021
India, the world's biggest vaccine producer, is running out of vaccines
Apr. 19, 2021
Half of US adults have received at least one COVID-19 shot
Apr. 20, 2021
Coronavirus spreads at record pace globally despite vaccines
Apr. 21, 2021
India's surge of coronavirus cases
Apr. 21, 2021
J&J phase 3 trial results published
Apr. 22, 2021
Counterfeit vaccines are popping up
Apr. 23, 2021
Hospitalizations tumble among US senior citizens
Apr. 23, 2021
"Breakthrough" cases are lower than expected
Apr. 24, 2021
US to resume J&J COVID vaccinations after 11 day pause
Apr. 25, 2021
Available vaccines appear to be effective against strains detected in India
Apr. 26, 2021
Virus surge in crowded Gaza threatens to overwhelm hospitals


Apr. 30, 2021
Worldwide Coronavirus Deaths **over 3,300,000**
May 8, 2021
Worldwide Coronavirus Deaths **over 3,400,000**
528
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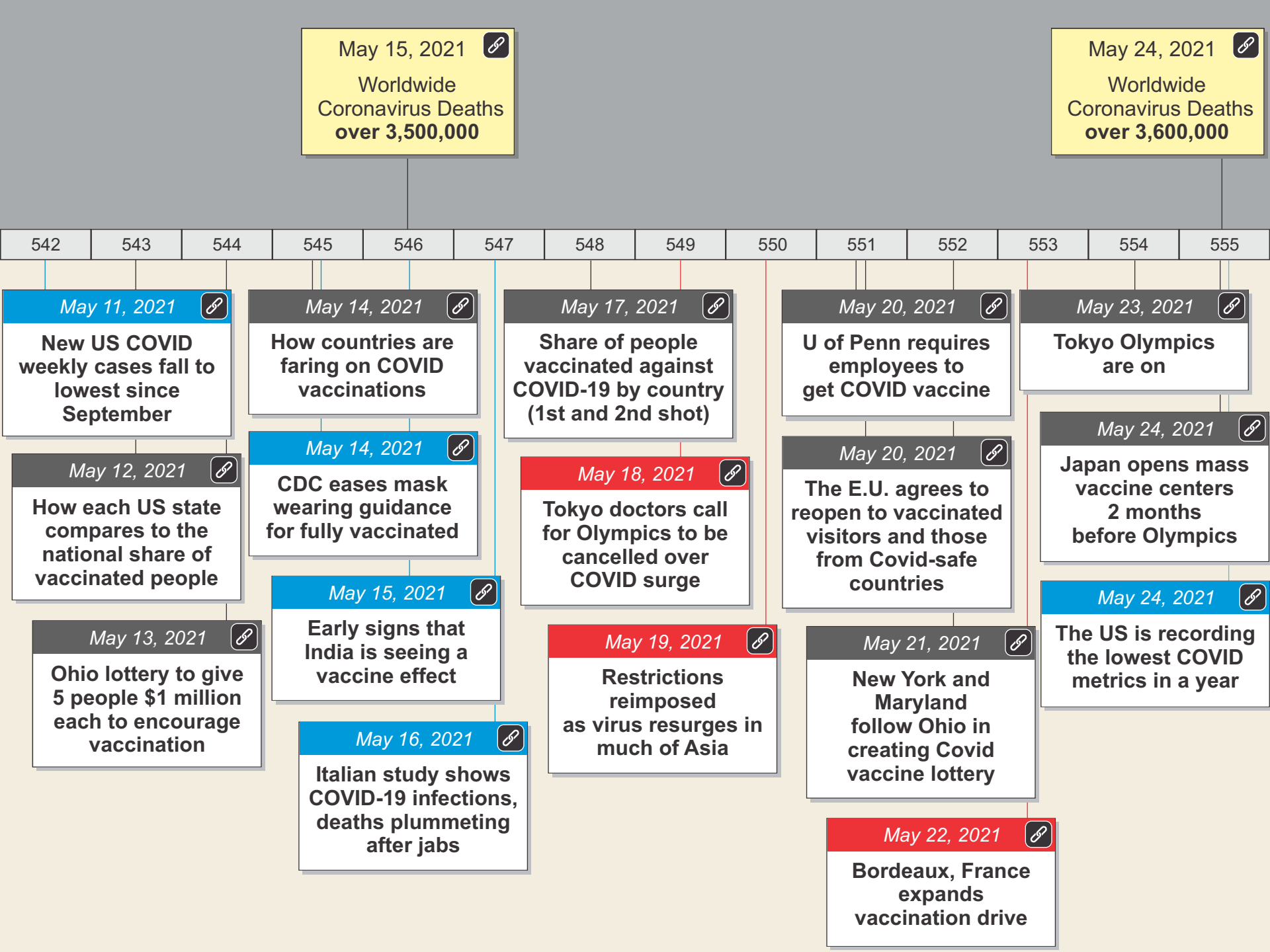
541
Apr. 27, 2021
US to share AstraZeneca shots with world after safety check
Apr. 27, 2021
Why the world should worry about India
Apr. 28, 2021
Outdoor mask guidance echoes what many Americans already do
Apr. 29, 2021
In 12 US states, new covid case numbers continue to climb
Apr. 30, 2021
Number of COVID-19 patients in hospital per million
Apr 30, 2021
Disneyland reopens after 400 days closure due to COVID
May 1, 2021
Hungary reopens for people holding immunity cards
May 2, 2021
India again breaks world record with over 400,000 cases
May 3, 2021
Vegas hitting jackpot as pandemic-weary visitors crowd back
May 4, 2021
Israel's new COVID cases are lowest in 14 months
May 5, 2021
Doctors find that COVID-19 infection can spur diabetes
May 5, 2021
India's richest man retools factories to provide free oxygen to COVID patients
May 6, 2021
India hits another grim virus record as oxygen demand jumps
May 7, 2021
Japan extends a state of emergency in Tokyo and other areas
May 8, 2021
Doctors in Nepal warn of major crisis as virus cases surge
May 9, 2021
A small city in Brazil may reveal how fast vaccines can curb COVID-19
May 10, 2021
Malaysia declares nationwide lockdown as COVID-19 cases spike


May 15, 2021
Worldwide Coronavirus Deaths over 3,500,000
May 24, 2021
Worldwide Coronavirus Deaths over 3,600,000
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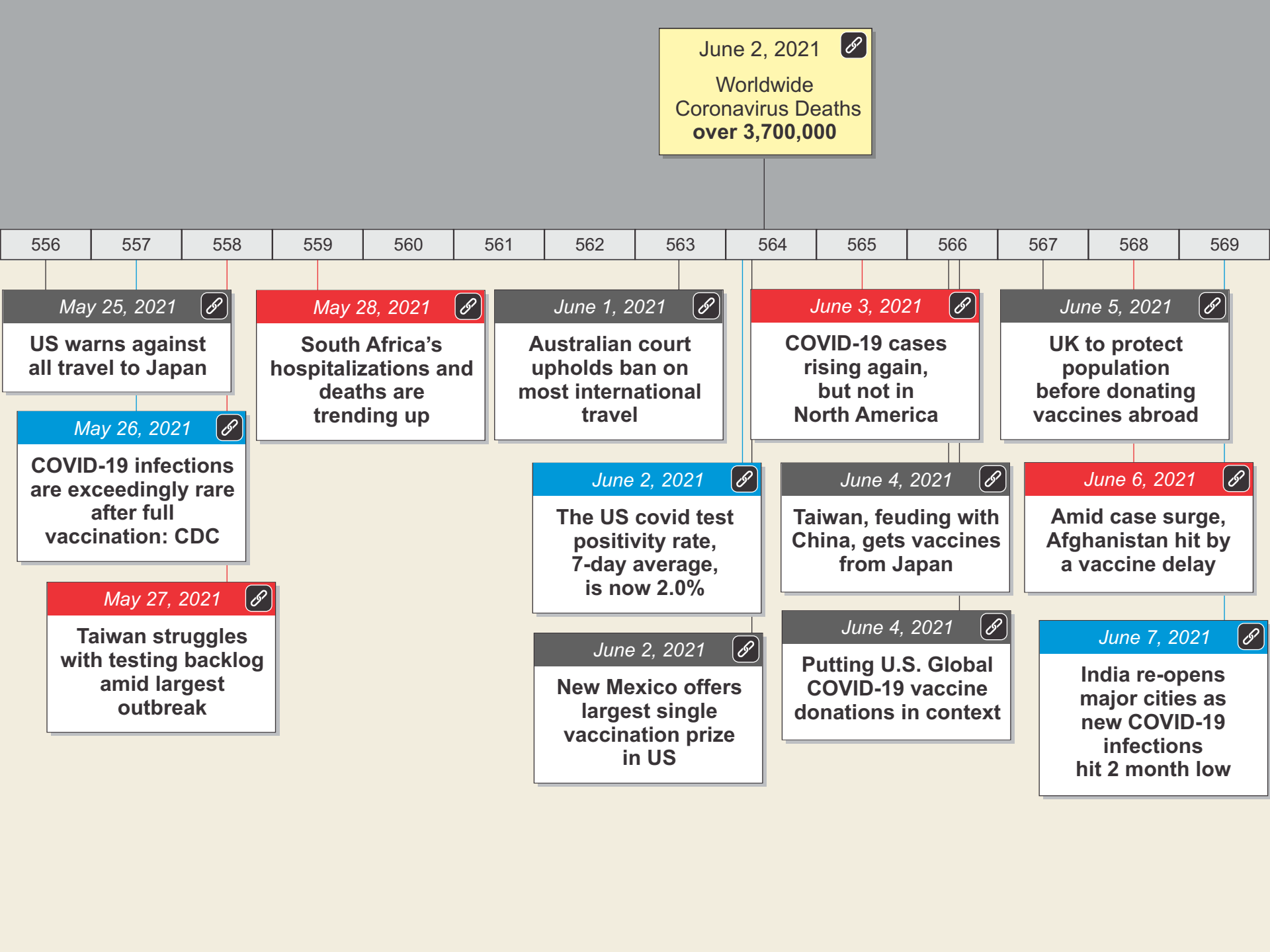
May 11, 2021
New US COVID weekly cases fall to lowest since September
May 12, 2021
How each US state compares to the national share of vaccinated people
May 13, 2021
Ohio lottery to give 5 people $1 million each to encourage vaccination
May 14, 2021
How countries are faring on COVID vaccinations
May 14, 2021
CDC eases mask wearing guidance for fully vaccinated
May 15, 2021
Early signs that India is seeing a vaccine effect
May 16, 2021
Italian study shows COVID-19 infections, deaths plummeting after jabs
May 17, 2021
Share of people vaccinated against COVID-19 by country (1st and 2nd shot)
May 18, 2021
Tokyo doctors call for Olympics to be cancelled over COVID surge
May 19, 2021
Restrictions reimposed as virus resurges in much of Asia
May 20, 2021
U of Penn requires employees to get COVID vaccine
May 20, 2021
The E.U. agrees to reopen to vaccinated visitors and those from Covid-safe countries
May 21, 2021
New York and Maryland follow Ohio in creating Covid vaccine lottery
May 22, 2021
Bordeaux, France expands vaccination drive
May 23, 2021
Tokyo Olympics are on
May 24, 2021
Japan opens mass vaccine centers 2 months before Olympics
May 24, 2021
The US is recording the lowest COVID metrics in a year


June 2, 2021
Worldwide Coronavirus Deaths
over 3,700,000
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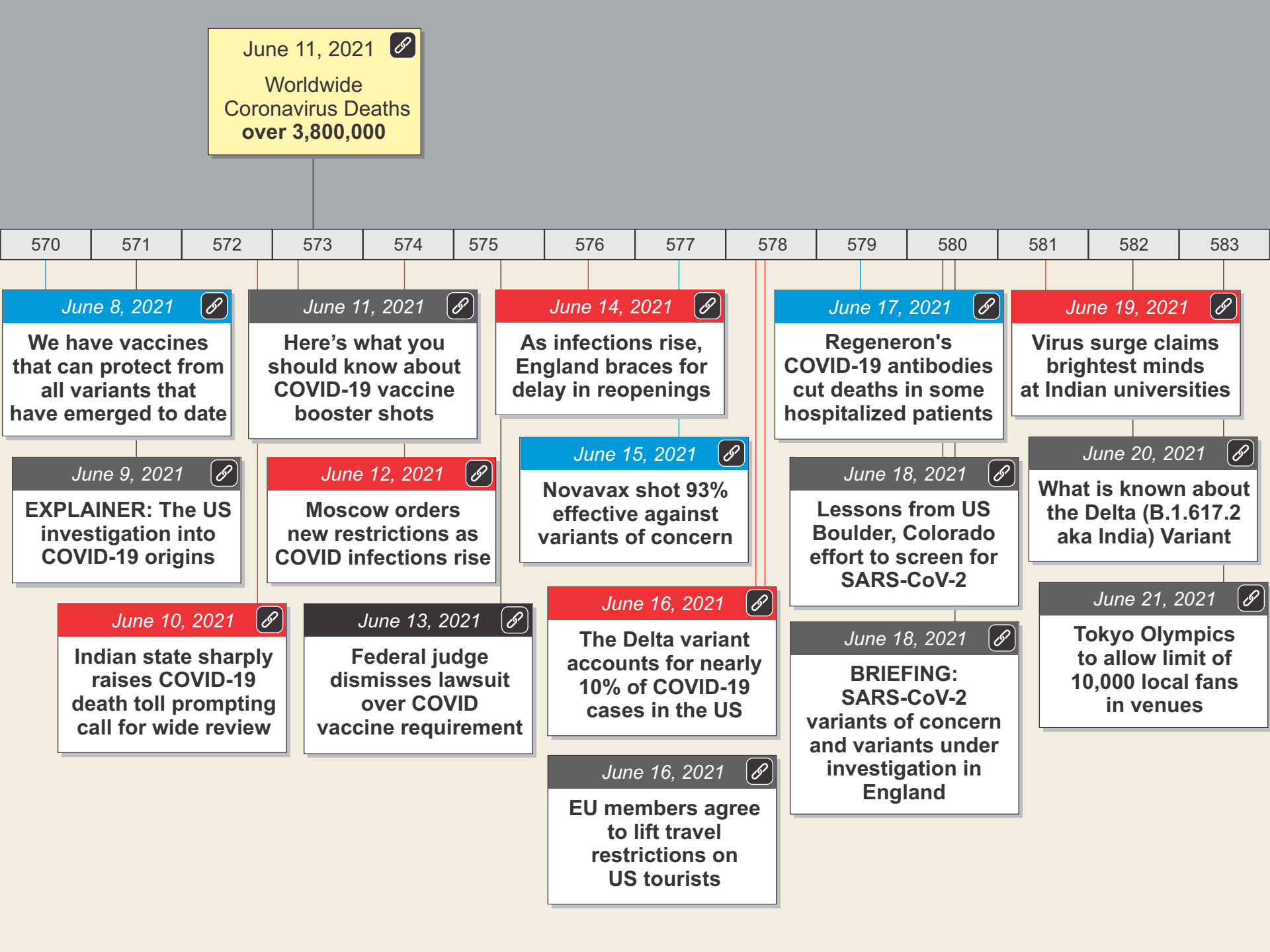
May 25, 2021
US warns against all travel to Japan
May 26, 2021
COVID-19 infections are exceedingly rare after full vaccination: CDC
May 27, 2021
Taiwan struggles with testing backlog amid largest outbreak
May 28, 2021
South Africa's hospitalizations and deaths are trending up
June 1, 2021
Australian court upholds ban on most international travel
June 2, 2021
The US covid test positivity rate, 7-day average, is now 2.0%
June 2, 2021
New Mexico offers largest single vaccination prize in US
June 3, 2021
COVID-19 cases rising again, but not in North America
June 4, 2021
Taiwan, feuding with China, gets vaccines from Japan
June 4, 2021
Putting U.S. Global COVID-19 vaccine donations in context
June 5, 2021
UK to protect population before donating vaccines abroad
June 6, 2021
Amid case surge, Afghanistan hit by a vaccine delay
June 7, 2021
India re-opens major cities as new COVID-19 infections hit 2 month low


June 11, 2021
Worldwide Coronavirus Deaths over 3,800,000
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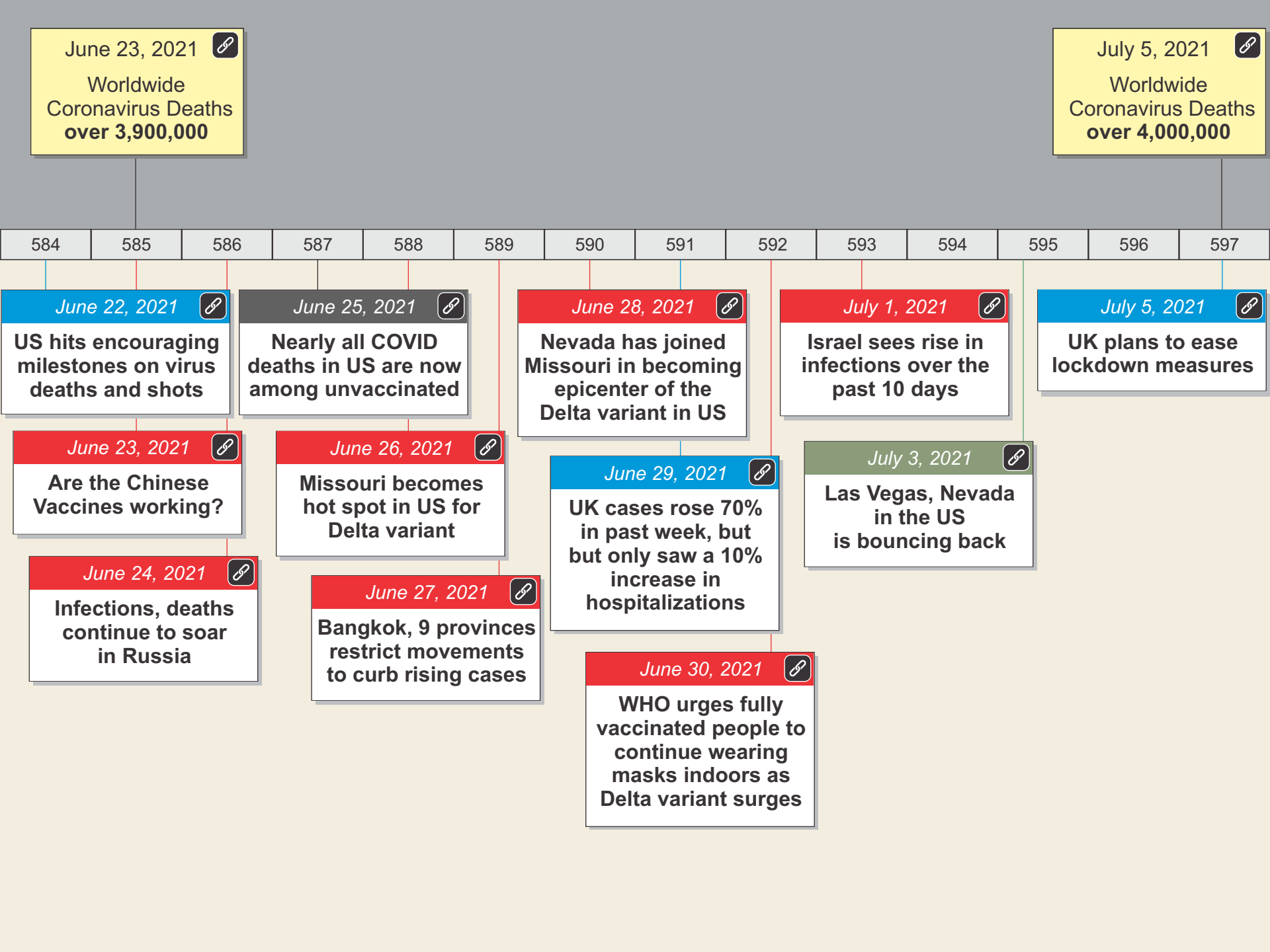
June 8, 2021
We have vaccines that can protect from all variants that have emerged to date
June 9, 2021
EXPLAINER: The US investigation into COVID-19 origins
June 10, 2021
Indian state sharply raises COVID-19 death toll prompting call for wide review
June 11, 2021
Here's what you should know about COVID-19 vaccine booster shots
June 12, 2021
Moscow orders new restrictions as COVID infections rise
June 13, 2021
Federal judge dismisses lawsuit over COVID vaccine requirement
June 14, 2021
As infections rise, England braces for delay in reopenings
June 15, 2021
Novavax shot 93% effective against variants of concern
June 16, 2021
The Delta variant accounts for nearly 10% of COVID-19 cases in the US
June 16, 2021
EU members agree to lift travel restrictions on US tourists
June 17, 2021
Regeneron's COVID-19 antibodies cut deaths in some hospitalized patients
June 18, 2021
Lessons from US Boulder, Colorado effort to screen for SARS-CoV-2
June 18, 2021
BRIEFING: SARS-CoV-2 variants of concern and variants under investigation in England
June 19, 2021
Virus surge claims brightest minds at Indian universities
June 20, 2021
What is known about the Delta (B.1.617.2 aka India) Variant
June 21, 2021
Tokyo Olympics to allow limit of 10,000 local fans in venues


June 23, 2021
Worldwide Coronavirus Deaths over 3,900,000
July 5, 2021
Worldwide Coronavirus Deaths over 4,000,000
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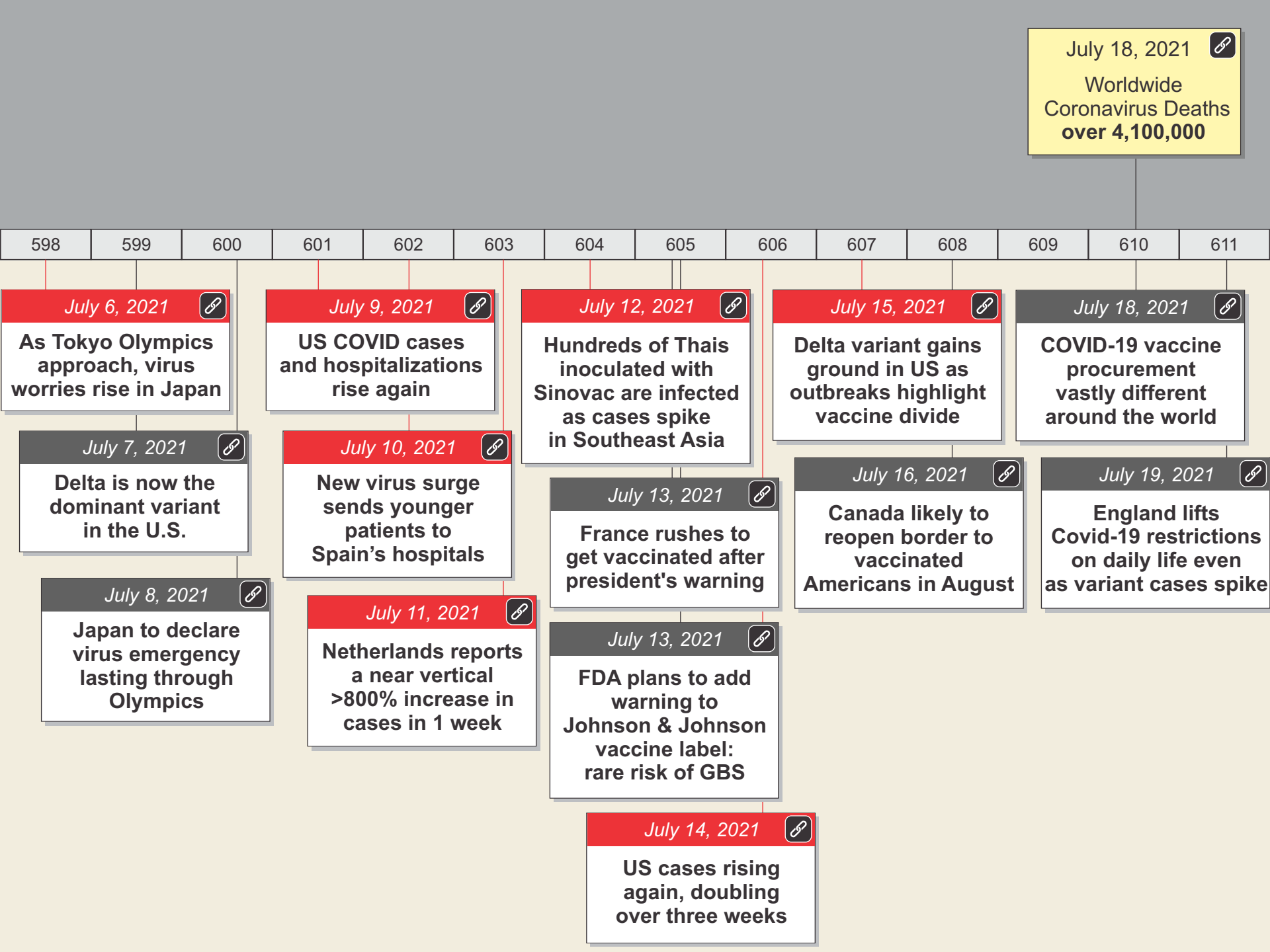
June 22, 2021
US hits encouraging milestones on virus deaths and shots
June 23, 2021
Are the Chinese Vaccines working?
June 24, 2021
Infections, deaths continue to soar in Russia
June 25, 2021
Nearly all COVID deaths in US are now among unvaccinated
June 26, 2021
Missouri becomes hot spot in US for Delta variant
June 27, 2021
Bangkok, 9 provinces restrict movements to curb rising cases
June 28, 2021
Nevada has joined Missouri in becoming epicenter of the Delta variant in US
June 29, 2021
UK cases rose 70% in past week, but but only saw a 10% increase in hospitalizations
June 30, 2021
WHO urges fully vaccinated people to continue wearing masks indoors as Delta variant surges
July 1, 2021
Israel sees rise in infections over the past 10 days
July 3, 2021
Las Vegas, Nevada in the US is bouncing back
July 5, 2021
UK plans to ease lockdown measures


July 18, 2021
Worldwide Coronavirus Deaths over 4,100,000
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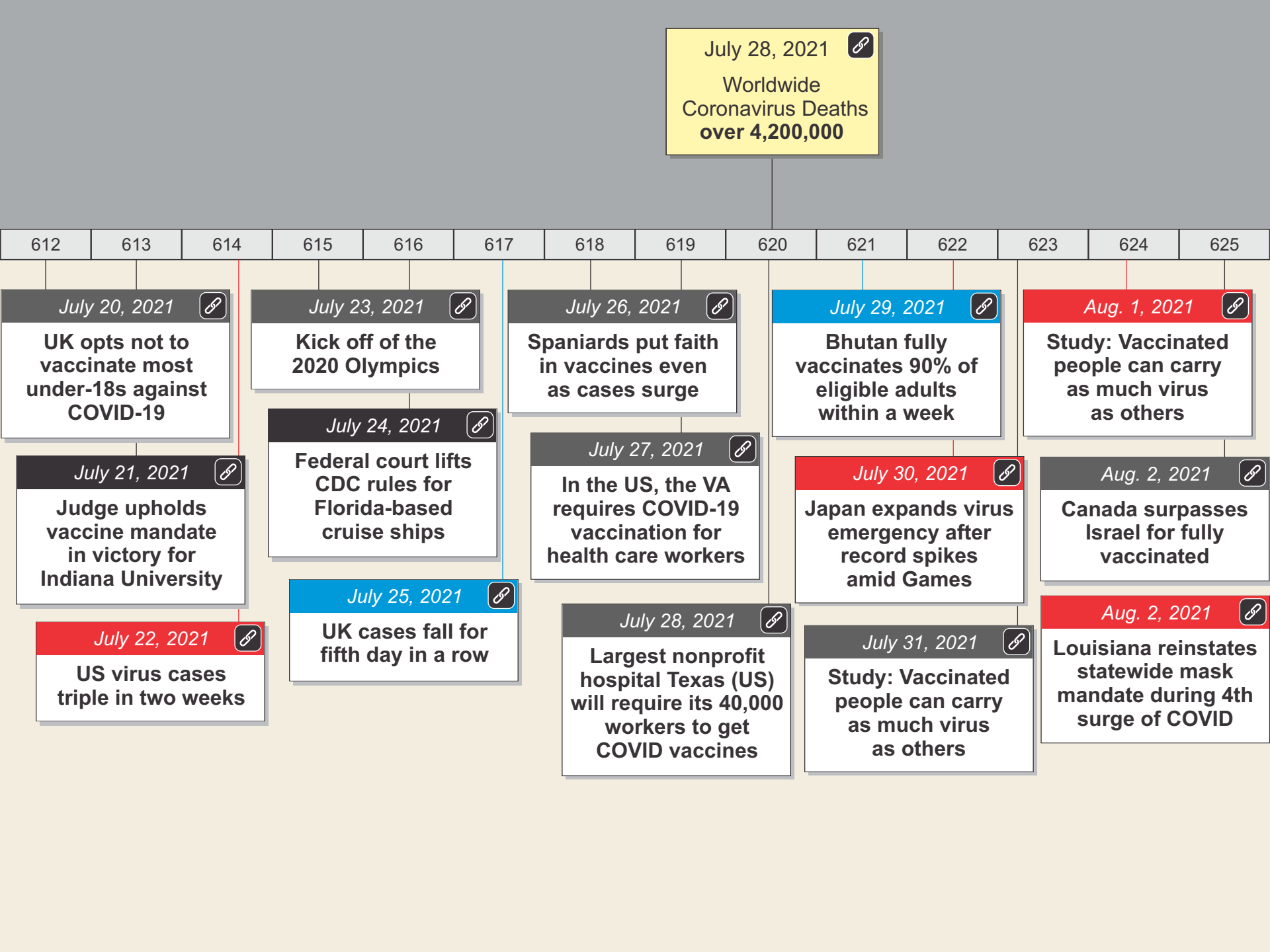
July 6, 2021
As Tokyo Olympics approach, virus worries rise in Japan
July 7, 2021
Delta is now the dominant variant in the U.S.
July 8, 2021
Japan to declare virus emergency lasting through Olympics
July 9, 2021
US COVID cases and hospitalizations rise again
July 10, 2021
New virus surge sends younger patients to Spain's hospitals
July 11, 2021
Netherlands reports a near vertical >800% increase in cases in 1 week
July 12, 2021
Hundreds of Thais inoculated with Sinovac are infected as cases spike in Southeast Asia
July 13, 2021
France rushes to get vaccinated after president's warning
July 13, 2021
FDA plans to add warning to Johnson & Johnson vaccine label: rare risk of GBS
July 14, 2021
US cases rising again, doubling over three weeks
July 15, 2021
Delta variant gains ground in US as outbreaks highlight vaccine divide
July 16, 2021
Canada likely to reopen border to vaccinated Americans in August
July 18, 2021
COVID-19 vaccine procurement vastly different around the world
July 19, 2021
England lifts Covid-19 restrictions on daily life even as variant cases spike


July 28, 2021
Worldwide Coronavirus Deaths over 4,200,000
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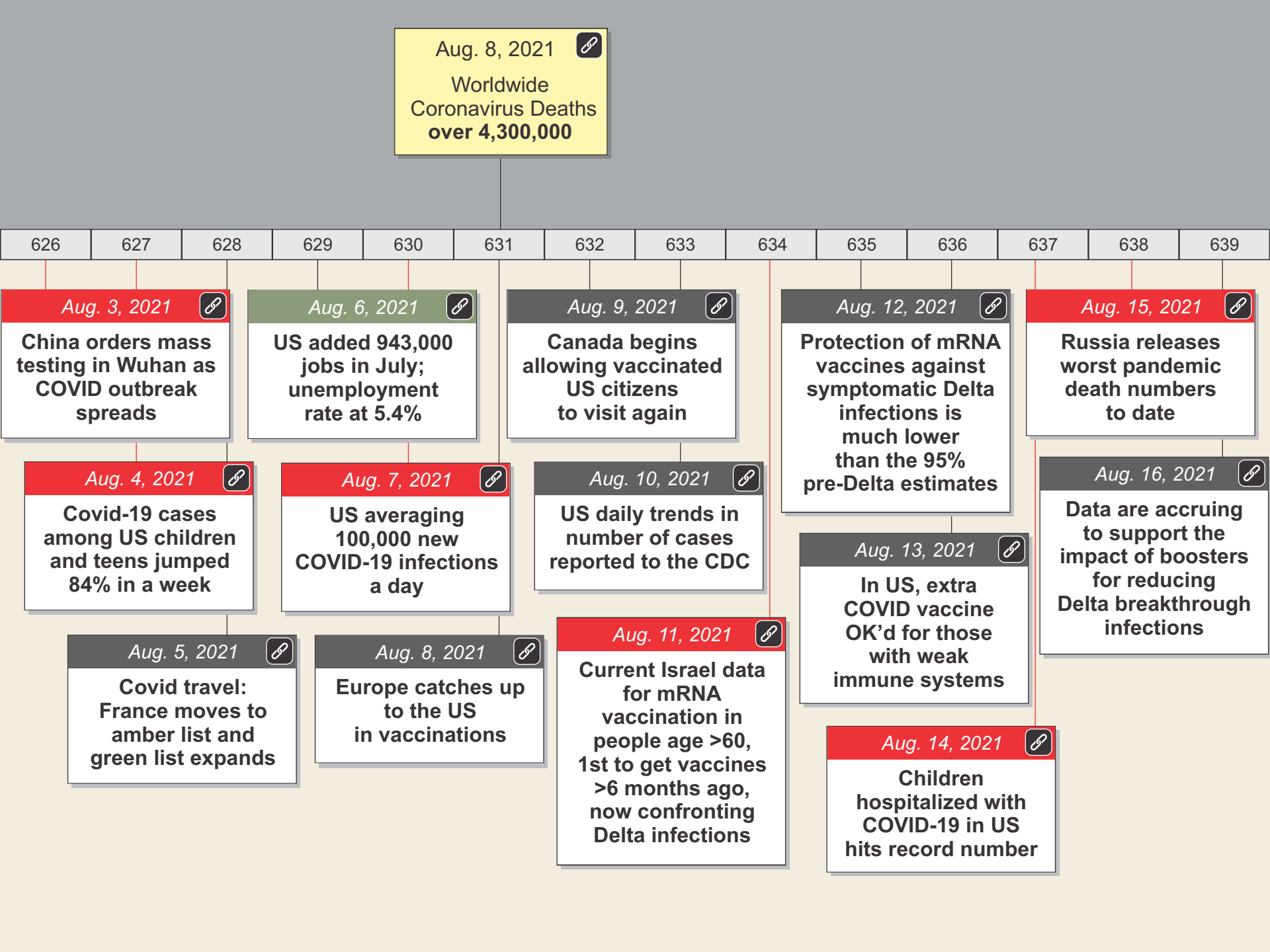
July 20, 2021
UK opts not to vaccinate most under-18s against COVID-19
July 21, 2021
Judge upholds vaccine mandate in victory for Indiana University
July 22, 2021
US virus cases triple in two weeks
July 23, 2021
Kick off of the 2020 Olympics
July 24, 2021
Federal court lifts CDC rules for Florida-based cruise ships
July 25, 2021
UK cases fall for fifth day in a row
July 26, 2021
Spaniards put faith in vaccines even as cases surge
July 27, 2021
In the US, the VA requires COVID-19 vaccination for health care workers
July 28, 2021
Largest nonprofit hospital Texas (US) will require its 40,000 workers to get COVID vaccines
July 29, 2021
Bhutan fully vaccinates 90% of eligible adults within a week
July 30, 2021
Japan expands virus emergency after record spikes amid Games
July 31, 2021
Study: Vaccinated people can carry as much virus as others
Aug. 1, 2021
Study: Vaccinated people can carry as much virus as others
Aug. 2, 2021
Canada surpasses Israel for fully vaccinated
Aug. 2, 2021
Louisiana reinstates statewide mask mandate during 4th surge of COVID


Aug. 8, 2021
Worldwide Coronavirus Deaths over 4,300,000
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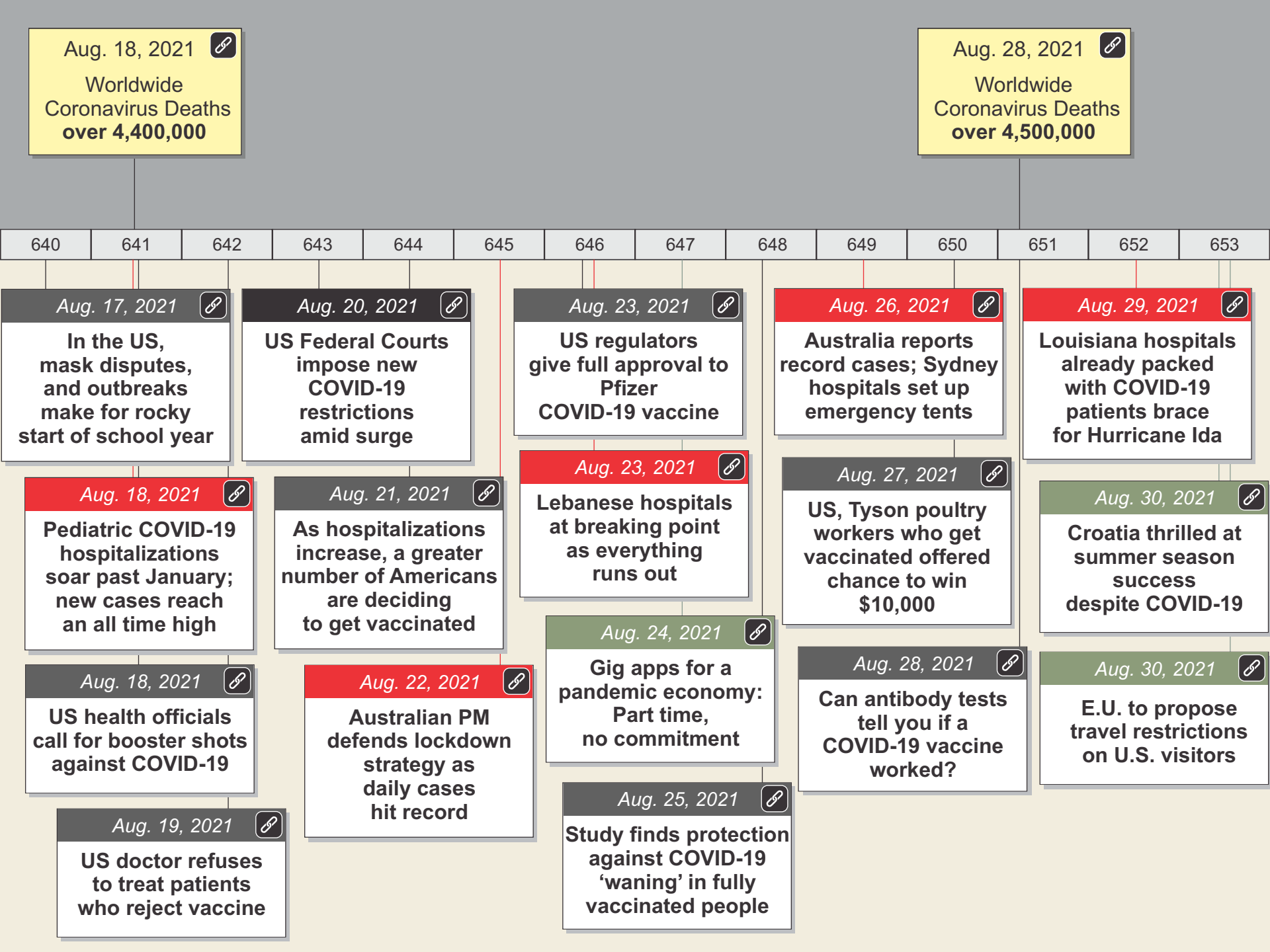
Aug. 3, 2021
China orders mass testing in Wuhan as COVID outbreak spreads
Aug. 4, 2021
Covid-19 cases among US children and teens jumped 84% in a week
Aug. 5, 2021
Covid travel: France moves to amber list and green list expands
Aug. 6, 2021
US added 943,000 jobs in July; unemployment rate at 5.4%
Aug. 7, 2021
US averaging 100,000 new COVID-19 infections a day
Aug. 8, 2021
Europe catches up to the US in vaccinations
Aug. 9, 2021
Canada begins allowing vaccinated US citizens to visit again
Aug. 10, 2021
US daily trends in number of cases reported to the CDC
Aug. 11, 2021
Current Israel data for mRNA vaccination in people age >60, 1st to get vaccines >6 months ago, now confronting Delta infections
Aug. 12, 2021
Protection of mRNA vaccines against symptomatic Delta infections is much lower than the 95% pre-Delta estimates
Aug. 13, 2021
In US, extra COVID vaccine OK'd for those with weak immune systems
Aug. 14, 2021
Children hospitalized with COVID-19 in US hits record number
Aug. 15, 2021
Russia releases worst pandemic death numbers to date
Aug. 16, 2021
Data are accruing to support the impact of boosters for reducing Delta breakthrough infections


Aug. 18, 2021
Worldwide Coronavirus Deaths over 4,400,000
Aug. 28, 2021
Worldwide Coronavirus Deaths over 4,500,000
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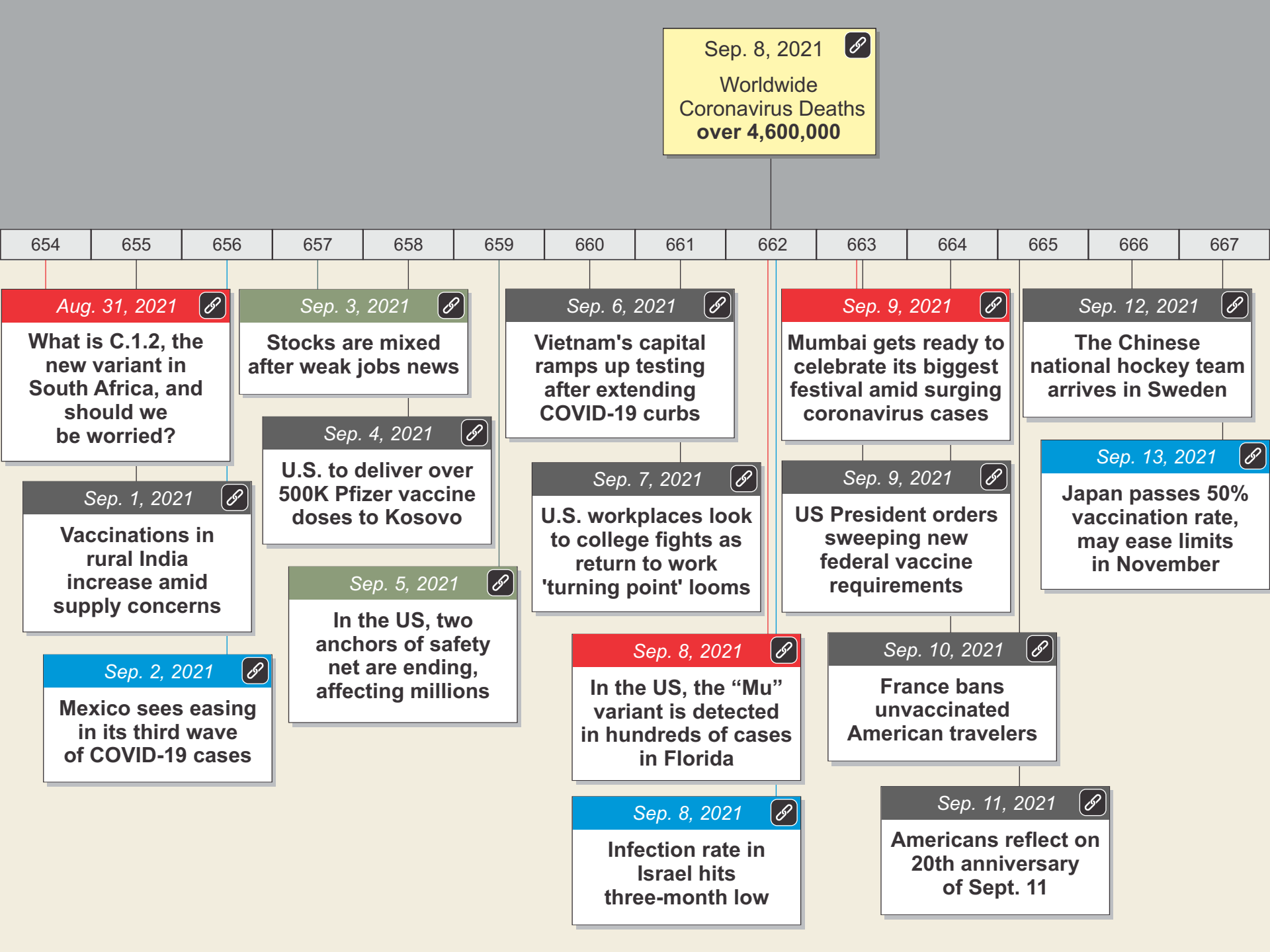
Aug. 17, 2021
In the US, mask disputes, and outbreaks make for rocky start of school year
Aug. 18, 2021
Pediatric COVID-19 hospitalizations soar past January; new cases reach an all time high
Aug. 18, 2021
US health officials call for booster shots against COVID-19
Aug. 19, 2021
US doctor refuses to treat patients who reject vaccine
Aug. 20, 2021
US Federal Courts impose new COVID-19 restrictions amid surge
Aug. 21, 2021
As hospitalizations increase, a greater number of Americans are deciding to get vaccinated
Aug. 22, 2021
Australian PM defends lockdown strategy as daily cases hit record
Aug. 23, 2021
US regulators give full approval to Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine
Aug. 23, 2021
Lebanese hospitals at breaking point as everything runs out
Aug. 24, 2021
Gig apps for a pandemic economy: Part time, no commitment
Aug. 25, 2021
Study finds protection against COVID-19 'waning' in fully vaccinated people
Aug. 26, 2021
Australia reports record cases; Sydney hospitals set up emergency tents
Aug. 27, 2021
US, Tyson poultry workers who get vaccinated offered chance to win $10,000
Aug. 28, 2021
Can antibody tests tell you if a COVID-19 vaccine worked?
Aug. 29, 2021
Louisiana hospitals already packed with COVID-19 patients brace for Hurricane Ida
Aug. 30, 2021
Croatia thrilled at summer season success despite COVID-19
Aug. 30, 2021
E.U. to propose travel restrictions on U.S. visitors


Sep. 8, 2021
Worldwide Coronavirus Deaths over 4,600,000
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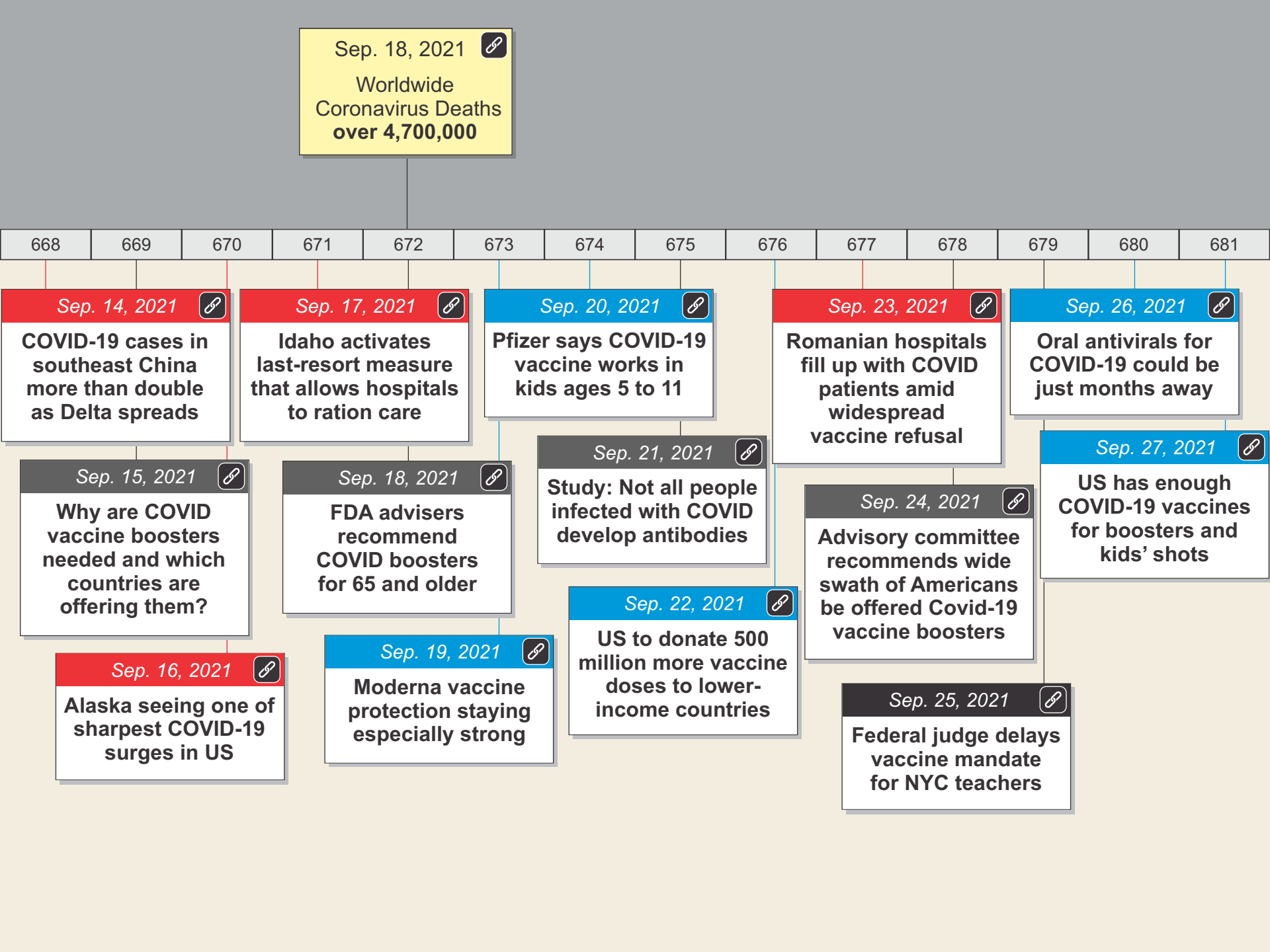
Aug. 31, 2021
What is C.1.2, the new variant in South Africa, and should we be worried?
Sep. 1, 2021
Vaccinations in rural India increase amid supply concerns
Sep. 2, 2021
Mexico sees easing in its third wave of COVID-19 cases
Sep. 3, 2021
Stocks are mixed after weak jobs news
Sep. 4, 2021
U.S. to deliver over 500K Pfizer vaccine doses to Kosovo
Sep. 5, 2021
In the US, two anchors of safety net are ending, affecting millions
Sep. 6, 2021
Vietnam's capital ramps up testing after extending COVID-19 curbs
Sep. 7, 2021
U.S. workplaces look to college fights as return to work 'turning point' looms
Sep. 8, 2021
In the US, the “Mu” variant is detected in hundreds of cases in Florida
Sep. 8, 2021
Infection rate in Israel hits three-month low
Sep. 9, 2021
Mumbai gets ready to celebrate its biggest festival amid surging coronavirus cases
Sep. 9, 2021
US President orders sweeping new federal vaccine requirements
Sep. 10, 2021
France bans unvaccinated American travelers
Sep. 11, 2021
Americans reflect on 20th anniversary of Sept. 11
Sep. 12, 2021
The Chinese national hockey team arrives in Sweden
Sep. 13, 2021
Japan passes 50% vaccination rate, may ease limits in November


Sep. 18, 2021
Worldwide Coronavirus Deaths over 4,700,000
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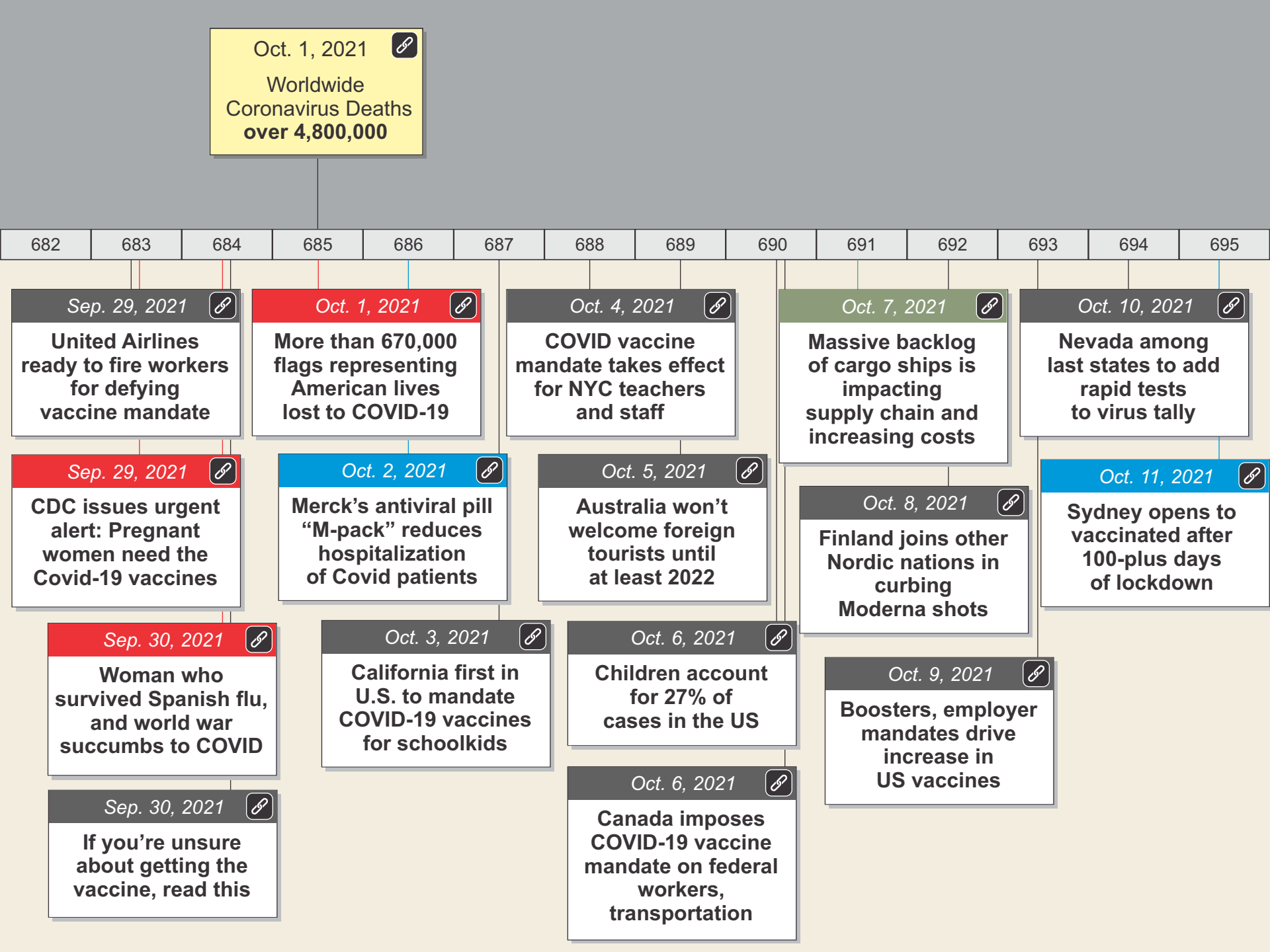
Sep. 14, 2021
COVID-19 cases in southeast China more than double as Delta spreads
Sep. 15, 2021
Why are COVID vaccine boosters needed and which countries are offering them?
Sep. 16, 2021
Alaska seeing one of sharpest COVID-19 surges in US
Sep. 17, 2021
Idaho activates last-resort measure that allows hospitals to ration care
Sep. 18, 2021
FDA advisers recommend COVID boosters for 65 and older
Sep. 19, 2021
Moderna vaccine protection staying especially strong
Sep. 20, 2021
Pfizer says COVID-19 vaccine works in kids ages 5 to 11
Sep. 21, 2021
Study: Not all people infected with COVID develop antibodies
Sep. 22, 2021
US to donate 500 million more vaccine doses to lower-income countries
Sep. 23, 2021
Romanian hospitals fill up with COVID patients amid widespread vaccine refusal
Sep. 24, 2021
Advisory committee recommends wide swath of Americans be offered Covid-19 vaccine boosters
Sep. 25, 2021
Federal judge delays vaccine mandate for NYC teachers
Sep. 26, 2021
Oral antivirals for COVID-19 could be just months away
Sep. 27, 2021
US has enough COVID-19 vaccines for boosters and kids' shots


Oct. 1, 2021
Worldwide Coronavirus Deaths over 4,800,000
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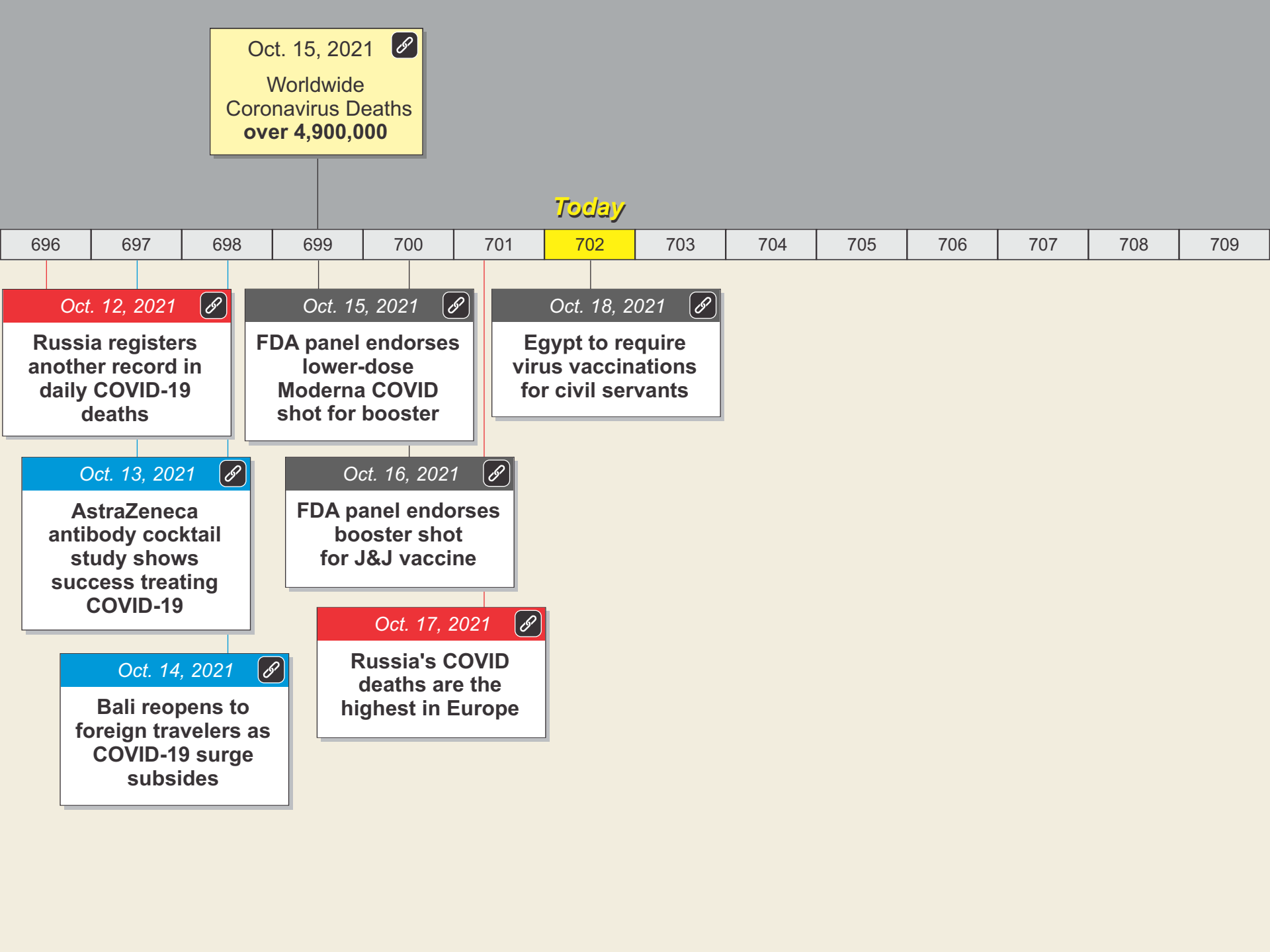
Sep. 29, 2021
United Airlines ready to fire workers for defying vaccine mandate
Sep. 29, 2021
CDC issues urgent alert: Pregnant women need the Covid-19 vaccines
Sep. 30, 2021
Woman who survived Spanish flu, and world war succumbs to COVID
Sep. 30, 2021
If you're unsure about getting the vaccine, read this
Oct. 1, 2021
More than 670,000 flags representing American lives lost to COVID-19
Oct. 2, 2021
Merck's antiviral pill "M-pack" reduces hospitalization of Covid patients
Oct. 3, 2021
California first in U.S. to mandate COVID-19 vaccines for schoolkids
Oct. 4, 2021
COVID vaccine mandate takes effect for NYC teachers and staff
Oct. 5, 2021
Australia won't welcome foreign tourists until at least 2022
Oct. 6, 2021
Children account for 27% of cases in the US
Oct. 6, 2021
Canada imposes COVID-19 vaccine mandate on federal workers, transportation
Oct. 7, 2021
Massive backlog of cargo ships is impacting supply chain and increasing costs
Oct. 8, 2021
Finland joins other Nordic nations in curbing Moderna shots
Oct. 9, 2021
Boosters, employer mandates drive increase in US vaccines
Oct. 10, 2021
Nevada among last states to add rapid tests to virus tally
Oct. 11, 2021
Sydney opens to vaccinated after 100-plus days of lockdown


Oct. 15, 2021
Worldwide Coronavirus Deaths over 4,900,000
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Oct. 12, 2021
Russia registers another record in daily COVID-19 deaths
Oct. 15, 2021
FDA panel endorses lower-dose Moderna COVID shot for booster
Oct. 18, 2021
Egypt to require virus vaccinations for civil servants
Oct. 13, 2021
AstraZeneca antibody cocktail study shows success treating COVID-19
Oct. 16, 2021
FDA panel endorses booster shot for J&J vaccine
Oct. 17, 2021
Russia's COVID deaths are the highest in Europe
Oct. 14, 2021
Bali reopens to foreign travelers as COVID-19 surge subsides

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https://www.cnbc.com/2020/11/16/moderna-says-its-coronavirus-vaccine-is-more-than-94percent-effective.html

Nov. 16

Moderna says data shows its vaccine is more than 94% effective

The analysis evaluated 95 confirmed Covid-19 infections among the trial's 30,000 participants. Moderna, which developed its vaccine in collaboration with the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, said 90 cases of Covid-19 were observed in the placebo group versus five cases observed in the group that received its two-dose vaccine. That resulted in an estimated vaccine efficacy of 94.5%, it said.

Shares of the company jumped more than 12% in premarket trading.

The announcement comes on the heels of similar news last week from Pfizer's late-stage Covid-19 vaccine trial as pharmaceutical companies across the world race against the clock to find ways to prevent the virus, which has spread to more than 54.4 million people, killing more than 1.3 million, according to data compiled by Johns Hopkins University.

Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar told CNBC on Monday that U.S. Food and Drug Administration will move "as quickly as possible" to clear Pfizer and Moderna's coronavirus vaccines for emergency use.

Bancel called it a "pivotal moment."

"Since early January, we have chased this virus with the intent to protect as many people around the world as possible. All along, we have known that each day matters," he said in a statement. "This positive interim analysis from our Phase 3 study has given us the first clinical validation that our vaccine can prevent COVID-19 disease, including severe disease."

The Cambridge, Massachusetts-based company also said there were no "significant" safety concerns, adding the vaccine was generally safe and well tolerated with the majority of adverse events in participants being labeled as mild or moderate. Side effects included pain at the injection site and, after the second dose, fatigue, muscle pain and headaches.

"Knowing that we have a vaccine that would help more people who would take it is just a wonderful feeling," Bancel said in an interview with CNBC. "As you know a lot of people have been reluctant in surveys to take a vaccine because I think we're worried about the politicization of a vaccine, they're worried about what you get with a flu shot you know 50% to 60% efficacy."

With an efficacy rate of 95%, "that's a game changer, I believe," he said.

Bancel said **the company plans to test the vaccine in teens "very soon," followed by children under the age of 12. "We have to be very, very careful because safety is priority No. 1,**" he said in a separate interview on CNBC's "Squawk Box," adding most trials test vaccines ...

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/travel-family-gatherings-coronavirus-pandemic-thanksgiving-holidays-3c759ab924a0d9de27803527ddf36c1c

Nov. 17

Governors ratchet up restrictions ahead of Thanksgiving

From California to Pennsylvania, governors and mayors across the U.S. are ratcheting up COVID-19 restrictions amid the record-shattering resurgence of the virus that is all but certain to get worse because of holiday travel and family gatherings over Thanksgiving.

Leaders are closing businesses or curtailing hours and other operations, and they are ordering or imploring people to stay home and keep their distance from others to help stem a rising tide of infections that threatens to overwhelm the health care system.

“I must again pull back the reins,” **New Jersey** Gov. Phil Murphy said Monday as he **restricted indoor gatherings to 10 people, down from 25**. “It gives me no joy.”

California Gov. Gavin Newsom announced he is pulling the “emergency brake” on efforts to reopen the economy, saying the state is experiencing the fastest growth in cases yet, and if left unchecked, it will lead to “catastrophic outcomes.” The move **closes many nonessential indoor businesses and requires the wearing of masks outside homes**, with limited exceptions.
...
New Mexico Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham’s **stay-at-home order went into effect Monday**. Only essential businesses, including grocery stores and pharmacies, will be open.

Washington’s Democratic Gov. Jay Inslee **ordered gyms, bowling alleys, movie theaters, museums and zoos to shut down indoor operations. Stores must limit capacity to 25%**.

People from different households will be barred in Washington from gathering indoors unless they have quarantined. There is no enforcement mechanism. Inslee said he hopes people obey anyway.

In **Michigan**, Democratic Gov. Gretchen Whitmer **warned she has the authority to issue a second stay-at-home order** to curb the spiking coronavirus if necessary and said it was “incredibly reckless” for President Donald Trump’s science adviser Scott Atlas to urge people to “rise up” against Michigan’s latest restrictions.

Over the weekend, Whitmer announced that Michigan **high schools and colleges must halt in-person classes, restaurants must stop indoor dining and entertainment businesses must close for three weeks.** Gathering sizes also will be tightened.
...
Even **North Dakota** Republican Gov. Doug Burgum, **who has resisted a mask mandate for months, put one in place** over the weekend, amid a severe outbreak in the state. Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds took a similar action and enacted a limited version of a mask mandate Monday.

Still, several other GOP governors were taking incremental steps, or resisting even those — continuing to emphasize “personal responsibility” rather than government edicts. **Oklahoma**’s Republican Gov. Kevin Stitt **announced bars and restaurants must space tables 6 feet apart and end in-person service at 11 p.m.**

In hard-hit **South Dakota**, Gov. Kristi Noem continued her hands-off approach and **resisted a mask mandate or other restrictions**.

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott in recent days has been emphasizing that new treatments and vaccines are expected to become available soon...

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/fda-allows-1st-rapid-virus-test-at-home-0430fe7460b4385bd952978f19b3d88d

Nov. 18

FDA allows 1st rapid virus test that gives results at home

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. regulators on Tuesday allowed emergency use of the first rapid coronavirus test that can be performed **entirely at home and delivers results in 30 minutes.**

The announcement by the Food and Drug Administration represents an important step in U.S. efforts to expand testing options for COVID-19 beyond health care facilities and testing sites. However, the test will require a prescription, likely limiting its initial use.

The FDA granted emergency authorization to the single-use test kit from Lucira Health, a California test developer.

The company's test allows users to swab themselves to collect a nasal sample. The sample is then swirled in a vial of laboratory solution that plugs into a portable device. Results are displayed as lights labeled positive or negative.

To date, the FDA has authorized nearly 300 tests for coronavirus. The vast majority require a nasal swab performed by a health professional and must be processed at laboratories using high-tech equipment. A handful of tests allow people to collect their own sample at home — a nasal swab or saliva — that's then shipped to a lab, which usually means waiting days for results.

Health experts have called for options to allow people to test themselves at home, reducing turnaround times and the potential spread of the virus to others, including health care workers. Rapid test results are critical to quickly quarantining those who are infected and tracing their contacts. But for months, U.S. testing has been plagued by slow results due to bottlenecks at testing laboratories. There are other rapid tests but most require a small, special machine operated by a health professional to deliver results.

"Now, more Americans who may have COVID-19 will be able to take immediate action, based on their results, to protect themselves and those around them," Dr. Jeff Shuren, director of the FDA's devices center, said in a statement.

Lucira said it expects the test to cost $50 and to be available nationwide by next spring ...

https://www.cnn.com/2020/11/19/us/mayo-clinic-900-staff-positive-covid/index.html

Nov. 19

More than 900 Mayo Clinic staff members diagnosed with Covid-19

(CNN)More than 900 staff members across the Midwest Mayo Clinic system have been diagnosed with Covid-19 over the last 14 days, a spokesperson told CNN.

That's about 30% of the total number who have tested positive since March.

"Our staff are being infected mostly due to community spread (93% of staff infections), and this impacts our ability to care for patients," Kelley Luckstein wrote to CNN in a Wednesday email.

Across the Midwest, Mayo Clinic currently has about 1,500 staff members with work restrictions related to Covid-19 exposures or diagnosis, Luckstein said.

The Midwest Mayo Clinic system consists of clinics, hospitals and other facilities that serve patients in Iowa, Minnesota and Wisconsin. Midwestern states have been hit especially hard in the latest round of Covid-19 case surges -- with Minnesota's governor announcing new measures this week to help curb the spread and Wisconsin's governor declaring a new state of emergency.

In Iowa, Gov. Kim Reynolds overcame her previous resistance to mask mandates and announced a new health order requiring masks indoors, saying hospitals have been pushed to the brink by the spread of the virus.

Like other health care systems, Mayo Clinic hasn't been spared from the pandemic's devastating effects.

"There are three things you need to take care of any patient," Dr. Amy Williams, the executive dean of the Mayo Clinic practice said in a Covid-19 update this week. "Space, supplies and staff. And what we are most worried about is staff."

Staff members are getting exposed and infected with the virus mostly in the community, Williams said. And while some Americans may be getting tired of hearing about safety measures like wearing masks and regularly washing hands, it's important to continue taking those precautions as the virus continues spreading rampantly throughout the country, she said.

“We're doing this because we care about our communities," Williams said in the update. "We don't want families to be sick. We don't want families to lose loved ones. We want everyone to be safe. We will get through this, but we need to be safe, we need to protect each other.”

Parts of the health system have already been overwhelmed by the surge in patients, while other facilities are preparing for what's to come.

In northwest Wisconsin, the Mayo Clinic Health System said last week that 100% of its hospital beds were full.

"The public urgently needs to treat COVID-19 as the ...

https://www.cnn.com/2020/11/21/health/us-coronavirus-saturday/index.html

Nov. 21

US coronavirus cases top 12 million ... spread 'faster' and 'broader' than ever

(CNN)The number of US coronavirus cases surpassed 12 million Saturday -- **an increase of more than 1 million cases in less than a week.**

At least 12,085,389 cases have been confirmed, according to Johns Hopkins University data, and 255,823 Americans have died.

It's another horrific milestone in a month full of devastating Covid-19 records in the country. November already accounts for almost a quarter of all Covid-19 cases and 9% of deaths.

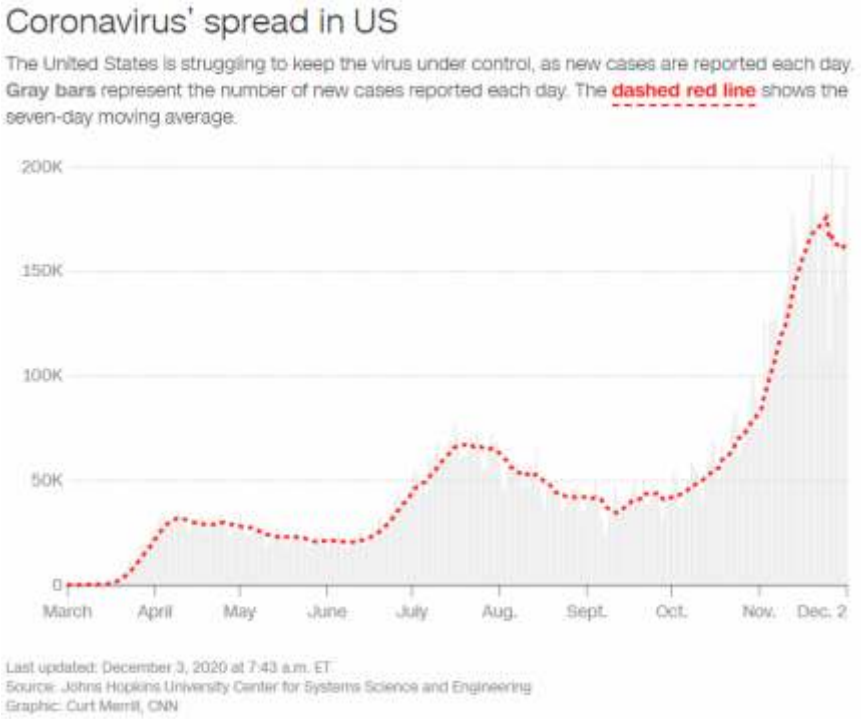
Almost every state has reported a rapid surge in cases, and nationwide numbers have been climbing much faster than ever before -- with the country reporting a staggering 2.9 million infections since the beginning of the month.

On Friday, more than 195,500 new infections were reported -- the country's highest for a single day, and far beyond what the nation was seeing just weeks ago. The highest number of single-day cases during the country's summer surge was a little more than 77,100 in July, Johns Hopkins University data shows.
The US on Friday also recorded its highest number of Covid-19 patients in hospitals on a given day: just over 82,100 -- according to the COVID Tracking Project.

Rising death rates typically follow rising hospitalizations. In just the past week, more than 10,000 US deaths have been reported -- nearly double the weekly death toll of just a month ago.

The numbers offer just a glimpse at the devastation the pandemic has unleashed across American communities, with some cities ordering mobile morgues to handle the excess deaths, while hospitals in other parts have reported overwhelmed ICUs and exhausted staff.

In Texas, a team of 36 National Guard personnel were sent to El Paso to help the city cope with the surge of Covid-19 deaths, the Texas Division of Emergency Management said Saturday, and El Paso has found a central location for an additional morgue, according to Mayor Dee Margo.



Return to Timeline

https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-11-23/astra-oxford-vaccine-prevents-average-of-70-of-covid-cases?utm_campaign=news&utm_medium=bd&utm_source=applenews

Nov. 23

Astra-Oxford vaccine found to be 70-90% effective

... The vaccine **stopped an average of 70% of participants from falling ill, an early analysis of the data show.** The **effectiveness rose to 90% for one of two regimens**, using half a dose followed by a full one later, close to the high bar set by Pfizer Inc. and Moderna Inc.

Astra and Oxford officials said they're preparing to submit the findings to regulators and don't expect the different outcomes in the study to affect the process. The U.S. could potentially take longer to sign off because a clinical trial in that country will need more time before it delivers results.

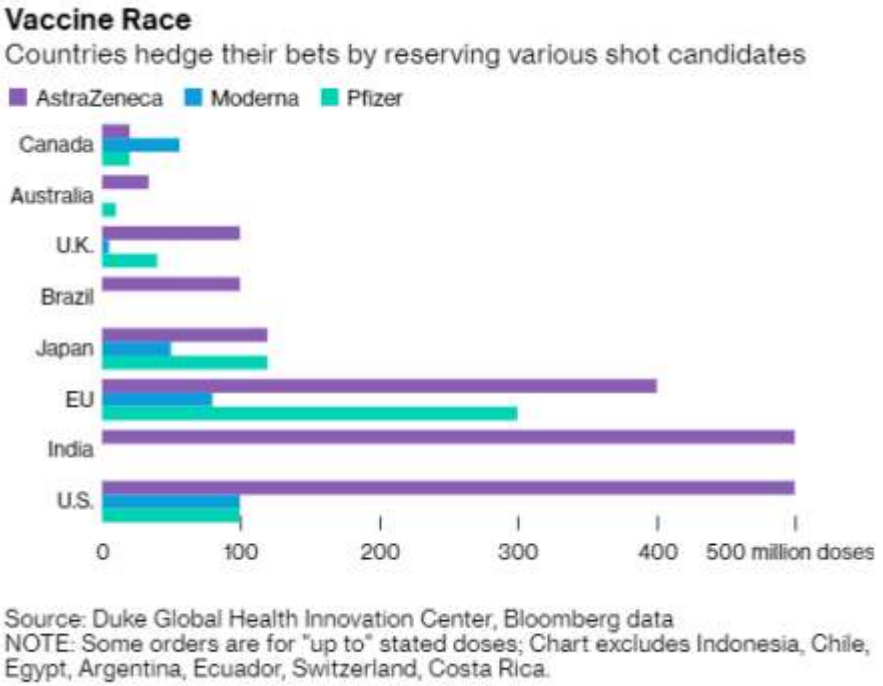
The results, based on trials in the U.K. and Brazil, were reviewed after 131 participants contracted Covid-19. The full two doses showed an efficacy of 62%. Among those who received the vaccine, there were no severe cases and no participants were hospitalized. The group is planning to submit the data for peer review in the next 24 hours.
...
The larger U.S. Astra trial, which could be key for approval there, has injected about 10,500 people with both doses. Mene Pangalos, Astra's head of biopharma research, told reporters the team is planning to talk to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration immediately and hopes to have another arm administering the half dose-full dose regimen starting within weeks.

"That scenario is possible," that other regulators could move before the U.S., he said. "We need to share the data with the FDA, which we will do very quickly, and then we will work out what the most appropriate steps are."

Despite the apparently lower efficacy than shots from Pfizer and Moderna, which each prevented about 95% of cases, the British vaccine has some advantages.

... **shot can be kept at refrigerator temperatures,** while those from Pfizer and Moderna, based on novel messenger RNA technology, require freezing for longer-term storage and transport. That would make Astra's **easier to deploy globally, particularly in lower- and middle-income countries.**

It also comes at a lower cost.



Source: Duke Global Health Innovation Center, Bloomberg data
NOTE: Some orders are for "up to" stated doses; Chart excludes Indonesia, Chile, Egypt, Argentina, Ecuador, Switzerland, Costa Rica.

Return to Timeline

https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/worldwide-graphs/#total-deaths

Select live link for current number

Nov. 23

Death toll from coronavirus tops 1,400,000

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/pandemics-jobless-claims-unemployment-coronavirus-pandemic-economy-01d54b8c5f65a813a09df482aa4b6786

Nov. 25

Picture of US economy is worrisome as virus inflicts damage

...The number of Americans **seeking unemployment aid rose last week for a second straight week to 778,000, evidence that many employers are still slashing jobs more than eight months after the virus hit.** Before the pandemic, weekly jobless claims typically amounted to only about 225,000. Layoffs are still historically high, with many businesses unable to fully reopen and some, especially restaurants and bars, facing tightened restrictions.

Consumers increased their spending last month by just 0.5%, the weakest rise since the pandemic erupted. The tepid figure suggested that on the eve of the crucial holiday shopping season, Americans remain anxious with the virus spreading and Congress failing to enact any further aid for struggling individuals, businesses, cities and states. At the same time, the government said Wednesday that income, which provides the fuel for consumer spending, fell 0.7% in October.

The spike in virus cases is heightening pressure on companies and individuals, with fear growing that the economy could suffer a “double-dip” recession as states and cities reimpose curbs on businesses. The economy, as measured by the gross domestic product, is expected to eke out a modest gain this quarter before weakening — and perhaps shrinking — early next year. Mark Zandi, chief economist at Moody’s Analytics, predicts annual GDP growth of around 2% in the October-December quarter, with the possibility of GDP turning negative in the first quarter of 2021.

...

Some corners of the economy still show strength, or at least resilience. Manufacturing is one. The government said Wednesday that **orders for durable goods rose 1.3% in October**, a sign that purchases of goods remain solid even while the economy’s much larger service sector — everything from **restaurants, hotels and airlines to gyms, hair salons and entertainment venues — is still struggling**. But economists caution that factories, too, remain at risk from the surge in coronavirus cases, which could throttle demand in coming months.

And sales of new homes remained steady in October, the latest sign that ultra-low mortgage rates and a paucity of properties for sale have spurred demand and made the housing market a rare economic bright spot.

But at the heart of the economy are the job market and consumer spending, which remain especially vulnerable to the spike in virus cases. **Most economists say the distribution of an effective vaccine would likely reinvigorate growth next year. Yet they warn that any sustained recovery will also hinge on whether Congress can agree soon on a sizable aid package to carry the economy through what could be a bleak winter.**

...

When the viral outbreak struck in early spring, employers slashed 22 million jobs in March and April, sending the unemployment rate rocketing to 14.7%, the highest rate since the Great Depression. Since then, the economy has regained more than 12 million jobs. Yet **the nation still has about 10 million fewer jobs than it did before the pandemic erupted.**

All of which has left many Americans anxious and uncertain. The Conference Board, a business research group, reported Tuesday that consumer **confidence weakened in November, pulled down by lowered expectations for the next six months.**

And the University of Michigan’s Surveys of Consumers reported Wednesday that sentiment declined slightly this month, and remained far below where it was before the pandemic struck. With the resurgence of the virus depressing the outlook of consumers, the sentiment index fell to its lowest point since August.

“Gloomier consumer expectations will weigh on spending as the holidays approach,” cautioned Kathy Bostjancic, chief U.S. financial economist at Oxford Economics.

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/macys-thanksgiving-day-parade-pandemic-815fbc2457e68d25c99c3a5df23171b1

Nov. 26

Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade to march on despite pandemic

... The pandemic, which shut down theaters in March, may have upended most traditions this holiday season, but **the annual New York City parade will march on with balloons, dancers, floats, Broadway shows and Santa — albeit heavily edited for safety.**

"Traditions like this are comforting and they're uplifting," said Susan Tercero, executive producer of the parade. "New York has always been a tough city. It bounces back. It takes its blows and then it continues on. And I think it's extremely important for us to be that display this holiday season. Regardless of what's happened, New York needs to be that beacon of light in the darkness and this parade, I think, is symbolic of that."

The Macy's parade has been a traditional holiday season kickoff for more than 90 years, and spectators often line up a half-dozen deep along the route to cheer about 8,000 marchers, two dozen floats, entertainers and marching bands. At last year's parade, the big fear was high wind. This time, it's a pandemic that has made crowds untenable.

The biggest change this year is that **the usual 2 1/2-mile route through crowded Manhattan has been scrapped in favor of concentrating events to a one-block stretch of 34th Street in front of the retailer's flagship Manhattan store. Many performances have been pre-taped and most of the parade's performers will be locally based to cut down on travel.**

... the parade will feature performances from the Broadway casts of "Hamilton," "Mean Girls" and "Jagged Little Pill," a musical built around the music of Alanis Morissette. The Broadway performances were taped days before the parade.

Things felt a lot different for actor Derek Klena, who was in the 2017 parade as part of the cast of "Anastasia." This year, he's Tony Award-nominated for his role in "Jagged Little Pill" and helped perform "You Learn" from the Tony-nominated show.

AP Photo of Elf on the Shelf from 2012

https://www.cnn.com/2020/11/26/health/us-coronavirus-thursday/index.html

Nov. 26

US Hospitalizations hit another record

The US enters Thanksgiving with coronavirus cases and deaths soaring and hospitalizations at record levels. And on a holiday weekend that lends itself to big gatherings, public health experts still were begging people to avoid them, fearing the pandemic is about to become much worse.

The number of Covid-19 patients in US hospitals hit a record for the 17th straight day Thursday, at more than 90,481, according to the COVID Tracking Project, as many medical centers warn they're running out of capacity.

Public health officials have generally urged Americans to celebrate Thanksgiving only with members of the same household, or at least gather outdoors, to keep asymptomatic carriers from further spreading the virus.
...
Recorded cases are rising to unprecedented levels. The average number of new daily cases across a week in the US was 175,809 on Wednesday -- the highest on record, and more than two and a half times greater than the previous peak in late July.

And Covid-19 deaths in the US are spiking. More than 2,100 deaths were reported on Tuesday and Wednesday each, the first time that level was crossed on consecutive days since late April.

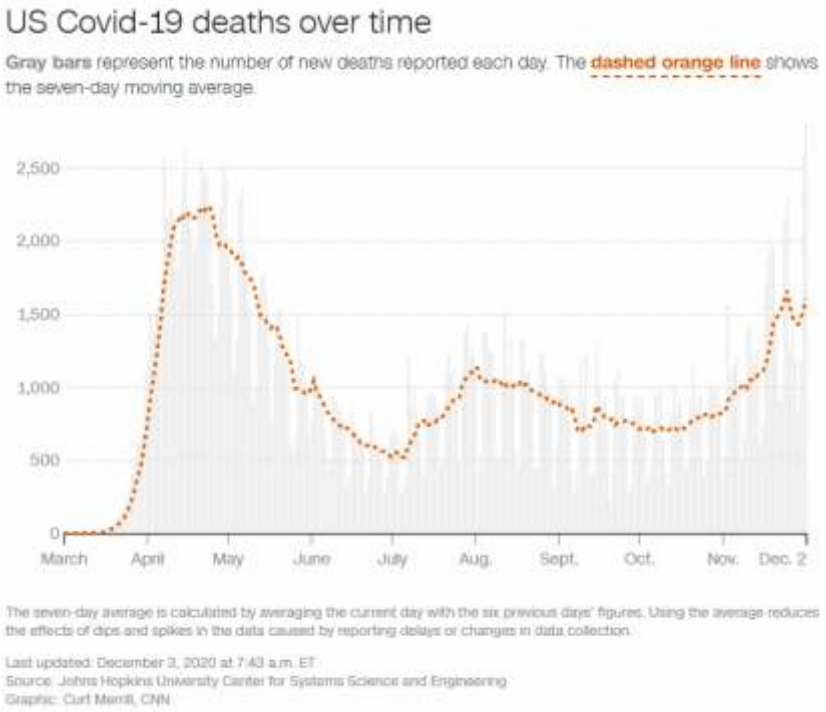
The average number of daily deaths across a week -- 1,658 on Wednesday -- is the highest it's been since mid-May.

The CDC recommended last week that Americans should not travel for Thanksgiving. Many changed their plans, a new poll showed. But millions didn't.

More than 1.07 million people passed through US airport security checkpoints on Wednesday alone -- the most in one day since March 16, around the time when coronavirus restrictions started nationwide, the Transportation Security Administration said Thursday.

More than 5.9 million people have flown through US airports since the CDC's anti-travel recommendation last week, according to TSA data. "I don't mean to be scary but ... today can change the course of Covid for our country for the rest of the year," Dr. Megan Ranney, a CNN medical analyst and emergency physician at Brown University, said Thursday.

"Infections that are sustained today are going to show up in three weeks and are going to show up in deaths over Christmas and New Year's and are going to spread in every state."...



Return to Timeline

https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2020/11/27/x-mas-trees-bright-spot-amid-pandemic-farmers-report-higher-demand/6440904002/

Nov. 27

Real Christmas trees are bright spot amid coronavirus

...The real Christmas tree industry, which has been battling increased interest in artificial trees, is glad to see that more Americans appear to be flocking to fresh-cut evergreens this season, seeking a bright spot amid the virus's worsening toll.

It's early in the season, but both wholesale tree farmers and small cut-your-own lots are reporting strong demand, with many opening well before Thanksgiving. Businesses say they are seeing more people and earlier than ever.

At some pick-your-own-tree farms, for example, customers sneaked in well before Thanksgiving to tag the perfect tree to cut down once the business opened. As demand surges, big box stores are seeking fresh trees up to a week earlier than last year, and Walmart is offering free home delivery for the first time.

“The season is running approximately six to seven days ahead of what we've seen in the past. We’ve never seen the demand like we’ve had this year,” said McKenzie Cook, who ships between 1.8 million and 2 million trees a year combined from McKenzie Farms in Oregon and Happy Holiday Christmas Trees in North Carolina.

A number of reasons are driving the uptick in interest.

[1] **More Americans are staying home for the holidays amid pandemic restrictions and are realizing that for the first time in years – or maybe ever – they will be home to water a fresh-cut tree.**

[2] **With holiday parades and festivals canceled, stir-crazy families also are looking for a safe way to create special memories.**

[3] Plus, **fresh-cut Christmas trees are largely displayed outside, where there's a lower risk of viral spread**, said Marsha Gray, executive director of the Christmas Tree Promotion Board.

The national organization says industry research tells them many people who put up an artificial tree last year plan to buy a real tree this year, and most are citing the pandemic as the reason.

“Yes, it’s a product, it’s a decoration that you put in your home, but getting a real tree involves the choosing, the hunting for it, the family outing. It really is a memory maker, it’s a day you spend together, and it really becomes much bigger than the tree itself,” Gray said. “It’s really making family memories and people really seem to gravitate to that right now.”

The growing interest in real trees comes after the industry has struggled to attract new, younger customers in recent years as more Americans buy artificial trees.

Between 75% and 80% of Americans who have a Christmas tree now have an artificial one, and the $1 billion market for fake trees has been growing by about 4% a year – despite them being reusable ...

Return to Timeline

https://www.foxnews.com/health/pfizer-united-airlines-fly-covid-19-vaccine

Nov. 28

United Airlines began flying Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine

United Airlines Holdings Inc., reportedly began operating charter flights on Friday to better position Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine for distribution once the inoculation is approved by the Food and Drug Administration.

United will fly the chartered planes between Brussels International Airport and Chicago O'Hare International Airport as part of the "first mass air shipment of a vaccine," supported by the FAA, The Wall Street Journal reported.

"United Cargo established a COVID Readiness Task Team earlier this summer to help ensure we have the right people, products, services, and partnerships in place to support a vaccine distribution effort on a global scale. We have made a commitment to our pharmaceutical and medical customers that we are ready to safely and effectively support their vaccines transportation needs," the airline said in a statement to Fox News. "The safety and security of these commodities is our priority and we are proud to be a trusted partner in these efforts."

The news of securing the charter flights comes as Pfizer has started to lay the foundation to move the vaccine quickly once the FDA and other regulators approve it.

According to the Journal, Pfizer has expanded storage capacity at specific distribution sites in Pleasant Prairie, Wisc., and Karlsruhe, Germany. **The drug company plans to use suitcase-size frozen storage in cargo planes and trucks to distribute the vaccine around the world.**

Pfizer did not immediately respond to Fox News' request for comment.

United Airlines will be allowed to carry five times the amount of dry ice normally permitted on board to keep the vaccine at the necessary cold temperature.

Other cargo and passenger airlines have also begun preparing for future vaccine shipments, the Journal reported.

United Airlines will fly the cargo from Brussels Airport to Chicago (iStock photo)

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/pandemics-coronavirus-pandemic-holidays-berlin-germany-0acaa5b941de65c3463c45d30f372e06

Nov. 29

Pandemic calls off Christmas markets in Europe

BERLIN (AP) — The European plazas where people would usually gather at crowded stalls to partake in hot mulled wine, gingerbread, sausages and other delicacies are just empty squares.

Christmas markets, a cherished tradition in Germany and neighboring countries, have joined the long list of annual traditions that were canceled or diminished this year because of the coronavirus pandemic. November saw many European countries impose partial or tougher lockdowns as new virus cases soared. The restrictions are either being retained or only partially loosened as Advent begins Sunday.

Nuremberg's sprawling, bustling Christkindlesmarkt, one of Germany's best known holiday markets and traditionally a big tourist draw, was called off a month ago. Markets across the country — including in Frankfurt, Dortmund and many in Berlin — have suffered the same fate, with authorities canceling the events or organizers concluding that it didn't make sense to push ahead with their plans.

Over the border in **France**, the roughly 300 stalls of Strasbourg's popular Christmas market won't go up this year. And it's the same story in the **Belgian** capital, Brussels.

Top photo was taken Dec. 1, 2017
of the square in front of the Church of Our Lady with the market in Nuremberg, Germany,

Botton photo was taken Nov. 23, 2020
of same area

(AP Photo/Matthias Schrader)

Return to Timeline

https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/health/2020/11/30/moderna-emergency-fda-authorization-covid-19-vaccine-pfizer/6376336002/

Nov. 30

Moderna to request emergency authorization of coronavirus vaccine

Massachusetts-based biotech company Moderna said it will request an Emergency Use Authorization from the Food and Drug Administration for its coronavirus vaccine on Monday as well as conditional approval from the European Medicines Agency.

Moderna CEO Stephane Bancel [says] the **FDA is expected to consider the vaccine at a Dec. 17 meeting, and that he hopes for approval in the next several weeks.**

"Our goal is to start vaccinating Americans within 24 hours after the FDA gives approval," Bancel said. **"There were 30 severe cases in the study. All 30 were on placebo."**

"I believe in the first quarter [of 2021] most people that want a vaccine, that are at higher risk with older age, severe disease, health care worker, frontline worker, should be able to get vaccinated. Second quarter, every American older than 18 years of age should be able to get vaccinated," Bancel continued.

Moderna said its vaccine's efficacy against coronavirus was 94.1% and efficacy against severe coronavirus was 100%, according to primary efficacy analysis involving 30,000 participants.

Bancel said the company expects to start a clinical study on teenagers in the next week.

"I hope to have that data by the end of the spring ... so they can go back to school next September," he said.

The Phase 3 study of the vaccine has "exceeded" the minimum two-months of post-vaccination follow-up as required by the FDA, Moderna said in a press release.

The vaccine has presented **"no serious safety concerns identified to date," and the "most common" adverse reactions are injection site pain, fatigue, myalgia, arthralgia, headache and redness at the injection site**, the company said.

Moderna said the FDA told the company to expect a Vaccines and Related Biological Products Advisory Committee (VRBPAC) meeting for its vaccine on Dec. 17.

"It's the first time in the company history that we've filed for commercial approval of a product," Bancel told "Mornings with Maria." "FDA has indicated to us that likely the advisory committee, the VRBPAC meeting, should happen on Dec. 17, and hopefully everything goes well in the next couple weeks. You could expect between, I would say, a day to two to three days after VRBPAC meeting for potential approval."

Bancel previously said that Nov. 25 would be the date the company would have enough safety data to put in an emergency use authorization request with the FDA.

Bancel said in August **pricing for smaller volumes of the vaccine, called mRNA-1273, will likely range between $32 and $37 per dose, while larger volumes could be lower.**

At a dose level of 100 micrograms (which was given in the Phase 3 trial that started in July), **Moderna said it can deliver 500 million doses per year and perhaps as many as 1 billion per year in 2021** as it works with Swiss drugmaker Lonza for its manufacturing needs.

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/europe-regulator-covid-19-vaccine-dec-29-8700be24e4fbdb1cbdcc78532b3a5d15

Dec. 1

European Union eyes Dec 29 approval for 1st virus vaccine, later than US

... On Tuesday, officials in Germany, France and the Netherlands cautioned that vaccine programs likely won't start until the end of the year.

"With the information we got in recent days we have to assume that approval will only happen around the turn of the year," German Health Minister Jens Spahn said.

"It has moved because some studies obviously need a little longer to be submitted," he said. "What's important is to be prepared."

His comments were echoed by French President Emmanuel Macron and Dutch Health Minister Hugo de Jonge, who said authorities in those countries are working to begin vaccinating people in the first week of January.

"It won't be a vaccination policy for the broader public" during the first few months, Macron said at a news conference.

BioNTech and U.S. partner Pfizer have said that clinical trials showed their vaccine is 95% effective. The two companies have already submitted data to regulators in the United States and Britain, and approval might come from them first.
...
British regulators also are assessing another vaccine developed by researchers from Oxford University and drugmaker AstraZeneca.

Whichever of the three regulators — American, British or European — acts earliest would be giving the first approval of a COVID-19 vaccine that's been that's been rigorously tested in tens of thousands of people in trials that meet common scientific standards.

Numerous other vaccines are also being worked on. Russia and China have even begun administering shots of locally developed vaccines and selling them to other countries but have not published evidence from advanced studies proving the vaccines are safe and effective.

Globally, every country that has a drug regulatory agency will have to issue its own approval for any COVID-19 vaccine, although countries with weak systems usually rely on the World Health Organization to vet the shots. In the EU, countries typically accept EMA approval for vaccines and drugs unless there is a specific issue the country wants examined further.

Multiple successful vaccines will be needed to end the pandemic, which has been on the upswing in Europe and the U.S. and so far left more than 1.4 million people worldwide dead.

Authorities and drugmakers have pledged to work together to immediately begin rolling out the first shots once approval comes in, whether that's in the United States or Europe.

"Depending on how the authorities decide we can start delivering within a few hours," said BioNTech's chief operating officer, Sierk Poetting.

But **officials caution that while some people may receive a vaccine in the coming weeks, it will likely take years to give billions of people around the world the shot, or two if a booster is necessary, meaning that people will be living with some virus control measures at least well into next year.**

While the three major vaccines so far submitted for approval seem to prevent people from getting sick, it is still unclear whether they prevent people from picking up the virus entirely — and crucially — passing it to others...

Return to Timeline

https://www.newsweek.com/us-covid-hospitalizations-highest-states-1551704

Dec. 2

U.S. COVID hospitalizations are highest in these five states

The total confirmed coronavirus case count in the U.S. has surpassed 13.7 million, **with nearly 100,000 COVID-19 patients currently in hospital, as of Wednesday.**

... the five states with the most number of COVID-19 patients currently hospitalized per one million people, according to data compiled by The Atlantic's The COVID Tracking Project.

...

South Dakota
Currently hospitalized per million: 618
Total cases: 80,912
Total population: 884,659

7-day average has been rising sharply from late August, peaking at 1,458 on November 11, after flattening out for months. The figure declined after then through the rest of November ...

Nevada
Currently hospitalized per million: 516
Total cases: 154,842
Total population: 3,080,156

7-day average has been increasing on a steep incline since early September, after declining from mid-July. The figure peaked at 2,499 on November 25 before declining through the end of November ...

Indiana
Currently hospitalized per million: 514
Total cases: 344,373
Total population: 6,732,219

7-day average has been rising sharply from late September, after flattening out from late March. The figure peaked at 6,535 on November 17 before declining through the rest of November ...

Nebraska
Currently hospitalized per million: 469
Total cases: 130,194
Total population: 1,934,408

7-day average of cases has been rising on a sharp incline from late September, peaking at 2,391 on November 17, after flattening out since late April ...

Montana
Currently hospitalized per million: 463
Total cases: 63,205
Total population: 1,068,778

7-day average has been rising sharply since early September, after flattening out from early July. The figure peaked at 1,293 on November 17

Dec. 2

US has reports its highest one-day Covid-19 death tally: Over 2,800

More than 2,800 Covid-19 deaths were reported Wednesday in the United States -- **the most the country has ever reported in a single day** -- as health care officials say their staff and facilities are struggling to support burgeoning numbers of patients.

The number of Covid-19 patients in US hospitals Wednesday -- 100,226, according to the COVID Tracking Project -- also is the highest reported on a given day during the pandemic.

One-day death totals can draw from delayed reports across several days. Still, recently soaring daily rates of infections and hospitalizations has **various experts predicting the daily death count could regularly surpass 2,000 or 3,000, and perhaps approach 4,000.**The country's daily average of Covid-19 deaths across a week is 1,654 -- above its summer high of around 1,130 but lower than the pandemic peak above 2,240 in late April.

"By this time next week, we are going to be talking about 3,000 deaths a day -- that's 9/11 every single day," Dr. Jonathan Reiner, a cardiologist and professor of medicine at George Washington University, told CNN on Wednesday.

The death count reported Wednesday was 2,804, surpassing the previous one-day high of 2,603 set on April 15, according to Johns Hopkins University data. Earlier, JHU's total for Wednesday was higher -- but that count was corrected Thursday morning because of an error found in one state's tally.

Coronavirus cases -- which passed 14 million nationwide Thursday -- and hospitalizations also have been soaring, prompting hospital and other officials to warn they're running out off staff and capacity to adequately care for patients.

"We have stretched our health care worker staff as far as we can, and it will get to the point where the quality of care will be severely hampered if, in fact, we don't have these health care workers," Michael Osterholm, director of the Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy and a member of President-elect Joe Biden's transition Covid-19 advisory board, said Thursday.

As for cases: The country's average number of new daily Covid-19 cases across a week was 164,103 Wednesday -- nearly 2.5 times the summertime peak in July, JHU data show.

Health experts say they **expect cases and hospitalizations to swell further in the coming week, when infections from Thanksgiving-week gatherings may noticeably accumulate.**

“We're not even going to see those (Thanksgiving) numbers until this weekend (or) early next week," Dr. Leana Wen, CNN medical analyst and former Baltimore health commissioner, said Thursday. "And I think at this point it's really important for us to flatten that (case) curve again, hunker down, stay at home and certainly not have any indoor gathering (or) non-essential travel."

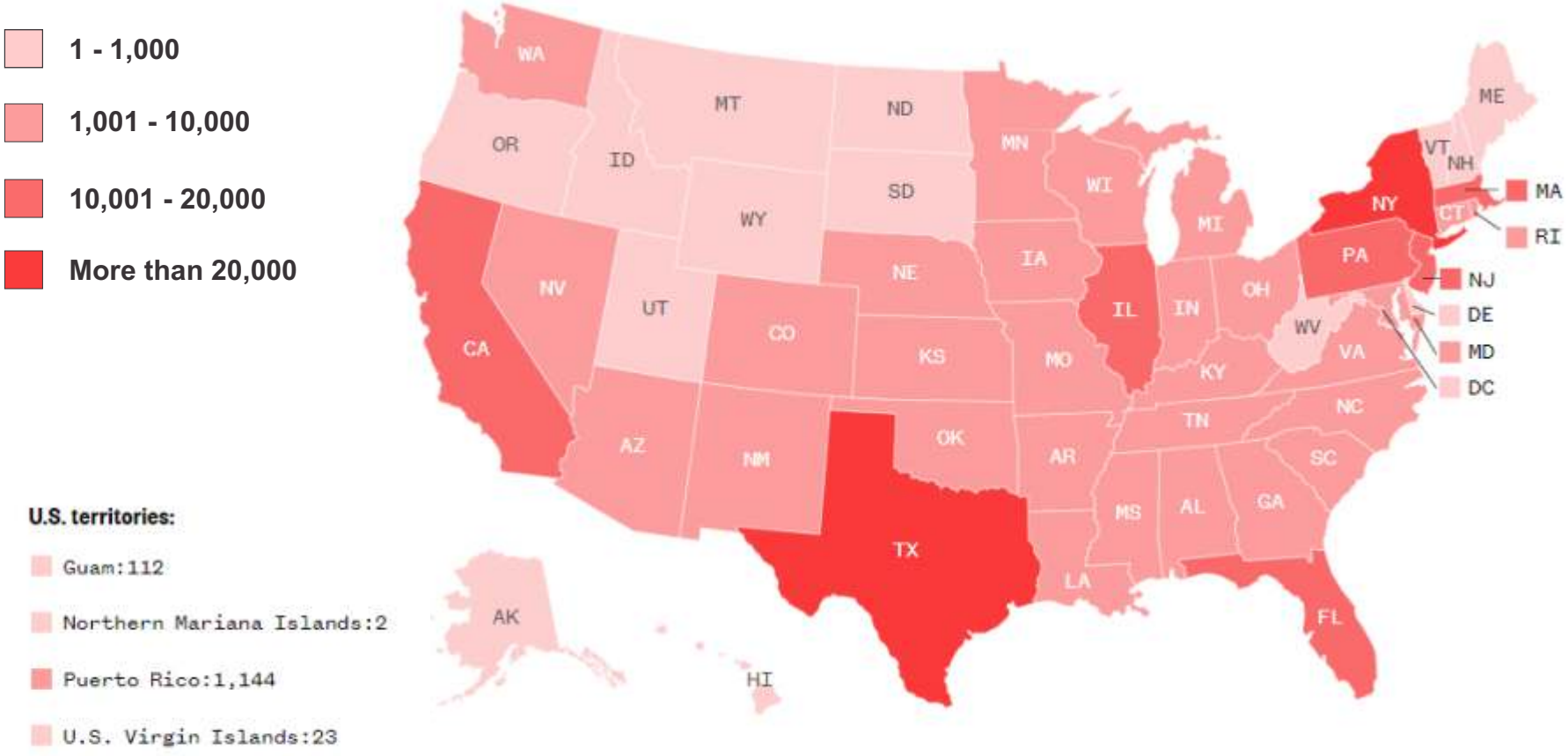
Return to Timeline

https://www.nbcnews.com/health/health-news/coronavirus-deaths-u-s-map-shows-number-fatalities-compared-confirmed-n1166966

Select live link for interactive chart and updates

Dec. 3

274,577 Coronavirus deaths in the United States



Data as of Dec. 3, 3:02 p.m. EST.

Sources: State and county officials

Graphic: Jiachuan Wu / NBC News

Return to Timeline

https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/worldwide-graphs/#total-deaths

Select live link for current number

Dec. 3

Death toll from coronavirus tops 1,500,000

https://www.npr.org/sections/coronavirus-live-updates/2020/12/04/942114022/job-growth-slows-sharply-in-november-as-pandemic-takes-toll-on-economy

Dec. 4

Job growth slows sharply as pandemic takes toll on economy

U.S. employers sharply scaled back their hiring last month, as the coronavirus pandemic put new pressure on restaurants, retailers and other businesses.

The Labor Department said Friday employers added just 245,000 jobs in November, down from a revised 610,000 in October.

The job growth figure was well below expectations. Economists at Wells Fargo had expected the United States to add just 425,000 jobs in November, while other forecasts pointed to just under half a million.

The unemployment rate dipped to 6.7%, from 6.9% the month before, largely because 400,000 people dropped out of the workforce.

So far the **U.S. has recovered 56% of the jobs that were lost in March and April, and payroll employment is still 9.8 million below its pre-pandemic levels.**
...
Job listings at the website Glassdoor fell 2.5% between October and November. That was the first such decline since May, and the drop was widespread among different parts of the country and different sectors of the economy.

"That doesn't mean we've gone over the cliff yet," said Glassdoor's senior economist Daniel Zhao. "But **there are definitely some warning signs flashing."**

The Census Bureau cut another 93,000 temporary workers in November as it wound down its once-a-decade headcount. Local governments cut 21,000 jobs in education.

Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell warned lawmakers this week that without federal help, state and local governments are likely to see additional job cuts in the months to come.

"State and local governments are one of the very largest employers in the country and they provide those critical services," Powell said. "That was a big part of the story in the slow recovery from the global financial crisis a decade ago."

The slowdown in hiring is especially worrisome for millions of Americans who are out of work and at risk of losing their financial lifeline later this month, when emergency unemployment benefits are set to expire.

Congress has been discussing a possible extension of those benefits, but no agreement has been reached yet.

The holiday shopping season typically creates job opportunities in retail. Zhao said this year, many of those jobs are in warehouses or as delivery drivers, as customers increasingly shift their gift-buying online.

The Labor Department report, which is adjusted for seasonal hiring patterns, shows a net loss of 35,000 retail jobs, but an increase of 145,000 jobs in transportation and warehousing.

While there are some openings in traditional brick-and-mortar stores, they may not be easily filled.

"Even in a time of high unemployment, workers are hesitant to return to in-person roles where the health risks might be higher," Zhao said.

New vaccines offer hope that the pandemic could be tamed sometime next year, but widespread distribution of the shots is still months away.

"The good news is, we know recovery is on the way with the vaccines," said Mitchell, the restaurant operator. "We just need to get from here to there, and Congress needs to help provide that bridge."

https://apnews.com/article/international-news-immunizations-moscow-coronavirus-pandemic-vladimir-putin-a814654e46118a8698eb815a4bdad343

Dec. 5

Moscow opens dozens of coronavirus vaccination centers

MOSCOW (AP) — Thousands of doctors, teachers and others in high-risk groups have signed up for COVID-19 vaccinations in Moscow starting Saturday, a precursor to a sweeping Russia-wide immunization effort.

The vaccinations come three days after President Vladimir **Putin ordered the launch of a "large-scale" COVID-19 immunization campaign even though a Russian-designed vaccine has yet to complete the advanced studies needed to ensure its effectiveness and safety** in line with established scientific protocols.

The Russian leader said Wednesday that more than 2 million doses of the Sputnik V jab will be available in the next few days, allowing authorities to offer jabs to medical workers and teachers across the country starting late next week.

Moscow, which currently accounts for about a quarter of the country's new daily infections, moved ahead of the curve, opening 70 vaccination facilities on Saturday. Doctors, teachers and municipal workers were invited to book a time to receive a jab, and Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyanin said that about 5,000 signed up in a few hours after the system began operating on Friday.

Russia boasted that Sputnik V was the world's "first registered COVID-19 vaccine" after the government gave it regulatory approval in early August. The move drew criticism from international experts, who pointed out that the vaccine had only been tested on several dozen people at the time.

Putin has shrugged off doubts about it, saying in August that one of his daughters was among the early vaccine recipients.

Over the past months, Sputnik V has been offered to medical workers and teachers even as it was still in the middle of advanced trials. Several top officials said they also have received the jabs, and earlier this week the Russian military began vaccinating crews of navy ships scheduled to depart on a mission.

Health Minister Mikhail Murashko said Wednesday that **more than 100,000 people in Russia already have received the shots.**

The free vaccine is offered to people aged 18 to 60 who don't suffer from chronic illnesses and aren't pregnant or breastfeeding.

The two-shot Sputnik V was developed by the Moscow-based Gamaleya Institute. An advanced study among 40,000 volunteers was announced two weeks after the vaccine received government approval and that is still ongoing.

Last month, **developers of the vaccine said interim analysis of trial data showed it was 91.4% effective. The conclusion was based on 39 infections among 18,794 study participants** that received both doses of either the vaccine or a placebo, which is a much lower number of infections than Western drugmakers have looked at when assessing the effectiveness of their vaccines. Two other Russia-designed vaccines are also undergoing tests.

...

Russia has been swept with a resurgence of the outbreak this fall, with numbers of new infections exceeding the levels recorded early in the pandemic, but the authorities so far have refrained from a tight lockdown imposed in the spring.

On Saturday, Russia reported a new record high of daily infections at 28,782, including 7,993 in Moscow. The government task force has recorded a total of 42,684 virus-related deaths since the start of the outbreak.

Russia's total of over 2.4 million confirmed cases is currently the fourth-largest caseload in the world behind the United States, India and Brazil.

https://apnews.com/article/immunizations-health-coronavirus-pandemic-germany-england-057828fe5237a32e1df744a8b00e0165

Dec. 6

UK gears up for huge vaccination plan watched by the world

LONDON (AP) — Final checks were taking place Sunday on the deliveries of the coronavirus vaccine developed by American drugmaker Pfizer and Germany's BioNTech before its rollout to hospitals across the U.K. in super-cold containers.

Around **800,000 doses of the vaccine are expected to be in place for the start of the immunization program on Tuesday**, which will be the country's biggest ever and which is being closely watched all around the world. British Health Secretary Matt Hancock has reportedly dubbed Tuesday as "V-Day," a nod to triumphs in World War II.
...
Last week the **U.K. became the first country to authorize the Pfizer-BioNtech vaccine for emergency use.** ...

The United States hopes to start vaccinations later this month. British regulatory authorities are also examining data on the vaccines from American biotechnology company Moderna and AstraZeneca-Oxford University.

Russia on Saturday began vaccinating thousands of doctors, teachers and others at dozens of centers in Moscow with its Russian-made Sputnik V vaccine, which was approved over the summer after being tested in only a few dozen people.

The excitement in **Britain**, which **has Europe's highest virus-related death toll at more than 61,000**, was palpable.
...
Patients aged 80 and above who are already attending hospitals as outpatients and those being discharged after a stay in the hospital will be among the first to receive the jab. Hospitals will also start inviting over 80s in for a vaccine shot and will work with nursing homes to book staff into vaccination clinics. Any appointments not taken up will be offered to those health workers deemed to be at the highest risk of COVID-19. Everyone who is vaccinated will need a booster jab 21 days later.

Buckingham Palace refused to comment on speculation that Queen Elizabeth II, 94, and her 99-year-old husband, Prince Philip, will soon be vaccinated and then make it public, a move that could reassure anyone nervous about getting a vaccination.

"Our goal is totally to protect every member of the population, Her Majesty, of course, as well," Dr. June Raine, chief executive of Britain's Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency, which authorized the vaccine, told the BBC.

The **U.K. has secured 40 million doses of the Pfizer vaccine, which can cover 20 million people**. Since the British government will only immunize people over 16, ar**ound 55 million people in the U.K. will be eligible**. In total, Britain has procured 357 million doses of seven vaccine candidates, including 100 million of the much cheaper Oxford vaccine, which has a lower efficacy rate than the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines.

Now that the first tranche of the vaccine has arrived from Pfizer's manufacturing plant in Belgium, checks are being conducted by a specialist medical logistics company to ensure there was no damage in transit. This could take up to a day.

Each box containing the vaccines, which includes five packs of 975 doses, will need to be opened and unpacked manually at specially licensed sites. After that, the vaccines will then be made available to hospitals.

Delivering the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine is complicated because it needs to be stored at super-chilled temperatures: about minus 70 degrees Celsius (minus 94 degrees Fahrenheit). **Fortunately, the vaccine is stable at normal refrigerator temperatures, between 2 and 8 degrees Celsius (35.6 to 46.4 F), for a few days, meaning it can be stored locally. After defrosting the vaccine, which takes a few hours, additional time is required to prepare it to be given in a shot.**...

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/international-news-taiwan-china-coronavirus-pandemic-5f14c76f18ddab4cc9bc5e826d820445

Dec. 7

China prepares large-scale rollout of coronavirus vaccines

... **China**'s fledgling pharmaceutical industry **has at least five vaccines from four producers being tested in more than a dozen countries** including Russia, Egypt and Mexico. Health experts say even if they are successful, the certification process for the United States, Europe, Japan and other developed countries might be too complex for them to be used there. However, **China said it will ensure the products are affordable for developing countries and has been actively pursuing deals across the world.**

On Sunday, 1.2 million doses of the Chinese company Sinovac's vaccine arrived in Indonesia, the government said.
...
Within China, so far **only one developer**, China National Pharmaceutical Group, known as **Sinopharm**, said in November it **applied for final market approval for use of its vaccine**. Others have been approved for emergency use on people deemed at high risk of infection.
...
The government has yet to say how many people it plans to vaccinate. Sun said plans call for vaccinating border personnel and other high-risk populations this month.

The companies are using more traditional techniques than Western developers....They say **unlike Pfizer's vaccine, which must be kept frozen at temperatures as low as minus 70 degrees Celsius (minus 94 Fahrenheit), theirs can be stored at 2 to 8 C (36 to 46 F).** The Chinese producers have yet to say how they might be distributed.
...
The **Sichuan and Anhui** announcements said **the vaccine, given in two shots, would cost a total of 400 yuan ($60).**
...
In November, the Communist Party secretary for **Sinopharm** said almost 1 million people had received its vaccine.
...
Sinopharm has clinical trials under way in 10 countries including the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Jordan, Peru and Argentina with nearly 60,000 volunteers. It has built two facilities in China capable of producing 200 million doses per year.

Sinovac has trials in Brazil, Turkey and Indonesia. Its most recent publicized data, a study in the science journal the Lancet, showed its candidate produced lower levels of antibodies in people than those who had recovered from COVID-19. The company projects it will be able to produce a few hundred million doses of the vaccine by February or March of next year.

Another producer, **CanSino, is testing in Russia, Pakistan and Mexico and pursuing partnerships in Latin American countries.** Its vaccine, which has been used on an emergency basis with the Chinese military, **uses a harmless adenovirus to carry genes into human cells to generate an immune response.**

Return to Timeline

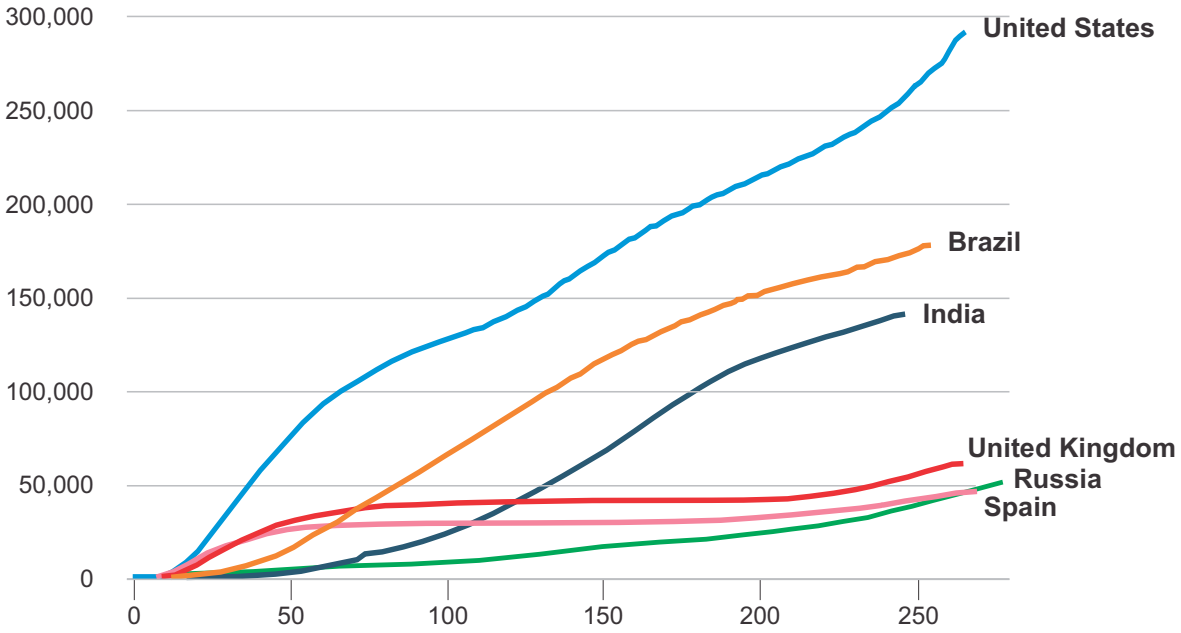
https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/worldwide-graphs/#countries-deaths

Select live link for interactive chart and updates

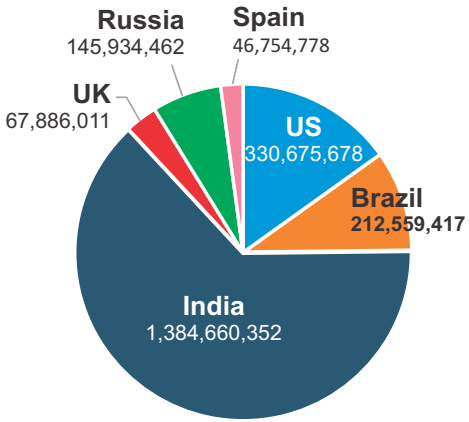
Dec. 8

Cumulative number of COVID-19 deaths

(by number of days since 100 deaths)



Total Population



Deaths per 100,000 population

Spain:	**99.83**
UK:	**92.54**
US:	**86.71**
Brazil:	**84.65**
Russia:	**29.85**
India:	**10.12**

Select live link for updates

https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/data/mortality

https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-64ddccd70c38a39f880da27941db3540

Dec. 9

U.K. investigates possible allergic reactions to COVID-19 shot

LONDON (AP) — British regulators warned Wednesday that people who have a history of serious allergic reactions shouldn't receive the new Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine as they investigate two adverse reactions that occurred on the first day of the country's mass vaccination program.

The U.K.'s Medical and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency is looking into whether the reactions were linked to the vaccine. T**he two people affected were staff members with the National Health Service who had a history of allergies, and both are recovering.** Authorities have not specified what their reactions were.

In the meantime, the regulator has issued the warning for **anyone who has had a significant allergic reaction to a vaccine, medicine or food. That includes anyone who has been told to carry an adrenaline shot or others who have had potentially fatal allergic reactions.**

...

The medical regulatory agency also said vaccinations should not be carried out in facilities that don't have resuscitation equipment.

...

The MHRA last week gave emergency authorization to the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, making Britain the first country to allow its widespread use.

The U.K. began its mass vaccination program on Tuesday, offering the shot to people over 80, nursing home staff and some NHS workers. It's not clear how many people have received the jab so far.

As part of its emergency authorization for the vaccine, the MHRA required healthcare workers to report any adverse reactions to help regulators gather more information about safety and effectiveness.

The agency is monitoring the vaccine rollout closely and "will now investigate these cases in more detail to understand if the allergic reactions were linked to the vaccine or were incidental," he said. "The fact that we know so soon about these two allergic reactions and that the regulator has acted on this to issue precautionary advice shows that this monitoring system is working well."

Dr. June Raine, head of the medical regulatory agency, informed a Parliamentary committee about the reactions during previously scheduled testimony on the pandemic.

"We know from the very extensive clinical trials that this wasn't a feature" of the vaccine, she said. "But if we need to strengthen our advice, now that we have had this experience in the vulnerable populations, the groups who have been selected as a priority, we get that advice to the field immediately."

Return to Timeline

https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2020/12/09/944379919/new-data-reveal-which-hospitals-are-dangerously-full-is-yours

Select live link for interactive chart and updates

Dec. 9

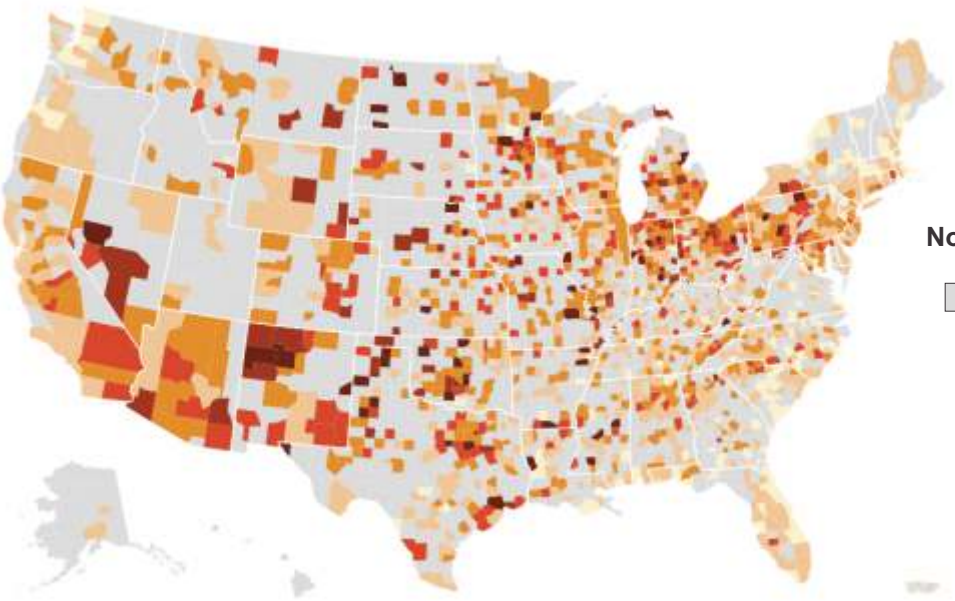
New Data Reveal Which Hospitals Are Dangerously Full. Is Yours?

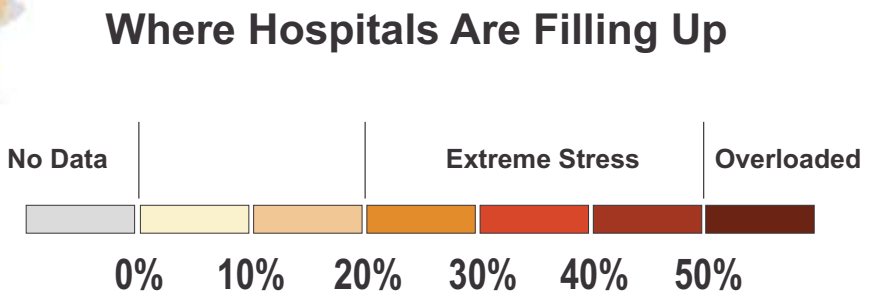
The federal government on Monday released detailed hospital-level data showing the toll COVID-19 is taking on health care facilities, including how many inpatient and ICU beds are available on a weekly basis.

... **it's concerning when that rate rises above 10%**, hospital capacity experts told NPR.

Anything above 20% represents "extreme stress" for the hospital, according to a framework developed by the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation at the University of Washington.

If that figure gets to near 50% or above, the stress on staff is immense. "It means the hospital is overloaded. It means other services in that hospital are being delayed. The hospital becomes a nightmare," IHME's Ali





Return to Timeline

https://fortune.com/2020/12/09/as-covid-deaths-rise-sweden-pulls-a-u-turn-and-proposes-a-lockdown-law/

Dec. 10

As COVID deaths rise, Sweden pulls a U-turn and proposes a lockdown law

Sweden's government proposed a law that would give it the power to close stores in response to a worsening pandemic.

The bill, which would allow the minority coalition to cut shops' opening hours and limit footfall, is due to take effect in March if it makes it through the consultation process, Minister of Health and Social Affairs Lena Hallengren said on Wednesday. She stressed that the government would only shutter businesses as a last resort, if parliament agrees.

"We are not rid of the pandemic, even if the vaccines obviously brighten the prospects," Hallengren said. "We see a need to have regulation in place during next year."

Sweden has so far avoided a full lockdown and relied mostly on voluntary measures to fight the pandemic. That's in part because the government lacked the legal framework to do more. A temporary law that made it possible to close down businesses expired on June 30, without ever being enforced.

But **after a sharp increase in coronavirus cases and deaths**, Sweden's government is stepping up its fight against the pandemic. That includes **capping the number of people permitted to gather in public at eight, as well as a ban on alcohol sales after 10 p.m.**

But Sweden currently has no legal tools to enforce limits on stores, gyms or the use of public transport. The new law, if passed, would stop short of regulating functions at private homes.

Hallengren also said the government's goal isn't to impose future lockdowns.

"We have made severe restrictions to people's way of life, but it's not possible to close down entirely," she said. "However, we need to be able to take more exact measures that also impact places that are not covered by current legislation."

Compared to other countries

per 100,000 population

https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/data/mortality

Select live link for updates

Belgium:	154.11
Peru:	113.79
Italy:	102.16
Spain:	100.63
UK:	94.25
US:	88.45
Sweden:	71.65

Return to Timeline

https://www.npr.org/2020/12/11/945360045/dr-paul-offit-discusses-fda-panels-vote-on-pfizer-vaccine

Dec. 11

Vaccine to be OK'd in days, but 'normal' may not return until next fall

The Food and Drug Administration's authorization of a COVID-19 vaccine could come within a day or two, a member of an FDA panel of experts that recommended an OK for the vaccine said on Friday. But Dr. Paul Offit, a member of that panel, cautioned that it could be next fall before life gets back to normal after the pandemic.

That fall prediction would depend on two-thirds of the American population getting the vaccine, he told NPR's Morning Edition.

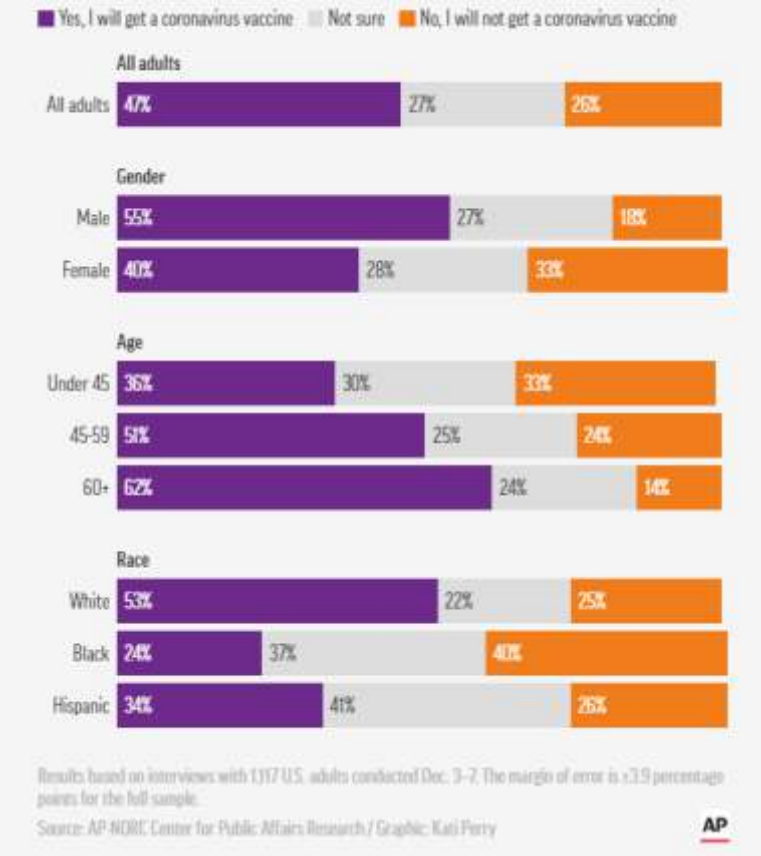
"The problem is logistics," Offit said. "It's a matter of making the vaccine and distributing it. It's making sure people get it, that they aren't sort of swayed by ... what is a lot of misinformation that surrounds not only this vaccine, but all vaccines. That's going to be the hang-up.

"I probably shouldn't make any predictions because you're invariably wrong with this virus when you make predictions. But I really do think that by next fall we could have life back to normal," said Offit, director of the Vaccine Education Center at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia.

On Thursday, **the advisory panel voted 17-4, with one abstention, to recommend that the COVID-19 vaccine being developed by Pfizer and BioNTech be authorized for emergency use.**

https://apnews.com/article/ap-norc-poll-us-half-want-vaccine-shots-4d98dbfc0a64d60d52ac84c3065dac55

Only about half of American adults plan to get COVID-19 vaccine



Return to Timeline

https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/worldwide-graphs/#total-deaths

Select live link for current number

Dec. 11

Death toll from coronavirus tops 1,600,000

Return to Timeline

https://www.bloomberg.com/graphics/covid-vaccine-tracker-global-distribution/

Select live link for updates

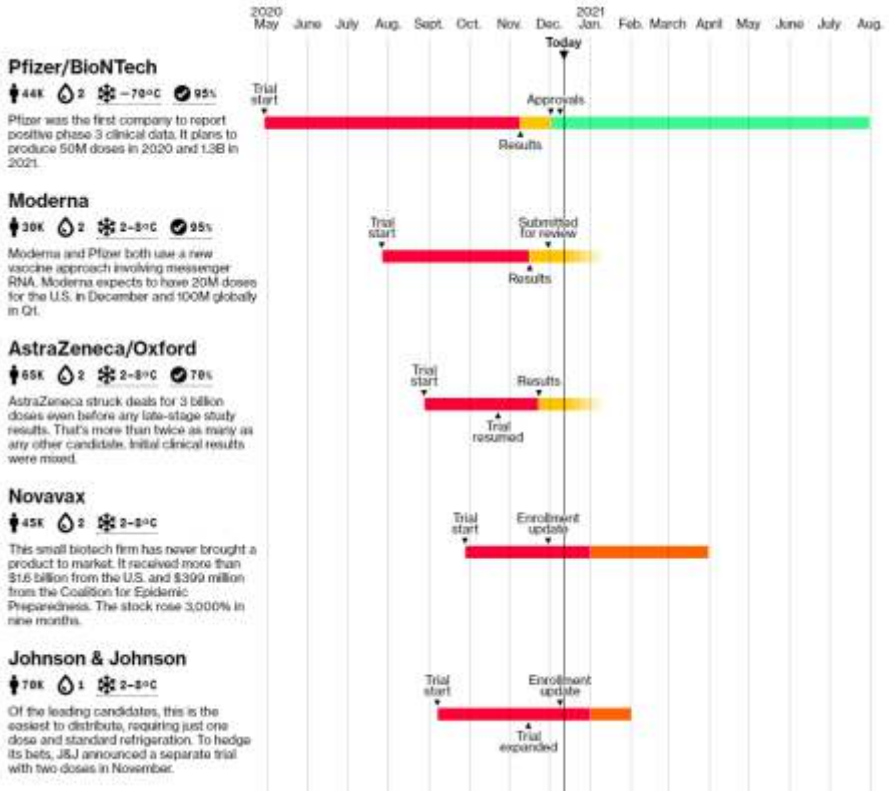
Dec. 12

Tracking nine of the most promising COVID-19 vaccines

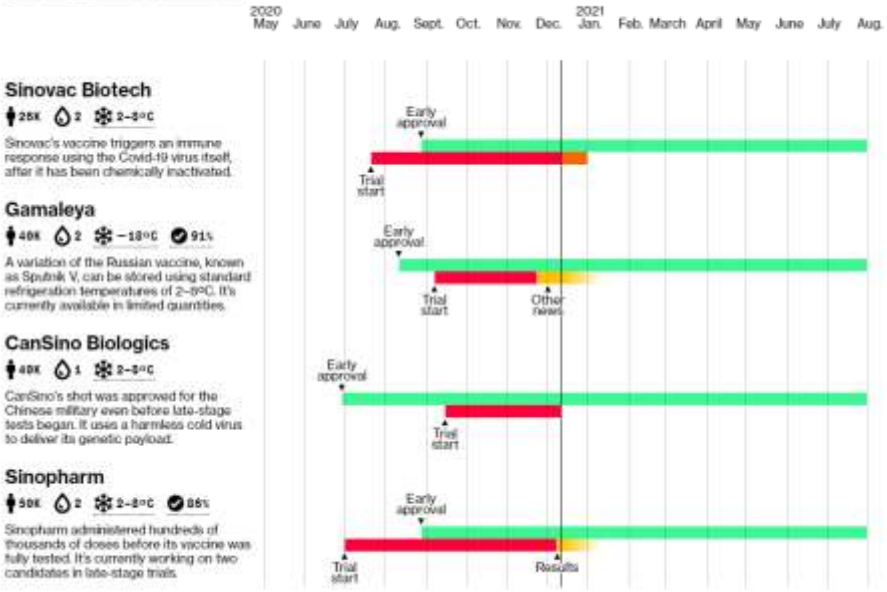
When to Expect the Next Vaccine

Progress: Trial | Results expected | Awaiting approval | Available to public

Trial size | Doses required | Storage temperature | Efficacy



Russia and China are allowing vaccine distribution before conducting large-scale clinical trials



Return to Timeline

https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-vaccines-distribut-idUSKBN28N041

Dec. 13

Historic U.S. COVID vaccine campaign launches with convoy of trucks

(Reuters) -Workers at a Pfizer Inc factory in Michigan dispatched the first shipments of its COVID-19 vaccine shortly after 6:30 a.m. on Sunday - launching the largest and most complex vaccine distribution project ever in the United States.

A network television video feed from the facility in Kalamazoo showed masked workers removing pizza-boxed sized cartons containing vaccine vials from a freezer, and placing them in large, blue coolers, before these were boxed and labeled.

Workers clapped and whistled as the first boxes were moved toward waiting trucks. The long-awaited moment comes as infections and deaths from COVID-19 are surging in the United States. It will take months before most U.S. residents can get a COVID-19 vaccine.

The federal government plans to release the nation's first **2.9 million doses** to 64 states, U.S. territories and major cities, as well as five federal agencies. Although the federal government is coordinating distribution efforts, **states have the final decision over who gets the first shots.** The federal government is sending the first shipments to more than 600 locations.

Companies in a range of industries are lobbying state and federal officials to give priority to their workers in the line of millions waiting for the vaccine and a return to life free from the fear of the deadly illness.

U.S. regulators late on Friday authorized the vaccine from Pfizer and partner BioNTech for use, and U.S. marshals will accompany the tightly secured shipments from factory to final destination.

"We have spent months strategizing with Operation Warp Speed officials and our healthcare customers on efficient vaccine logistics, and the time has arrived to put the plan into action," Wes Wheeler, president of UPS Healthcare, said on Saturday.

Pfizer's dry-ice cooled packages can hold as many as 4,875 doses, and the first leg of their **journey will be from Kalamazoo to planes positioned nearby.** Workers will load the vaccine - which must be kept at sub-Arctic temperatures - onto the **aircraft that will shuttle them to United Parcel Service or FedEx air cargo hubs** in Louisville, Kentucky, and Memphis, Tennessee, respectively.

From there, they will be **trucked or flown to facilities close to the 145 U.S. sites earmarked to receive the first doses.**

DELIVERY FIRMS GIVE VACCINE TOP PRIORITY

Familiar UPS and FedEx package delivery drivers, who may also be carrying holiday gifts and other parcels, will deliver many of the "suitcases" into the hands of healthcare providers on Monday. The shipments are the first of three expected this week.

Return to Timeline

https://oklahoma.gov/content/dam/ok/en/covid19/documents/vaccine/state_of_oklahoma_covid-19_vaccination_plan.pdf

Dec. 13

COVID-19 vaccine: Where are you in Oklahoma's distribution line?

Phase 1: [maybe as early as tomorrow!]

1. Nursing home, assisted living, and long-term care facility **staff** ...
2. Public health staff conducting front-line COVID-19 pandemic mitigation..
3. Health care workers providing direct inpatient COVID-19 care...
4. Nursing home, assisted living, and long-term care facility **residents** ...
5. Public health staff supporting front-line efforts, senior state, county and city government leaders and elected officials critical to maintain continuity of governmental operations and services ....

Phase 2: [January 2021?]

1. First responders ...
2. Adults age 65 and older, and adults of any age with comorbidities...
3. Health care workers providing direct, COVID-19 outpatient care and services ...
4. Staff and residents in homeless shelters; state and municipal prisons/jails; certain manufacturing facilities with limited social distancing capacity who are critical to the maintenance of the food supply ...

Phase 3: [no estimated start date]

1. Teachers, students, residents and administrative staff in educational settings ...
2. Critical infrastructure personnel ...

Phase 4: [no estimated start date]

All remaining Oklahoma residents. ...

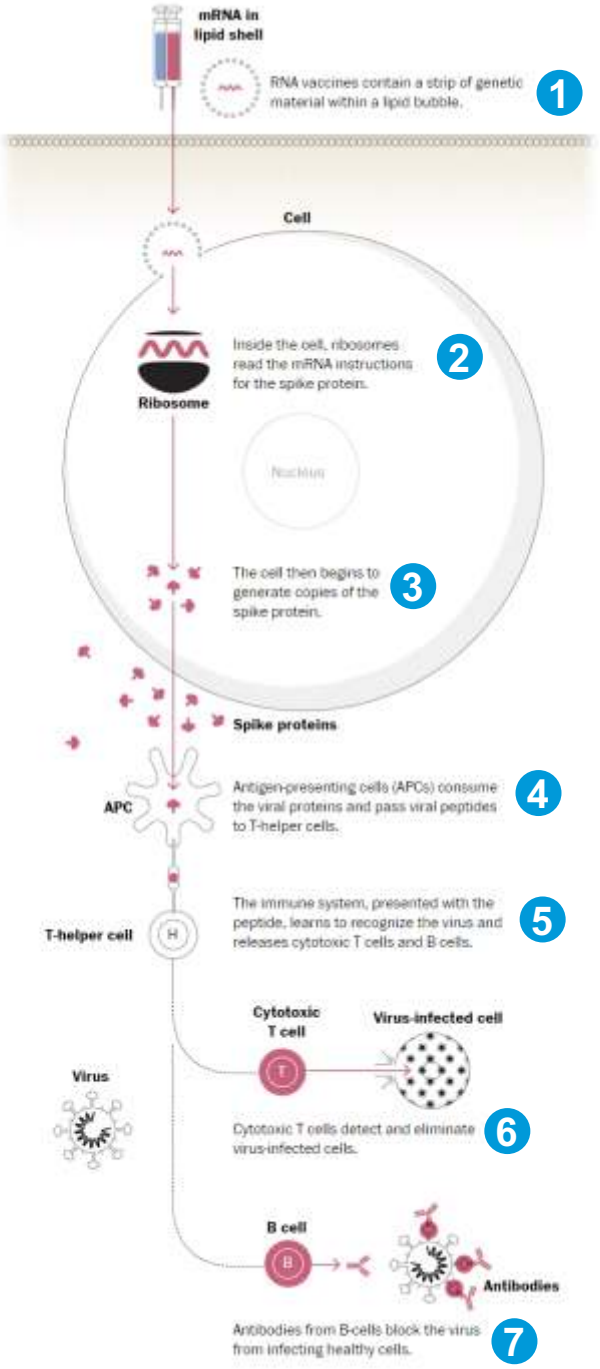
Return to Timeline

https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2020/11/17/covid-vaccines-wh need-to-know/?arc404=true

Dec. 14

How do the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines work?

1. RNA vaccines contain a strip of genetic material within a lipid bubble
2. Inside the cell, ribosomes read the mRNA instructions for the spike protein
3. **The cell then begins to generate copies of the spike protein**
4. Antigen-presenting cells (APCs) consume the viral proteins and pass viral peptides to T-helper cells
5. The **immune system**, presented with the peptide, **learns to recognize the virus and releases cytotoxic T cells and B cells**
6. Cytotoxic **T cells** detect and **eliminate virus-infected cells**
7. Antibodies from **B-cells block the virus from infecting healthy cells**



Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-coronavirus-vaccine-af9bc295fa685aaa04e204e4db62e336

Select live link to see numbers for all states and updates

Dec. 15

US vaccinations ramp up as 2nd COVID-19 shot nears

... **A panel of outside experts is expected to vote to recommend the [Moderna] vaccine on Thursday**, with a final FDA decision coming soon thereafter.
...
A second vaccine can't come soon enough as the country's daily death count continues to top 2,400 amid over 210,000 new daily cases, based on weekly averages of data compiled by Johns Hopkins University. The devastating toll is only expected to grow in coming weeks, fueled by holiday travel, family gatherings and lax adherence to basic public health measures.
...
Moderna's vaccine is the same type as Pfizer's, made with the same technology. And in scrutinizing early results of a 30,000-person study, the FDA found it also worked just about the same.

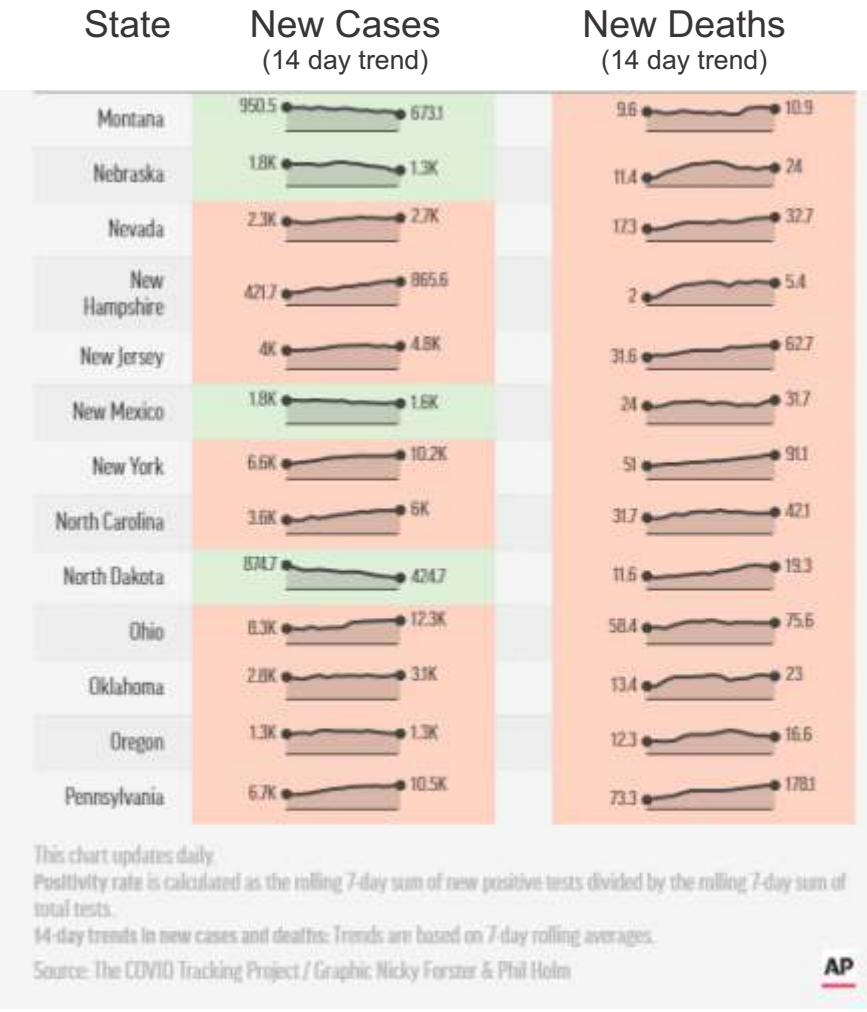
The Moderna vaccine was more than **94% effective overall at preventing COVID-19 illness, and 86% effective in people 65 and older.** The FDA uncovered no major safety issues.

Recipients tend to experience temporary flu-like side effects that can include fever, fatigue and aches, especially after the second dose as the vaccine revs up their immune system.
...
The FDA found no serious allergic reactions in the Moderna study. About 1.5% of vaccine recipients and 1.1% who got dummy shots reported possible smaller, "hypersensitivity" reactions.

Both Moderna's and Pfizer-BioNTech's shots are so-called mRNA vaccines. **They aren't made with the coronavirus itself, meaning there's no chance anyone could catch it from the shots**. Instead, the vaccine contains a piece of genetic code that trains the immune system to recognize the spiked protein on the surface of the virus.

indicates a decrease from 2 weeks ago

indicates an increase from 2 weeks ago



Return to Timeline

https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-12-15/trudeau-ramps-up-vaccine-push-secures-early-doses-from-moderna

Dec. 16

Canada secures early doses from Moderna

Canada has secured 417,000 early doses of two Covid-19 vaccines, part of a **push by Justin Trudeau's government to inoculate as many Canadians as possible against the virus before the end of the year.**

The government reached an agreement with Moderna Inc. for as many as 168,000 doses of its vaccine, which will be shipped within 48 hours of Health Canada's approval, the prime minister said Tuesday. The first inoculations of the approved Pfizer Inc.-BioNTech SE shot began Monday, with the bulk of an initial order of 249,000 due next week.

"As with the early shipments of the Pfizer vaccine, this moves us even further forward on getting Canadians protected as quickly as possible," Trudeau told reporters at an Ottawa news conference. "The regulatory process for the Moderna vaccine is ongoing, but I want to assure Canadians that any vaccine approved in Canada will be both safe and effective."

A second wave of Covid-19 is hitting Canada hard, with new cases averaging about 6,500 a day, or triple what was seen in April and May. The virus has killed more than 13,500 people so far across the country.

Trudeau said there will be 70 inoculation sites established as of next week, up from the 14 sites currently operating in urban centers. He added that the northern territories and remote areas will be prioritized for the Moderna vaccine, which has less onerous logistical requirements.

Health Canada approved the Pfizer-BioNTech shot on Dec. 9, and is nearing the completion of its review of Moderna's candidate. Potential vaccines from AstraZeneca PLC and Johnson & Johnson are also making their way through the regulatory process.

Trudeau's team, led by Health Minister Patty Hajdu and Procurement Minister Anita Anand, has positioned Canada ahead of the pack on vaccine supply. **The government has secured enough doses for more than 400% of its population, ahead of the U.K.'s 295% and Australia's 230%,** according to Bloomberg's vaccine tracker.

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-vaccine-florida-coronavirus-pandemic-california-nursing-homes-d042fd93c4d9f65f39f255fa3ca03b7f

Dec. 17

Vaccinations reach nursing homes as California faces crisis

... The first COVID-19 vaccinations are underway at U.S. nursing homes, where the virus has killed more than 110,000 people, even as the nation struggles to contain a surge so alarming it has spurred California to dispense thousands of body bags and line up refrigerated morgue trucks.
...
At the same time, a major snowstorm pushing its way into the Northeast raised concern it could disrupt distribution of the first vaccine.
...
In **Florida**, the longtime retirement haven whose 141,000 nursing home residents are the second most of any state behind California, eagerness to get the vaccine was mixed with some anxiety.
...
West Virginia, with one of the oldest and unhealthiest populations in America, is working with small and local pharmacies to reach nursing homes across the heavily rural state, leapfrogging states that are relying on a partnership with the CVS and Walgreens drugstore chains to kick in any day now.
...
California is distributing 5,000 body bags mostly to the hard-hit Los Angeles and San Diego areas and has 60 refrigerated trailers standing by as makeshift morgues. The state is averaging 163 virus deaths per day, up from 63 just two weeks ago.

Many California hospitals are running out of space in intensive care wards, as the state records an average of about 32,500 new virus cases a day. That is up from about 14,000 a day at the start of the month.
...
Hospitals are also under pressure in **Arizona**, where a record 92% of beds are filled, nearly half of them with people with COVID-19.
..."

In the nation's capital, congressional leaders said they hoped to seal a deal on a package that would extend aid to individuals and businesses and help ship vaccines to millions. It would include enhanced federal unemployment benefits and another round of stimulus checks. A hoped-for announcement Wednesday failed to materialize, however, as lawmakers across the spectrum hammered out details of the sprawling legislation and top negotiators continued to trade offers.

On Thursday, a government advisory panel will consider whether to endorse emergency use of a second vaccine, made by Moderna.

Meanwhile, **officials supervising distribution of the first vaccine said they didn't expect the winter storm to disrupt distribution.**

U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar said the government is tracking the vaccine shipments precisely, has staffers in place to receive them and believes the companies transporting them — FedEx and UPS — have the expertise to navigate the storm.

Return to Timeline

https://www.nytimes.com/live/2020/12/17/world/covid-19-coronavirus/us-virus-deaths-and-cases-set-records-as-vaccines-bring-a-glint-of-hope-to-a-dark-holiday-season

Dec. 18

US virus deaths and cases set records

... The nation set single-day records on Wednesday for reported deaths, with more than 3,600, and for newly reported cases, more than 245,000. The previous case record was set last Friday, when more than 236,800 new infections were announced, not including tens of thousands of significantly older cases reported that day.

Three times as many more people in the United States are dying each day now than three months ago, and the number of new cases is six times what it was then. Also, with large cities already ravaged by the virus, it is now exacting a deadly toll on many midsize cities.

In the past week, just over 30 percent of the nation's coronavirus-related deaths were reported in the South, and nearly 30 percent in the Midwest. **Pennsylvania, Arizona and Kansas** in particular **have seen dizzying growth in death tolls over the last seven days**; **North and South Dakota registered the most deaths relative to the size of their populations.**

Nevada reported 57 deaths on Wednesday, a record. "That's another 57 Nevadans who will be missed by loved ones this holiday season," Gov. Steve Sisolak wrote in a Twitter post.

California, the nation's most populous state by far, has been averaging 202 deaths a day recently. The state has bought 5,000 extra body bags and set up 60 refrigerated storage units around the state to help local coroners...

It is hard to say whether the precipitous rise in cases in December is directly linked to gatherings and travel over Thanksgiving, "but certainly, there's an association," said Catherine L. Troisi, an infectious-disease epidemiologist at the University of Texas Health School of Public Health in Houston.

Anyone who was going to become ill from an infection caught over the holiday weekend would probably have done so by now, Dr. Troisi said. But they could also have spread it to others who are only now showing symptoms and being tested. "So there's a continuing ramification of these cases," she said.

The first shots of a vaccine made by Pfizer and BioNTech were administered on Monday, and another vaccine, made by Moderna, is expected to receive emergency authorization from the Food and Drug Administration this week.

Even with the arrival of the first vaccine and another on the way, it "doesn't help us right now to put out the wildfire," Dr. Troisi said.

"I think things are going to get worse for a while," she said. And in the meantime, what happens "is entirely up to us," she added, emphasizing the need to take precautionary measures.

Return to Timeline

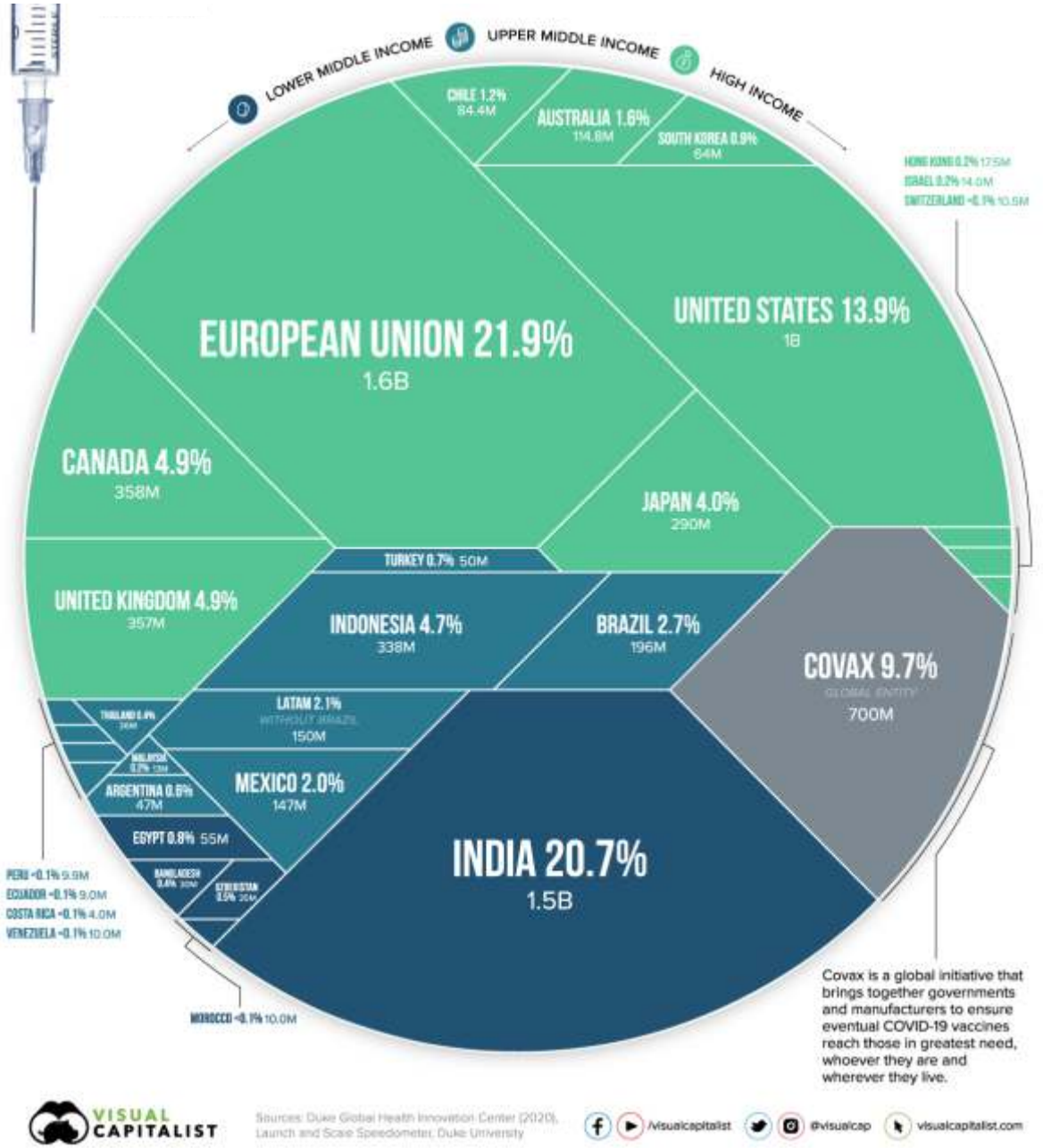
https://www.visualcapitalist.com/tracking-covid-19-vaccines-around-the-world/

Dec. 19

How many COVID-19 vaccines has each country bought?

Confirmed number of doses purchased by country and income level
(as of December 11, 2020)

- **High Income**
- **Upper Middle Income**
- **Lower Middle Income**
- **COVAX**
  a global initiative that brings together governments and manufacturers to ensure eventual COVID-19 vaccines reach those in greatest need



Return to Timeline

https://www.sciencenews.org/article/covid-19-coronavirus-moderna-vaccine-fda-approval

Dec. 21

How does the newly authorized Moderna COVID-19 vaccine compare to Pfizer's?

[Highlights of some of the differences:]

[1] **Moderna's vaccine might provide better protection after the first dose**...

[2] Moderna's vaccine may be better at preventing severe symptoms, but it's too soon to know...

[3] Unlike Pfizer, **Moderna** has **preliminary data that suggest its vaccine stops infection**, not just symptoms [However, the vaccines are similar, so there are scientists that believe Pfzier's could prevent asymtomatic cases] ...

[4] Both vaccines trigger similar side effects, though questions remain about serious allergic reactions...

[5] **More doses of Moderna's vaccine will be initially available in the United States**...

[6] Moderna's vaccine doesn't have to be kept quite so cold, so it should be easier to distribute...

Select links below to right to access complete studies submitted to FDA

	Pfizer		Moderna
# of Study Participants	38,000		30,350
Age Range	16 and older		18 and older
Efficacy Endpoint	≥7 days		≥14 days
Efficacy	**95.0%**		**94.5%**
Side Effects			
Injection site pain	84%		92%
Fatigue	63%		69%
Headache	55%		63%
Muscle Pain	38%		60%
Joint Pain	24%		45%
Chills	32%		43%

Return to Timeline

https://www.bbc.com/news/health-55388846

Dec. 21

New coronavirus variant: What do we know?

...The rapid spread of a new variant of coronavirus has been blamed for the introduction of strict tier four mixing rules for millions of people, harsher restrictions on mixing at Christmas in England, Scotland and Wales, and other countries placing the UK on a travel ban.

...

Three things are coming together that mean it is attracting attention:

[1] It is rapidly replacing other versions of the virus
[2] It has mutations that affect part of the virus likely to be important
[3] Some of those mutations have already been shown in the lab to increase the ability of the virus to infect cells

All of these come together to build a case for a virus that can spread more easily.

...

It was first detected in September. In November around a quarter of cases in London were the new variant. This reached nearly two-thirds of cases in mid-December.

...

It is thought the variant either emerged in a patient in the UK or has been imported from a country with a lower ability to monitor coronavirus mutations.

The variant can be found across the UK, except Northern Ireland, but it is heavily concentrated in London, the South East and eastern England. Cases elsewhere in the country do not seem to have taken off.

Data from Nextstrain, which has been monitoring the genetic codes of the viral samples around the world, suggest cases in Denmark and Australia have come from the UK. The Netherlands has also reported cases.

...

Will the vaccines work against the new variant?
Almost certainly yes, or at least for now.

All three leading vaccines develop an immune response against the existing spike, which is why the question comes up.

Vaccines train the immune system to attack several different parts of the virus, so even though part of the spike has mutated, the vaccines should still work.

"But if we let it add more mutations, then you start worrying," said Prof Gupta.

"This virus is potentially on a pathway for vaccine escape, it has taken the first couple of steps towards that."

Vaccine escape happens when the virus changes so it dodges the full effect of the vaccine and continues to infect people.

This may be the most concerning element of what is happening with the virus.

This variant is just the latest to show the virus is continuing to adapt as it infects more and more of us.

A presentation by Prof David Robertson, from the University of Glasgow on Friday, concluded: "The virus will probably be able to generate vaccine escape mutants."

That would put us in a position similar to flu, where the vaccines need to be regularly updated. Fortunately the vaccines we have are very easy to tweak.

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/joe-biden-bills-coronavirus-pandemic-economy-75389549d3eaf2f3828b16d45c9706e6

Dec. 21

Congress seals agreement on $900 billion COVID relief bill

...The package, expected to draw votes in Congress on Monday, would establish a temporary **$300 per week supplemental jobless benefit and a $600 direct stimulus payment to most Americans**, along with a new round of subsidies for hard-hit businesses and money for schools, health care providers and renters facing eviction.
...
The final agreement would be the largest spending measure yet. It combined $900 billion for COVID-19 relief with a **$1.4 trillion government-wide funding plan and lots of other unrelated measures on taxes, health, infrastructure and education.** The government-wide funding would keep the government open through September.
...
Republicans were most intent on **reviving the Paycheck Protection Program with $284 billion, which would cover a second round of PPP grants to especially hard-hit businesses.** Democrats won set-asides for low-income and minority communities.
...
additional details, including **$25 billion in rental assistance, $15 billion for theaters and other live venues, $82 billion for local schools, colleges and universities, and $10 billion for child care.**

The governmentwide appropriations bill would fund agencies through next September. That measure was likely to provide a last **$1.4 billion installment for Trump's U.S.-Mexico border wall as a condition of winning his signature.**

The bill was an engine to carry much of Capitol Hill's unfinished business, including an almost 400-page water resources bill that targets **$10 billion** for 46 Army Corps of Engineers **flood control, environmental and coastal protection projects.** Another addition would **extend a batch of soon-to-expire tax breaks, including one for craft brewers, wineries and distillers.**

It also would carry numerous clean energy provisions, **$7 billion to increase access to broadband, $4 billion to help other nations vaccinate their people, $14 billion for cash-starved transit systems, Amtrak and airports.**

Democrats failed in a monthslong battle to deliver direct fiscal relief to states and local governments, but they successfully pressed for **$22 billion would help states and local governments with COVID-19-related health expenses like testing and vaccines.**

The end-of-session rush also promised relief for victims of shockingly steep surprise medical bills, a phenomenon that often occurs when providers drop out of insurance company networks.

Return to Timeline

https://covid19.who.int/?gclid=EAIaIQobChMInen64Y3f7QIVjL3ACh1W_AlgEAAYASAAEgJ8k_D_BwE

Select live link for current number

Dec. 21

Death toll from coronavirus tops 1,700,000

Return to Timeline

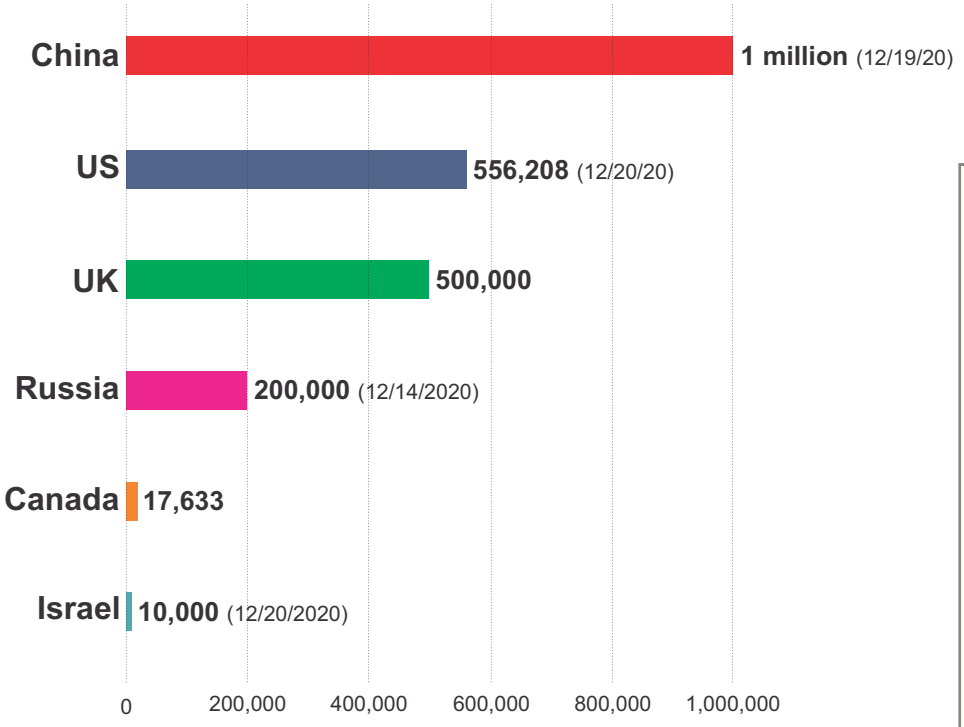
https://ourworldindata.org/covid-vaccinations

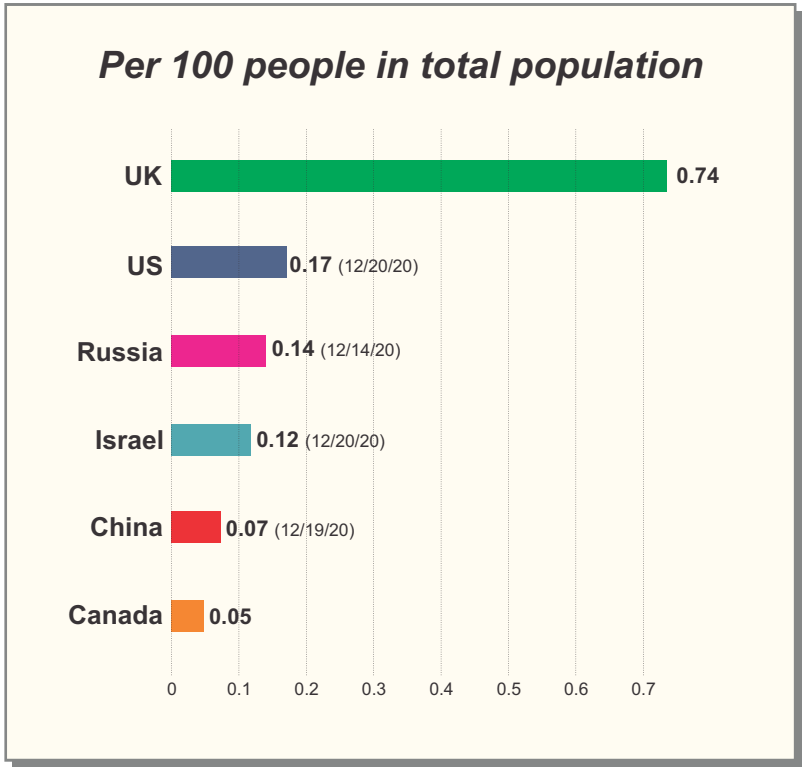
Select live link to see numbers for other countries and updates

Dec. 22

Vaccination doses administered around the world

Shown is the total number of single doses, and does not measure the measure vaccinated against the disease (which usually requires two doses)





Return to Timeline

https://www.bloomberg.com/graphics/covid-vaccine-tracker-global-distribution/?sref=leQ3i2ya

Select live link for updates and an interactive version of the map below

Dec. 22

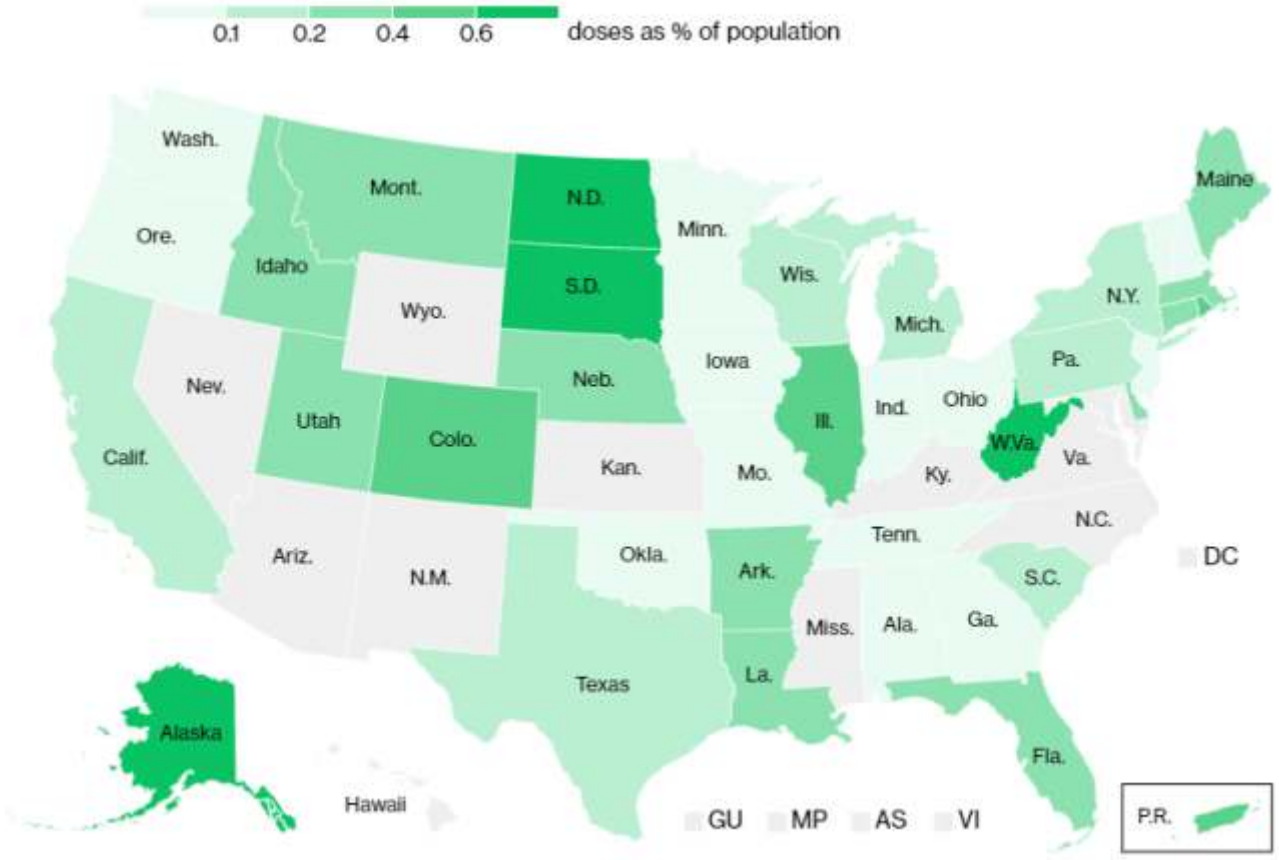
The five states making the fastest progress giving COVID-19 vaccines

…… % of the state's population

South Dakota	**0.85%**
West Virginia	**0.84%**
North Dakota	**0.80%**
Alaska	**0.78%**
Colorado	**0.59%**

The U.S. is allocating **5.1 million doses of Pfizer** and BioNTech's vaccine and **6 million doses of Moderna**'s shot for distribution through this week.

Both vaccines require two doses taken several weeks apart. The second doses are being held in reserve until they're ready to be administered. The vaccine is being distributed based on state population.



Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/international-news-migrant-workers-coronavirus-pandemic-bangkok-thailand-4aca16dbe886d140054a7c38c7b9ef61

Dec. 23

After months of calm, Thailand grapples with virus outbreak

(AP) — After managing against the odds to keep the coronavirus largely in check for most of the year, Thailand has suddenly found itself challenged by an expanding outbreak among migrant workers on the doorstep of Bangkok, the capital.

The surge of cases in Samut Sakhon province threatens to undo months of efforts to contain the virus and hasten recovery of Thailand's ailing economy.

...

Cases related to the outbreak have already been reported in more than a dozen other provinces, including Bangkok. Officials in the capital ordered existing safety measures, such as social distancing, mask wearing and checking for fevers, to be more strictly observed at markets, temples, parks and entertainment venues. The city's more than 700 state schools and nurseries have been ordered to close for 12 days starting Thursday.

Contact tracing has found suspected cases for testing as well as areas to be disinfected. At a mall in central Bangkok's popular Siam Square shopping area, three shops visited by a Thai woman who tested positive for the coronavirus were temporarily closed for deep cleaning, as was a food court at the nearby MBK mall.

...

"What we have seen now is that being too relaxed about COVID precaution measures can lead to greater economic suffering," he said.

Prayuth said the situation means Thailand must tread carefully as it relaxes rules for admitting visitors from other countries — an approach that could hinder efforts to revive the country's lucrative tourism industry, whose business dried up after Thailand closed to regular passenger flights from overseas in early April.

val was under discussion.

Thailand's 576 new cases of the coronavirus reported on Sunday — a **13% increase** over the previous overall total of 4,907 — was the **country's biggest daily spike**. For months, nearly all of the cases detected were in people already in quarantine after arriving from abroad.

More cases since Sunday have pushed Thailand's total to 5,762. **Virtually all were migrant workers** in Samut Sakhon or otherwise **linked to a big seafood market** in the province. Health officials said 44% of the migrant workers and people with direct links to the market who have been tested so far were found to be infected, though most did not display symptoms.

The seafood market was sealed off over the weekend, and other local restrictions were imposed, including a night curfew, the banning of travel out of the province and the closing of many public places. Late Tuesday night, two neighboring provinces also imposed lockdown measures, including bans on New Year's celebrations. The seaside resort city of Pattaya also canceled plans for public celebrations.

The Center for COVID-19 Situation Administration on Wednesday declared 23 provinces — almost a third of the total — to be high risk based on vendors identifying where their major customers were from.

Even though cases related to the seafood market have spread around the country, Prayuth expressed confidence that Thailand "can continue to be among the least affected countries in the world by this terrible disease."

World Health Organization chief Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus has praised Thailand's handling of its coronavirus crisis several times, citing in a September tweet, "A whole of society & whole of government response, extensive testing, contact tracing, community engagement, & nationwide mobilization of community #healthworkers."

Prayuth's declaration in March of a state of emergency allowed ...

Return to Timeline

https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/white-house/gov-t-agrees-buy-additional-100-million-doses-pfizer-covid-n1252209

Dec. 23

US agrees to buy additional 100 million doses of Pfizer Covid-19 vaccine

... This expands the total number of Pfizer vaccine doses purchased by the federal government to 200 million, HHS said.

"..."This new federal purchase can give Americans even more confidence that we will **have enough supply to vaccinate every American who wants it by June 2021**."
...

Boxes containing the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine are prepared to be shipped at the Pfizer Global Supply Kalamazoo manufacturing plant in Portage, Michigan

Dec. 13, 2020
Morry Gash / AP file

Return to Timeline

https://www.cnn.com/videos/health/2020/12/19/sesame-street-covid-19-santa-claus-vaccine-fauci-sot-vpx.cnn

Dec. 24

Santa Claus has received the COVID-19 vaccine

"I went [to the North Pole], and **I vaccinated Santa Claus myself**.

I measured his level of immunity, and **he's good to go.**

He can come down the chimney, he can leave the presents ... you have nothing to worry about."

Dr. Anthony Fauci

Return to Timeline

https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/dec/25/uk-scientists-trial-drug-to-prevent-coronavirus-infection-leading-to-disease

Dec. 26

UK scientists trial AZD7442

British scientists are trialling a new drug that **could prevent someone who has been exposed to coronavirus from going on to develop the disease Covid-19** ...
...
It could be **available as soon as March or April** [2021] if it is approved by the medicines regulator after it has reviewed evidence from the study.

Oct. 9

US enters agreement for AZD7442

https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2020/10/09/trump-administration-expands-collaboration-with-astrazeneca-to-develop-and-manufacture-an-investigational-monoclonal-antibody-to-prevent-covid-19.html

The company estimates **100,000 doses** ... could be available from this project for the nation's high-risk population that may not benefit from a vaccine **by December 2020**.

Summary of how AZD7442 works

https://www.pharmaceutical-journal.com/news-and-analysis/features/everything-you-need-to-know-about-the-covid-19-therapy-trials/20208126.article?firstPass=false#AZD7442

... [it's] a **combination of two long-acting antibodies (LAABs) derived from convalescent patients after SARS-CoV-2 infection**;

LAABs mimic natural antibodies and have the potential to treat and prevent disease progression in patients already infected with the virus, as well as to be given as a preventative intervention prior to exposure to the virus;

In pre-clinical experiments the two LAABs have been shown to **block the binding of the SARS-CoV-2 virus to host cells and protect against infection** in cell and animal models of disease.

US AZD7442 Study

https://clinicaltrials.gov/ct2/show/NCT04625972

https://www.cnn.com/2020/12/27/health/us-coronavirus-sunday/index.html

Dec. 27

December: the deadliest month in the US since the coronavirus pandemic began

... with **more than 63,000 Americans lost to the virus in the past 26 days**. In comparison, the entire month of **November saw about 36,964 deaths**.

The grim death toll comes on the heels of several brutal months for the US, with Covid-19 ravaging communities from coast to coast, crippling hospital systems and prompting new widespread restrictions.

The authorization of two Covid-19 vaccines earlier in December offered some hope of a light at the end of the tunnel. But experts continue to warn that while the end is in sight, **the pandemic is not over and another surge stemming from the Christmas holiday could be on its way.** "We very well might see a post-seasonal -- in the sense of Christmas, New Years -- surge," Dr. Anthony Fauci said on CNN's "State of the Union" Sunday morning, **pointing to holiday travel and private gatherings taking place despite the advice of health experts.**

The nation's top infectious disease expert described the potential rise in cases as a "surge upon a surge," telling CNN's Dana Bash, "If you look at the slope, the incline of cases that we've experienced as we've gone into the late fall and soon to be early winter, it is really quite troubling."

More than 1.1 million people were screened at airports on Saturday, according to the TSA, marking the third busiest day for US air travel since March. More than 616,000 were screened on Christmas Day alone, and hundreds of thousands more traveled in the days leading up to the holiday.

Covid-19 hospitalization numbers across the US are already at record-high levels. **On Saturday, the country recorded its fifth-highest number of hospitalizations -- with more than 117,300 Covid-19 patients nationwide**, according to the COVID Tracking Project.

Another surge of cases and hospitalizations will, inevitably, mean more deaths -- on top of an already devastating death toll.

"When you're dealing with a baseline of 200,000 new cases a day and about 2,000 deaths per day, with the hospitalizations over 120,000, we are really at a very critical point," Fauci said.

"As we get into the next few weeks," he added, "it might actually get worse."

Nearly 332,000 Americans have died of Covid-19. **Another 193,000 could lose their lives over the next two months**, according to predictions from the University of Washington's Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation.

..."**People can still save the lives of their loved ones by practicing that social distancing and masks.** And remember, vaccines are around the corner." ...

Return to Timeline

https://www.cnn.com/2020/12/27/us/boy-scouts-hug-booth-nursing-home-clear-lake-trnd/index.html

Dec. 27

“Hug booth” allows nursing home residents to touch their loved ones

... Luckily for residents of ... an assisted living facility in Webster, Texas ..., an employee's idea came to life with the help of a teenage Boy Scout, who designed three "hug booths" that allow people to embrace without touching at all.

"In March, when things shut down, one of my residents told me the only thing she missed was human touch," Becky Hudson, the lifestyle director at the facility who came up with the idea, told CNN. "When she said that, I put my gloves on and held her hands and she was just crying. That's when I started thinking of ways for our seniors to be able to hug their loved ones without risking their lives.”

...

In September, Hudson shared her idea -- a booth with gloves that would allow people to touch without skin-to-skin contact -- with local Boy Scout Troop 848 in hopes they would help.

Immediately, 17-year-old McCain Penrod decided to take on the project. For nearly a month, with the help of his dad, fellow Boy Scouts and friends, he tried out various designs before building three wooden booths.

Each booth features a plexiglass window, so loved ones can see each other, and two large, sanitized gloves for the senior residents to put their hands through to hug friends and family.

...

On November 25, a day before Thanksgiving, McCain delivered the booths to the facility. Since then, everything has completely changed for the nursing home residents... **"I immediately saw an enormous difference**. Some residents who were normally active had become withdrawn when they stopped seeing their family members. Most of our residents have dementia and they were just confused why their children stopped coming to see them," Hudson said.

"They declined emotionally, but the hug booths came in and they could finally see them and hold their hands, and **now they're finally doing activities again, they want to come down for their meals.”...**

Return to Timeline

https://www.cnbc.com/2020/12/28/uk-expected-to-approve-oxford-astrazeneca-covid-vaccine-this-week.html

Dec. 28

UK expected to approve Oxford-AstraZeneca Covid vaccine this week

... the approval could come as early as [today] as health-care workers prepare to administer the shots.
...
Around 30,500 daily infections and 316 deaths were recorded in the U.K. on Sunday, but those figures could be understated due to reporting delays.
...
The Oxford-AstraZeneca candidate would allow the country to significantly ramp up its inoculation program, given its development in the U.K. It's also much **cheaper than others and does not need to be kept at ultra-low temperatures.**

Earlier this month, Dr. Richard Horton, editor-in-chief of The Lancet medical journal, told CNBC the vaccine could be used around the globe more effectively than others.

"The Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine is the vaccine right now that is going to be able to immunize the planet more effectively, more rapidly than any other vaccine we have," Horton said, adding that it was **important to think about vaccine immunization on a global scale "because even if we immunize one country, the threat then is you reintroduce the virus from another country that is not protected."**

Confusion around its trial data in November led to some criticism of U.K.-based AstraZeneca. The data suggests that the vaccine can help reduce the spread of Covid-19, as well as prevent illness and death. The study also found it had an **effectiveness of 62% for trial participants given two full doses, but 90% for a subgroup given half a dose followed by a full dose.**

But chief of the White House's Operation Warp Speed, Moncef Slaoui, and others in the U.S. have expressed concern over the age group tested, saying the **90% efficacy was only shown for the lowest risk group, which numbered 2,741 people below age 55.**

Pascal Soriot, CEO of AstraZeneca, said the pharmaceutical giant will run an additional global trial to evaluate the efficacy of its vaccine. Soriot told The Times newspaper this weekend he is convinced that subsequent data will show his company had achieved an efficacy rate equal to the others, at above 90%.

"We think we have figured out the winning formula and how to get efficacy that, after two doses, is up there with everybody else," he said. "I can't tell you more because we will publish at some point."

He added that **AstraZeneca believes the vaccine will be effective against the new strain of the coronavirus**, but was running tests to confirm it.

https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2020/12/22/948874701/low-demand-for-antibody-drugs-against-covid-19

Dec. 29

Monoclonal antibody drugs designed to prevent people recently diagnosed from ending up in the hospital.

... The FDA granted emergency authorization in November to two monoclonal antibody products — one produced by Eli Lilly, the other by Regeneron. President Trump was given the Regeneron product on an emergency basis before the FDA authorized it for widespread use.

These **drugs mimic natural antibodies. They target the coronavirus that causes COVID-19 and are designed to block it from entering cells.** The drugs are **not effective in treating people sick enough to be hospitalized, but** the companies' studies suggested that the drugs **can help hold a new infection in check.**

Charles Barnes, a 72-year-old Vietnam veteran from Upper Marlboro, Md., gave one a try. Before Thanksgiving, he came down with symptoms of COVID-19 – a stubborn cough and some chills.

"It got pretty bad one day," Barnes says, "but other than that I just had mild symptoms."

He and his wife got tested for the coronavirus. He came back positive. As it happens, the MedStar Health system where he got diagnosed had just started offering patients treatment with monoclonal antibodies.

"They kind of explained the science behind it a little bit, so I went for it," he says.
...
The **treatment took an hour**, he says, and nurses kept an eye on him for another hour to make sure there were no problems. "And there were **no side effects**, so I got into my car and drove home."
...
As of last week, about 3% of patients who received the treatment ended up in the hospital anyway, Kumar says. Another 4% made a trip to the emergency room. Kumar figures that patients with similar preexisting conditions would end up in the hospital 10% to 15% of the time — so **it appears the medicines are allowing some people to recuperate at home and reducing the burden on hospitals.**
...
The federal government has purchased 1.2 million doses of these drugs and allocated more than 300,000 of those doses to states and territories. But Dr. Moncef Slaoui, chief adviser to the federal government's Operation Warp Speed, says **initial surveys suggest only 5% to 20% of the drug that has been delivered has actually been used.**
...
People over 65 or those with preexisting conditions such as obesity are eligible for the drugs, which means hundreds of thousands of people could potentially be in line to get them every week.
...
Doctors hope that as word gets out, more people will end up trying these drugs. They are provided to health systems free by the federal government, but it costs money to administer the medication. At first, Medicare set a price that would require many patients to pay a $60 copay, but the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services later found a way to waive that fee.

"Some of the private payers have not yet said if they are going to charge copays or not," Bariola says.

Stories such as Barnes' could make a difference, too. He heads up a 10-piece musical ensemble called the C. Barnes Project and, having recovered from COVID-19, is back to playing the trombone.

"As a matter of fact, a couple of days ago I did take it out of the case to see how my wind was, and it was the same. No difference," Barnes says.

And he says he's also back to his regular exercise regime. His case of COVID-19 is now just another story for him to tell.

Return to Timeline

https://www.dw.com/en/coronavirus-where-the-vaccine-has-been-rolled-out/a-56073292

Select link below for another source with **interactive map**

https://ourworldindata.org/covid-vaccinations

Dec. 29

Which countries have rolled out a COVID-19 vaccine?

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/europe-coronavirus-pandemic-united-kingdom-df039995c569f6696e0b1aa3298eaf17

Dec. 30

Britain became the first country to approve AstraZeneca vaccine

... “The **rollout will start on Jan. 4** and will really accelerate into the first few weeks of next year,” British Health Secretary Matt Hancock told told Sky News. **Britain has bought 100 million doses** of the vaccine.

... people at the highest risk would get priority, and everyone would get a second jab within 12 weeks of the first.

The new strategy comes against a backdrop of soaring infections in the U.K. The number of hospitalized COVID-19 patients has surpassed the first peak of the outbreak in the spring, with authorities blaming a new, more transmissible variant of the virus, first identified in southeast England, for the spike.

Oxford University’s Dr. Andrew Pollard, one of the leaders of the development team, offered hope the newly approved vaccine will help.

“**At the moment, there’s no evidence that the vaccines won’t work against the new variant**,” Pollard told Radio 4. “But that is something which we have to look at. We can’t be complacent about this variant or perhaps future variants.”

Partial results from **studies in almost 24,000 people in Britain, Brazil and South Africa suggest the shots are safe and about 70% effective** for preventing illness from coronavirus infection.

That’s not as good as some other vaccine candidates, but Soriot recently told the Sunday Times newspaper that he was confident the vaccine would prove as effective as its rivals.

The Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine is **expected to be relied on in many countries because of its low cost, availability and ease of use.** It can be kept in refrigerators rather than the ultra-cold storage some other vaccines require. The company has said it **will sell it for $2.50 a dose and plans to make up to 3 billion doses by the end of 2021**. “We have a vaccine for the world,” said Pollard.

Researchers claim the vaccine protected against disease in **62% of those given two full doses and in 90% of those initially given a half dose** because of a manufacturing error. However, the second group included only 2,741 people — too few to be conclusive.

Questions also remain about how well the vaccine protects older people. **Only 12% of study participants were over 55** and they were enrolled later, so there hasn’t been enough time to see whether they develop infections at a lower rate than those not given the vaccine.
...
Britain’s action likely means the World Health Organization will soon clear the AstraZeneca vaccine for use in a global effort to help poor countries, called COVAX. The initiative, led by WHO and the vaccines alliance GAVI, has secured access to at least 100 million doses of the vaccine, with options and other deals to buy more. But none can be distributed until green-lighted by WHO.

The U.N. health agency does not licence or regulate vaccines itself, but typically evaluates vaccines once they have been approved by an agency such as the U.K. regulator or the European Medicines Agency. WHO experts conduct their own evaluation of whether or not the risks of a vaccine outweigh its benefits and then make a recommendation for the shots to be “pre-qualified” so they can be bought by donors for developing countries.

Most coronavirus vaccines to be used in poorer countries likely will be made by the Serum Institute of India, which has been contracted by AstraZeneca to make 1 billion doses. In June, the pharmaceutical company announced that the Serum Institute would produce 400 million doses by the end of 2020 but as of early December, only about 50 million doses had been manufactured after production was halted several times.

In addition to the Serum Institute, AstraZeneca also has deals with vaccine makers in Brazil, South Africa and China to make the Oxford-developed vaccine for use in developing countries.

Return to Timeline

https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/coronavirus-variant-colorado-us/2020/12/29/8e6379fc-4a01-11eb-a9f4-0e668b9772ba_story.html

Dec. 30

"B.1.1.7"

First case of highly infectious coronavirus variant in US, detected in Colorado

... The Colorado case involves **a man in his 20s**, who is in isolation in Elbert County, about **50 miles southeast of Denver, and has no travel history**, according to a tweet from the office of Gov. Jared Polis (D).

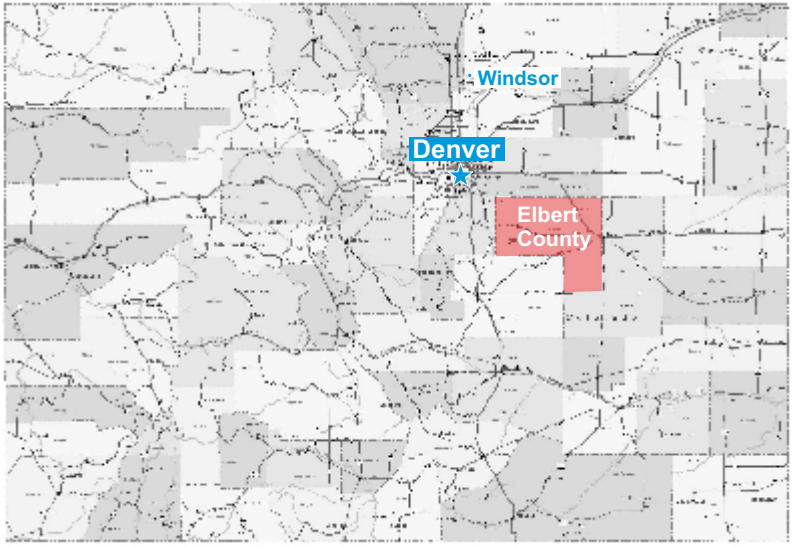
"The individual has no close contacts identified so far, but public health officials are working to identify other potential cases and contacts through thorough contact tracing interviews," the statement said.

A federal scientist familiar with the investigation said the man's lack of known travel — in contrast with most confirmed cases outside the United Kingdom — indicates **this is probably not an isolated case. "We can expect that it will be detected elsewhere,"** said the official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss the broader context of the announcement.
...
Researchers have detected the more transmissible **variant in at least 17 countries outside the United Kingdom**, **including** as far away as **Australia** and **South Korea**, as of Tuesday afternoon. Officials in **Canada** had previously said they had identified two cases.

Although the U.K. **variant appears more contagious, it is not leading to higher rates of hospitalizations or deaths**, according to a report from Public Health England, a government agency. **Nor is there any sign that people who were infected months ago with the coronavirus are more likely to be reinfected if exposed to the variant** ...

The Colorado case occurred in a county of about 27,000, which is currently classified, along with much of the state, in the "red" level for the virus, denoting serious but not extreme risk.
...
All viruses mutate randomly, and over time some of those mutations appear to confer some kind of advantage to the virus as it adapts to the human species. **The novel coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2, mutates at a slow rate, and scientists do not think the genetic changes seen in the variant so far are sufficient to allow it to elude the vaccines now being administered** to millions of people in many countries. **But the coronavirus is a moving target, and these mutations require surveillance.**

Many scientists call the arrival of more transmissible mutations a wake-up call. ...



US State of Colorado

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/united-nations-coronavirus-pandemic-china-only-on-ap-bats-24fbadc58cee3a40bca2ddf7a14d2955

Dec. 30

China clamps down in hidden hunt for coronavirus origins

... More than a year since the first known person was infected with the coronavirus, an AP investigation shows the **Chinese government is strictly controlling all research** into its origins, clamping down on some **while actively promoting fringe theories that it could have come from outside China.**

...A rare leak from within the government, the dozens of pages of unpublished documents confirm what many have long suspected: **The clampdown comes from the top.**

...

The **AP investigation** was based on dozens of interviews with Chinese and foreign scientists and officials, along with public notices, leaked emails, internal data and the documents from China's cabinet and the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention. It **reveals a pattern of government secrecy and top-down control that has been evident throughout the pandemic.**

As the AP previously documented, this culture has **delayed warnings about the pandemic, blocked the sharing of information with the World Health Organization and hampered early testing.** Scientists familiar with China's public health system say the **same practices apply to sensitive research.**

"They only select people they can trust, those that they can control," said a public health expert who works regularly with the China CDC, declining to be identified out of fear of retribution. "Military teams and others are working hard on this, but **whether it gets published all depends on the outcome."**

...

The little **information** that has dribbled out **suggests** the **virus was circulating well outside Wuhan in 2019** — a finding that could raise awkward questions for Chinese officials about their early handling of the outbreak. Chinese researchers found that a child hundreds of miles from Wuhan had fallen ill with the virus by Jan. 2, suggesting it was **spreading widely in December**. But earlier samples weren't tested, according to a scientist with direct knowledge of the study.

"There was a very deliberate choice of the time period to study, because going too early could have been too sensitive," said the scientist, who declined to be named out of fear of retribution.

A WHO report written in July but published in November said Chinese authorities had identified 124 cases in December 2019, including five cases outside Wuhan. Among WHO's aims for its upcoming visit to China are reviews of hospital records before December.

Coronavirus expert Peter Daszak, a member of the WHO team, said identifying the pandemic's source should not be used to assign guilt.

"We're all part of this together," he said. "And until we we're never going to get rid of this problem."

Return to Timeline

https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/worldwide-graphs/#total-deaths

Select live link for current number

Dec. 30

Death toll from coronavirus tops 1,800,000

Return to Timeline

https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/how-did-we-develop-a-covid-19-vaccine-so-quickly

Dec. 31

How did we develop a COVID-19 vaccine so quickly?

[1] **Scientists have been studying coronaviruses for over 50 years** ... this meant **scientists had existing data on the structure, genome, and life cycle of this type of virus**.... "Research on these viruses established the importance of the viral spike (S) protein in viral attachment, fusion, and entry, and identified the S proteins as a target for the development of antibody therapies and vaccines. ...

[2] **Worldwide collaboration** ... amid a global pandemic, time was a luxury the world could not afford. Researchers quickly mobilized to share their coronavirus data with other scientists. [and] thanks to advances in genomic sequencing, **researchers successfully uncovered the viral sequence of SARS-CoV-2 in January 2020** — roughly 10 days after the first reported pneumonia cases in Wuhan, China. The ability to fast-track research and clinical trials was a direct result of this worldwide cooperation...

[3] **Funding for COVID-19 vaccine research**... the **U.S.**, ... [has spent **$18 billion** partnering][1] with multiple institutions ... to develop, manufacture, and distribute 300 million doses by early next year. By providing resources and assuming the financial risk, [this allowed] companies to produce and stockpile vaccine doses even before the company [knew] if the vaccine [was] going to work.... The **European Commission** have also funded several vaccine candidates and worked with others in pledging **$8 billion** for COVID-19 research ... The UK government Vaccine Taskforce have also been a significant contributor to a wide variety of vaccine research. Recipients of this funding helped develop the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine. The designers of this vaccine were the first to publish peer reviewed efficacy results from phase 3 trials...

[4] **mRNA technology** [used in Pfizer and Moderna vaccines] **is something the NIH have been working on for some time** ...

...

A simple explanation?

... this unprecedented crisis has brought economies around the world to their knees and affected the daily lives of billions of people, so thousands of scientists stepped up to the challenge[2]
...

The pandemic has ushered in a new era of vaccine research. **A global collaboration of scientists and the development of mRNA vaccines is akin to the "landing on the moon moment,"** ...

[1, 2] https://www.arabnews.com/node/1779366

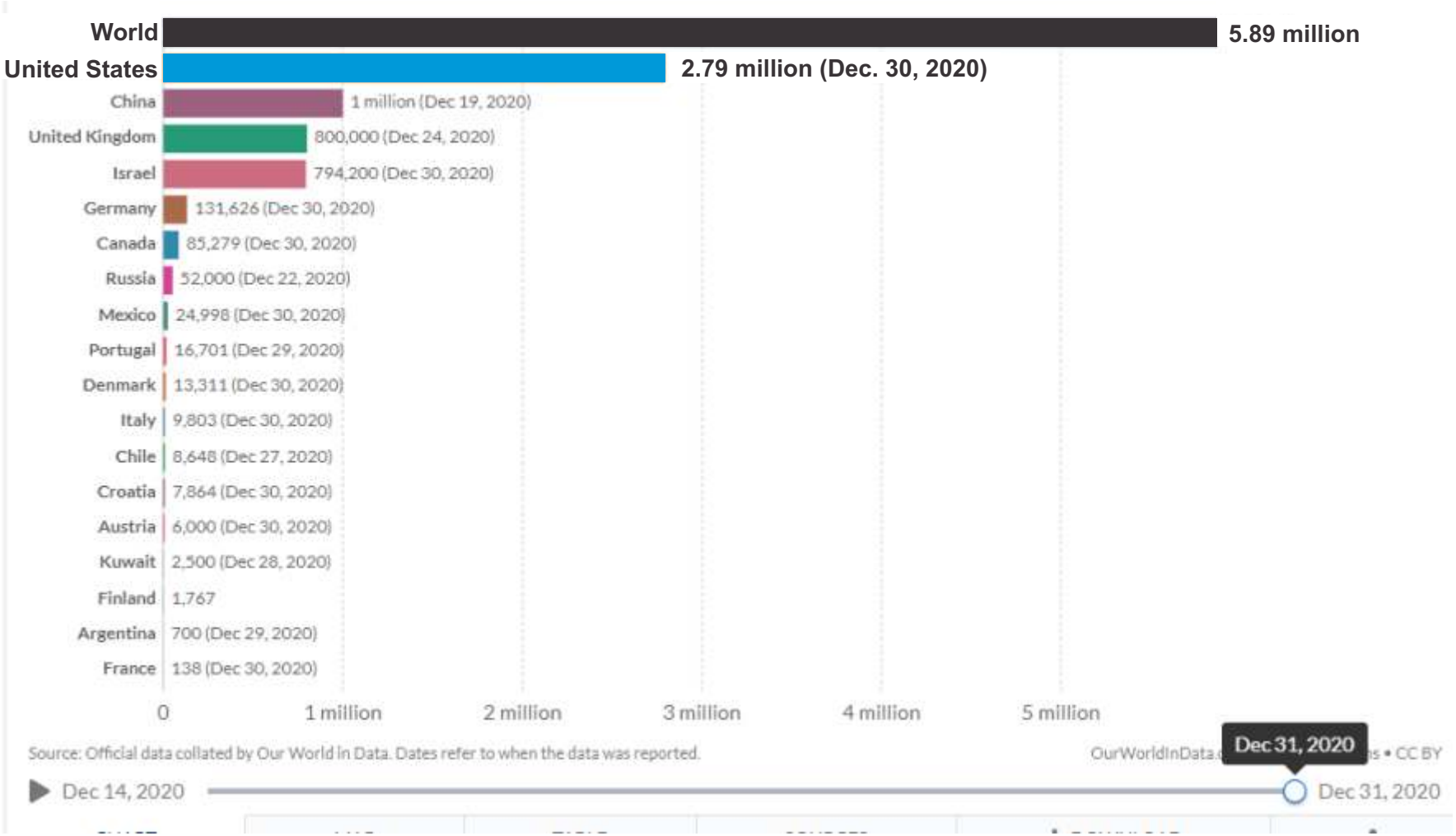
Return to Timeline

https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/cumulative-covid-vaccinations?tab=chart&stackMode=absolute&time=2020-12-31&country=RUS~GBR~OWID_WRL~CAN~USA~CHN~ISR~CHL~MEX~DEU~DNK~PRT~ITA~KWT~AUT~HRV~ARG~FRA~FIN&region=World

Select link the above link for updates and to add other countries

Dec. 31

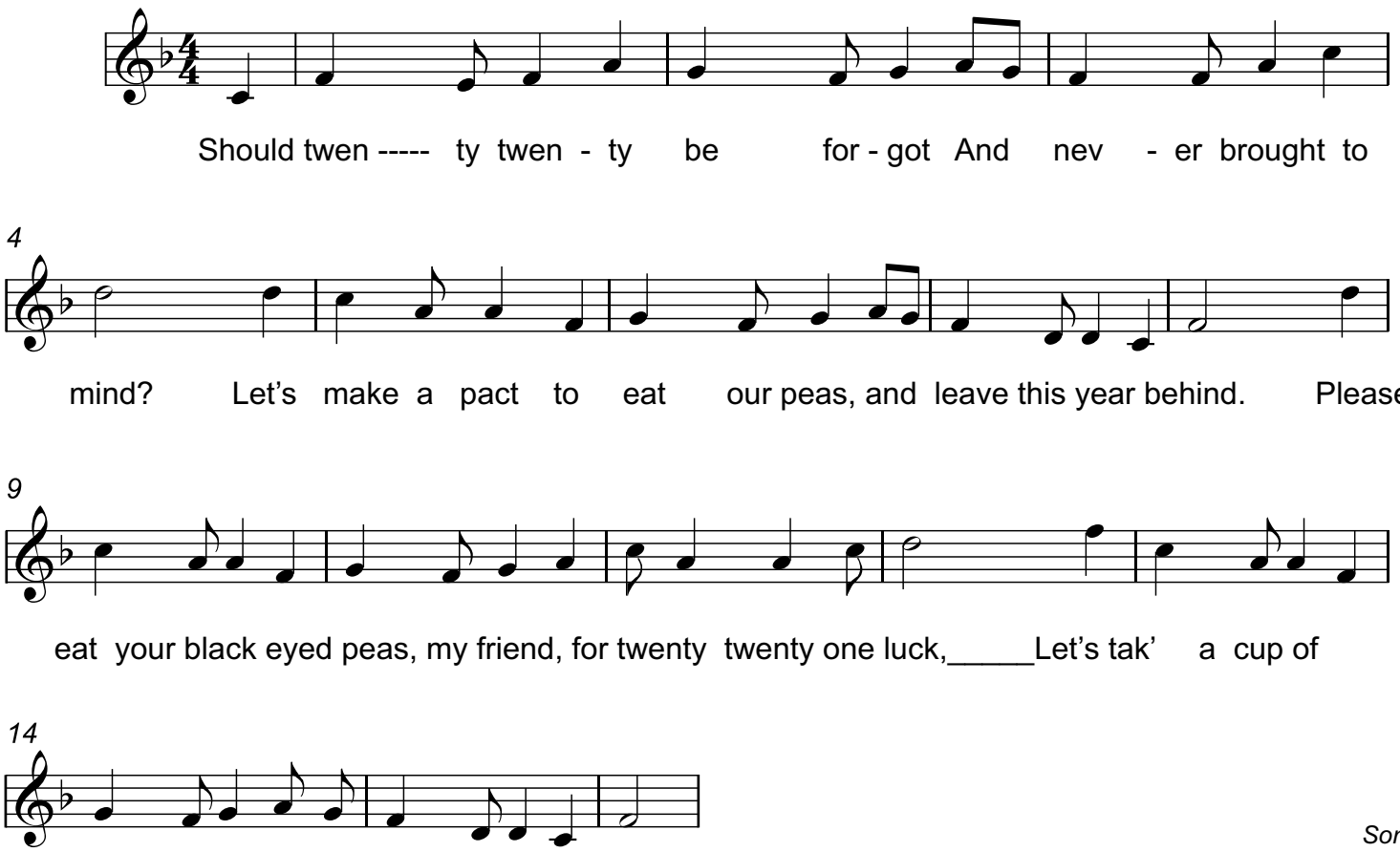
Number of vaccinations administered as of today



Return to Timeline

A Song for 2020 New Year's Eve

Dec. 31



Song Credits:

Music: Scottish folk song
(Roud #6294)

Lyrics: by some survivors
of 2020 with hopes
for a better new year

Return to Timeline

https://time.com/5912616/pet-of-the-year-2020-rescue-animals/

Jan 1

Demand for rescue animals skyrocketing

... [2020] demand for animal adoption [skyrocketed] as stay-at-home orders were issued across the U.S. in March in response to the coronavirus pandemic,. [D]uring the second half of March, with an **estimated national adoption rate of 58% at the beginning of the month, jumping to 85% by the end of the month.**

...

“The animal shelters have been emptied of adoptable animals through either adoptions or fosters, because of what a good time it is, when families are home together during lockdown, to work with a new pet. And it’s also a hedge against loneliness.”

The emotional support that pets can offer their owners is more crucial than ever in this moment, says Rachael Silverman, a psychologist specializing in couple and family psychology who often prescribes emotional support animals for patients. **“With so much uncertainty and instability, animals provide people**, **especially children, with unconditional love, support, and comfort** as well as serve as a distraction,”...

2021 looks to be a big year for shelter pets, too: In January, **a shelter dog will take up residence in the White House for the first time ever** when President-elect Joe Biden moves in with his dog **Major, a German shepherd who the Bidens adopted in 2018** from the Delaware Humane Association (DHA).

Joe Biden adopted a German shepherd named Major from the Delaware Humane Association in 2018

Return to Timeline

https://www.bbc.com/news/world-55514243

Jan 2

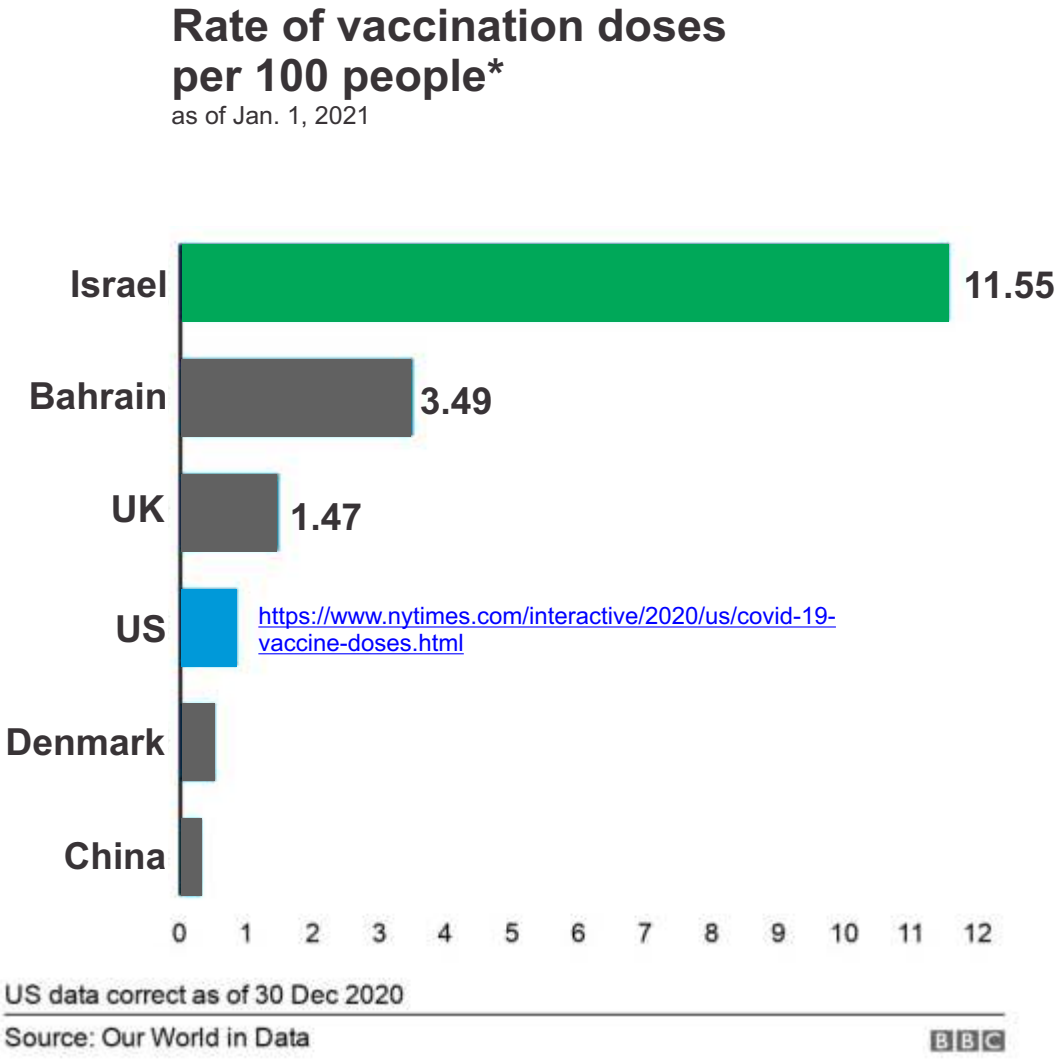
Israel leads vaccine race with 12% given jab

... Israel **began** vaccinations on **December 19th** and is delivering jabs to about **150,000 people a day**, with priority given to the **over-60s, health workers and people who are clinically vulnerable.** [the US is averaging 161,820 people a day]

It secured supplies of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine following negotiations early on in the pandemic. It is contacting people with priority access to the vaccine through its health care system - by law all Israelis must register with a recognised health care provider.

Israel has safely subdivided shipments of the Pfizer vaccine, which must be stored at -70C, Health Minister Yuli Edelstein told YNet TV news. This means smaller batches of the vaccine can be sent out to remote communities.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who is campaigning for re-election, has predicted Israel could emerge from the pandemic as early as February. It is currently in its third national lockdown...



* measured using number of people who have received the first dose of coronavirus vaccine

Return to Timeline

https://covidactnow.org/?s=1483439

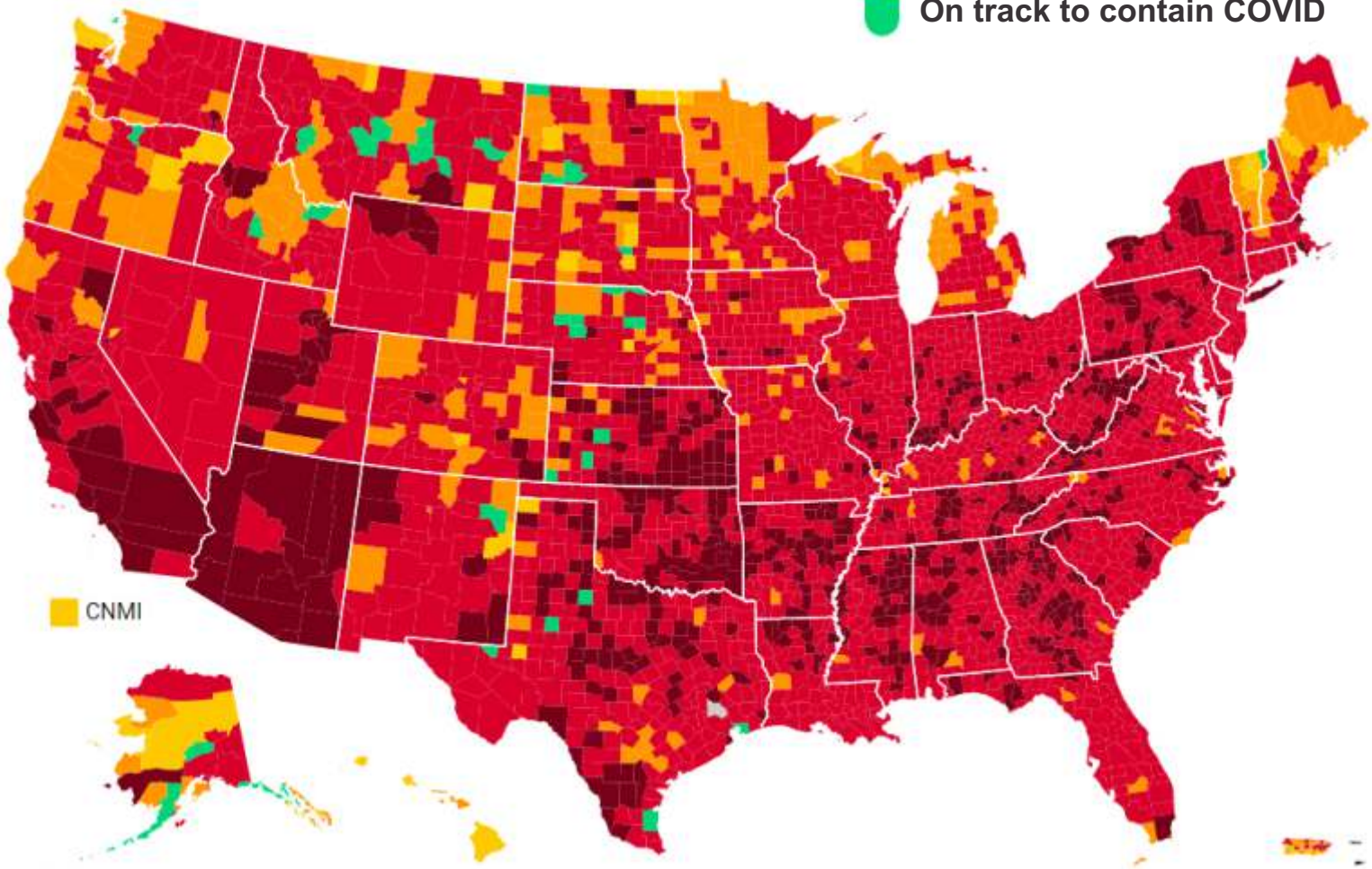
Select link the above link for interactive map and updates

Jan 3

Current COVID risk levels

Risk Levels

- Severe outbreak
- Active or imminent outbreak
- At risk of outbreak
- Slow disease growth
- On track to contain COVID



Return to Timeline

https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/jan/04/brian-pinker-is-first-to-get-oxfordastrazeneca-covid-19-vaccine

Jan 4

First person in world to get Oxford/AstraZeneca jab

An **82-year-old** retired maintenance manager has become the **first person in the world outside clinical trials** to receive the vaccine developed by Oxford University and AstraZeneca.

Brian Pinker, a **dialysis patient**, received the jab at 7.30am on Monday from Sam Foster, a nurse at Oxford University hospitals NHS foundation trust's Churchill hospital.

Pinker, who describes himself as Oxford born and bred, said in a statement issued by NHS England that the jab would give him peace of mind as he continued to receive treatment, and he was looking forward to celebrating his 48th wedding anniversary in February.

"I am so pleased to be getting the Covid vaccine today and really proud that it is one that was invented in Oxford," he said. "The nurses, doctors and staff today have all been brilliant and I can now really look forward to celebrating my 48th wedding anniversary with my wife, Shirley, later this year."

...the national medical director of NHS England, described the distribution of the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine as "another turning point in our way out of this pandemic".

..."Four weeks ago I had the privilege to be in Coventry for the first jab of the Pfizer vaccine – remember Maggie Keenan got that first jab – that felt like a huge moment in this pandemic and, to be honest, today, when I saw the first jab in the building behind me of the AstraZeneca vaccine, felt like an even bigger moment, another turning point in our way out of this pandemic."

He added: "We've been preparing in the NHS for many months for the biggest vaccination programme in our history. We've already delivered over a million vaccines of the Pfizer jab; now we've got the AstraZeneca one, so we aim to get it into people's arms as quickly as it is supplied to us. If we get 2m doses a week, our aim is to get 2m doses into the arms of those priority groups."

...

we're aiming for tens of millions of doses by the time we get to April. This is a new vaccine, each batch will need to be looked at before it's released, so that schedule will become clearer over the next few weeks, but, as I said, we are raring to go."

Brian Pinker receives the Oxford/AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccine from nurse Sam Foster at the Churchill hospital in Oxford on Monday. Photograph: Steve Parsons/PA

Return to Timeline

https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/vaccines

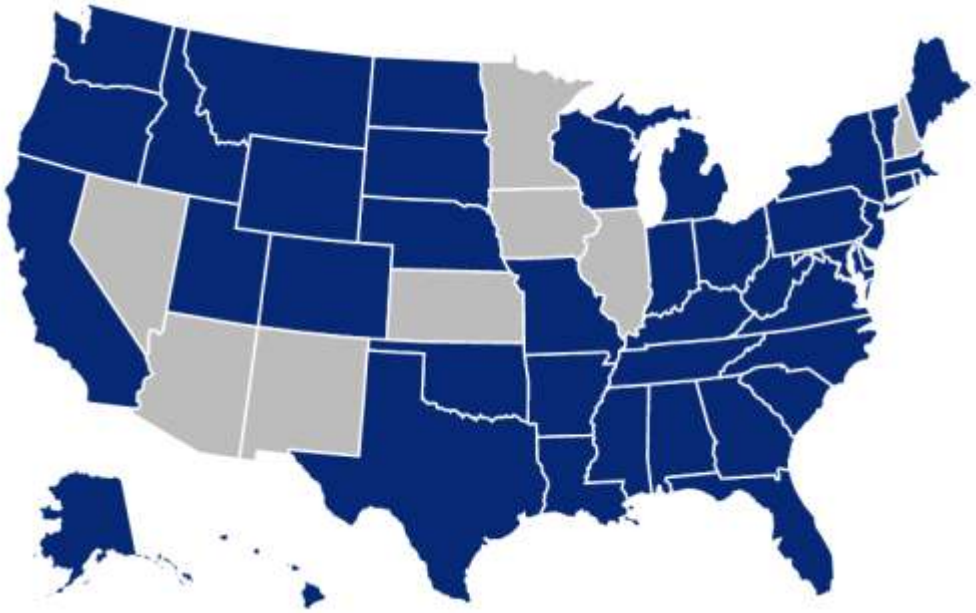
Live link

Jan 4

Vaccine Tracker

All of the states shown in blue are publicly reporting data about the administration of COVID-19 vaccines

Select the link at the top of this page for an interactive map and updates



Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/pandemics-england-coronavirus-pandemic-nicola-sturgeon-london-89bccc582c028501d6dcf46c612d7afc

Jan 5

UK hospitals stagger under toll from the new virus variant

... Pressure on the nation's hospitals forced the hand of Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who has plunged the country into **its third national lockdown and ordered everyone to stay at home as much as possible for at least the next six weeks.** The situation is worsening, said Siva Anandaciva, chief analyst of the King's Fund think tank.

"It's not hyperbole to say that the (National Health Service) is going through probably the toughest time in living memory," he told The Associated Press. Anandaciva said **some emergency rooms have waits of 12 hours.**

"I was speaking to an emergency care physician from London last week, and she was saying that half of her shift was spent **delivering care in ambulances because they couldn't get the patients into the emergency department**," he said. "So you put that all together and you paint a picture of the health service that's under incredible pressure."

Johnson announced the tough new stay-at-home order for England that **takes effect at midnight Tuesday and won't be reviewed until at least mid-February.** Few in England expect any relief until after the traditional late February school break.

"The weeks ahead will be the hardest yet, but I really do believe that we are entering the last phase of the struggle," Johnson told the nation Monday night. "Because with every jab that goes into our arms, we are tilting the odds against COVID and in favor of the British people."

Scotland's leader, Nicola Sturgeon, also imposed a lockdown that began Tuesday. **Northern Ireland** and **Wales** had already imposed tough measures, though rules vary.
...
The new measures are similar to those imposed last spring, with people being told to work from home unless it's impossible to do so, and to leave home only for exercise or essential trips such as grocery shopping. **Schools across England were ordered to close their doors except for the children of critical workers and most vulnerable children**, and shift to online instruction beginning Tuesday. University students won't return to campus until at least mid-February.

All nonessential shops and personal care services like hairdressers will stay closed. Restaurants will be allowed to offer takeout services only.

New COVID-19 infections have soared in recent weeks as public health officials struggled to contain the new variant, which the government says is 50% to 70% more contagious. The number of confirmed new daily infections in the past seven days jumped 50% from the previous week, and coronavirus-related deaths rose 21% in the same period.

Britain has been seeing over 50,000 new infections a day for a week and has reported 75,500 virus-related deaths overall, one of the highest tallies in Europe.

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/europe-coronavirus-pandemic-coronavirus-vaccine-925e91f8de26c517d18fd6b99458a132

Jan 6

EU agency approves Moderna's COVID-19 vaccine

The European Union's medicines agency gave the green light Wednesday to Moderna Inc.'s COVID-19 vaccine, a decision that **gives the 27-nation bloc a second vaccine** to use in the desperate battle to tame the virus rampaging across the continent.

...

The EU agency gave the green light to use the Moderna vaccine on people age 18 year and above.

Cook stressed that EU authorities "will closely monitor data on the safety and effectiveness of the vaccine to ensure ongoing protection of the EU public. Our work will always be guided by the scientific evidence and our commitment to safeguard the health of EU citizens."

The **United States**, **Canada** and **Israel have already approved use of the Moderna vaccine.** The U.S. gave it the green light for emergency use in people over 18 years on Dec. 18, followed by Canada five days later with an interim authorization also for people over 18. Israel authorized the vaccine on Monday.

Moderna said Monday that it is increasing its estimate for global vaccine production in 2021 from 500 to 600 million doses. The company said it is "continuing to invest and add staff to build up to potentially 1 billion doses for 2021."

Both Moderna's and Pfizer-BioNTech's shots are mRNA vaccines, made with a groundbreaking new technology. They don't contain any coronavirus – meaning they cannot cause infection. Instead, they use a piece of genetic code that trains the immune system to recognize the spike protein on the surface of the virus, ready to attack if the real thing comes along.

The **EU officially began giving out Pfizer-BioNTech vaccination shots on Dec. 27**, but the speed of each nation's inoculation program has varied widely. **France vaccinated around 500 people in the first week, while Germany vaccinated 200,000.** The Dutch were only beginning to give out vaccine shots Wednesday, the last EU nation to start doing so.

Pharmacist Brian Meyer holds a Moderna COVID-19 vaccine vial for a photo on Tuesday, Jan. 5, 2021 at Sunflower Pharmacy in Odessa, Texas. Sunflower Pharmacy is the first privately owned pharmacy in Odessa given to permission to distribute the vaccine. (Eli Hartman/Odessa American via AP)

Return to Timeline

https://www.cnbc.com/2021/01/06/what-people-might-not-be-allowed-to-do-if-they-dont-get-vaccinated.html

Jan 6

What people might not be allowed to do if they don't get vaccinated

... Should any restrictions be imposed on people who choose not to get vaccinated given they can catch and spread the virus?

It's a tricky subject but governments are already looking at introducing systems that would enable authorities, and possibly businesses, to tell if a person has had a Covid vaccine or not.
...
China has launched a health code app that shows whether a person is symptom-free in order to check into a hotel or use the subway
...
Chile, citizens that have recovered from the coronavirus have been issued with "virus free" certificates.
...
Spain ... will create a registry to show who has refused to be vaccinated and that the database could be shared across Europe
...
Isra Black, a lecturer in law at the University of York, and Lisa Forsberg, a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Oxford who researches medical ethics, told CNBC that it **"isn't easy to say whether it would be ethically permissible for a state to impose restrictions" on people who refuse a jab.**

The academics said in a joint statement via email that the **answer will depend on factors like vaccine supply, the level of vaccination in the population, the nature of time restrictions on vaccine refusers, and how the restrictions are operationalized.**

... it may be justifiable for the state to restrict vaccine refusers if it turns out the vaccines reduce onward transmission.

They also highlighted that allowing unvaccinated individuals to circulate freely may be associated with the development and spread of mutations of the virus, some of which might become vaccine-resistant.

Vaccine passports

In December it emerged that **Los Angeles County** plans to let Covid vaccine recipients store proof of immunization in the Apple Wallet on their iPhone...

"The idea of immunity certificates is not new," ... children who get vaccinations for measles, polio and other diseases often must show their immunity certificate to register at a new school. Health passports could be a way to help reopen the economy and manage the new normal with a privacy-first approach."

Trilli added: "There is a growing appetite for the use of **health passports/certificates within the travel industry to improve the safety of their staff and customers**, as well as to instil greater levels of confidence to help re-catalyze the tourism industry."

In May, John Holland-Kaye, CEO of the **U.K.**'s busiest airport Heathrow, **backed the introduction of health certificates to help the country emerge from the more stringent travel restrictions** in place at that time. Heathrow Airport did not immediately respond to CNBC's request for comment.

Elsewhere, the **CEO of Delta Air Lines**, Ed Bastian, said in April that **imunity passports could be used to help fliers feel more confident in their personal safety while traveling.**

... British Airways, Qantas, and easyJet did not respond to CNBC's [question, if it would ever prevent non-vaccinated people from flying on its aircraft.]
...

[**Britain**] **"Hospitality would be split with restaurants and bars for vaccinated guests and then bars and restaurants popping up that will cater for non-vaccinated guests.** ...

https://www.cnn.com/2021/01/07/health/us-coronavirus-thursday/index.html

Jan 7

US reports highest single-day death toll

... Centers for Disease Control and Prevention warned the overall toll could exceed 430,000 by the end of the month.

The US reported **3,865 coronavirus deaths Wednesday**, bringing the **overall toll to 361,123 people in the US**, according to data from Johns Hopkins University. In addition, the number of people who have been infected reached more than 21.2 million, according to the data.
At the same time, **hospitals are being flooded** with coronavirus patients. On Wednesday, **a record 132,476 patients were being treated** for the virus, according to the Covid Tracker Project.

Meantime, the CDC predicted Wednesday that January will be a devastating month for pandemic impacts, even as the federal government allocated $22 billion more for testing, contact tracing, surveillance and vaccinations,

The CDC forecast, assembled from 36 coronavirus models, projected there will be 405,000-438,000 deaths by the end of the month. The previous ensemble forecast, published December 30, projected up to 424,000 deaths by January 23.

But director of the National Institute for Allergy and Infectious Disease Dr. Anthony Fauci hopes that the US can ramp up vaccinations before the month is over.

"We should have done better, but I think we should wait until we get into maybe the second, or the third week in January, to see if we can now catch up with the original pace that was set," he said.

At the epicenter of the virus is California, a state that has been among several to report record hospitalizations, surging deaths and healthcare systems struggling to meet the demand.
...
Elsewhere, **Kentucky** saw two highs Wednesday: 5,743 new cases reported in one day and a positivity rate of 11.7%, the highest rate in the state since May.

"Today's numbers show how critically important a centralized effort and response is to defeating this virus," Governor Andy Beshear said.

In **Louisiana**, the spike in cases and hospitalizations has led to tighter coronavirus restrictions in New Orleans. As of Friday morning, gatherings and special events are not allowed except for people living together in a single household and outdoor tables at bars and restaurants will be limited to 6 people of the same household, according to a statement from the mayor's office.

"These next few weeks will be a defining moment in the history of our response to this pandemic," Mayor LaToya Cantrell said. "These restrictions are for the short term, but they are in place for a reason. "

As cases grow, some states are expanding the number of people eligible to receive coronavirus vaccines.

US Surgeon General Dr. Jerome Adams said Wednesday that vaccine administration is "quickly ramping up" and he urged states to move to the next priority groups so supply "can match up with demand."

Adams said on "Good Morning America" that the **US is now approaching 500,000 vaccinations per day and that more funding and locations are becoming available and that the list of priority groups is expanding.**

Illinois, for example, has **lowered the minimum recommended age of residents to receive the vaccine to 65 years old from 75 years**. These vaccinations will happen in "a few weeks," Illinois Governor JB Pritzker. said. The state made the decision to lower the bar in the new phase because Black and Brown Americans have been disproportionately affected by Covid-19 and are more likely to die from the virus at a younger age on average, he said ...

Return to Timeline

https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/worldwide-graphs/#total-deaths

Select live link for current number

Jan. 7

Death toll from coronavirus tops 1,900,000

Return to Timeline

https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSKBN29D0DX

Jan 8

Pfizer vaccine appears effective against mutation in new virus variants

... Pfizer Inc and BioNTech's COVID-19 vaccine appeared to work against a key mutation in the highly transmissible new variants of the coronavirus discovered in Britain and South Africa, according to a laboratory study conducted by the U.S. drugmaker.

The study by Pfizer and scientists from the University of Texas Medical Branch, which has not yet been peer-reviewed, indicated the vaccine was effective in neutralizing virus with the so-called N501Y mutation of the spike protein.

The **mutation could be responsible for greater transmissibility and there had been concern it could also make the virus escape antibody neutralization elicited by the vaccine**, said Phil Dormitzer, one of Pfizer's top viral vaccine scientists.

The first results of tests on the variants offer a glimmer of hope while more studies are carried out as Britain and other countries try to tame the more infectious variants which authorities believe are driving a surge in infections that could overwhelm healthcare systems.

The Pfizer-BioNTech study was conducted on blood taken from people who had been given the vaccine. Its findings are limited because it does not look at the full set of mutations found in either of the new variants of the rapidly spreading virus.

Dormitzer said it was encouraging that the vaccine appears effective against the mutation, as well as 15 other mutations the company has previously tested against.

"So **we've now tested 16 different mutations, and none of them have really had any significant impact.** That's the good news," he said. "That doesn't mean that the 17th won't."

Dormitzer said another mutation found in the South African variant, called the E484K mutation, was also concerning.

The researchers plan to run similar tests to establish whether the vaccine is effective against other mutations found in the British and South African variants and hope to have more data within weeks.

The **variants are** said by scientists to be **more transmissible than previously dominant ones, but they are not thought to cause more serious illness.**

Scientists said the results of the study would help calm concerns that people will not be protected by vaccines being given to millions of people around the world in the fight against the pandemic, which has killed more than 1.8 million people and roiled economies.

But they cautioned that **more clinical tests and data are still needed to come to a definitive conclusion.**

...

AstraZeneca, Moderna and CureVac are also testing whether their shots work against the fast-spreading variants. They have said they expect them to be effective, but the timing of those studies are not known.

...

The **Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine and the one from Moderna Inc, which use synthetic messenger RNA technology, can be quickly tweaked to address new mutations of a virus if necessary. Scientists have suggested the changes could be made in as little as six weeks.**

The variant is not the first of the pandemic to emerge and Eleanor Riley, professor of immunology and infectious disease at the University of Edinburgh, said these types of study will be needed as they appear.

"It may be necessary to tweak the vaccine over time," she said.

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-vaccine-health-workers-676e03a99badfd5ce3a6cfafe383f6af

Jan 9

US vaccine rollout hits snag as health workers balk at shots

... Surprising numbers of health care workers who have seen firsthand the death and misery inflicted by COVID-19 are refusing shots.

It is happening in nursing homes and, to a lesser degree, in hospitals, with employees expressing what experts say are unfounded fears of side effects from vaccines that were developed at record speed. More than three weeks into the campaign, **some places are seeing as much as 80% of the staff holding back.**

...

Many medical facilities from Florida to Washington state have boasted of near-universal acceptance of the shots, and workers have proudly plastered pictures of themselves on social media receiving the vaccine. Elsewhere, though, the drive has stumbled.

While the federal government has released no data on how many people offered the vaccines have taken them, glimpses of resistance have emerged around the country.

In **Illinois**, a big divide has opened at state-run veterans homes between residents and staff. The discrepancy was worst at the veterans home in Manteno, where 90% of residents were vaccinated but only 18% of the staff members.

In rural Ashland, **Alabama**, about 90 of some 200 workers at Clay County Hospital have yet to agree to get vaccinated, even with the place so overrun with COVID-19 patients that oxygen is running low and beds have been added to the intensive care unit, divided by plastic sheeting.

The pushback comes amid the most lethal phase in the outbreak yet, with the death toll at more than 350,000, and it could hinder the government's effort to vaccinate somewhere between 70% and 85% of the U.S. population to achieve "herd immunity."

Administrators and public health officials have expressed hope that more health workers will opt to be vaccinated as they see their colleagues take the shots without problems.

...

There have been no signs of widespread severe side effects from the vaccines, and scientists say the drugs have been rigorously tested on tens of thousands and vetted by independent experts.

States have begun turning up the pressure. **South Carolina's governor gave health care workers until Jan. 15 to get a shot or "move to the back of the line." Georgia's top health official has allowed some vaccines to be diverted to other front-line workers, including firefighters and police, out of frustration with the slow uptake.**

"There's vaccine available but it's literally sitting in freezers," said Public Health Commissioner Dr. Kathleen Toomey. "That's unacceptable. We have lives to save."

Nursing homes were among the institutions given priority for the shots because the virus has cut a terrible swath through them. **Long-term care residents and staff account for about 38% of the nation's COVID-19 fatalities.**

In **West Virginia**, only about 55% of nursing home workers agreed to the shots when they were first offered last month, according to Martin Wright, who leads the West Virginia Health Care Association.

"It's a race against social media," Wright said of battling falsehoods about the vaccines.

Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine said only 40% of the state's nursing home workers have gotten shots. North Carolina's top public health official estimated more than half were refusing the vaccine there...

https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-9130025/Queen-launches-Britains-jab-blitz-Vaccine-superhubs-ready-inject-four-people-minute.html

Jan 9

Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip get COVID-19 vaccine

... As Boris Johnson announced an ambitious 'test and jabs' blitz to combat the virus, Her Majesty, 94, and the Duke of Edinburgh, 99, received their injections at Windsor Castle from a doctor in the Royal Household.

They had their first jab only when it became available to others in the Berkshire area to avoid any suggestion of special treatment. The same will apply to the second injection, expected in a few weeks.

The Palace declined to specify whether they received the Oxford or the Pfizer vaccine, to avoid giving the impression of favouring one over the other.

But well-placed sources said it was a **'reasonable assumption' that they had the one developed by Oxford University and AstraZeneca. Both accepted the inoculations on the advice of their doctors and did not suffer any side-effects.**

It came as Britain recorded more than 1,000 Covid-19 deaths for the fourth day in a row as the new mutation wreaks havoc across the country.

A further 1,035 people have died today in the deadliest Saturday since April 18, as the total Covid death toll since the pandemic began hit a grim 80,000.

The total marked a 132.5 per cent rise on the 445 deaths recorded on Saturday last week and was the highest Saturday figure since April 18.

But in a positive sign the upward curve in cases may be levelling out a further 59,937 people tested positive, up just 3.8 per cent on last Saturday.

It is also more than 8,000 cases fewer than the 68,053 recorded yesterday - a record high. Friday also saw 1,325 more deaths.

AP photo (pictured in November 2020)

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/europe-coronavirus-pandemic-sadiq-khan-london-boris-johnson-9f45538038d470952d70bcc093193384

Jan 10

Johnson under fire as UK again faces onslaught of COVID-19

... Many countries are enduring new waves of the virus, but Britain's is among the worst, and it comes after a horrendous 2020. **More than 3 million people in the U.K. have tested positive for the coronavirus and 81,000 have died** — 30,000 in just the last 30 days. **The economy has shrunk by 8%, more than 800,000 jobs have been lost and hundreds of thousands more furloughed workers are in limbo.**

Even with the new lockdown, London Mayor Sadiq Khan said Friday that the situation in the capital was "critical," with one in every 30 people infected. "The stark reality is that **we will run out of beds for patients in the next couple of weeks unless the spread of the virus slows down drastically**," he said.

Medical staff are also at breaking point.
...
Much of the blame for Britain's poor performance has been laid at the door of Johnson, who came down with the virus in the spring and ended up in intensive care. Critics say his government's slow response as the new respiratory virus emerged from China was the first in a string of lethal mistakes.

Anthony Costello, professor of global health at University College London, said "dilly-dallying" in March about whether to lock down the U.K. cost thousands of lives.

Britain locked down on March 23, and Costello said if the decision had come a week or two sooner, "we would be back down at 30,000-40,000 deaths. ... More like Germany."

"And the problem is, they've repeated these delays," said Costello, a member of Independent SAGE, a group of scientists set up as an alternative to the government's official Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies.

Most countries have struggled during the pandemic, but **Britain had some disadvantages from the start. Its public health system was frayed after years of spending cuts** by austerity-minded Conservative governments. It had only a tiny capacity to test for the new virus. And while **authorities** had planned for a hypothetical pandemic, they **assumed it would be a less deadly and less contagious flu-like illness.**

The government sought advice from scientists, but critics say its pool of advisers was too narrow. And their **recommendations were not always heeded by a prime minister** whose laissez-faire instincts make him reluctant to clamp down on the economy and daily life.
...
The government points out, correctly, that there has been huge progress since last spring. **Early problems getting protective equipment to medical workers have largely been resolved. Britain now carries out almost half a million coronavirus tests a day. A national test-and-trace system has been set up to find and isolate infected people**, though it struggles to cope with demand and can't enforce requests to self-isolate.

Treatments including the steroid dexamethasone, whose effectiveness was discovered during a U.K. trial, have improved survival rates among the most seriously ill. And now there are **vaccines, three of which have been approved for use in Britain**. The government has vowed to give the first of two shots to almost 15 million people, including everyone over 70, by mid-February.
...
"It's very easy to be critical about how we've done, but you do have to remember that there's nobody who's really managed a pandemic like this, who's ever done it before," [John Bell, Regius professor of medicine at the University of Oxford] told the BBC. **"We're all trying to make decisions on the run, and some of those decisions will inevitably be the wrong decisions."**

"Everybody should be doing their best, and I think on the whole people are — including, I have to say, the politicians. So don't beat them up too badly."

Return to Timeline

https://www.cnbc.com/2021/01/11/japan-covid-variant-how-it-compares-to-strains-in-uk-south-africa.html

Jan 11

Japan has found a new Covid variant

... On Jan. 6, Japan's NIID detected a new mutant strain of Covid in four passengers arriving from Brazil's Amazonas state on Jan. 2.

One male in his 40s, who was found to be asymptomatic on his arrival to Japan, was hospitalized as his respiratory condition worsened. One female in her 30s reported a sore throat and headache, one male aged between 10 and 19 recorded a fever and one young woman over the age of 10 was asymptomatic.

The variant of the virus discovered in Japan belongs to the **B.1.1.248 strain and has 12 mutations in the spike protein**, the NIID said.

Japan's Health Ministry said studies were underway to determine the effectiveness of coronavirus vaccines against the new variant, Reuters reported on Sunday, citing an unnamed ministry official.

...

Japan on Thursday declared a state of emergency in the greater Tokyo area after a record number of Covid cases were reported in the country's capital city.

As he announced the new restrictions, Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga said: **"The situation has become increasingly troubling nationwide and we have a strong sense of crisis."** He added the **measures were necessary to tackle an "increasingly troubling" third wave of infections.**

To date, the country has recorded 290,270 cases of the coronavirus, with 3,855 related deaths, according to data compiled by Johns Hopkins University.

A woman wearing a face mask walks under a row of gates at Hie Shrine in Tokyo on January 7, 2021.
PHILIP FONG | AFP | Getty Images

Return to Timeline

https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/investigations/2021/01/10/covid-19-vaccine-rollout-stirs-anger-people-scramble-find-shots/6584105002/

Jan 11

COVID-19 vaccine rollout leaves people scrambling to find shots

Anger and frustration are surging across the country as the federal government leaves states to handle the distribution of COVID-19 vaccines. **Through Friday, states had received 22.1 million doses of the vaccines. Of those, about 6.7 million – less than one-third – had been administered.**

...

For a 71-year-old **Florida** man and his 66-year-old wife, the chaos meant rising before dawn to get in line for a vaccine, only to be turned away after learning many of the supplies had been given out to people who'd camped overnight, against the express wishes of authorities.

...

For a **Texas** man and advocate of getting aid for the Hispanic community during COVID-19, it means he can't find a way to vaccinate his 93-year-old grandmother, who spends all day in her recliner and refuses to go outside for fear of catching the virus.

And for [Austin, Texas mother of 18 year old disabled son "Dean"] it means extending her family's 11-month lockdown. Her husband, who recently got COVID-19 while taking care of his 96-year-old father, had to leave home for weeks. Her children have been quarantined to their rooms and everyone has had to wear masks around Dean. They canceled Thanksgiving and Christmas festivities with family.

"I can't think of the last time I kissed anybody," Kearns said. "Probably February. Because there's such fear. I miss hugging my family."

...

Federal officials point to a **host of reasons** for the lag in vaccine distributions, including vaccination systems **still gearing up, federal funding that hasn't yet been disbursed to states and a requirement that states set aside vaccines for long-term-care facilities.**

Add to that **two holidays, bad weather** in some areas and the **need to train medical professionals** to prepare and administer two vaccines that require special storage and handling.

A **hodgepodge of rules and procedures across the country adds to the confusion**. In Florida, for example, seniors 65 and older are in the first phase of vaccine distribution. In Texas, seniors and medically fragile people are in the second phase. In New York, they are in the third phase.

Richard Paiva, a 71-year-old retired advertising man from DeLand, Florida, and his 66-year-old wife, Aida, were determined to get one of the 1,000 vaccines given out on Jan. 4 at a football stadium in nearby Daytona Beach. They'd considered camping out until area officials specifically told people not to do that.

So at 5:30 a.m., they climbed into their Toyota Sienna – loaded with bananas, bread, cashews, applesauce, ...

Return to Timeline

https://www.koco.com/article/what-you-need-to-know-about-the-osdhs-covid-19-vaccine-scheduling-portal/35173445

Jan 11

What you need to know about the OSDH's COVID-19 vaccine scheduling portal

Hundreds of thousands of people signed up to get the COVID-19 vaccine through the Oklahoma State Department of Health's new vaccine portal that launched this past week.

Oklahoma is in phase two of the state's vaccine distribution rollout plan, during which people can sign up to schedule to get a vaccine.

"We're making significant progress getting vaccines into Oklahomans' arms," Deputy Commissioner of Health Keith Reed said.

If you want to get on the list to receive a COVID-19 vaccine, you first need to know how the portal works.

"This **scheduling portal will guide Oklahomans through several key points in the vaccination process, hopefully, send out reminders for their eligibility and ability to look for appointments,"** Reed said. "We're optimistic that, overall, it will make the scheduling process run much more smoothly."

Signing up for the vaccine portal is just the first step. You won't be able to book appointments or see them until the state reaches your priority group.

At this point, people who are able to sign up are 65 years or older or a front-line worker.

Then, you'll get an email with a registration link that does not expire. After that, it's a matter of finding an appointment before it's taken.

"Each appointment slot in this scheduler is tied to available vaccines. We are not scheduling in advance, hoping we'll have vaccines," Reed said.

Reed added that health leaders understand the public's frustration with having trouble making appointments, but there's a good reason **slots are limited. It's based on the number of vaccines the state is given from the federal government.**

Click here to access portal

Return to Timeline

https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-55615791

Jan 12

Concern as Irish infection rate becomes ‘world's highest'

Concern has been raised in the Republic of Ireland after figures showed it has the world's highest number of confirmed new Covid-19 cases per million people.

The statistics were released by Johns Hopkins University in the US.

The taoiseach (Irish PM) said the new south-east of England variant of the virus "has had a significant impact on transmission" in Ireland.... **the new variant of the virus accounted for 45% of the most recent 92 samples** that underwent additional testing, compared with 25% of those tested in the week to 3 January and 9% two weeks earlier.

...the president of the Irish Hospital Consultants' Association described the situation in the Republic of Ireland's acute hospitals as "truly a national emergency".

Professor Alan Irvine told RTÉ's News at One the acute hospital system was "under the greatest pressure that it's ever been in living memory".

He said 1,000 people had been admitted with Covid-related illnesses to acute hospitals since 2 January and admission figures were doubling, in both intensive care and general acute beds, every week.

Prof Irvine warned if the trend continues: "The system really will not be able to cope, so it's truly an emergency in the acute health system.

...

Some patients had to wait in ambulances outside ...There were up to seven ambulances waiting outside the hospital at 21:00 local time, according to Irish national broadcaster RTÉ News. Letterkenny University Hospital on Sunday...

New confirmed cases of COVID-19

Seven-day rolling average of new cases (per 100k)

Return to Timeline

https://www.huffpost.com/entry/alabama-fans-covid-19-superspreader_n_5ffd761dc5b66f3f7961048b?ncid=tweetlnkushpmg00000067

Jan 12

A US potential superspreader celebration erupted in Alabama

University of Alabama football fans packed the streets of Tuscaloosa to celebrate the Crimson Tide's national championship Monday night, "the COVID-19 pandemic be damned," the Tuscaloosa News wrote.

Videos and photos showed tightly packed swarms of young people, many of them maskless, whooping it up after Alabama defeated Ohio State, 52-24.

...

Tuscaloosa Mayor Walt Maddox had earlier admonished fans on Twitter against congregating in parties... and warned **"our hospital is stretched."**

...

Alabama's coronavirus cases surged 30% in the week before the celebration, according to the New York Times. The state recorded 2,100 cases on Jan. 11 alone and was averaging 4,272 cases per day in the last week.

Tuscaloosa police quickly dispersed the revelers. Within a half-hour, traffic cameras revealed that University Boulevard had mostly been cleared, according to the Tuscaloosa News.

Photo taken by Lt. Andy Norris, Tuscaloosa Police
January 11, 2021 at 11:38 PM

Return to Timeline

www.timesofisrael.com/israeli-data-shows-50-reduction-in-infections-14-days-after-first-vaccine-shot/

Jan 13

Initial Israeli data: First Pfizer shot curbs infections by 50% after 14 days

... With Pfizer's phase 3 trials only checking some 40,000 people, and given Israel's world-leading vaccination campaign, the data could be some of the best on-the-ground indication yet of the vaccine's efficacy.

Regardless, the vaccine is only expected to reach full protection potential a week after the administration of the second dose of the vaccine, which began in Israel this week. The second dose is expected to bring immunity levels to some 95% after about a week.

Alroy-Preis stressed that the **data wasn't enough to conclude that the vaccine prevents transmission of the virus altogether, since it is believed that one can spread the virus to others for a limited amount of time if it is located in their nasal cavity**, even if it hasn't infected the body to a level that would yield a positive test result.

Earlier, Alroy-Preis said that **nearly one-fifth of over 1,000 current serious COVID-19 patients had previously received the first dose of Pfizer's vaccine — stressing the need to continue to protect oneself after receiving the shot.**

"Seventeen percent of the new serious cases today, or 180 cases, are after the first dose," she told reporters.

Alroy-Preis also expressed alarm at the sky-high infection rates throughout the country, which have climbed to nearly 10,000 new daily cases.

"We have never had such a figure," she said, adding that the more infectious British strain of the virus, which is believed to have spread throughout the country, has surely played a part in the steep rise in serious cases.

She said I**srael will likely have to extend its nationwide lockdown, but added that there were initial signs that the rise in infection rates was starting to slow down.**

Alroy-Preis said that 7**3% of Israelis who are over the age of 60 or who have other high-risk factors have already been vaccinated with at least one shot,** but noted that inoculations were slower in the Arab and ultra-Orthodox communities.

The latest number given by officials for total vaccinations was 1,910,330 — about **20% of the population** — although Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Tuesday held a ceremonial event celebrating the 2,000,000th vaccinee.

Health Ministry sources and experts have in recent days been cited by various news outlets in reporting that the exit from Israel's latest strict lockdown, imposed Friday, will likely take time, be gradual and depend on the vaccination rate and the trend seen in serious COVID-19 cases....

Return to Timeline

https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/jan/14/recovering-from-covid-gives-similar-level-of-protection-to-vaccine

Jan 14

Recovering from Covid gives similar level of protection to vaccine

People who recover from coronavirus have a similar level of protection against future infection as those who receive a Covid vaccine – at least for the first five months, research suggests.

A Public Health England (PHE) study of more than 20,000 healthcare workers found that **immunity acquired from an earlier Covid infection provided 83% protection against reinfection for at least 20 weeks**

The findings show that **while people are unlikely to become reinfected soon after their first infection, it is possible to catch the virus again and potentially spread it to others.**

“Overall I think this is good news,” said Prof Susan Hopkins, a senior medical adviser to PHE. “It allows people to feel that prior infection will protect them from future infections, but at the same time it is not complete protection, and therefore they still need to be careful when they are out and about.”

PHE recruited healthcare workers from hospitals across the UK and divided them into two groups: those who had coronavirus before and those who had not. Between June and November last year, the participants underwent fortnightly PCR tests for the virus, and monthly tests to examine the antibody levels in their blood.

Over the five months the researchers monitored infection rates in the two groups. They spotted 44 potential reinfections, including 13 symptomatic, among the 6,614 believed to have had Covid before, and 318 cases among the 14,173 who had no evidence of past infection. A previous infection, they conclude, provides 94% protection against symptomatic reinfection, and 75% protection against asymptomatic reinfection.

The cases are referred to as “potential” reinfections because a detailed genetic analysis of both first and second viruses must be done to confirm a reinfection, but information for the first infections was often not available.

“The immunity gives you a similar effect to the Pfizer vaccine and a much better effect than the AstraZeneca vaccine and that is reassuring for people. But we still see people who could transmit and so we want to strike a note of caution,” Prof Hopkins said. In clinical trials, two doses of the Pfizer vaccine had an efficacy of 95%, compared with 62% from two doses of the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine.

While the study is encouraging, it is **unclear whether the same protection applies to older people. The study participants were aged 35 to 54 and would be expected to have robust immune systems**. Older people tend to have weaker immune responses that are more short-lived.

Another question mark hangs over the risk of reinfection from new Covid variants spotted in the UK, South Africa and Brazil, an issue PHE will investigate as the study continues this year.

“What one thinks of the numbers is very much a ‘glass half full or half empty?’ question,” said Danny Altmann, professor of immunology at Imperial College. **“To many, it may be disappointing to put hard numbers to the idea that immunity to this virus is seemingly so variable and feeble that there is a greater than 1 in 10 chance of suffering reinfection, even at five months,** let alone now, when many UK healthcare workers are more than nine months out from infections in the first wave.”

Return to Timeline

https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/worldwide-graphs/#total-deaths

Select live link for current number

Jan. 14

Death toll from coronavirus tops 2,000,000

https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/1/15/this-is-not-a-game-two-million-people-dead-from-covid-19

... **More than 93 million cases of the virus have been confirmed worldwide** since the start of the pandemic, according to Johns Hopkins University.

Europe is the continent where the health crisis has proved most deadly, with 650,560 deaths to date.

Latin America and the **Caribbean** have recorded **542,410 deaths**, while the **United States and Canada have counted 407,090**.
...
In wealthy countries including the US, the United Kingdom, Israel, Canada and Germany, millions of citizens have already been given some measure of protection with at least one dose of a vaccine developed with revolutionary speed and quickly authorised for use.

But elsewhere, immunization drives have barely gotten off the ground. M**any experts are predicting another year of loss and hardship in places like Iran, India, Mexico and Brazil**, which together account for about a quarter of the world's deaths.
...
Mexico, a country of 130 million people that has suffered mightily from the virus, has received just 500,000 doses of a vaccine and has put barely half of those into the arms of healthcare workers.

In the US, despite early delays, hundreds of thousands of people are rolling up their sleeves every day. But the virus has killed about 390,000, the highest toll of any country.

The COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access Facility – COVAX, a UN-backed project to supply shots to developing parts of the world – has found itself short of vaccines, money and logistical help.

As a result, the World Health Organization's chief scientist warned it is **highly unlikely that herd immunity – which would require at least 70 percent of the globe to be vaccinated – will be achieved this year.**

Health experts fear, too, that **if shots are not distributed widely and fast enough, it could give the virus time to mutate.**

Dr Julian Tang, from the University of Leicester, said this number is not that surprising given the circumstances.

"This is a new virus to which no one really has any immunity, and we are going through the winter season where these respiratory viruses traditionally peak," he told Al Jazeera.

"The coronavirus vaccines have come rather late, so we put all that together, the winter season, the delay [in] vaccination, indoor crowding that comes with the winter season, this type of peak and mortality… it is probably not that surprising," he added.

Meanwhile, in Wuhan, a global team of researchers led by the WHO arrived on Thursday on a politically sensitive mission to investigate the origins of the virus, which is believed to have spread to humans from wild animals.

The Chinese city of 11 million people is bustling again, with few signs it was once the epicentre of the catastrophe, locked down for 76 days, with more than 3,800 dead.
...
While the death toll is based on figures supplied by government agencies around the world, the real number of lives lost to is believed to be significantly higher.

Return to Timeline

https://www.usatoday.com/in-depth/graphics/2021/01/14/covid-vaccine-distribution-by-state-how-many-covid-vaccines-have-been-given-in-us-how-many-people/6599531002/

Select link the above link for interactive map and updates

Jan 15

Tracking COVID-19 vaccine distribution by state

See how many COVID-19 vaccines your state received, and how many people have gotten one so far

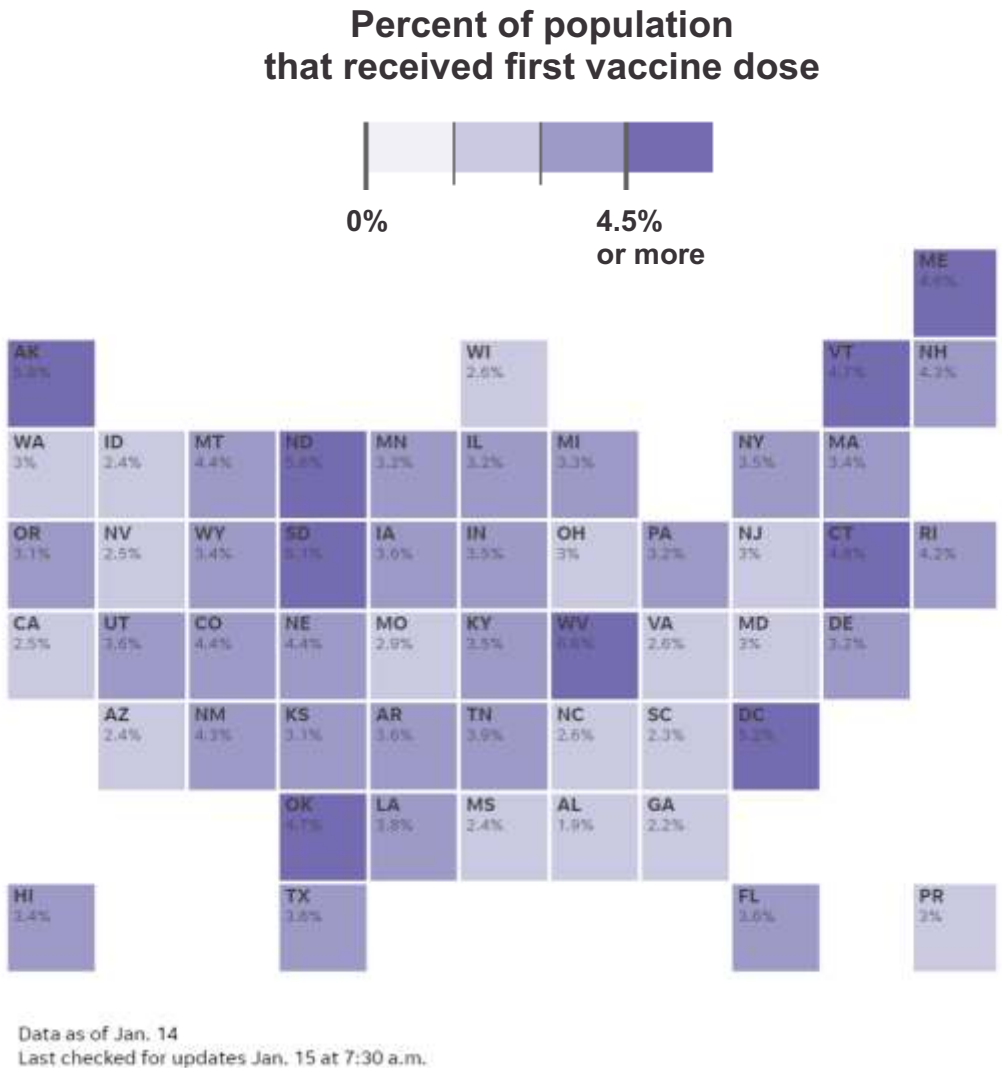
...

Anyone age 16 or older can receive the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, but the Moderna vaccine is authorized only for adults.

States prioritize at-risk populations to be vaccinated first, including medical staff, people in nursing homes or other long-term care facilities, essential workers, the elderly and people with medical conditions that put them at greater risk of becoming seriously ill with COVID-19.
[Link to state by state guide below]

https://www.today.com/health/how-register-covid-19-vaccine-state-state-guide-t205275

Some federal agencies manage their own distribution and vaccination processes outside state governments. These numbers are not included in the state tallies.



Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/health-india-immunizations-coronavirus-pandemic-ab830864393480ea6dcc67b0571fc29c

Jan. 16

India starts world's largest COVID-19 vaccination drive

India started inoculating health workers Saturday in what is likely the world's largest COVID-19 vaccination campaign, joining the ranks of wealthier nations where the effort is already well underway.

India is home to the world's largest vaccine makers and has one of the biggest immunization programs. But there is no playbook for the enormity of the current challenge.

Indian **authorities hope to give shots to 300 million people**, roughly the population of the U.S and several times more than its existing program that targets 26 million infants. The recipients include 30 million doctors, nurses and other front-line workers, to be followed by 270 million people who are either over 50 years old or have illnesses that make them vulnerable to COVID-19

For workers who have pulled India's battered healthcare system through the pandemic, the shots offered confidence that life can start returning to normal. Many burst with pride.

"I am excited that I am among the first to get the vaccine," Gita Devi, a nurse, said as she lifted her left sleeve to receive the shot.

"I am happy to get an India-made vaccine and that we do not have to depend on others for it," said Devi, who has treated patients throughout the pandemic in a hospital in Lucknow, the capital of Uttar Pradesh state in India's heartland.

The first dose was administered to a sanitation worker at the All Indian Institute of Medical Sciences in the capital. New Delhi, after Prime Minister Narendra Modi kickstarted the campaign with a nationally televised speech.
...

Health officials haven't specified what percentage of India's nearly 1.4 billion people will be targeted by the campaign. But experts say it will almost certainly be the largest such drive globally.
...
India on Jan. 4 approved emergency use of two vaccines, one developed by Oxford University and U.K.-based drugmaker AstraZeneca, and another by Indian company Bharat Biotech. Cargo planes flew 16.5 million shots to different Indian cities last week.

But doubts over the effectiveness of the homegrown vaccine is creating hurdles for the ambitious plan.

Health experts worry that the regulatory shortcut taken to approve the Bharat Biotech vaccine without waiting for concrete data that would show its efficacy in preventing illness from the coronavirus could amplify vaccine hesitancy. At least one state health minister has opposed its use.

In New Delhi, doctors at Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital, one of the largest in the city, demanded they be administered the AstraZeneca vaccine instead of the one developed by Bharat Biotech. A doctors union at the hospital said many of its members were a "bit apprehensive about the lack of complete trial" for the homegrown vaccine.

"Right now, we don't have the option to chose between the vaccines," said Dr. Nirmalaya Mohapatra, vice president of the hospital's Resident Doctors Association.

India's Health Ministry has bristled at the criticism and says the vaccines are safe, but maintains that health workers will have no choice in deciding which vaccine they will get themselves....

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/beijing-health-coronavirus-pandemic-wuhan-china-c555525ecdaea032b6d1bc1ec2894513

Jan. 16

China builds hospital in 5 days after surge in virus cases

China on Saturday finished building a 1,500-room hospital for COVID-19 patients to fight a surge in infections the government said are harder to contain and that it blamed on infected people or goods from abroad.

The hospital is **one of six with a total of 6,500 rooms being built in Nangong, south of Beijing in Hebei province**, the official Xinhua News Agency said.

China had largely contained the coronavirus that first was detected in the central city of Wuhan in late 2019 but **has suffered a surge of cases since December.**

...

The Chinese government has suggested the disease might have originated abroad and publicized what it says is the discovery of the virus on imported food, mostly frozen fish, though foreign scientists are skeptical.

Also Saturday, the city government of Beijing said **travelers arriving in the Chinese capital from abroad would be required to undergo an additional week of "medical monitoring" after a 14-day quarantine** but gave no details.

...

In Shijiazhuang, authorities have finished construction of 1,000 rooms of the planned hospital, state TV said Saturday. Xinhua said all the facilities are due to be completed within a week.

More than 10 million people in Shijiazhuang underwent virus tests by late Friday, Xinhua said, citing a deputy mayor, Meng Xianghong. It said 247 locally transmitted cases were found.

...

Meanwhile, researchers sent by the World Health Organization were in Wuhan preparing to investigate the origins of the virus. The team, which arrived Thursday, was under a two-week quarantine but was due to talk with Chinese experts by video link.

The team's arrival was held up for months by diplomatic wrangling that prompted a rare public complaint by the head of the WHO.

That delay, and the secretive ruling party's orders to scientists not to talk publicly about the disease, have raised questions about whether Beijing might try to block discoveries that would hurt its self-proclaimed status as a leader in the anti-virus battle.

https://www.readfrontier.org/stories/extremely-frustrated-federal-reserve-of-covid-vaccine-doesnt-exist-ridding-oklahoma-officials-hopes-of-more-shots/?fbclid=IwAR2vZo9tZdSvmp38CgZBdcgqiDi9idWzcVTBqfjB-negmtYKd2y8vvAV9xI

Jan. 16

‘Extremely frustrated’: Federal reserve of COVID vaccine doesn’t exist, ridding Oklahoma officials’ hopes of more shots

When the federal government announced this week it would start releasing coronavirus vaccine shots that were held in reserve for second doses, Oklahoma officials were optimistic, hoping they could greatly expand how many people could be vaccinated.

The Trump administration said it would stop holding back the shots that were reserved for the second dose of Pfizer’s and Moderna’s two-dose vaccines, potentially doubling states’ supplies.

Except there was no reserve, The Washington Post reported on Friday morning. The Trump administration had already started shipping all available vaccine shots, including second doses, in December.

Oklahoma’s allocation of vaccines would remain flat.

“I’m extremely frustrated to learn that that’s actually not in existence, that is not coming to us,” said Keith Reed, deputy commissioner for the Oklahoma State Department of Health, during a virtual news conference on Friday.

Oklahoma officials were mulling the idea of using the unspecified number of shots released from reserve to give more people the first dose of the vaccine.

Oklahoma, which gets around 30,000 to 50,000 doses weekly, will continue to receive vaccine, but the state won’t immediately have expanded access, Reed said. He said he was confident in the department’s ability to manage inventory and ensure people get their second shots.

Until Thursday, federal workers had assured Oklahoma health officials and gave them a “clear impression” that for every first dose the state received, the federal government was holding back a second shot in reserve.

The first indication no such reserve existed came on Thursday, when someone from Operation Warp Speed called Reed to talk about the state’s future vaccine allocations.

What of the reserve?

“‘Yeah, that doesn’t really exist like that,’” Reed said he was told. The state didn’t get the full story until the following morning, when media reports came out, he said.

Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar on Tuesday announced new guidance aimed to increase vaccine administration by expanding eligibility to everyone 65 and older and to those with comorbidities.

Further, the federal government’s allocation of COVID-19 vaccines would soon be based on how many doses each state has administered and the number of residents over 65, according to the new guidance.

State officials had expressed optimism for the new guidance earlier this week. They detailed plans to greatly expand access to COVID-19 vaccines by utilizing pharmacies, community health centers and planning additional mass vaccination sites.

“This updated plan means vaccine doses will be available at a level they haven’t been so far,” Reed said on Wednesday.

But by Friday, following news that the federal government’s vaccine reserve was figuratively bare, that optimism had turned to disappointment.

Oklahoma started vaccinating front line hospital workers, and residents and staff of long-term care facilities, such as nursing homes, in mid-December. Earlier this month, the state broadened eligibility to include anyone over the age of 65....

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/conspiracy-theories-europe-russia-czech-republic-eastern-europe-45f495d7205a7b47ae8d499ec08e0504

Jan. 17

Vaccine skepticism hurts East European anti-virus efforts

BELGRADE, Serbia (AP) — Vaccines from the West, Russia or China? Or none at all? That dilemma faces nations in southeastern Europe, where coronavirus vaccination campaigns are off to a slow start — overshadowed by heated political debates and conspiracy theories.
...
False beliefs that the coronavirus is a hoax or that vaccines would inject microchips into people have spread in the countries that were formerly under harsh Communist rule. Those who once routinely underwent mass inoculations are deeply split over whether to get the vaccines at all.

“There is a direct link between support for conspiracy theories and skepticism toward vaccination,” a recent Balkan study warned. “A majority across the region does not plan to take the vaccine, a ratio considerably lower than elsewhere in Europe, where a majority favors taking the vaccine.”
...
“**Serbs prefer the Russian vaccine**,” read a recent headline of the Informer, a pro-government tabloid, as officials announced that **38% of those who have applied to take the shots favor the Russian vaccine, while 31% want the Pfizer-BioNTech version** — a rough division among pro-Russians and pro-Westerners in Serbia.
...
A study by the Balkans in Europe Policy Advisory Group, published before the regional vaccination campaign started in December, concluded that virus **conspiracy theories are believed by nearly 80% of citizens of the Western Balkan countries striving to join the EU. About half of them will refuse to get vaccinated**, it said.

Baseless theories allege **the virus isn’t real or that it’s a bioweapon created by the U.S.** or its adversaries. Another popular falsehood holds that **Microsoft founder Bill Gates is using COVID-19 vaccines to implant microchips in the planet’s 7 billion people.**

A low level of information about the virus and vaccines, distrust in governments and repeated assertions by authorities that their countries are besieged by foreigners help explain the high prevalence of such beliefs, according to the Balkans think tank.

Similar trends have been seen even in some eastern European Union countries.

In **Bulgaria**, widespread conspiracy theories hampered past efforts to deal with a measles outbreak. Surveys there suggested distrust of vaccines remains high even as coronavirus cases keep rising. A recent Gallup International poll found that 30% of respondents want to get vaccinated, **46% will refuse and 24% are undecided**.
...
In the Czech Republic, where surveys show some 40% reject vaccination, protesters at a big rally against government virus restrictions in Prague demanded that vaccinations not be mandatory. Former President Vaclav Klaus, a fierce critic of the government’s pandemic response, told the crowd that vaccines are not a solution.
...
Populist authorities in **Hungary** have taken a hard line against virus misinformation, but **rejection of vaccines is still projected at about 30%**. Parliament passed emergency powers in March that allows authorities to prosecute anyone deemed to be “inhibiting the successful defense” against the virus, including “fearmongering” or spreading false news. At least two people who criticized the government’s response to the pandemic on social media were arrested, but neither was formally charged.

Romanian Health Minister Vlad Voiculescu said he is relying on family doctors to “inform, schedule and monitor people after the vaccine” and that his ministry will offer bonuses to medical workers based on the number of people they get onboard. Asked if such incentives would fuel anti-vaccination propaganda, Voiculescu said: “I am interested more by the doctors’ view on the matter than I am about the anti-vaxxers.”...

Return to Timeline

https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/hidden-hunger-elderly-hunger-rise-during-covid-n1254415

Jan. 17

Elderly hunger is on the rise during Covid

... Elderly hunger often goes unnoticed, and those who suffer from it are often unseen, tucked away in their homes due to mobility issues. Unable to shop or cook due to physical limitations, they depend on Citymeals for food.
...
The pandemic has put a spotlight on the elderly, who are the most vulnerable to the virus. For many seniors, a trip to the grocery store can be life-threatening. People aged 65 to 74 are 90 times more likely to die from Covid and people over 65 make up eight out of ten Covid deaths.

The pandemic has worsened the already dire problem of elderly hunger in America. **Before the pandemic there were an estimated 5.8 million hungry seniors nationwide. Since the onset of the pandemic in March that number is believed to have increased rapidly.**

National statistics have not yet been compiled, but there are numbers for New York City. **Prior to the pandemic, one in 10 older New Yorkers was food insecure, but now that number has soared to one in five**, according to a study done by FoodBank NYC.

Since March, Citymeals has delivered 2.5 million **meals to homebound New York City seniors**. It delivered more than 3 million in all of 2020, an **increase of 64 percent over the prior year.**

Beth Shapiro, the executive director of Citymeals, says the nonprofit has not missed a single meal delivery since the pandemic began. She says it's a tribute, in part, to the legion of volunteers who have stepped up to help, doubling the number in prior years. Eighty-thousand volunteer hours were logged in 2020.

Shapiro says her group gets **12 percent of its $25 million annual budget from the city. The rest is raised through donations.**

"I think the social safety net is stretched very thin," said Shapiro. **"We should not be hungry in this city or in this country. And certainly older people should not be hungry. We would not be there without them,** and we have the systems that could care for them."

Back in Brooklyn, Andrew Smith is unfailingly cheerful. He says he has been able to win over even the most skeptical elderly with persistent kindness. It took him three days with one woman, he says, but she is now eager to see him. "You know, even if it's not a great day, you say, 'Have a great day,' because at the end of the day it will be a great day because he finished a meal."

Smith is not just the sole source of human interaction for many of his clients, he is also the only person in a position to notice if something is wrong. If a client seems mentally fuzzy when they are normally lucid or if they take longer to answer the doorbell than normal, he'll notice. And in ...

https://mynorthwest.com/2472789/israel-trades-pfizer-doses-for-medical-data-in-vaccine-blitz/

Jan. 18

Israel trades Pfizer doses for medical data in vaccine blitz

JERUSALEM (AP) — After sprinting ahead in the race to inoculate its population against the coronavirus, Israel has struck a deal with Pfizer, promising to share vast troves of medical data with the international drug giant in exchange for the continued flow of its hard-to-get vaccine.

Proponents say **the deal could allow Israel to become the first country to vaccinate most of its population, while providing valuable research that could help the rest of the world.** But **critics say the deal raises major ethical concerns**, including possible privacy violations and a deepening of the global divide that enables wealthy countries to stockpile vaccines as poorer populations, including Palestinians in the Israeli-occupied West Bank and Gaza, have to wait longer to be inoculated.
...
Israel, home to some 9.3 million people, is considered an ideal place for studying these questions. Its mandatory universal health care is provided by four publicly funded HMOs with meticulously digitized medical records. This centralized system has helped Israel administer more than 2 million doses of the vaccine in under a month. Israel has also purchased doses of the Moderna and AstraZeneca vaccines.
...
The Health Ministry has recorded over 551,000 cases since the beginning of the pandemic and more than 4,000 deaths. Israeli officials say they aim to have most of the country vaccinated by the end of March, just around election day.

But the exact quid pro quo between Israel and Pfizer is unclear, even after a redacted version of the agreement was released by the Israeli Health Ministry on Sunday.

Neither Israel nor Pfizer would say how much Israel has paid for the vaccines, though Edelstein called it a “classical win-win” for both sides. Israeli media have reported that Israel paid at least 50% more than other countries. The data is reportedly being shared with the World Health Organization, but the global body did not respond to repeated requests for comment.

...
The arrangement has drawn attention to the unequal distribution of vaccines between rich and poor nations. A recent estimate from the International Rescue Committee said that the WHO’s global COVAX campaign is likely to vaccinate only 20% of the world’s lower-income countries by the end of 2021.
...
That disparity is particularly striking in the case of Israel and Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, who live under varying degrees of Israeli control and have yet to receive any vaccines.

While vaccinating its own Arab citizens and Palestinian residents of Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem, Israel says it is not responsible for inoculating the Palestinians. Edelstein said Israel will consider helping once it takes care of its own citizens.
...
It’s also uncertain exactly what information is being shared with Pfizer. According to the redacted agreement, “no identifiable health information” shall be shared, and the research is to be published in a recognized medical journal.

It said Israel will provide weekly data to Pfizer about various age and demographic groups. The objective, it said, is to “analyze epidemiological data arising from the product rollout, to determine whether herd immunity is achieved after reaching a certain percentage of vaccination coverage in Israel.”

The data, it added, is “aimed at helping end the global COVID-19 pandemic for the benefit of all patients inside and outside of Israel.”

Privacy Israel, an advocacy group that had petitioned the government to disclose the deal, welcomed its release but said certain questions remained unanswered, mostly about the handling and security of private information. It also blacked out certain details, such as key dates and the names of officials involved. Still, it said there is a “little more certainty” about sharing information with a global corporation...

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/us-news-genetics-coronavirus-pandemic-united-kingdom-f471eca388965ee95cd1e324c4e239d8

Jan. 19

A new COVID-19 challenge: Mutations rise along with cases

The race against the virus that causes COVID-19 has taken a new turn: Mutations are rapidly popping up, **and the longer it takes to vaccinate people, the more likely it is that a variant that can elude current tests, treatments and vaccines could emerge.**

The coronavirus is becoming more genetically diverse, and health officials say the high rate of new cases is the main reason. Each new infection gives the virus a chance to mutate as it makes copies of itself, threatening to undo the progress made so far to control the pandemic.
...
"We need to do everything we can now ... to get transmission as low as we possibly can," said Harvard University's Dr. Michael Mina. **"The best way to prevent mutant strains from emerging is to slow transmission."**

So far, vaccines seem to remain effective, but there are signs that some of the new mutations may undermine tests for the virus and reduce the effectiveness of antibody drugs as treatments.
...
It's normal for viruses to acquire small changes or mutations in their genetic alphabet as they reproduce. Ones that help the virus flourish give it a competitive advantage and thus crowd out other versions.

In March, just a couple months after the coronavirus was discovered in China, a mutation called D614G emerged that made it more likely to spread. It soon became the dominant version in the world.

Now, after months of relative calm, "we've started to see some striking evolution" of the virus, biologist Trevor Bedford of the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center in Seattle wrote on Twitter last week. **"The fact that we've observed three variants of concern emerge since September suggests that there are likely more to come."**

...
"The important finding here is that this is **unlikely to be travel-related"** and instead may reflect the virus acquiring similar mutations independently as more infections occur, Jones said.
...
Some lab tests suggest the variants identified in South Africa and Brazil may be less susceptible to antibody drugs or convalescent plasma, antibody-rich blood from COVID-19 survivors — both of which help people fight off the virus.

Government scientists are "actively looking" into that possibility, Dr. Janet Woodcock of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration told reporters Thursday. The government is encouraging development of multi-antibody treatments rather than single-antibody drugs to have more ways to target the virus in case one proves ineffective, she said.

Current vaccines induce broad enough immune responses that they should remain effective, many scientists say. Enough genetic change eventually may require tweaking the vaccine formula, but "it's probably going to be on the order of years if we use the vaccine well rather than months," Dr. Andrew Pavia of the University of Utah said Thursday on a webcast hosted by the Infectious Diseases Society of America.
...
"We still want people to be masking up," she said Thursday on a webcast hosted by the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

"We still need people to limit congregating with people outside their household. We still need people to be washing their hands and really being vigilant about those public health practices, especially as these variants emerge."

https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/white-house/biden-harris-inauguration-amid-covid-pandemic-d-c-lockdown-n1254732

Jan. 20

Biden, Harris inauguration amid Covid pandemic and D.C. lockdown

President-elect Joe Biden will be sworn-in as the 46th president of the United States Wednesday at noon, amid a devastating global pandemic and the threat of possible domestic terrorism.

In a ceremony that will keep with tradition while being unlike any other inauguration in U.S. history, **Biden will take his oath of office before a small, socially distanced audience in a city that has been locked down because of the dual threats of the coronavirus pandemic, which has killed over 400,000 people in the U.S., and worries over another attack just weeks after the deadly violence at the U.S. Capitol.**

Those slated to attend the scaled-down ceremony include **most members of Congress and the Supreme Court and former presidents Barack Obama, George W. Bush and Bill Clinton, and their spouses, as well as Vice President Mike Pence.**

President Donald Trump won't be in attendance, making him the first president to skip his successor's inauguration in more than 150 years. Trump is instead scheduled to leave the White House on Wednesday morning, taking a final trip on Air Force One down to his Mar-a-Lago resort in southern Florida.

As president, Biden will be forced to immediately confront several major crises facing the country, including the pandemic, the subsequent economic collapse it caused, and the devastating divisions in the country that culminated in the violent mob of Trump supporters who stormed the Capitol earlier this month.

As a result, the stakes for his inaugural address couldn't be higher.

The inaugural theme is "America United," a theme Biden campaigned on and which he is expected to focus on in his speech. A transition official said that Biden was working on the speech this weekend with family members and his senior adviser Mike Donilon and that the address will emphasize familiar themes from his campaign: unity, healing and a vision for the many crises the country faces.

As is tradition, the chief justice of the Supreme Court, John Roberts, will administer the oath of office to Biden just after the clock strikes 12. Biden will take the oath with his hand on top of his 127-year-old, 5-inch-thick family Bible, which will be held by his wife, Jill Biden.

Kamala Harris, the first woman, the first Black American and the first South Asian American vice president, will be sworn in next by Justice Sonia Sotomayor, the first Latina justice on the Supreme Court.

Because of the pandemic, **attendees will be socially distanced and will have to wear masks.** Only about 1,000 people will attend, the Joint Congressional Committee on Inaugural Ceremonies has said. In normal times, the committee makes 200,000 tickets available for members of Congress.

Extra security precautions stemming from the Capitol attack include **over 25,000 National Guard members having been called up to keep the event secure and extra security fencing erected near the Capitol. In addition, the White House and numerous streets have been shut down.**

The National Mall, usually a place for onlookers to gather, has also been closed down.

https://oklahoman.com/article/5680780/celebrating-america-oklahoma-dancers-singers-landmarks-featured-in-president-bidens-inauguration-day-special

Jan. 20

Oklahoma dancers, singers, landmarks featured in Inauguration day special

Brandon Graves [an] **Enid native was among at least six Sooner State performers filmed at different Oklahoma City locales who were featured** on the "Celebrating America" special as part of a musical montage to accompany Lovato's cover of the late, great Bill Withers' classic hit.

“It was a pleasant surprise and a **great source of pride to see Oklahoma City so well-represented in our nation’s inaugural program,” OKC Mayor David Holt said in a statement. “From our neighborhoods to our Indigenous culture to our skyline, OKC was all over it. My gratitude to everyone who made it possible!”**

Oklahoma icons were well-represented during Wednesday's daytime swearing-in ceremonies for Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris, with **Yukon's own Garth Brooks crooning "Amazing Grace" and pop star Jennifer Lopez singing Okemah native Woody Guthrie's seminal anthem "This Land Is Your Land."**

But the primetime special featured a diverse group of everyday Oklahomans, while also showing off the skill and resourcefulness of the state's creative community.

"The diversity was just so beautiful. I think that's just one of the most exciting things about the project, about the upcoming administration as a whole. I felt like ... when we were looking at that video, we were looking at what America looks like. ... This is our beautiful, diverse tapestry of multiculturalism - and Oklahoma is a big part of that," said **Stephanie Pena, a Latina singer who hails from Midwest City and appeared in the montage.**

...

German immigrant **Petra Germany, of Yukon**, could be seen biking in Heritage Hills, **Lenny Hatchett, of Choctaw**, was playing at the downtown OKC basketball courts; and **Jaclyn Gass, of Midwest City**, was hanging out at Carl Albert High School.

Perhaps the most eye-catching of the performers they filmed was **Sgt. Denny MedicineBird**, who adapted the Native American Southern Straight dance style to the R&B song. A member of the Cheyenne & Arapaho Tribes who is also Kiowa, the Jones resident **danced across the Skydance Bridge** for the musical moment, his first time to attempt adapting the tribal dance style to pop music.

...

[This video was] seen by millions of people who watched "Celebrating America" on ABC, CBS, NBC, Spectrum, PBS, CNN, CNBC, BET and MSNBC as well as online on YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and Twitch

Link to Video

https://www.cnn.com/2021/01/20/americas/pfizer-canada-vaccine/index.html

Jan. 20

Pfizer tells Canada it will not receive any Covid-19 vaccine doses next week

Frustration visibly boiled over with some Canadian leaders Tuesday as Pfizer told Canada that it would not receive any vaccine doses next week due to the continuing manufacturing disruptions at its facility in Belgium.

Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau sought to reassure Canadians that vaccine deliveries would pick up again in a few weeks and that the overall goal, to have every willing Canadian vaccinated by September, would remain on track.

But it was Ontario's Premier Doug Ford who bluntly voiced the frustration of many provincial leaders as Pfizer continues to cut its vaccine delivery schedule to Canada.

Canada's supply of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine comes from the European allotment and not from nearby manufacturing facilities in the US, since the Trump administration made it clear vaccines would not be exported.

“There's a plant, a Pfizer plant, six hours in Kalamazoo, Michigan, with the Americans," Ford said. **"My American friends help us out, we need help once again as we did with the PPE.** You have a new President, no more excuses we need your support, and we look forward to your support and that's a direct message to President (Joe) Biden, 'help out your neighbor.'"

"We got to be on these guys like a blanket, I'd be outside that guy's house. Every time he moved, I'd be saying, 'Where's our vaccines?' Other people are getting them, the European Union is getting them, why not Canada? That's my question to Pfizer, we need your support," said Ford during a Tuesday news conference.

Ford made a direct plea to President-elect Joe Biden for a million vaccines for Canada.

The incoming Biden administration is unlikely to release vaccine doses for export in the short term as Biden transition officials have stated they are uncertain of the current supply of vaccines available in the US.

Canadian government officials made it clear Tuesday that the shortfall in deliveries from Pfizer would result in a "major reduction" in vaccinations in the coming weeks.

"There will be a considerable impact across all provinces," said Major Gen. Dany Fortin, the Canadian commander in charge of the vaccine rollout, adding, "the overall impact over the next month is in the range of a 50% decrease of expected allocation.”

The pandemic curve in Canada is beginning to show signs of bending downward after weeks of lockdowns. But hospitalizations remain high, and officials say the overall death toll during this second wave could eventually be more dire than the first.

"We're all contributing to reducing the burden on the health system, supporting our health care workforce in the difficult task of planning and implementing mass vaccine rollout and giving vaccines a longer runway to begin to work as access expands to reach all Canadians," said Dr. Theresa Tam, Canada's chief public health officer during a Tuesday news conference.

Tam added on average, **about 140 virus-related deaths are reported in Canada each day.**

Return to Timeline

https://www.forbes.com/sites/greatspeculations/2021/01/19/johnson--johnsons-covid-19-vaccine-updates-efficacy-figures-production-delays/?sh=50437dc1364a

Jan. 20

Johnson & Johnson's Vaccine Updates: Efficacy Figures, Production Delays

Johnson & Johnson (NYSE: JNJ) is developing one of the most closely watched Covid-19 vaccines, considering that it is a **single-dose shot that should be relatively easy to distribute**.

Here's a quick rundown on the recent developments for the vaccine.

Based on data from the phase ½ trials of 805 participants, published on Wednesday, the vaccine generated a long-lasting immune response with 90% of participants generating neutralizing antibodies against the Coronavirus. **Based on these early-stage findings the company expects the vaccine to be more than 70% effective**, noting that efficacy could reach "very high levels". For perspective, the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines, which are being rolled out in the U.S. are over 90% effective. More conclusive efficacy data from J&J's phase 3 study which has 45,000 volunteers is expected in the coming weeks with the company likely to proceed with emergency approval if the results are favorable.

Separately, there have been reports that **the company is seeing some manufacturing delays** for the vaccine. While J&J was **expected to deliver 12 million doses by the end of February and 100 million by the end of June, it has reportedly fallen behind these goals by as much as two months.** As of last September, the company said that it had plans to deliver over a billion doses by the end of 2021.
...

Johnson & Johnson is **expected to report interim data from the phase 3 trial of its Covid-19 vaccine candidate this month, providing insight into its safety and efficacy.** The company has completed enrollment on the trial, with **45,000 people for the trial, below its initial target of 60,000**, although this is unlikely to make a difference as higher rates of Coronavirus infections in the U.S. are likely to allow it to gather the data it needs with fewer volunteers. If all goes well, **J&J could apply for emergency use approval from the U.S. FDA as early as February**. Although J&J is at least two months behind Pfizer (NYSE: PFE) and Moderna (NASDAQ: MRNA) who have already started to roll out their vaccines, J&J's shot could be much sought after if it proves as safe and effective as rivals, considering that it likely requires only a single dose, unlike rival vaccines which require two shots to be given a few weeks apart.

Overall, the vaccine **isn't expected to really move the needle for J&J financially, as it intends to sell the vaccine at cost through the pandemic.** However, the vaccine should help the company rebuild its brand image after it faced setbacks amid lawsuits relating to contamination of its baby and other talc products. Secondly, the end of Covid-19 should bode well for diversified healthcare companies like Johnson and Johnson, as hospital visits and elective procedures rise. The focus could also shift back to the company's blockbuster drugs, including Stelara, Imbruvica, and Darzalex, which posted about 22% y-o-y growth over the first nine months of 2020.

https://apnews.com/article/pandemics-new-york-new-york-city-coronavirus-pandemic-coronavirus-vaccine-1303ab439b5e27ac6b733597592c40f8

Jan. 21

Mobile labs take vaccine studies to diverse neighborhoods

NEW YORK (AP) — Lani Muller doesn't have to visit a doctor's office to help test an experimental COVID-19 vaccine — she just climbs into a bloodmobile-like van that parks on a busy street near her New York City neighborhood.

The U.S. is rightly fixated on the chaotic rollout of the first two authorized vaccines to fight the pandemic. But with more vaccines in the pipeline — critical to boosting global supplies — scientists worry whether enough volunteers will join and stick with the testing needed to prove if they, too, really work.

Those studies, like earlier ones, must include communities of color that have been hard-hit by the pandemic, communities that also voice concern about the vaccination drive in part because of a long history of racial health care disparities and even research abuses. To help, researchers in more than a dozen spots around the country are rolling out mobile health clinics to better reach minority participants and people in rural areas who might not otherwise volunteer.

Muller, who is Black, said her family was worried about the vaccine research so she didn't mention she'd signed up to test AstraZeneca's shot.

"The legacy of African Americans in science in these sort of trials hasn't been great and we haven't forgotten," said Muller, 49, a Columbia University employee whose participation in some prior research projects made her willing to get a test injection earlier this month.

Muller knows more than 20 people who have gotten or died from COVID-19. "I'm much more afraid of the disease than the vaccine trial," she said.

From the beginning, the National Institutes of Health was adamant that COVID-19 vaccines be tested in a population about as diverse as the nation's — key to building confidence in whichever shots proved to work.

In studies of the Pfizer and Moderna shots so far cleared for widespread U.S. use, 10% of volunteers were Black, and more were Hispanic.

Diversity is an even tougher challenge now. The high-risk volunteers needed for final testing of other vaccine candidates have to decide if they want to stick with an experimental injection — one that might be a dummy shot — or try to get in line for a rationed but proven dose.

AstraZeneca, with about 30,000 volunteers so far, didn't release specific numbers but said the last weeks of enrollment are focusing on recruiting more minorities and people over age 65. Another maker, Novavax, just began recruiting for its final testing last month.

Studying the vaccines in diverse populations is only one step in building trust, said Dr. Wayne Frederick, president of Howard University, a historically Black university in the nation's capital.

Howard's hospital shared video of Frederick and other health workers getting vaccinated as a public service announcement encouraging African Americans to get their own shot as soon as it's their turn.

Frederick, a surgeon who's also at high risk because of diabetes and sickle cell disease, said he's dismayed to get emails espousing conspiracy theories such as that vaccination is "an experiment on African Americans."

"There is misinformation that does require all of us to be in the forefront of getting involved and challenging it," he said.

But efforts to build confidence in the vaccines could be undermined if, once there's more supply to go around, hard-hit minority communities get left behind.

"The equity issue is absolutely important," said Stephaun Wallace, ...

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-coronavirus-vaccine-1e6792a0bd4695487313fb3430429d94

Jan. 22

Lucky few hit COVID-19 vaccine jackpot for rare extra doses

... With millions of Americans waiting for their chance to get the coronavirus vaccine, a lucky few are getting bumped to the front of the line **as clinics scramble to get rid of extra, perishable doses at the end of the day.**

It is often a matter of being in the right place at the right time.

Sometimes people who just happen to be near a clinic at closing time are offered leftover shots that would otherwise be thrown away. Sometimes health workers go out looking for recipients. Some places keep waiting lists and draw names at random. Such opportunities may be becoming more prized as shortages around the U.S. lead some places to cancel vaccinations.
...
Once a vial is thawed from the deep freeze and, even more so, **once its seal is punctured and the first dose is drawn, those administering the vaccine are in a race to use it up before it spoils**–even if it means giving shots to those who don't fit into the priority list.

While it may be unsettling to see a 20-something getting a shot while an 90-year-old woman in a nursing home is still waiting, public health experts say getting a dose into someone's arm, anyone's arm, is better than throwing it away.
...
In **New York City**, a rumor that the Brooklyn Army Terminal had extra doses triggered a rush to the vaccine distribution site, leading to bumper-bumper traffic in the streets and a line of hundreds on the sidewalks until police came out to say they had been duped.

Mike Schotte, 53, and his 72-year-old mother started showing up at pharmacies near their home in **Hurst, Texas**, in hopes of getting a leftover shot. Eventually they put their names on a waiting list and got a call saying shots might be available if they arrived within a half-hour.
...
Nashville started its lottery system to avoid more haphazard ways of distributing leftover shots. In one case last month, the city's health department ended up giving extra doses to two workers at a Subway restaurant in a nearby hospital so they wouldn't go to waste.

Vaccine clinics expect only a few leftover doses, at most, on any given day. Providers also note that the **chances of leftover shots becoming available to the broader public are diminishing with each passing week** as eligibility for the vaccine widens beyond the very old, nursing home residents and front-line medical workers.

Waste is common in global inoculation campaigns, with millions of doses of flu shots trashed each year. By one World Health Organization estimate, more than half of all vaccines are thrown away because they were mishandled, unclaimed or expired. **The coronavirus rollout appears to have bucked the trend.**

Though federal data is not available, health authorities in various jurisdictions contacted by The Associated Press reported **very little waste beyond a few notable cases of doses that were accidentally or deliberately spoiled.**

In **Chicago**'s Cook County, Illinois, the health department reported just three of 87,750 doses were wasted, each accidentally spilled by staff. In Ohio, officials said 165 of 459,000 doses distributed as of last week were damaged or lost in transit, thrown away because of vaccine no-shows, or otherwise wasted. **New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Houston and other cities and states all have similarly reported tiny fractions of waste** ... It's like gold in Fort Knox ...

Those giving out the vaccines are choreographing an intricate dance to ensure they are handled right. **Vials of the Pfizer vaccine contain five doses – and sometimes an extra one – and Moderna's contain 10. And clinics try their best not to open a new container unless they have a registered recipient scheduled to get inoculated.**

At a clinic on the **Hawaiian island of Kauai**, Jill Price said that as the end of the day nears, if it looks like some doses will be left, calls ...

Return to Timeline

https://oklahoma.gov/health/newsroom/2021/january/state-leaders-cut-ribbon-on-new-pandemic-center--public-health-l.html

Jan. 22

OPCIE - a Pandemic Center and Public Health Lab opens in Stillwater

Gov. Kevin Stitt, the Oklahoma State Department of Health and state Cabinet secretaries unveiled the new **Oklahoma Pandemic Center for Innovation and Excellence** (OPCIE) and the newly relocated Public Health Lab with a ribbon cutting ceremony in Stillwater today.

...

"The OPCIE is an incredible investment in public health that puts Oklahoma on track to becoming a Top Ten state, a national and global leader in pandemic preparedness and response and will attract top talent in clinical research, innovative grants and national investment in our great state."

The OPCIE is the **first public health and research center of its kind in the nation.** The center's **mission is to develop innovative testing tools, conduct cutting edge research and grow partnerships between public and private entities**, bridging the gap between laboratory and clinical practices and improving public health responses by establishing an all-encompassing approach to research for rural, urban and tribal communities.

OPCIE's comprehensive approach to public health is based on the One Health concept – that the health of humans, animals and the environment are interrelated and interconnected. **The goal of OPCIE is to prevent health threats at the human, animal and environmental level** including zoonotic diseases, food safety and security, vector-borne diseases and environmental contamination.

...

Through OPCIE, **Oklahoma is in a unique position as a rural, agricultural and centrally-located state to become a global leader in leveraging human, animal and environmental science insights to improve public health through collaborative research and innovation.**

The OPCIE was established in Stillwater and houses the relocated and modernized Public Health Lab. It will allow for all resources to be located in one place to collaborate on the highest caliber public health response.

"The agricultural industry in Oklahoma has long advocated for a One Health approach to public health. Scientific discoveries taking place in animal health have direct implications on human health and vice versa. The establishment of OPCIE is welcome news for our ranchers and farmers who understand the importance of food safety and security to maintaining human health," said Sec. of Agriculture Blayne Arthur.

"OPCIE broadens and elevates the purpose of the Public Health Lab. **This center will position Oklahoma to be at the forefront of studying and addressing pandemics as a public health issue for our state, nation and world,**" said Sec. of Science and Innovation Elizabeth Pollard. "COVID-19 has brought to light the urgency for our state to have our own capability to respond to the public health needs of Oklahomans. The OPCIE is meant to become a national leading authority on all aspects of public health to ensure the needs of Oklahomans are addressed without dependence on other states or federal agencies in the midst of an emergency."...

Return to Timeline

https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/worldwide-graphs/#total-deaths

Select live link for current number

Jan. 22

Death toll from coronavirus tops 2,200,000

Return to Timeline

https://www.economist.com/science-and-technology/2021/01/23/how-fast-can-vaccination-against-covid-19-make-a-difference

Jan. 23

Israel giving us insight into how mass vaccination may change things

... Israel is the place to watch for the first evidence about how mass vaccination may change things, for **it has vaccinated its citizens faster than anywhere else**. By January 19th, a month after the campaign had begun, Israel had given **26% of its 9m people at least one dose**. As has happened elsewhere, it started with older people. And for them, some results are now emerging.

In a **recent analysis**, Ran Balicer of the Clalit Research Institute in Tel Aviv and his colleagues **compared, day by day, a group of 200,000 over-60s who had been vaccinated with an otherwise-similar group of unvaccinated individuals**. They tracked differences in infection rates between the groups by comparing test results for people in them who were tested for covid after reporting pertinent symptoms or close contact with someone who had previously tested positive.

For the study's **first 12 days, positive test rates remained identical** between groups. On the **13th, the vaccinated group's rate fell slightly. Then, on day 14, it dropped by a third.** There has been some disappointment that this drop was not greater, but the vaccine in question, the Pfizer-BioNTech offering, is intended to be given in two doses, so the picture will not be clear until the second doses have been administered, and results from younger people have been included, too.

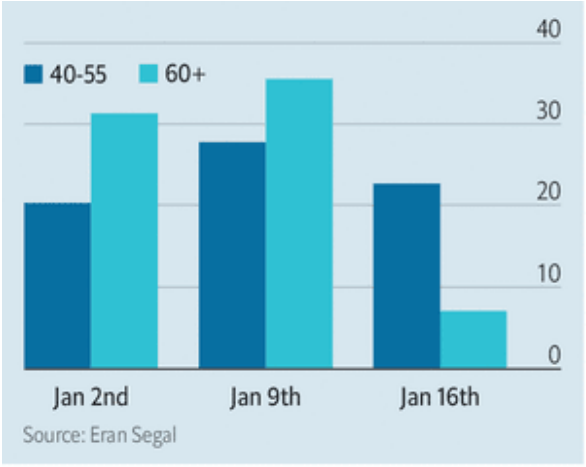
The early effect on hospital admissions of Israel's mass vaccination campaign has been trickier to measure, because of two confounding variables: the country's national lockdown, which tends to reduce the rate regardless of the effect of vaccines, and the spread of b.1.1.7, a variant of the virus first found in Britain, which is a lot more contagious and so tends to push the rate up. This combination of factors is, though, also being experienced in many European countries, and in parts of the United States, so **what happens in Israeli hospitals now is a harbinger of what those other places can expect in coming weeks and months.**

A sign that vaccination is starting to give Israeli hospitals some breathing space emerged a fortnight after **January 2nd,** the day when the proportion of **those over 60 who had been vaccinated reached 40%. The number critically ill with covid-19 in that age group grew by about 30% in the week before January 2nd, and also in the following week—but by just 7% in the week after that** [see chart below]. By contrast, among those aged between 40 and 55 (who were vaccinated at a much lower rate at the time) the weekly change in the number of critically ill remained constant, with a 20-30% increase in each of those three weeks.

Taking such early results into a model of the epidemic's trajectory, Eran Segal of the Weizmann Institute and his colleagues reckon that **covid-19 deaths in Israel could start tapering off early in March**, even if the lockdown ends, as planned, in the last week of January. Their prognosis assumes that the pace of vaccination holds up, and that 80% of adults get their second dose by the end of February. (The other 20% are people who cannot be vaccinated for reasons such as allergies, or who refuse to be vaccinated.) ...

Going in the right direction

Israel's change in critically ill patients



The Economist

https://www.cnn.com/2021/01/23/us/michigan-marijuana-free-weed-vaccine-trnd/index.html

Jan. 23

A Michigan marijuana dispensary is offering a free joint to anyone who gets a Covid-19 vaccine

To help stem the coronavius pandemic, Greenhouse of Walled Lake is offering free pre-rolled joints to anyone who gets the Covid-19 vaccine.

“We're all stressed out, but the vaccine is hopefully what's going to finally end this pandemic, and we just want to reward people who are going ahead of the curve to get the vaccine," Greenhouse owner Jerry Millen told CNN. "If I can help stop the pandemic in any slightest way, and this is the way I can do it, so be it.”

The "Pot for Shots" promotion is a joint effort with UBaked Cannabis Company, which is providing the pre-rolls. It started on Friday and runs through February.

To get the free weed, all someone has to do is get vaccinated and show up to the dispensary with proof of vaccination.

Millen said he's considering extending the deadline if not enough people get vaccinated by the end of February to encourage others to take that step so the world "can go back to normal.”

"We support the freedom of choice, everyone chooses what to do, but it's important people take measures to stop the pandemic by staying home and wearing a mask, or getting a vaccine if they choose to do so," Millen said. "This is our way of thanking people who do.”

Although it will take more time before enough Americans are vaccinated to end the pandemic, Millen says he's sure the grass is greener on the other side.

https://www.instagram.com/greenhousewalledlake/?utm_source=ig_embed

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/us-news-coronavirus-pandemic-faf144ff9442077a9f2bb292614e1342

Jan. 24

2 in 5 Americans live where COVID-19 strains hospital ICUs

... An Associated Press analysis of federal hospital data shows that since November, the share of U.S. hospitals nearing the breaking point has doubled. **More than 40% of Americans now live in areas running out of ICU space, with only 15% of beds still available.**
...
According to data through Thursday from the COVID Tracking Project, hospitalizations are **still high in the West and the South, with over 80,000 current COVID-19 hospital patients in those regions**. Encouragingly, hospitalizations appear to have either plateaued or are trending downward across all regions. It's unclear whether the easing will continue with more contagious versions of the virus arising and snags in the rollout of vaccines.

In **New Mexico**, one surging hospital system brought in 300 temporary nurses from outside the state, at a cost of millions of dollars, to deal with overflowing ICU patients, who were treated in converted procedure rooms and surgery suites.
...
In **Los Angeles**, Cedars-Sinai Medical Center ran into shortages of take-home oxygen tanks, which meant some patients who could otherwise go home were kept longer, taking up needed beds. But the biggest problem is competing with other hospitals for traveling nurses.
...
Houston Methodist Hospital recently paid $8,000 retention bonuses to keep staff nurses from signing up with agencies that would send them to other hot spots. Pay for traveling nurses can reach $6,000 per week, an enticement that can benefit a nurse but can seem like poaching to the hospital executives who watch nurses leave.
...
Space is another problem. Augusta University Medical Center in **Augusta, Georgia**, is treating adult ICU patients, under age 30, in the children's hospital. Recovery rooms now have ICU patients, and, if things get worse, other areas — operating rooms and endoscopy centers — will be the next areas converted for critical care.
...

The Alabama hospital's ICU has been overflowing for six weeks, with 16 virus patients on ventilators in a hospital that a year ago had only 10 of the breathing machines. "You can see the stress in people's faces and in their body language. It's just a lot for people to carry around," Smith said.

"Just the fatigue of our staff can affect quality of care. I've been encouraged we've been able to keep the quality of care high," Smith said. "You feel like you are in a very precarious situation where errors could occur, but thankfully we've managed to stay on top of things."

Hospitals say they are upholding high standards for patient care, but experts say surges compromise many normal medical practices. Overwhelmed hospitals might be forced to mobilize makeshift ICUs and staff them with personnel without any experience in critical care. They might run out of sedatives, antibiotics, IVs or other supplies they rely on to keep patients calm and comfortable while on ventilators.

"It's really daunting and mentally taxing. You're doing what you believe to be best practice," said Kiersten Henry, a nurse at MedStar Montgomery Medical Center in Olney, Maryland, and a board director for the American Association of Critical-Care Nurses.

In **Oklahoma City**, OU Medicine Chief Medical Officer Dr. Cameron Mantor said while the vaccines hold promise, hope still seems dim as ICU cases keep mounting. The number of COVID-19 hospitalizations at OU Medicine has declined from more than 100 daily in recent weeks to 98 on Wednesday, Mantor said.

"What is stressing everybody out," Mantor said, "**is looking at week after week after week, the spigot is not being turned off, not knowing there is a break, not seeing the proverbial light at the end of the tunnel."**

https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSKBN29T0OS

Jan. 25

Bernie Sanders happy his mittened meme may raise millions for charity

(Reuters) - U.S. Senator Bernie Sanders, the famed curmudgeon photographed at President Joe Biden's inauguration wearing mittens and a scowl behind his facemask in an image that instantly became a meme, said on Sunday he was happy it may help raise millions for charity.

Lifting spirits around the world since it went viral, the meme depicts everything from Sanders' mittens touching Michelangelo's Hand of God in the Sistine Chapel, to the Vermont Democrat helping actor Demi Moore mold clay at the pottery wheel from the film "Ghost," to **Sanders joining the World War Two Yalta Conference in 1945, seated next to British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, U.S. President Franklin Roosevelt and Soviet leader Joseph Stalin.**

Asked by CNN on Sunday whether he was enjoying the meme as much as the rest of the world, the 79-year-old gave an uncharacteristic grin and said he was overjoyed that his handwoven mittens, blue facemask and trademark glower could be turned into gold for needy Americans.

"Not only are we having fun but what we are doing here in Vermont is we're going to be selling around the country sweatshirts and T-shirts, and all of the money that's going to be raised – which I expect will be a couple of million dollars – will be going to programs like 'Meals on Wheels,' that feed low-income senior citizens," Sanders said.

"So, it turns out actually to be a good thing, and not only a fun thing," he said.

Vermont teacher Jen Ellis said on Twitter that she gifted Sanders the mittens, which she knitted from repurposed wool sweaters, two years ago.

Featured since in everything from Japanese anime art to 1960s album cover copies, Sanders stood out among the designer garb at the ceremony for his mittens, a snowboarding jacket made by Vermont company Burton, and carrying a large manila envelope.

"I'm convinced Sen. Sanders would have dressed exactly the same to his own inauguration had he won," said one Twitter user.

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/nfl-super-bowl-football-coronavirus-pandemic-c17d72e98fda8f07d114657dfb7f5b90

Jan. 25

Some advertisers are approaching the first COVID-era Super Bowl with caution

NEW YORK (AP) — For the first time since 1983, when Anheuser-Busch used all of its ad time to introduce a beer called Bud Light, the **beer giant isn't advertising its iconic Budweiser brand during the Super Bowl. Instead, it's donating the money it would have spent on the ad to coronavirus vaccination awareness efforts.**

Anheuser-Busch **still has four minutes of advertising** during the game **f**or its other brands including Bud Light, Bud Light Seltzer Lemonade, Michelob Ultra and Michelob Ultra Organic Seltzer. Those are some of its hottest sellers, particularly among younger viewers.

...

The Anheuser-Busch move follows a **similar announcement from PepsiCo., which won't be advertising its biggest brand, Pepsi, in order to focus on its sponsorship of the the halftime show.** (It will be advertising Mountain Dew and Frito-Lay products). Other veteran Super Bowl advertisers like **Coke, Audi and Avocados from Mexico are sitting out the game altogether.**

These big-brand absences are just one more way Super Bowl LV will look very different from previous years. **Attendance at the game will be limited to 22,000 people, about a third of the more than 65,890 capacity** of Raymond James Stadium in Tampa, Florida. And Super Bowl parties will be more likely to be smaller affairs with pods or families.

"I think the advertisers are correctly picking up on this being a riskier year for the Super Bowl," said Charles Taylor, marketing professor at Villanova University. "With COVID and economic uncertainty, people aren't necessarily in the best mood to begin with. There's a risk associated with messages that are potentially too light. ... At the same time, there's risk associated with doing anything too somber."

The pandemic has cut sharply into sales for many Super Bowl advertisers. With pricey **ads costing an estimated $5.5 million for 30 seconds during the Feb. 7 broadcast** on CBS, some may have decided it's not worth it this year. **Coca-Cola**, for example, has been **hard hit since half of its sales come from stadiums, movie theaters and other usually crowded places that have been closed during the pandemic.** It announced layoffs in December, and said it said it wouldn't advertise this year to ensure it's "investing in the right resources during these unprecedented times."

To fill the void, newcomers like the TikTok rival Triller, online freelance marketplace Fiverr and online car seller Vroom are rushing in to take their place. Returning brands include M&M's, Pringles, Toyota and others.

Companies that are running ads this year face a number of challenges. Super Bowl ads are usually developed months in advance and shot in the fall, meaning that ads airing in two weeks were shot under costly pandemic conditions and without any idea how the presidential election would turn out. That further complicates the already delicate process of striking a tone that acknowledges what's happening with the world, managing to either entertain or tug at viewer heartstrings, and finding a way to tie it all back to their brand.

"It's a tough year to do an ad," Argenti said. "It will be a good year for creative companies who figure out how to thread that needle."...

Budweiser's Message

https://www.cnn.com/2021/01/25/health/kittitas-county-washington-covid-19-vaccine-trnd/index.html

Jan. 25

A rural county in Washington state hasn't wasted a single Covid-19 vaccine dose. Here's its secret

...A big part of the reason Kittitas County says it is outpacing the vaccine rates in the state is that **it's had a lot of practice in triaging and managing disasters**, especially wildfires.

“We're a fairly rural county, and we get significant weather events, mostly wildfires," said Rich Elliott, the deputy fire chief of Kittitas Valley Fire and Rescue. "Our county has a 25-year history of just sort of everybody -- the hospital, the school districts, law enforcement, fire agencies, federal state partners -- **we just cooperate**.”

When the coronavirus pandemic started and there was a need for personal protective equipment and testing, groups working with the emergency management center banded together to respond.

Now the cross-functional team of essential workers and volunteers are working to distribute the vaccine and it's working, says Elliott, who is in charge of vaccine distribution for the county. In fact, he says a single dose hasn't been wasted.

The story is different across the country. The United States is struggling to get the precious vaccine into arms, with supply issues, logistics challenges, long lines and crashed appointment sites. As of Friday, 16.2 million Americans, about 4.5% of the US population, had received their first dose and about 2.8 million people are fully vaccinated, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Washington state has distributed more than 335,000 vaccines, which is 48% of the delivered doses given, according to the state's Department of Health Covid-19 dashboard, **as of January 18.**

While Kittitas County has given 53% of its current vaccines, the county has vaccine clinics running through next week to deliver a new batch of more than 2,000 vaccines, according to Kittitas Valley Healthcare. With all of the appointments taken, **the county estimates having 97% of their doses administered by the end of next week.**

"The infrastructure that we have with everybody communicating, everybody willing to be flexible and play whatever role's necessary and an understanding of (incident command system) and emergency operation centers gives us the framework to do it," Elliott told CNN.

When you're fighting large fires, you have to act fast and resources can change in a flash, so learning to change plans and stay flexible is part of the job, Elliott said.

"In fires, we make do, and you build plans around what you have available, and what the priorities are," Elliott said. "Those change almost daily at wildland fires because the risks change, the weather changes, all of those things ...

Return to Timeline

https://www.cnbc.com/2021/01/25/covid-vaccine-moderna-working-on-covid-booster-shots-for-south-african-strain.html

Jan. 26

Moderna working on Covid booster shot for variant in South Africa, says current vaccine provides some protection

...The company's researchers said its current coronavirus vaccine a**ppears to work against the two highly transmissible strains found in the U.K. and South Africa, although it looks like it may be less effective against the latter.**

The two-dose vaccine produced an antibody response against multiple variants, including B.1.1.7 and B.1.351, which were first identified in the U.K. and South Africa, respectively, according to a Moderna study conducted in collaboration with the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases. The study has not yet been peer reviewed.

The vaccine **generated a weaker immune response against the South African strain, but the antibodies remained above levels that are expected to be protective against the virus**, the company said, adding the findings may suggest **"a potential risk of earlier waning of immunity to the new B.1.351 strains.**"

"Out of an abundance of caution and leveraging the flexibility of our mRNA platform, **we are advancing an emerging variant booster candidate against the variant first identified in the Republic of South Africa** into the clinic to determine if it will be more effective to boost titers against this and potentially future variants," Moderna CEO Stephane Bancel said in a statement.
...

On Thursday, White House health advisor Dr. Anthony Fauci said new data showed that the Covid-19 vaccines currently on the market may not be as effective in guarding against new, more contagious strains of the coronavirus. Some early findings that were published in the preprint server bioRxiv indicate that the South Africa variant can evade the antibodies provided by some coronavirus treatments.

The news also comes after the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said earlier this month that **the U.K. variant could become the dominant strain in the U.S. by March.** "It is highly likely there are many variants evolving simultaneously across the globe," Jason McDonald, a spokesman for the CDC, said in an email to CNBC at the time.
...
Bancel told CNBC that Moderna's vaccine will be protective against the South African strain in the short term, but the company doesn't know how long that protection may last.

"What is unknowable right now is what will happen in six months, 12 months, especially to the elderly because, as you know, they have a weaker immune system," he said during an interview with "Squawk Box." "Because of that unknown ... we decided to take into the clinic, out of an abundance of caution, a new vaccine."

"We cannot be behind. We cannot fall behind this virus," he said, adding the coronavirus will "keep mutating."

Return to Timeline

https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/us/eli-lilly-says-monoclonal-antibody-cocktail-cuts-hospitalizations-by-70-for-high-risk-covid-19-patients/ar-BB1d7bFv?li=BBorjTa

Jan. 27

Monoclonal antibody cocktail cuts hospitalizations by 70% for high-risk

While vaccines may help slow the COVID-19 pandemic over the next months, drug company **Eli Lilly announced Tuesday** that its treatments can help save lives in the meantime.

The company's drug **bamlanivimab** was authorized by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration late last year and **has been used by 125,000 high-risk patients nationwide** based on early-stage data suggesting it could be effective.

The drug is a monoclonal antibody, meaning it **mimics one of the natural antibodies the immune system uses to fight off the virus.**

Former President Donald Trump as well as former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie and former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani all received monoclonal antibodies shortly after they were diagnosed with COVID-19.

In a large, late-stage study the company unveiled Tuesday, **bamlanivimab combined with another monoclonal antibody, etesevimab, was found to be extremely effective** in high-risk patients diagnosed with COVID-19.

Among patients who received a placebo, 10% of those at high risk ended up in the hospital, compared to just 2% of those who received the drug cocktail – **a 70% drop**. Patients were diagnosed an average of four days before treatment.
...
The single drug and the cocktail performed equally well, said Lilly's chief scientific officer Dr. Daniel Skovronsky, but the company is going to switch to making the combination once it receives FDA authorization.

The combination is more likely to remain effective, he said at an afternoon news conference, as the virus that causes COVID-19 evolves, leading to new variants.

"Bamlanivimab alone is predicted to be effective against more than 99% of all strains that we see in the United States today," he said. "Bamlanivimab plus etesevimab should take care of the rest of them."
...
There are 100,000 doses of bamlanivimab available today to patients around the world and another 250,000 will become available by the end of the quarter, Skovronsky said.
...
The U.S. government has bought hundreds of thousands of doses of Lilly's and another combination antibody from Regeneron.

But many doses remain on shelves, unused, because of the difficulties of providing the drug to patients.

To get a benefit, people have to receive the drug within the early stages of disease – once hospitalized with COVID-19, the drug does nothing to help, a Lilly study has shown...

Return to Timeline

ttps://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2021/01/28/960901166/how-is-the-covid-19-vaccination-campaign-going-in-your-state

Select link the above link for complete chart and updates

Jan. 28

How Is The COVID-19 Vaccination Campaign Going In Your State?

The U.S. is working to vaccinate a high percentage of its population against COVID-19 as soon as possible to stop the spread of the disease and end the outbreak in the country.

The mission becomes even more urgent as coronavirus variants emerge around the world, raising concerns that the virus could evade our efforts to control it, if the spread is not curbed quickly.

Since vaccine distribution began in the U.S. on Dec. 14, **more than 24 million doses have been administered**, reaching **6.2% of the total U.S. population**, according to federal data collected by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The **U.S. is currently administering around 1 million shots a day.**

	How much of the population has been vaccinated?		How efficiently are states administering their doses?		
STATE	% OF POP. WITH AT LEAST ONE DOSE	% OF POP. WITH BOTH DOSES	DOSES ADMINISTERED	DOSES DISTRIBUTED	% DOSES USED
United States	6.2%	1.1%	24,652,634	47,230,950	52%
Alaska	11.4%	2.5%	101,597	170,575	60%
West Virginia	9.5%	2.5%	214,926	278,400	77%
Connecticut	8.5%	1.5%	360,991	543,975	66%
New Mexico	8.4%	1.8%	217,075	303,625	71%
North Dakota	7.7%	2.2%	77,230	96,425	80%
District of Columbia	7.6%	2%	68,086	107,575	63%
Oklahoma	7.5%	1.2%	345,144	569,575	61%
South Dakota	7.4%	2.5%	86,986	122,825	71%
Vermont	7.1%	1.7%	55,377	96,825	57%
Arkansas	6.9%	1.4%	252,824	406,175	62%
Florida	6.8%	0.8%	1,632,491	3,095,850	53%
Louisiana	6.7%	1%	358,746	620,325	58%
Delaware	6.7%	1.3%	77,449	140,850	55%
Colorado	6.6%	1.6%	474,527	775,050	61%
New York	6.6%	1.1%	1,518,697	2,744,450	55%

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/pandemics-mexico-coronavirus-pandemic-latin-america-c0caea45313a33ffc6de8bbbd594790e

Jan. 28

Mexico's new daily record of almost 28,000 coronavirus cases

MEXICO CITY (AP) — Mexico posted its highest one-day total of newly confirmed coronavirus cases Wednesday, with 27,944 infections, and a near-record 1,623 confirmed deaths.

That brings the country's total so far to just over 1.8 million cases and 153,639 deaths. However, **Mexico has an extremely low rate of testing, and estimates of excess deaths suggest the real toll is over 195,000.**

A group of over a dozen of the country's top universities and medical institutes also recommended Wednesday that the use of face masks be made mandatory in Mexico, a move that President Andrés Manuel López Obrador and his advisers have long opposed.

The president himself seldom wears a mask, and over the weekend tested positive for COVID-19.

The president's top pandemic adviser, Hugo López-Gatell, said the 67-year-old president was doing well and was active, and had almost no symptoms apart from an occasional low-grade fever.

"When you ask him repeatedly, he'll finally break down and say 'Well, I have a little headache, now that you insist on it,'" López-Gatell said.

Early in the pandemic, López-Gatell said that face masks provided little protection for the wearer and that he opposed rules requiring their use. However, the experts' report said masks should be mandatory to stop the spread of coronavirus.

Hospitals are so full in some parts of Mexico that many families have to treat their relatives at home, and they need oxygen cylinders to do so. But federal authorities reported Wednesday that there have there have been 14 robberies of oxygen tanks at hospitals, delivery trucks or other locations across the country.

There have also been examples of fraud, in which people offer tanks or oxygen concentrators for sale, accept deposits and then keep the money without delivering them.

The federal public safety department said eight people have been arrested for theft or fraud.

People wait to refill oxygen tanks for relatives sick with COVID-19 in the Iztapalapa district of Mexico City, on Tuesday, Jan. 26, 2021. The city is offering free oxygen refills for patients with COVID-19. (AP Photo/Marco Ugarte)

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-variant-south-africa-us-2bc397370cdd44afe916ddd6edbaf870

Jan. 28

Virus variant from South Africa detected in US for 1st time

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — A new variant of the coronavirus emerged Thursday in the United States, posing yet another public health challenge in a country already losing more than 3,000 people to COVID-19 every day.

The mutated version of the virus, first identified in South Africa, was found in **two cases in South Carolina**. Public health officials said it's almost certain that there are more infections that have not been identified yet. They are also concerned that this version spreads more easily and that vaccines could be less effective against it.

The two cases were discovered **in adults in different regions of the state and do not appear to be connected. Neither of the people infected has traveled recently**, the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control said Thursday.

"That's frightening," because it means there could be more undetected cases within the state, said Dr. Krutika Kuppalli, an infectious diseases physician at the Medical University of South Carolina in Charleston. **"It's probably more widespread."**

The arrival of the variant shows that **"the fight against this deadly virus is far from over,"** Dr. Brannon Traxler, South Carolina's interim public health director, said in a statement. "While more COVID-19 vaccines are on the way, supplies are still limited. Every one of us must recommit to the fight by recognizing that we are all on the front lines now. We are all in this together."

Viruses constantly mutate, and coronavirus variants are circulating around the globe, but scientists are primarily concerned with the emergence of three that researchers believe may spread more easily. Other variants first reported in the United Kingdom and Brazil were previously confirmed in the U.S.

As the variants bring a potential for greater infection risks in the U.S., pandemic-weary lawmakers in several states are pushing back against mask mandates, business closures and other protective restrictions ordered by governors.

States including Arizona, Michigan, Ohio, Maryland, Kentucky and Indiana are weighing proposals to limit their governors' abilities to impose emergency restrictions. Wisconsin's Republican-controlled Assembly had been expected to vote to repeal Democratic Gov. Tony Evers' mask mandate, but lawmakers abruptly called off the vote Thursday in the face of broad criticism and out of concern it would jeopardize more than $49 million in federal aid. Pennsylvania lawmakers are considering a constitutional amendment to strip the governor of many of his emergency powers.

Governors argue that they need authority to act swiftly in a crisis, and limitations could slow critical emergency responses....

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/pandemics-health-dubai-united-arab-emirates-coronavirus-pandemic-259b63e7da38caec83d6b5f4112466b4

Jan. 29

Dubai blamed for virus cases abroad; questions swirl at home

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — After opening itself to New Year's revelers, Dubai is now being blamed by several countries for spreading the coronavirus abroad, even as questions swirl about the city-state's ability to handle reported record spikes in virus cases.

The government's Dubai Media Office says the sheikhdom is doing all it can to handle the pandemic, though it has repeatedly declined to answer questions from The Associated Press about its hospital capacity.

"After a year of managing the pandemic, we can confidently say the current situation is under control and we have our plans to surge any capacity in the health care system should a need rise," it said.

However, Nasser al-Shaikh, Dubai's former finance chief, offered a different assessment Thursday on Twitter and asked authorities to take control of a spiraling caseload.

"The leadership bases its decisions on recommendations from the team, the wrong recommendations which put human souls in danger and negatively affect our society," he wrote, adding that "our economy requires accountability."

Dubai, known for its long-haul carrier Emirates, the world's tallest building and its beaches and bars, **in July became one of the first travel destinations to describe itself as open for business.** The move staunched the bleeding of its crucial tourism and real estate sectors after lockdowns and curfews cratered its economy.

As tourism restarted, daily reported coronavirus case numbers slowly grew but mostly remained stable through the fall.
But then came **New Year's Eve — a major draw for travelers from countries otherwise shut down over the virus who partied without face masks in bars and on yachts. For the last 17 days, the United Arab Emirates as a whole has reported record daily coronavirus case numbers as lines at Dubai testing facilities grow.**

In Israel, more than 900 travelers returning from Dubai have been infected with the coronavirus, according to the military, which conducts contact tracing. The returnees created a chain of infections numbering more than 4,000 people, the Israeli military told the AP.

Tens of thousands of Israelis had flocked to the UAE since the two countries normalized relations in September. Israeli Health Ministry expert Dr. Sharon Alroy-Preis was quoted by Channel 13 TV as complaining in a call with other officials that a few weeks of travel had been more deadly than decades of no relations with the Arab nation.

Since late December, Israel has required those coming from the UAE to go into a two-week quarantine. Israel later shut down its main international airport through the end of the month over rising cases.

In the United Kingdom, tabloids have splashed shots of bikini-clad British influencers partying in Dubai while the country struggled through lockdowns trying to control the virus. Britain in mid-January closed a travel corridor to Dubai that had allowed travelers to skip quarantine over what was described as ...

Return to Timeline

https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/worldwide-graphs/#total-deaths

Select live link for current number

Jan. 29

Death toll from coronavirus tops 2,300,000

Return to Timeline

https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-biden-masks-idUSKBN29Y2YG

Jan. 30

CDC orders sweeping U.S. transportation mask mandate

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued a sweeping order late Friday requiring the use of face masks on nearly all forms of public transportation Monday as the country continues to report thousands of daily COVID-19 deaths.

The **order, which takes effect at 11:59 p.m. EST on Monday (0459 GMT Tuesday), requires face masks to be worn by all travelers on airplanes, ships, trains, subways, buses, taxis, and ride-shares and at transportation hubs like airports, bus or ferry terminals, train and su**bway stations and seaports.

President Joe Biden on Jan. 21 ordered government agencies to “immediately take action” to require masks in airports and on commercial aircraft, trains and public maritime vessels, including ferries, intercity bus services and all public transportation.

Under Donald Trump, who was president until Jan. 20, a CDC push to mandate masks in transit was blocked and the agency instead only issued strong recommendations for mask use. Trump also rejected efforts by Congress to mandate mask use.

“Requiring masks on our transportation systems will protect Americans and provide confidence that we can once again travel safely even during this pandemic,” said the 11-page order signed by Marty Cetron, director for CDC’s Division of Global Migration and Quarantine.

While airlines and most transit modes already require masks, the CDC order will make not wearing a mask a violation of federal law that could make it easier for flight attendants and others to enforce.

A U.S. airline group told Biden this month that carriers had had to bar “thousands of passengers” from future flights for failing to comply with airline mask policies.

The CDC said **people violating the order could potentially face criminal penalties but suggested civil penalties would be more likely if needed.** The order will be enforced by the Transportation Security Administration and federal, state and local agencies.

The order says passengers must wear a mask in transit except for brief periods, such as to eat, drink or take medication. Masks may be either manufactured or homemade.

The only exceptions are for travelers younger than two and for those with certain medical conditions. People in private cars and solo commercial truck drivers do not have to wear masks.

U.S. airlines raised concerns this week about passenger requests to opt out of mask-wearing on health grounds.

https://blogs.sciencemag.org/pipeline/archives/2021/01/29/jj-and-novavax-data

Jan. 30

J&J and Novavax Data

...The full Novavax package should be coming out in a few days. But what we know now is that in the **UK trial (roughly 15,000 people**), the vaccine showed **89% efficacy**. And the company says that around **half of these participants were infected with the B.1.1.7** variant, so these are excellent results against that one and against "coronavirus classic". The South African trial was smaller (around 4,000 patients), and the data have correspondingly more scatter in them. But the readout is clear: the **vaccine is less effective against the B.1.351 variant, perhaps around 50%**. Almost all the cases in this trial were from that one. Novavax says that they have already begun working on another protein vaccine to be used as a booster for those who've received another one, and that's good news. Not least because Novavax also noted that they were seeing people infected with B.1.351 who had already been infected with the earlier strains. There appear to have been no significant safety signals during the trials (an initial report of volunteers being hospitalized appears to have been mistaken). Keep in mind that there's another trial of the Novavax candidate still underway here in the US as well – the question is now how many countries will authorize the vaccine based on the data we have in hand and when this vaccine can be rolled ou

Now to **J&J** – then we'll discuss some implications. Their data for the one-shot dosing protocol show **72% efficacy in the North American volunteers, 66% in Latin America, and 57% in South Africa. That last one has to be another B.1.351 effect.** There were also no safety signals – adverse events were actually more frequent in the placebo group. There were also no real differences across different age groups, which is very good to see.

Now, these numbers from J&J are **definitely lower than the Moderna and Pfizer/BioNTech vaccines**. I wish that they were higher. But this is the landscape we have, and given the development timelines, I think we'd better get used to this it, because now the biggest and most advanced players have reported in. Broadly speaking, it looks like the **mRNA vaccines have definitively higher efficacy, but we have to remember that their trials were run before the new variants got much of a foothold**. We have in vitro data about how they might respond to B.1.1.7 and B.1.351, but so far we have no real-world efficacy reads. **For all we know, the Moderna and Pfizer/BioNTech vaccines also come down to 50-60% efficacy against B.1.351.**

But at any rate, with a 95% value (or the **96% seen with Novavax against "coronavirus classic"**), you can have a good deal of confidence that you're going to have solid real-world effects. When we see numbers like J&J's, or (especially) AstraZeneca's (the EMA says this morning that overall efficacy for that one is 60%), or probably everyone's against B.1.351, we have to look more closely at the clinical outcomes. **You may not be able to prevent so many people from going PCR-positive, but can you keep them out of the hospital? Out of the morgue?**

J&J is saying that overall, their vaccine was overall at 66% efficacy at preventing all "moderate to severe"coronavirus infection (updated this), **but 85% effective at preventing "severe disease" requiring hospitalization.** They had a conference call this morning, and my impression is that this statement wasn't clarified very much (we'll hear more next week, I believe). But they also say that there were **no coronavirus deaths at all in the vaccinated group.** So the real-world effects are nothing to turn up one's nose at – if this had been the first vaccine to report, we'd have been setting off fireworks. Similarly, it looks like the AstraZeneca/Oxford vaccine, for all the problems in figuring out its dosing and its efficacy numbers, also does a good job of preventing severe disease. We don't have data on severity of disease from the Novavax team yet; I hope that we see it very soon....

https://www.cnn.com/2021/01/31/health/us-coronavirus-sunday/index.html

Jan. 31

Hospitalizations are the lowest they've been in nearly 2 months. But US is still in for 'rough' coming weeks, expert says

Covid-19 hospitalizations in the US dropped below 100,000 for the first time in nearly two months, according to data from the COVID Tracking Project.

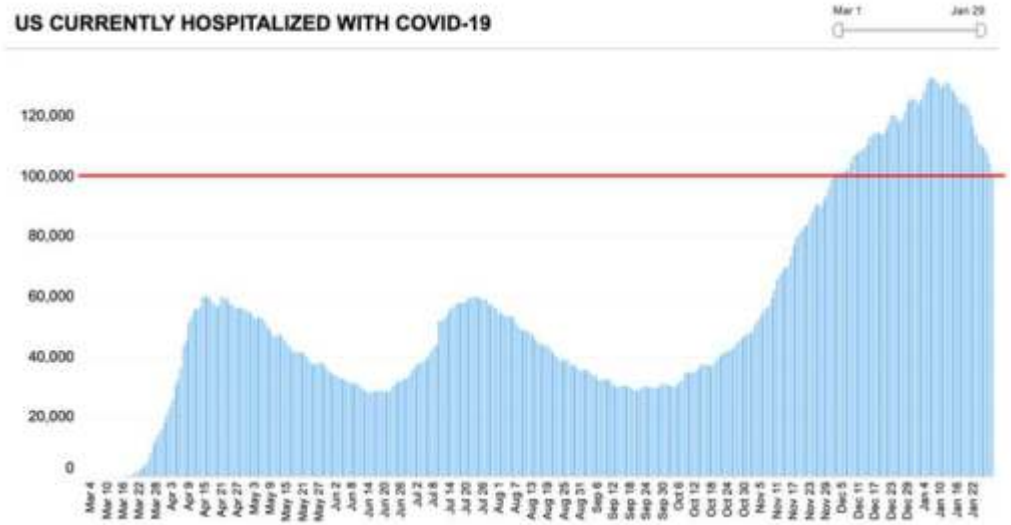
More than 97,000 patients remain hospitalized with the virus -- a far cry from the country's peak of more than 132,400 on January 6. The last time this number fell below 100,000 was December 1.

But while this drop may be a piece of good news, other Covid-19 numbers remain grim: **the seven-day average of new cases is roughly about the same it was December 1 -- while the average number of daily deaths is more than double what it was then.**

"Right now it's the worst of possible worlds. It's the winter. It's getting cold out, people are together more, there's still a critical number of people in the United States who don't wear masks, who don't social distance," Dr. Paul Offit, a member of the FDA's vaccine advisory committee, told CNN Saturday. **"I think the next six weeks or two months are going to be rough. I think we could have another 100,000, 150,000 deaths."**

According to projections from the University of Washington's Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, nearly 120,000 more Americans could lose their lives to the virus over the next two months.

A rapid variant spread could push that projection even higher. That's why experts have urged doubling down on safety measures like masks and social distancing and called for accelerated vaccinations across the country.



Return to Timeline

https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/transmission/variant-cases.html

Select live link for current number

Jan. 31

438 reported US cases caused by variants*

*** Number thought to be grossly under-reported due to limited genomic surveillance**

Select link for explanation

B.1.1.7 (United Kingdom)
434 cases now confirmed in more than 30 US States, mainly California and Florida

B.1.351 (South African)
3 cases now in two states: South Carolina and Maryland all community transmission

P.1 (Brazilian)
1 case via travel was confirmed in Minnesota

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/travel-beijing-coronavirus-pandemic-asia-wuhan-a344f7979602d043194db6de0cc82fec

Jan. 31

China sees most monthly infections since March

BEIJING (AP) — China recorded **more than 2,000 new domestic cases of COVID-19 in January, the highest monthly total since the tail end of the initial outbreak in Wuhan in March of last year.**

The National Health Commission said Sunday that 2,016 cases were reported from Jan. 1-30. That does not include another 435 infected people who arrived from abroad. The tally for Jan. 31 is due to be released Monday.

Two people have died in January, the first reported coronavirus deaths in China in several months.

Most of the new cases have been in three northern provinces. Hardest-hit Hebei province, which borders Beijing, has reported more than 900 cases. Beijing, the Chinese capital, has had 45 cases this month.

The numbers, **while low compared to many other countries, have prompted officials to tighten restrictions and strongly discourage people from traveling** during the upcoming Lunar New Year, a major holiday when people typically return home for family reunions.

Train trips were down nearly 75 percent in the first three days of the holiday travel season, the official Xinhua News Agency said Sunday, citing the state railway company. The Lunar New Year falls on Feb. 12.

A woman wearing a face mask to help curb the spread of the coronavirus takes a souvenir photo near a Lunar New Year decoration with ox figures at Qianmen Street, a popular tourist spot in Beijing, Sunday, Jan. 31, 2021.

AP Photo/Andy Wong

https://apnews.com/article/race-and-ethnicity-sexually-transmitted-diseases-coronavirus-pandemic-syphilis-us-news-eae3315d2dfecd6443b56a2dc7bcb887

Feb. 1

Vaccine skepticism lurks in town famous for syphilis study

...The coronavirus immunization campaign is off to a shaky start in Tuskegee and other parts of Macon County. **Area leaders point to a resistance among residents spurred by a distrust of government promises and decades of failed health programs. Many people in this city of 8,500 have relatives who were subjected to unethical government experimentation during the syphilis study.**
...
Tuskegee is not a complete outlier. A recent survey conducted by the communications firm Edelman revealed that as of November, **only 59% of people in the U.S. were willing to get vaccinated within a year with just 33% happy to do so as soon as possible.**

But skepticism seems to run deeper here.

When Alabama and the rest of the South were still segregated by race, government medical workers starting in 1932 withheld treatment for unsuspecting men infected with syphilis in Tuskegee and surrounding Macon County so physicians could track the disease. The study, which involved about 600 men, ended in 1972 only after it was revealed by The Associated Press.

A lawsuit filed on behalf of the men by Black Tuskegee attorney Fred Gray resulted in a $9 million settlement, and then-President Bill Clinton formally apologized on behalf of the U.S. government in 1997. But the damage left a legacy of distrust that extends far beyond Tuskegee: **A December survey showed 40% of Black people nationwide said they wouldn't get the coronavirus vaccine. Such hesitancy is more entrenched than among white people, even though Black Americans have been hit disproportionately hard by the virus.**

The Chicago-based Black nationalist group Nation of Islam is warning away members nationwide with an online presentation titled "Beyond Tuskegee: Why Black People Must Not Take The Experimental COVID-19 Vaccine."

Gray, now 90 and still practicing law in Tuskegee, rejects such comparisons. The syphilis study and the COVID-19 vaccine are completely different, he said. He believes that enough that he himself has gotten the vaccine and is publicly encouraging others to do the same.

Georgette Moon is on a similar mission. Hoping to both protect herself and encourage skittish friends, the former city council member recently bared an arm and let a public health nurse immunize her. Now, Moon said, if only more fellow Black residents could overcome their lingering fears and get the vaccine.

"The study is a huge factor," Moon said. "I've had very qualified, well-educated people tell me they are not going to take it right now."

The Macon County health department, which is administering two-step Moderna vaccines in its modern building near downtown, could perform as many as 160 immunizations a day, officials said. But a maximum of 140 people received the vaccine on any single date during the first six days of appointments, with a total of 527 people immunized during the period. Health care workers, emergency responders and long-term care residents are currently eligible for shots in Alabama, along with people 75 and older.

There are some signs of hope. State statistics show a slow uptick in the number of people coming in for vaccinations, and word seems to be filtering through the community that it's OK to be vaccinated.

Down the street from the county clinic, the Veterans Affairs hospital in Tuskegee is vaccinating veterans 65 and older. While only 40% of the VA workers in the area have been vaccinated, officials said, more people are agreeing to the shots than during the initial wave.

"They know people who have had the vaccine, they hear more about it, they become more comfortable with it," said Dr. April Truett, an infectious disease physician at the hospital.

The Rev. John Curry Jr. said he and his wife took the shots after the health department said they could get appointments without a long ...

Feb. 1

The vaccine news continues to be better than many people realize

...**All five vaccines with public results have eliminated Covid-19 deaths. They have also drastically reduced hospitalizations.** “They’re all good trial results,” Caitlin Rivers, an epidemiologist at Johns Hopkins University, told me. “It’s great news.”

Many people are instead focusing on relatively minor differences among the vaccine results and wrongly assuming that those differences mean that some vaccines won’t prevent serious illnesses. It’s still too early to be sure, because a few of the vaccine makers have released only a small amount of data. But **the available data is very encouraging — including about the vaccines’ effect on the virus’s variants.**

“The vaccines are poised to deliver what people so desperately want: an end, however protracted, to this pandemic,” as Julia Marcus of Harvard Medical School recently wrote in The Atlantic.

Why is the public understanding more negative than it should be? **Much of the confusion revolves around the meaning of the word “effective.”**
...
But it’s not the most meaningful definition for most coronavirus infections.

Whether you realize it or not, you have almost certainly had a coronavirus. **Coronaviruses have been circulating for decades if not centuries, and they’re often mild. The common cold can be a coronavirus. The world isn’t going to eliminate coronaviruses — or this particular one, known as SARS-CoV-2 — anytime soon.**

Yet we don’t need to eliminate it for life to return to normal. **We instead need to downgrade it from a deadly pandemic to a normal virus.** Once that happens, adults can go back to work, and children back to school. Grandparents can nuzzle their grandchildren, and you can meet your friends at a restaurant.

... all five of the vaccines — from **Pfizer, Moderna, AstraZeneca, Novavax and Johnson & Johnson** — look extremely good. **Of the roughly 75,000 people who have received one of the five in a research trial, not a single person has died from Covid, and only a few people appear to have been hospitalized.** None have remained hospitalized 28 days after receiving a shot.

To put that in perspective, it helps to think about what Covid has done so far to a representative group of 75,000 American adults: It has killed roughly 150 of them and sent several hundred more to the hospital. The vaccines reduce those numbers to zero and nearly zero, based on the research trials.

Zero isn’t even the most relevant benchmark. A typical U.S. flu season kills between five and 15 out of every 75,000 adults and hospitalizes more than 100 of them.

I assume you would agree that any vaccine that transforms Covid into something much milder than a typical flu deserves to be called effective. But that is not the scientific definition. When you read that the Johnson & Johnson vaccine was 66 percent effective or that the Novavax vaccine was 89 percent effective, those numbers are referring to the prevention of all illness. They count mild symptoms as a failure.

The variants

What about the highly contagious new virus variants that have ...

Return to Timeline

https://www.bbc.com/news/health-55706855

Feb. 2

Israel's vaccine rollout linked to infection fall

...The fall appears to be most pronounced in older people and areas furthest ahead in their immunisation efforts.

This suggests it is the vaccine, and not just the country's current lockdown, taking effect.

Israeli Ministry of Health (MoH) figures show 531 over-60s, out of almost 750,000 fully vaccinated, tested positive for coronavirus (0.07%).

And far fewer fell ill, with 38 becoming hospitalised with moderate, severe or critical disease - a tiny proportion.

The MoH assessed the medical records of almost a million people in total - 743,845 of whom were over the age of 60 - until at least seven days after they received a second dose of the vaccine.

There were three deaths in vaccinated over-60s - although it is possible they contracted the infection earlier, before their immunity had time to build.

Before the vaccine had time to take effect, more than 7,000 infections were recorded, just under 700 cases of moderate to critical illness and 307 deaths.

The MoH data suggests **infections and illnesses fell consistently from 14 days after receiving the first jab onwards**.

Delayed dose strategy

While the biggest fall observed was in people seven days after their second dose of the vaccine, this cannot be used as evidence for or against the wisdom of the UK's strategy of delaying second doses.

Israel has consistently given people their first and second doses no more than three weeks apart, but the first dose isn't expected to provide protection for at least two weeks.

So it is not possible by looking at this data to untangle the impact of the second dose from the first dose starting to kick in.

The first dose takes longer to show any effect as it primes the immune system to start recognising and fighting off the virus.

Israel has delivered five million doses of the vaccine to a population of about nine million - and about one million people have received two doses.

The jury's still out on whether the vaccine completely stops people from carrying, and passing on, the virus.

So for now, while many people remain unvaccinated, those who have had the jab are still being told to socially distance and wear masks...

Return to Timeline

https://www.aol.com/news/not-snow-nor-pandemic-keeps-060136721-124222036.html

Feb. 2

A gloomy Groundhog Day: Punxsutawney Phil says more winter

...The spectacle that is Groundhog Day still went on, but because of the coronavirus pandemic, revelers weren't able to see Phil and celebrate in person: **This year, it was all virtual.**

A livestream, which had more than 15,000 viewers at one point, played footage from previous Groundhog Day's ahead of the big reveal.

Then of course, the prognosticator of prognosticators — assisted by his Inner Circle — emerged at dawn. The lore goes that if he sees his shadow as he did this year, there will be six more weeks of winter. If he doesn't, spring comes early.

The livestream from Gobbler's Knob, a tiny hill just outside Punxsutawney about 65 miles (105 kilometers) northeast of Pittsburgh, is made possible by the Pennsylvania Tourism Office's Holi-stay PA. **The event there — always Feb. 2 — dates back to 1887.**

Phil this year, like many years in the past, gave his forecast during a major snowstorm that hit the entire Northeast.

The annual event has its origin in a German legend about a furry rodent. Records dating to the late 1800s show Phil has predicted longer winters more than 100 times. The 2020 forecast called for an early spring — however, Phil didn't say anything about a pandemic...

Return to Timeline

https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/oxford-astrazeneca-vaccine-cuts-covid-transmission-study/ar-BB1dlJci?li=BBnb7Kz

Feb. 3

Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine cuts COVID transmission: Study

The Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine **may reduce the transmission of the coronavirus by up to two-thirds**, a study has suggested, marking the first time a jab has been shown to have such an effect.

The Oxford University study published on Tuesday, which is awaiting peer review, found that t**hose who had been vaccinated with a single dose of the vaccine were 67 percent less likely to test positive with a PCR test.**

The paper suggested the vaccine, which was developed by Oxford University in partnership with British-Swedish pharmaceutical giant AstraZeneca, **may have a "substantial effect on transmission of the virus"** as a result and also prevent severe disease.

Health secretary Matt Hancock said the study, which also suggested the Oxford-AstraZeneca shot is highly protective after a single dose, showed "vaccines are the way out of this pandemic".

"This news about the Oxford vaccine is absolutely superb," Hancock tweeted. "This vaccine works & works well."

The study also showed the vaccine was **76 percent efficient against symptomatic infection for three months after a single dose**, a level which increased if the second shot was delayed.

The results from trials in Britain, Brazil and South Africa showed that immune responses were boosted with a longer interval between the two doses, among participants aged 18 to 55 years.

"Vaccine efficacy after a single standard dose of vaccine from day 22 to day 90 post vaccination was 76 percent, and modelled analysis indicated that protection did not wane during this initial 3 month period," Oxford academics said.

Their paper added that **vaccine efficacy was 82.4 percent with 12 or more weeks to the second dose, compared with 54.9 percent for those where the booster was given fewer than six weeks after the first dose.**

Oxford academics approve 12-week dose interval
The findings supported the UK's decision to extend the interval between the initial and booster doses of the shots to 12 weeks, Oxford academics said.

The UK has decided to vaccinate as many people as possible, as quickly as possible, by lengthening the amount of time between initial shots and booster shots.

Andrew Pollard, chief investigator of the Oxford Vaccine Trial, said the data showed the 12-week interval was "the optimal approach to roll out, and reassures us that people are protected from 22 days after a single dose".

AstraZeneca's research chief has said eight to 12 weeks between doses seemed to be the "sweet spot" for efficacy, contrasting with Pfizer, which has warned that its vaccine – developed with Germany's BioNTech, was not trialled with such an interval.
...
Oxford University's Pollard on Wednesday said the team's **researchers also believe the vaccine will continue to offer protection against new variants of COVID-19**, although they are still waiting for data on this.

Even if the virus adapts, "that doesn't mean that we won't still have protection against severe disease", he said.

"If we do need to update the vaccines, then it is actually a relatively straightforward process it only takes a matter of months, rather than the huge efforts that everyone went through last year to get the very large-scale trials run," Pollard told the BBC

Return to Timeline

https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2021/02/danish-scientists-see-tough-times-ahead-they-watch-more-contagious-covid-19-virus-surge

Feb. 4

All eyes are on Denmark's massive virus -sequencing effort

On its face, the curve of COVID-19 infections in Denmark looks reassuring enough. A nationwide lockdown has led numbers to plummet from more than 3000 daily cases in mid-December 2020 to just a few hundred now. But don't be fooled. "Sure, the numbers look nice," says Camilla Holten Møller of the Statens Serum Institute, who heads a group of experts modeling the epidemic. "But **if we look at our models, this is the calm before the storm."**

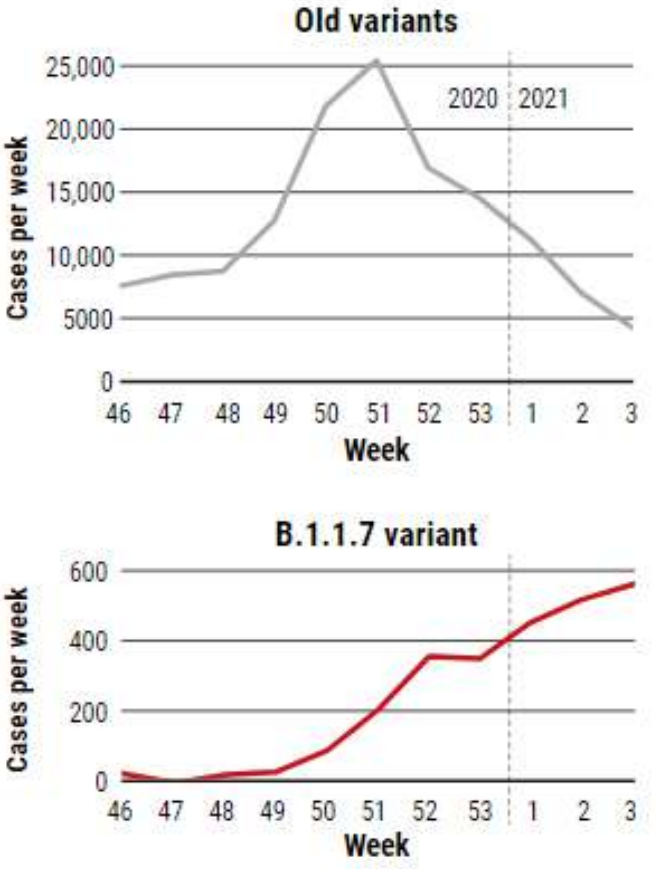
That's because **the graph really reflects two epidemics: one, shrinking fast, that's caused by older variants of SARS-CoV-2, and a smaller, slowly growing outbreak of B.1.1.7**, the variant first recognized in England and now driving a big third wave of the pandemic there. If B.1.1.7 keeps spreading at the same pace in Denmark, it will become the dominant variant later this month and cause the overall number of cases to rise again, despite the lockdown, Holten Møller says. "It is a complete game changer."

The same is likely happening in many countries without being noticed. But **a massive virus-sequencing effort has allowed Denmark, a country of 5.8 million, to track the rise of the new COVID-19 variant more closely than any other country. "All eyes are on Denmark right now,"** says Kristian Andersen, an infectious diseases researcher at Scripps Research who is advising the Danish government. "When it comes to B.1.1.7, is there a way in which … we can prevent the kind of calamity that we have seen in the U.K. and Ireland, for example?" he asks.

The data aren't reassuring. Danish scientists' **best guess is that B.1.1.7 spreads 1.55 times faster than previous variants**...

A new virus gathers steam

Previous SARS-CoV-2 variants are rapidly declining in Denmark (top), but B.1.1.7 is on the rise (bottom).



(GRAPHIC) V. ALTOUNIAN/*SCIENCE*; (DATA) STATENS SERUM INSTITUTE

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/technology-europe-coronavirus-pandemic-coronavirus-vaccine-2d5a2308329c277ada635ab3c75ba957

Feb. 4

Britain to test mixing and matching of COVID-19 vaccines

British scientists are **starting a study [today]** to find out if it's OK to mix and match COVID-19 vaccines.

The vaccines being rolled out now require two doses, and people are supposed to get two shots of the same kind, weeks apart.

Guidelines in Britain and the U.S. say the vaccines aren't interchangeable, but can be mixed if the same kind isn't available for the second dose or if it's not known what was given for the first shot.

Participants in the government-funded study will get one shot of the AstraZeneca vaccine followed by a dose from Pfizer, or vice versa.

"This study will give us greater insight into how we can use vaccines to stay on top of this nasty disease," said Jonathan Van Tam, the U.K.'s deputy chief medical officer.

He said that given the challenges of immunizing millions of people amid a global vaccine shortage, there would be advantages to having data that could support more "flexible" immunization campaigns.

COVID-19 vaccines all train the body to recognize the coronavirus, mostly the spike protein that coats it. The ones from AstraZeneca and Pfizer use different technologies. **AstraZeneca's uses a common cold virus to carry the spike gene into the body. Pfizer's is made by putting a piece of genetic code called mRNA — the instructions for that spike protein — inside a little ball of fat.**

The British **research is scheduled to run 13 months and will also test different intervals between doses**, four weeks and 12 weeks apart.

A study published this week on the **Russian-made Sputnik V vaccine showed it was about 91% effective in preventing COVID-19. Some immunologists credit the fact that the vaccine uses two slightly different shots, made with similar technology to AstraZeneca's.**

But the AstraZeneca and Pfizer vaccines are "so different that it's really hard to know if that would work," said Alexander Edwards, an associate professor in biomedical technology at Britain's University of Reading.

Matthew Snape, the new study's leader at Oxford University, which helped develop the AstraZeneca vaccine, called for British volunteers over age 50 to sign up; scientists are hoping to enroll more than 800 people.

If the vaccines can be used interchangeably, "this will greatly **increase the flexibility** of vaccine delivery," he said in a statement. "**(It) could provide clues as to how to increase the breadth of protection against new virus strains.**"

In recent weeks, Britain, the European Union and numerous other countries have been hit with vaccine supply issues: AstraZeneca said it would dramatically reduce the expected number of doses it could deliver due to manufacturing delays and Pfizer also slowed deliveries while it upgraded its Belgian factory.

Return to Timeline

https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/worldwide-graphs/#total-deaths

Select live link for current number

Feb. 5

Death toll from coronavirus tops 2,400,000

Return to Timeline

https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-02-04/j-j-seeks-emergency-clearance-for-covid-19-vaccine-in-u-s

Feb. 5

J&J Seeks Vaccine Clearance, Moving U.S. Near Third Shot

Johnson & Johnson asked U.S. drug regulators to clear its experimental Covid-19 vaccine for emergency use, setting off a review process that could lead to millions more doses becoming available to step up a stumbling immunization drive.

The drugmaker said in a statement Thursday that it had filed an application for an emergency-use authorization with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. If cleared, the shot would give the U.S. a third vaccine to try to halt a pandemic that has killed more than 450,000 Americans.

In the coming weeks FDA officials will examine J&J's trial data, and t**he agency scheduled a Feb. 26 meeting at which a panel of outside advisers will consider the request for clearance and make a recommendation** about whether to grant it. While its decision isn't binding, it is unusual for the FDA to reject the experts' advice.

...

J&J's vaccine was found to be 72% effective in the U.S. in preventing moderate to severe Covid-19 after a single shot, and 66% effective overall in a global trial. It was 100% effective in preventing hospitalization and death.

... **the company would be ready to begin shipping vaccines upon receiving an authorization.**

"...

Variant Questions

One question likely to be in focus as experts consider the vaccine's potential authorization is its effectiveness against new variants of the coronavirus. While J&J's shot was 85% effective across the board in preventing severe disease, there were indications **it could be less potent against new viral mutations that have caused infections to rise in some countries.**

In **South Africa**, where a variant called B.1.351 is circulating widely, the **vaccine was only 57% effective**. And the shot was **66% effective** in Latin America, where another mutation has caused cases to climb in **Brazil**. Both have recently surfaced in the U.S., though there isn't yet a clear indication that any are widespread.

The FDA said in a separate statement on Thursday that the agency has been communicating with drugmakers and developing guidelines for vaccine developers as they evaluate how their products will be affected by variants. The agency is "currently deliberating and discussing the types of data needed to support changes in the composition of the vaccine," said acting FDA Commissioner Janet Woodcock.

U.S. officials emphasized the J&J shot's proficiency at preventing the worst forms of Covid-19 at a news briefing last week.

"If you can prevent severe disease in a high percentage of individuals, that will alleviate so much of the stress and human suffering" of the pandemic, said Anthony Fauci, the top U.S. infectious-disease official.

J&J has previously indicated it expected an emergency clearance as soon as March, and that it would have millions of doses ready to ship upon receiving a nod from regulators. It has vowed to deliver 100 million doses to the U.S. by the end of June, and maintains that it will be able to meet all other supply commitments.

Return to Timeline

https://www.latimes.com/science/story/2021-02-04/whats-difference-between-variant-strain-coronavirus

Feb. 5

What's the difference between a variant and a strain?

... Confusion over the terms "variant" and "strain" predate this coronavirus. It seems virologists never got around to defining their terms.

Here's how a group of scientists explained the predicament in a 2013 article in the journal Archives of Virology, in which they spelled out what to call members of the Filoviridae family, which includes the Ebola and Marburg viruses:

"It is unclear how to distinguish their individual subclasses (strains, genetic variants, genotypes, mutants, etc.), mainly because of a lack of definitions for these terms and the absence of generally applicable guidelines for assigning viruses to them."

A pair of scientists stepped into the breach last month with a workable definition for the COVID-19 era.

The distinction between a variant and a strain hinges on whether the virus in question behaves in a distinct way, according to Dr. Adam Lauring, who studies the evolution of RNA viruses at the University of Michigan, and Emma Hodcroft, an expert on viral phylogenetics at the University of Bern in Switzerland.

"Genomes that differ in sequence are often called variants," Lauring and Hodcroft explained in the Journal of the American Medical Assn. "Strictly speaking, **a variant is a strain when it has a demonstrably different phenotype.**"

In other words, a particular coronavirus specimen may contain one or more mutations that another specimen lacks. **If there is no detectable functional difference, it is merely a variant.**

However, **if those mutations make the specimen more transmissible than its predecessors, or endow it with an added ability to evade a drug or vaccine, or alters it in another meaningful way, then it qualifies as a distinct strain.**

The two terms have been thrown around interchangeably, especially by those who have become armchair virologists over the course of the pandemic. But they are not synonymous.

"The distinctions are important," Lauring and Hodcroft wrote.

Another definition for strain comes from Nancy R. Gough, a scientist and editor who explains the biological world on her website, Bioserendipity. In her telling, **a viral variant that becomes dominant in its population earns the right to be called a strain.**

It doesn't matter whether that dominance was achieved through superior genetics or by happenstance, she adds.

By these measures, the virus from South Africa qualifies as a strain because its response — or lack thereof — to COVID-19 vaccines sets it apart from other versions of SARS-CoV-2. Its behavior is so singular that vaccine researchers are designing booster shots to target it.

The coronavirus from the U.K. counts as a strain as well because it spreads more readily than other variants. Indeed, researchers at the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have forecast that the U.K. virus is spreading so fast that it's on track to become America's "predominant variant in March."

If that happens, it will be a strain twice over.

https://www.cnn.com/2021/02/04/health/coronavirus-vaccine-second-shot-effects-wellness/index.html

Feb. 5

Here's why that second coronavirus shot can be such a doozy

... "With the first dose, you are having to generate an immune response from the ground up ...

The body produces antibodies, but also starts to generate immune cells called B cells to make targeted antibodies. This takes time -- a process known as maturing.

"You end up with a finely-tuned B-cell population," Worobey said. "Then t**he second time you give a person the shot, those cells are sitting around like a clone army and can immediately start producing a very big immune response**, which is what is happening when people feel like they have been kicked in the teeth."

Thomas Geisbert, a professor and expert in emerging viral threats at the University of Texas Medical Branch, notes that some vaccines build up plenty of response with a single dose. But the prime-boost strategy builds a longer-lasting defense force, he says.

"Your immune system is already jacked up from the first dose," he said. So w**ith a second dose, "You tend to build up a longer and more durable response.**"

The **flu-like symptoms that come with any viral infection are not caused by the virus itself. They are caused by the body's response.** The **fever and muscle aches come from inflammation**, which in turn is a sign that immune cells called T cells are sending out an alarm in the form of signaling chemicals called cytokines.

"You get swelling at the injection site," said Geisbert. "People can have chills or aches and pains, or they are feeling off or feeling tired."

That bodes well for predicting whether the vaccines will provide better protection than natural immunity. "These symptoms mean that your immune system is revving up and the vaccine is actually working," US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky told a White House briefing last month.

The new coronavirus has only been around for about a year, so no one can say yet whether it will be more like measles, which people catch once in a lifetime, or like influenza, which people catch over and over again.

Studies indicate that immunity to coronavirus lasts for months anyway -- six months, nine months or even longer.

That's not 100% of the population -- immunity varies a lot from one person to another, and a few cases have been documented of people being infected twice with coronavirus. But they seem to be uncommon instances.

These studies also take snapshots of people's immune systems over time and they show that right after infection, two types of antibody spike in number and then crash, while a third type builds up more slowly. And then B cells that have been "trained" to recognize the virus start producing specific antibodies that build up in the blood.

Vaccination may speed up this process -- providing people quicker protection but also perhaps providing a broader level of protection that a natural infection would.

"Because this is all going so fast, the studies and the key data are not there yet," Geisbert said.

Return to Timeline

https://www.ft.com/content/0cdc8563-1e6d-4089-bedb-b0f675c0d683

This link does requires a subscription. (We do try to avoid using articles that require a subscription, but occasionally we find ones that need to be shared!)

Feb. 6

Israel provides first signs of mass vaccination driving down virus cases

Daily case rates among **people aged 60 and above have fallen by 46 per cent relative to their mid-January peak, compared with a much smaller decline of 18 per cent among under-60s**, according to analysis by a team from the Weizmann Institute of Science at Tel Aviv University.

The country has been in a lockdown since January 8 that initially pushed cases down across all ages at a similar rate, but the striking divergence in trajectory between the older citizens — who have received the jabs — and younger people has opened up in the wake of the world's fastest vaccine rollout. The country has so far administered over 57 doses per 100 residents.

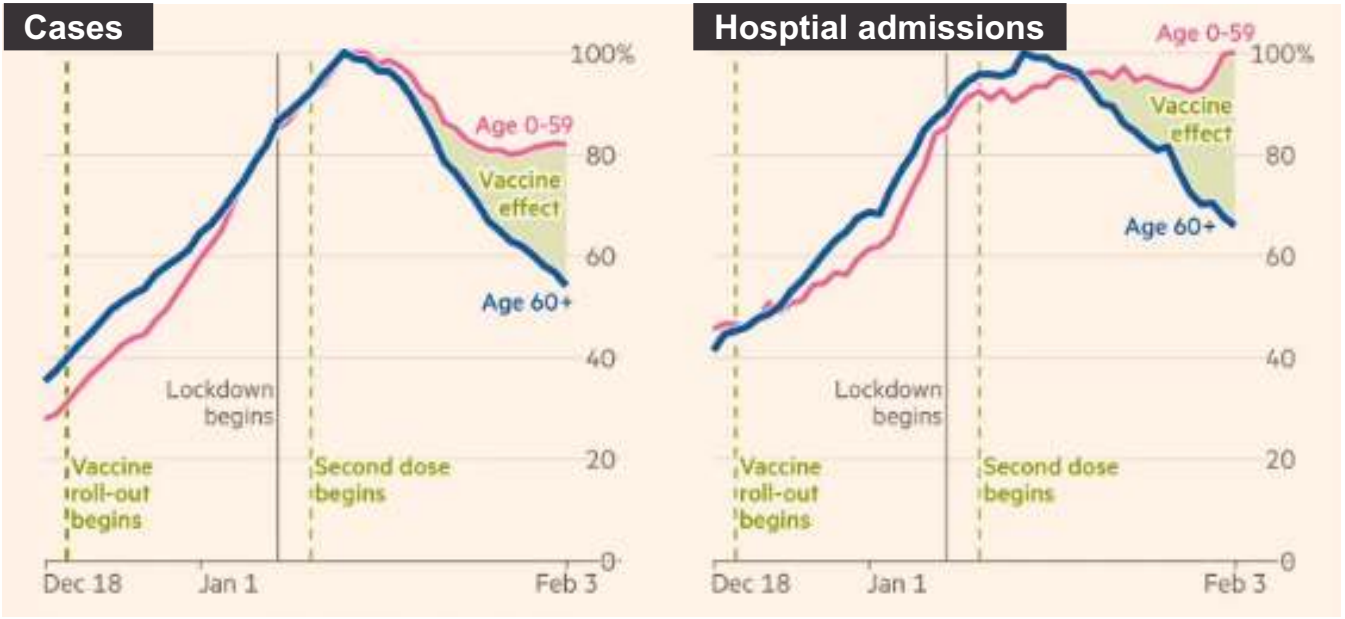
Eighty per cent of Israelis aged 60 and above had received at least their first dose of the BioNTech/Pfizer vaccine by 15 January, with mass rollout of the second dose beginning around the same time. **As of 4 February, 78 per cent of this group have now received two doses.**

Hospital admissions of those aged 60 and above have already dropped 34 per cent below mid-January levels, while admissions among **younger adults had remained flat and are now slightly higher than they were three weeks ago....**

Cases and hospital admissions are falling much more steeply among vaccinated age groups than among younger groups

Age 60+

Age 0-59



Sources: Segal et al, Weizmann Institute, Tel-Aviv University

© FT

https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-cases-drop-us-elderly-homes-c889d733d127465f0ff858156daafe40

Feb. 6

Coronavirus cases drop at US homes for elderly and infirm

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (AP) — **Coronavirus cases have dropped at U.S. nursing homes and other long-term care facilities over the past few weeks**, offering a glimmer of hope that **health officials attribute to the start of vaccinations, an easing of the post-holiday surge and better prevention, among other reasons.**

More than 153,000 **residents of the country's nursing homes and assisted living centers have died of COVID-19, accounting for 36% of the U.S. pandemic death toll**, according to the COVID Tracking Project. Many of the roughly 2 million people who live at such facilities remain cut off from loved ones because of the risk of infection. The virus still kills thousands of them weekly.

The overall trend for long-term care residents is improving, though, with fewer new cases recorded and fewer facilities reporting outbreaks. Coupled with better figures for the country overall, it's cause for optimism even if it's too early to declare victory.

"We definitely think there's hope and there's light at the end of the tunnel," said Marty Wright, who heads a nursing home trade group in West Virginia.

Nursing homes have been a priority since vaccinations began in mid-December, and the federal government says 1.5 million long-term care residents have already received at least an initial dose.

Researchers and industry leaders say they are seeing marked improvements after months in which some nursing homes lost dozens of residents to the disease and had to keep others in semi-isolation for protection. Some 2,000 nursing homes are now virus-free, or about 13% nationally, according to an industry group, and many are dealing with far fewer cases than before.
...
The American Health Care Association and National Center for Assisted Living, an industry trade organization, said Thursday that data from about 800 nursing homes where initial vaccine doses were administered in late December offered promising results. **Cases among residents fell by 48% at homes where immunizations had occurred, compared to a 21% decline at non-vaccinated facilities nearby**. Meanwhile, **cases among employees dropped by 33% at vaccinated homes, compared to 18% at non-vaccinated facilities.**

After reaching a high of almost 73,600 new weekly cases in long-term care facilities nationwide in mid-December, the number was down 31% by late January, to about 50,000 new cases per week, an Associated Press analysis found. Still, the most recent weekly count is 18% higher than the seven-day period that ended on Thanksgiving, when numbers started climbing.

The weekly count of new deaths remains stubbornly high, with a record 7,042 recorded during the seven-day span that ended Jan. 14 and only a slight decline since. By comparison, for the seven days that ended on Thanksgiving, 3,181 deaths were recorded. More encouragingly, the COVID Tracking Project found that only 251 facilities reported new outbreaks recently, compared to 1,410 in early January.

Dr. David Gifford, chief medical officer for the national association, said the numbers show signs for hope since they indicate vaccines might decrease the spread of COVID-19, a finding not shown in trials.

"If verified with additional data, this could expedite the reopening of long-term care facilities to visitors, which is vital to residents' health and wellbeing," he said in a statement.
...

Health officials say other factors are likely playing a larger role, including an ebb in the post-holiday surge, an ever-larger number of people who are immune because they've had the disease, behavioral changes and more abundant protective gear. And they caution that there are still threats lurking, including more contagious strains of the virus and a reluctance by many nursing home workers to get vaccinated....

Return to Timeline

https://www.cnn.com/2021/02/05/africa/vaccine-race-africa-intl/index.html

Feb. 7

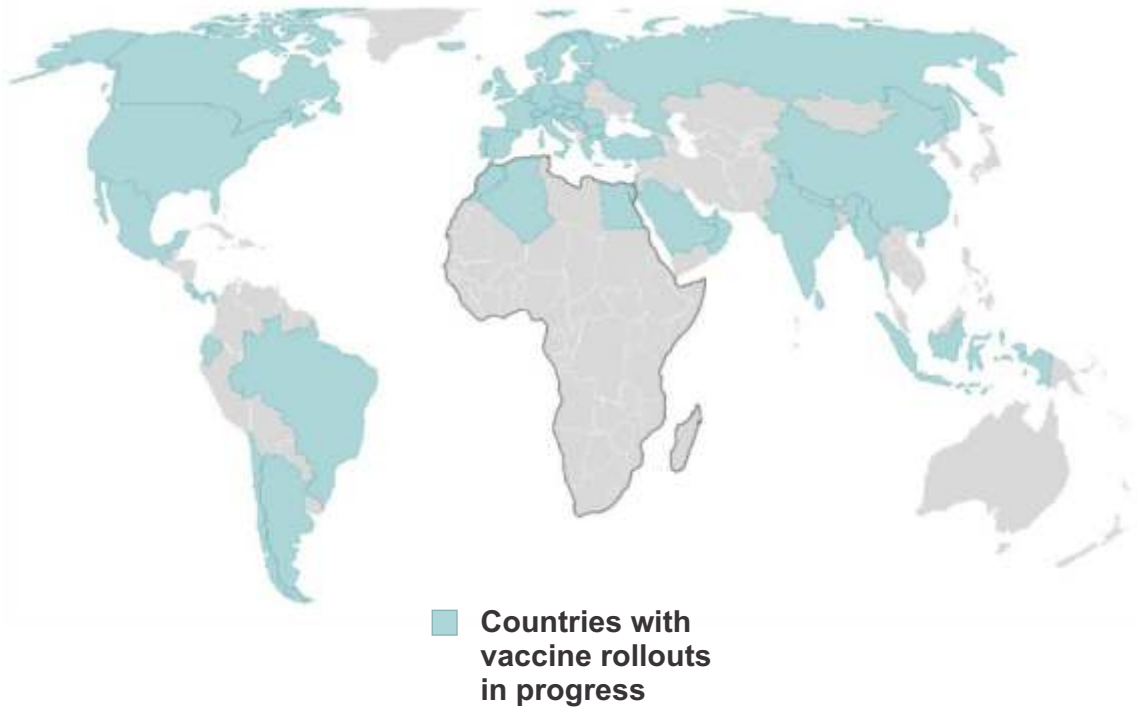
Richer countries stockpile vaccines; Africa left behind as cases surge

... African countries on the whole face a long wait in receiving Covid-19 vaccines. For example, **less than 20% of the 270 million doses first ordered by the AU will be available before June** ...

In contrast, the European Union expects member states to vaccinate 70% of their adult populations by the summer.

[The director of WHO stated] **"Until we end the Covid-19 pandemic everywhere, we won't end it anywhere"** ...

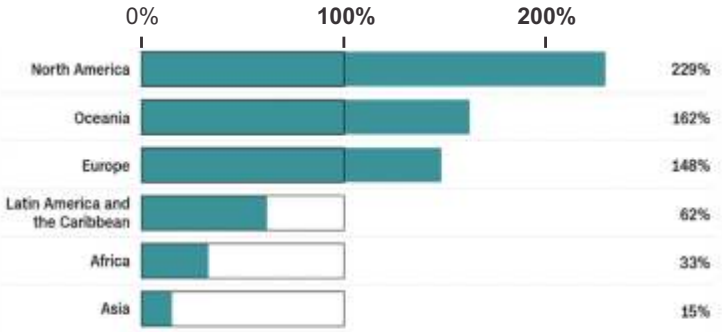
"Time is short, and the stakes could not be higher; every moment counts."



Inequity in vaccine deals

North American countries have purchased enough doses to fully vaccinate the region's population more than twice, while countries in Africa have only secured enough doses to cover a third of the continent's populations.

Share of regions' populations able to be fully vaccinated with doses bought



In addition, the global **COVAX** program has purchased enough doses to inoculate 705 million people. The doses will be distributed among 190 participating countries, with the **aim to vaccinate 20% of the population in the 92 lower income countries**.

https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/04/world/middleeast/israel-palestinians-vaccine.html

Feb. 7

Israel's vaccine success unleashes a debate on Palestinian inequities

JERUSALEM — Israel quickly became the world leader in vaccinating its population against Covid-19, but almost all Palestinian residents of the occupied West Bank are still waiting for their first doses of the inoculation.

That disparity has set off a roiling debate about Israel's responsibilities as an occupying power in one of the world's most protracted territorial feuds.

To Israel's critics, international law obligates Israel to give Palestinians access to vaccines comparable to what it offers its own citizens. But supporters of Israel's policies contend that the Palestinians assumed responsibility for health services for their population when they signed the Oslo Accords in the 1990s.

While the Palestinians' glaring vulnerability to the virus lessened somewhat this week — the Palestinian Authority officially launched a vaccination campaign by giving frontline medical workers doses received from Israel — the contrast with Israel remains striking. The disparity also reflects in part the stark inequality in access to vaccines between rich countries like Israel and other areas of the developing world.

The Palestinian vaccine campaign still lags far behind that of Israel, which with a population of about 9.2 million has already inoculated more than 3.3 million people with a first dose. They include a substantial percentage of the roughly 450,000 settlers living alongside Palestinians in the West Bank, who number between 2.5 million and three million.

It remains unclear precisely when the roughly two million Palestinians in Gaza, the blockaded enclave controlled by the militant anti-Israel group Hamas, will begin to receive vaccinations.

...

The Palestinians received their first substantial shipment of vaccines this past Monday when **Israel gave the Palestinian Authority 2,000 Moderna doses** — a measure the Israeli government approved after public health experts had recommended it. Israeli officials **said they intend to hand over an additional 3,000 doses.**

On Tuesday, the Health Ministry of the Palestinian Authority said the vaccination campaign would initially target frontline health workers and then expand to people above the age of 60 as well as those who suffer chronic illnesses.

The Palestinians received 10,000 doses of Russia's Sputnik V vaccine on Thursday. They **expect to receive 37,440 Pfizer doses in February and hundreds of thousands of AstraZeneca doses in either late February or early March through the global-sharing initiative Covax,** according to Gerald Rockenschaub, the head of the World Health Organization's mission to the Palestinians. **An additional two million doses of AstraZeneca are slated to arrive throughout March**, Palestinian officials said.

...

Advocates have pointed to the Fourth Geneva Convention, which states occupying powers hold a duty to ensure the public health of people living under occupation to "the fullest extent" possible, especially with regard to combating epidemics and diseases.

"After 50 years of occupation with no end in sight, Israel's duties go beyond offering spare doses," said Omar Shakir, Human Rights Watch director for Israel and Palestine, referring to the vaccine vials Israel delivered to the Palestinians on Monday.

Mr. Shakir emphasized that Israel must provide vaccines to the Palestinians irrespective of efforts by the Palestinian Authority to secure them independently and said it was unjustified to afford settlers greater access to vaccines than their Palestinian neighbors.

But Israeli officials have said that while Israel has an interest in ensuring the vaccination of Palestinians, many of them laborers who frequently come into contact with Israelis, it has no legal responsibility to do so...

https://apnews.com/article/pandemics-coronavirus-pandemic-africa-south-africa-coronavirus-vaccine-77fe432d044b63c4e7ba3b0017d1529d

Feb. 8

South Africa seeks new vaccine plan after halting AstraZeneca

JOHANNESBURG (AP) — South Africa is considering giving a COVID-19 vaccine that is still in the testing phase to health workers, after suspending the rollout of another shot that **preliminary data indicated is not effective at preventing mild to moderate illness from the variant dominant in the country.**

The country is scrambling to come up with a new vaccination strategy after it halted use of the AstraZeneca vaccine — which is cheaper and easier to handle than others and which many had hoped would be crucial to combatting the pandemic in developing countries. **Among the possibilities being considered: mixing the AstraZeneca vaccine with another one and giving Johnson & Johnson's single-dose vaccine**, **which has not yet been authorized for use anywhere, to 100,000 health care workers while monitoring its efficacy against the variant.**

South Africa's inoculation strategy is being watched globally because the variant first detected and now dominant here is spreading in more than 30 countries. Officials say this form of the virus is more contagious, and evidence is emerging that it may be more virulent; recent studies have also shown it can infect people who have survived the original form of the virus.

After a second surge, cases and deaths in South Africa have begun to fall recently, but it is still battling one of Africa's most severe outbreaks, with more than 46,000 deaths. It is worried that another spike will come in May or June, when the Southern Hemisphere country heads into its winter.

So far, early **results from trials of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine showed it offers less protection against the variant than the original disease but is still highly effective at preventing severe and fatal cases,** according to Dr. Glenda Gray, director of the South Africa Medical Research Council, who led the South African part of the global trial. A Novavax vaccine candidate has shown similar results.

"We can't wait. We already have good local data," Gray said, stressing that clinical trials show that it is safe. She added that South Africa is making urgent plans to "roll it out and evaluate it in the field."

"Our scientists must get together and quickly figure out what approach we're going to use," Health Minister Zweli Mhkize said Sunday night, announcing the suspension of the use of the AstraZeneca vaccine, which is currently the only one available in South Africa. Deliveries of others, including the one made by Pfizer and BioNTech, are expected soon.

The suspension threw South Africa's vaccination plans into disarray just one week after the country received its first 1 million doses of the vaccine. It came after the early results of a small clinical trial showed that the shot did not prevent mild to moderate cases of COVID-19 in young adults, according to an announcement by the University of Witwatersrand, which conducted the test.

The **AstraZeneca study involved 2,000 healthy volunteers with an average age of 31 and showed just 22% were protected against mild to moderate cases of the disease.**

Experts say **the vaccine may still prevent against severe disease — and that would go a long way in slowing the pandemic and avoiding hospitals from becoming overwhelmed with patients.**

"Vaccines that are effective against the more severe forms of disease may not affect milder forms, so there is optimism that severe disease will still be prevented by vaccines," said Peter Openshaw, a professor of experimental medicine at Imperial College London.

But the results were disappointing enough that South African officials decided to postpone the rollout of the vaccine, which was supposed to be given to front-line healthcare workers starting in mid-February.

The preliminary study has not been peer-reviewed — the gold standard in scientific studies — but was still "a reality check," said Professor Shabir...

Return to Timeline

https://twitter.com/yuvharpaz/status/1358857105537708035

Feb. 9

A report from SMC [Sourasky Medical Center in Israel] **shows that the majority of COVID19 hospitalizations are people not vaccinated**

Materials translated to English. In parentheses- floor(N) from Twitter post by @YuvHarpaz

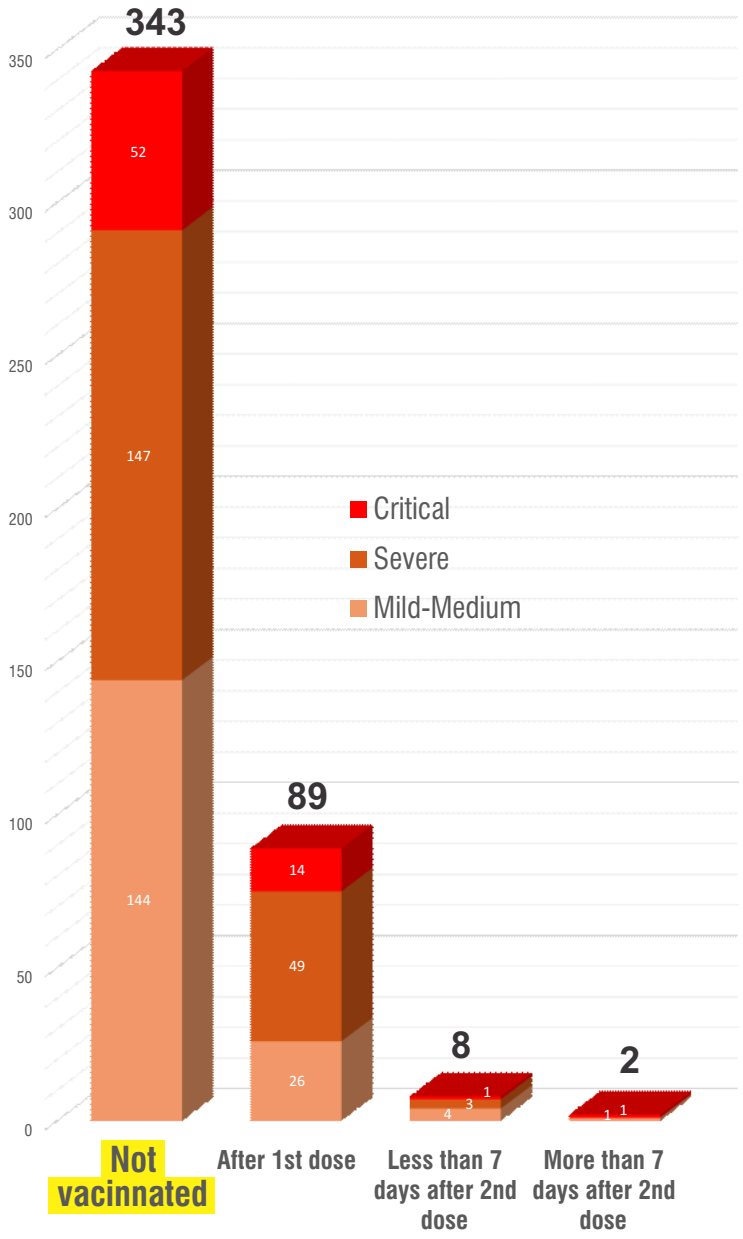
Total	More than 7 days from dose II	Less than 7 days from dose II	After dose I	Not vaccinated	Condition
175	(0.5) 1	(2.2) 4	(14) 26	(82) 144	**Mild-Medium**
199	(0) 0	(1.5) 3	(24) 49	(73) 147	**Severe**
68	* (1.4) 1	(1.4) 1	(20) 14	(76) 52	**Critical**
442	(2) 2	(1.8) 8	(20) 89	(77) 343	**Total**

Diagnosed 4 days after dose II *

Original Twitter post by @LittleMoiz

https://twitter.com/tasmc1/status/1358785091355500547

SMC COVID19 hospitalizations since Jan. 1, 2021



Return to Timeline

https://covid19-projections.com/path-to-herd-immunity/

Select live link for interactive chart

Feb. 10

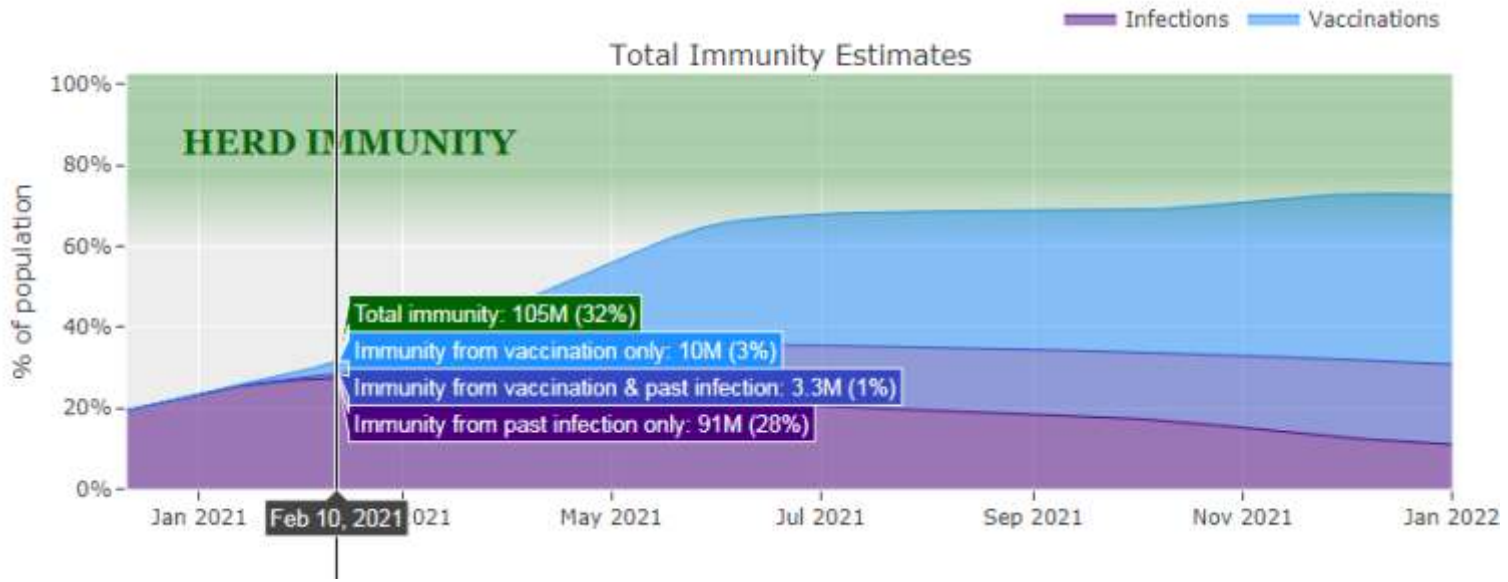
Path to herd immunity - US

COVID-19 projections is a site built and run by, Youyang Gu, " [a] remarkable 27-year-old data scientist who did some of the best modeling and most accurate projections throughout the pandemic, and is still at it for vaccines/herd immunity" (Eric Topol's description)

Gu describes himself as "Presenter of unbiased takes. Realist. Data scientist. @MIT '15."

https://youyanggu.com/

more about Gu



Summary

- The US will be **near COVID-19 herd immunity by summer 2021 (Jun-Aug 2021)**. At a high level, herd immunity is a concept in which a population can be protected from a virus if enough people possess immunity. Current accepted estimates for the herd immunity threshold range from 60-90% of the population.
- Due to vaccine hesitancy and the delayed arrival of a children's vaccine, it is possible that we do not reach the levels required for herd immunity in 2021. Nevertheless, herd immunity is not a hard threshold, and being close to herd immunity may be sufficient to prevent large outbreaks.
- At the time herd immunity is near, roughly half of the immunity will be achieved through natural infection, and the other half will be achieved through vaccination.
- New infections may become minimal before herd immunity is reached. But due to imported cases and localized clusters, it is unlikely that new infections will drop to zero until at least 2022.
- Deaths may drop to low levels even earlier (May-Jul 2021), in part due to a vaccine distribution strategy that initially prioritizes high-risk individuals. Once deaths fall to minimal levels, we may see a relaxation of restrictions.
- Summarizing the above findings, our best estimate of a complete "return to normal" in the US is mid-summer 2021 (June/July 2021).
- We estimate roughly 60-80% of the US population (~240 million) will receive at least one dose of the vaccine by the end of 2021, with children being the last group to receive it (fall 2021 or later).
- We estimate around 30-40% of the US population (~120 million) will have been infected by the SARS-CoV-2 virus by the end of 2021. That is an additional 55 million infections since mid-December 2020.
- This translates to a final US COVID-19 death toll of roughly 625,000 (±100,000) reported deaths, or ~325,000 additional deaths since mid-December 2020.

https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2021/02/herd-immunity-might-be-impossible-even-vaccines/617973/

Feb. 10

Never reach herd immunity? Vaccines can still help end the pandemic

... Even if herd immunity remains theoretically within reach, **15 percent of Americans say they will never get a COVID-19 vaccine, making that threshold all the harder to hit.**

The role of COVID-19 vaccines may ultimately be more akin to that of the flu shot: reducing hospitalizations and deaths by mitigating the disease's severity. The COVID-19 vaccines as a whole are excellent at preventing severe disease, and this level of protection so far seems to hold even against a new coronavirus variant found in South Africa that is causing reinfections. This, rather than herd immunity, is a more achievable goal for the vaccines. "My picture of the endgame is we will, as fast as we can, start taking people out of harm's way" through vaccination, says Marc Lipsitch, an epidemiologist at Harvard. **The virus still circulates, but fewer people die.**

At the same time, we don't need to hit the herd-immunity threshold before transmission begins to slow. With less transmission, fewer people will get exposed, and if those who do are vaccinated, even fewer will become seriously sick or die. The pandemic will slowly fade as hospitalizations and deaths inch down.

...

The **variants are the newest and potentially most pressing challenge to herd immunity.** As the virus evolves, our vaccines and our immunity will continually have to catch up. "The trillion-dollar question for where we go from here is this relationship we have with the variants," says Michael Osterholm, the director of the Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy at the University of Minnesota.

For about a year, the coronavirus seemed to gain mutations at a steady and unspectacular rate. But recently, new variants have accumulated an unusually large number of mutations, and worrisome new data are now coming out every week.

The **South Africa** and **Brazil** variants, which are the **most concerning for immunity, share several mutations, including a key one called E484K.**

...

All of these data are pointing in the same direction: **Immunity, whether from vaccines or from prior infection, is weaker against these variants.** However, the **U.K. variant, which is significantly more transmissible than earlier iterations of the virus, has not been linked to significant reductions in vaccine efficacy. But scientists are beginning to find E484K in some samples of the U.K. variant too.** In multiple infection hot spots around the world, the coronavirus is independently converging on some of the same key mutations.

These same mutations keep popping up probably because they are the lowest-hanging fruit. They are relatively simple genetic changes. Other mutations that confer certain advantages to the virus may exist but require more dramatic genetic changes, says Benhur Lee, a virologist at the Icahn School of Medicine. Given enough time and enough opportunities to replicate, the virus may sometimes be lucky enough to reach higher up the tree. But "if you don't give it a chance, it takes even longer," Lee told me. **Slowing down the coronavirus's evolution requires preventing infections whenever and however we can.**

This needs to happen globally. Right now, wealthy countries have largely bought out the vaccine supply. Even if they are able to vaccinate large segments of their population by the end of 2021, the virus will keep circulating elsewhere and keep gaining mutations, eventually evolving so much that the original vaccines may become even less effective. **Rampant spread in unvaccinated countries may very well seed new variants that come back to cause new outbreaks in vaccinated countries.** As my colleague James Hamblin has written, "The countries that hoard the vaccine without a plan to help others do so at their own peril." Taking away the virus's chance to acquire other advantageous mutations means reducing its spread everywhere. Vaccines can be updated against any new variants, but it will be a constant race to catch up.

...

Think of immunity from vaccines not as an on-off switch but as a dampener on the virus's ability to replicate inside you. There are four important thresholds, from easiest to hardest to achieve: protection against severe symptoms, protection against any symptoms, protection ...

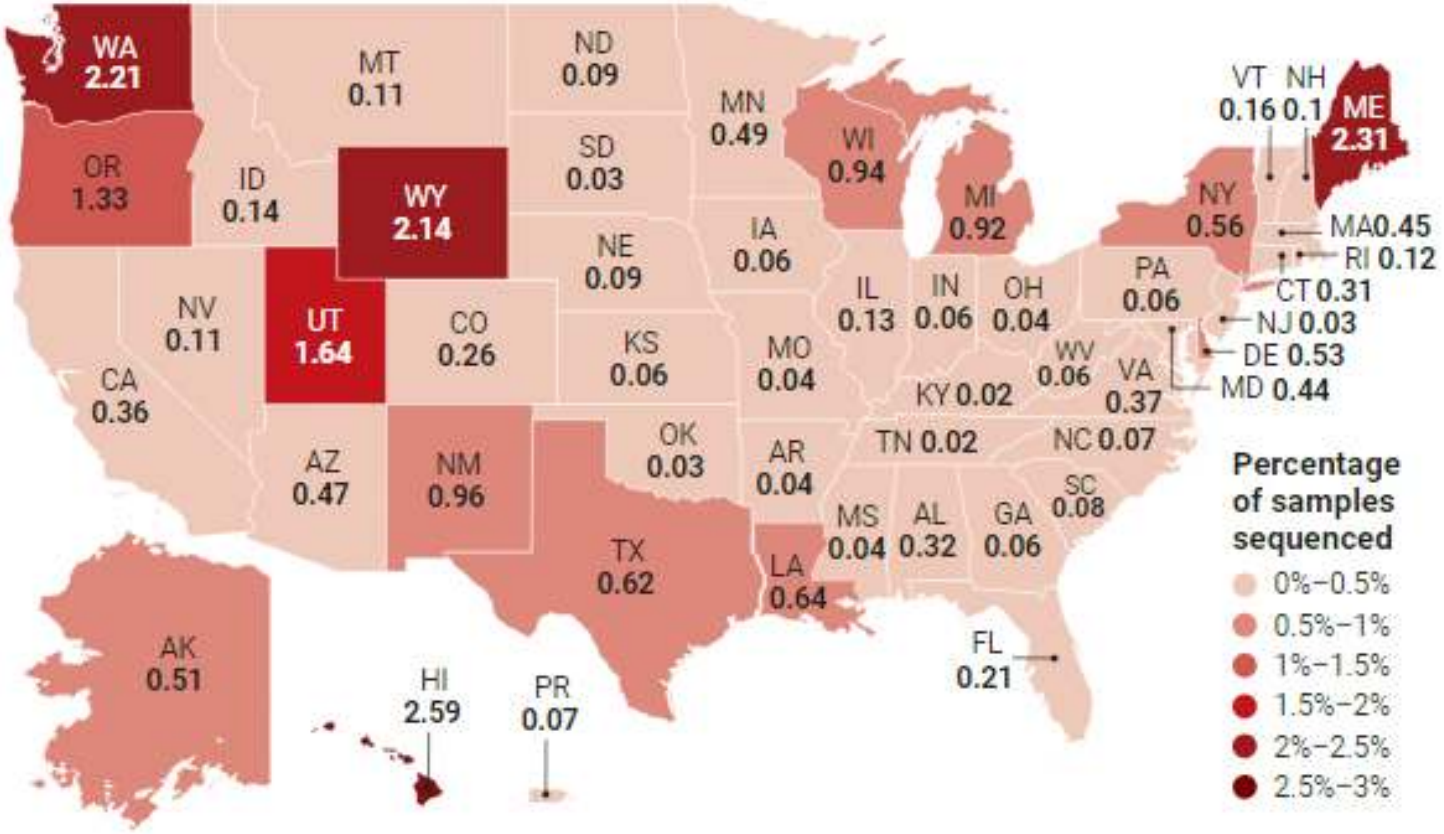
Return to Timeline

https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2021/02/us-rushes-fill-void-viral-sequencing-worrisome-coronavirus-variants-spread

Feb. 10

U.S. rushes to fill void in viral sequencing as coronavirus variants spread

... **Scientists are calling for sequencing at least 5% of positive cases** nationally, a target not currently reached by any state.



(MAP) K. FRANKLIN/*SCIENCE*; (DATA) GISAID; JOHNS HOPKINS CORONAVIRUS RESOURCE CENTER

Return to Timeline

https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/health/coronavirus-variant-tracker.html

Select live link for interactive charts and a lot more graphics

Feb. 11

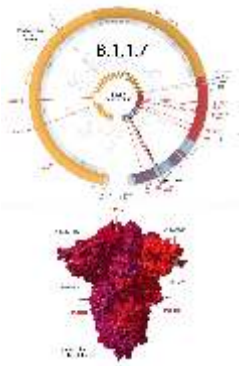
Coronavirus Variants and Mutations

Summary prepared by Dr. Eric Topol

https://twitter.com/EricTopol/status/1359543802407440385?s=20

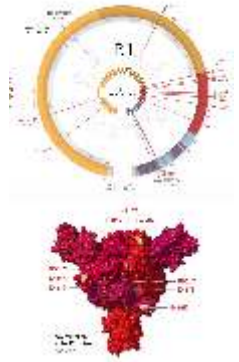
	B.1.1.7	B.1.351	P.1
Alternate name	501Y.V1	501Y.V2	501Y.V3
Country identified	United Kingdom	South Africa	Brazil
Mutations	23	21	17
Spike mutations	8	9	10
Key RBD, spike mutations beyond N501Y in all	E69/70 deletion, P681H 144Y deletion, A570D	E484K, K417N, orf1b deletion	E484K, K417T, orf1b deletion
Other mutations, including N-terminal	T7161, S982A, D1118H	L18F, D80A, D215G, Δ242-244, R264I, A701V	L18F, T20N, P26S, D138Y, R190S, H655Y, T10271
Transmissibility Δ	>50% increased	Not established	Not established
Lethality Δ	Not resolved	?	?
Vaccine efficacy reduction	Partial; Novavax (96->86%); Astra Zeneca (84->75%)	Yes Partial resistance In 3 vaccine trials	Likely Partial resistance
Countries reported (not = to local transmission)	75	32	11
US States reported	33	3	2

UK



South Africa

Brazil



Return to Timeline

https://www.bioworld.com/articles/503429-fda-grants-eua-for-abcellera-junshi-lilly-covid-19-treatment

Feb. 11

FDA grants EUA for Abcellera-Junshi-Lilly COVID-19 treatment

Another **monoclonal antibody therapy** has entered the pandemic fray with the FDA granting emergency use authorization (EUA) for bamlanivimab (LY-CoV555) 700 mg and etesevimab (JS016 or LY-CoV016) **1,400 mg as a cocktail for treating mild to moderate COVID-19 in patients aged 12 and up at high risk for progressing to severe COVID-19 and/or hospitalization.**

Three companies, Abcellera Biologics Inc., Eli Lilly and Co. and Junshi Biosciences Co. Ltd., had a hand in the development. Abcellera and Lilly discovered and developed bamlanivimab while Lilly licensed etesevimab from Shanghai-based Junshi, which developed the recombinant fully human monoclonal antibody with the Institute of Microbiology, Chinese Academy of Science.

The authorization follows the EUA granted to Regeneron Pharmaceutical Inc. and Roche Holding AG's monoclonal antibody cocktail REGEN-COV (casirivimab and imdevimab) on Nov. 21. **The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Defense said it will purchase all finished doses supplied by June 30, as many as 1.25 million doses, for up to $2.625 billion.**

... There are 100,000 doses available now and another 150,000 doses will be manufactured by the end of the first quarter of 2021. Lilly said it expects to manufacture up to a million doses by mid-2021.

...The Abcellera-Lilly-Junshi cocktail is to be **administered as a single I.V. to patients who test positive and within 10 days of showing symptoms.** The FDA, in the EUA, did step away from its previously authorized 60-minute infusion time to tab bamlanivimab dosing alone at 16 minutes and bamlanivimab and etesevimab together at 21 minutes.

Etesevimab binds to the SARS-CoV-2 surface spike protein receptor binding domain, blocking the virus from binding to the ACE2 host cell surface receptor. Bamlanivimab is designed to neutralize the virus by blocking viral attachment and cell entry.

The EUA is based on phase III data, released in late January, from the phase III Blaze-1 study, which **met its primary and key secondary endpoints by decreasing the risk of hospitalizations or death by 70%. The clinical trial also showed improvement in the change from baseline to day seven in SARS-CoV-2 viral load, time to sustained symptom resolution and COVID-related hospitalization. Ten deaths involved patients taking placebo.**

Bamlanivimab already had an EUA, granted in November, for treating mild to moderate disease in high-risk patients. The authorization was based on Lilly's phase II Blaze-1 study, a randomized, double blind, placebo-controlled investigation of outpatients with mild to moderate COVID-19. Viral load limits were reduced, according to the data, along with rates of symptoms and hospitalization.

MAb troubles

In addition to battling the clock for infusion times, there are other issues surrounding monoclonal antibodies for treating COVID-19. The **FDA, in granting the November EUA, noted monoclonal antibodies "may be associated with worse clinical outcomes" when administered to hospitalized COVID-19 patients needing high-flow oxygen or mechanical ventilation. The FDA also warned about hypersensitivity that includes anaphylaxis and infusion-related reactions in patients.**

The U.S. government bought 300,000 doses and said American patients will have no out-of-pocket costs though health care facilities may charge to administer the treatment. ...

Return to Timeline

http://www.pharmatimes.com/news/who_panel_recommends_azoxfords_covid-19_vaccine_1363139#:~:text=The%20World%20Health%20Organization%20(WHO,of%20the%20virus%20are%20circulating.

Feb. 11

WHO panel recommends AZ/Oxford's COVID-19 vaccine

The World Health Organization (WHO) has recommended the wide use of **AstraZeneca** (AZ) and **Oxford** University's COVID-19 vaccine even in countries where variants of the virus are circulating.

The interim recommendations, made by the WHO's **Strategic Advisory Group of Experts on Immunisation (SAGE)** panel, detail that the vaccine **can be widely used**, including in people aged over 65, and **should be given in a two-dose regimen.**

The SAGE panel also **recommended that each dose should be given with an interval of around eight to 12 weeks.**

Although **early data from clinical trials in South Africa showed the jab offers 'minimal protection' against the variant discovered in this country, the WHO still recommended use of the vaccine in locations were this strain is circulating...**

https://www.moneycontrol.com/news/coronavirus/what-made-who-back-az-oxford-vaccine-despite-concerns-of-low-efficacy-to-new-variants-and-those-aged-65-and-above-6494921.html

What will be the impact of WHO's recommendation on COVID-19 vaccination?

The WHO recommendation **will help clear concerns among many countries** about using the AstraZeneca-Oxford vaccine in the backdrop of new SARS-CoV-2 variants and limited data on people above 65.

COVID-19 vaccine of AstraZeneca **has already been granted conditional marketing authorisation or emergency use in over 50 countries, including India. It's a vaccine that's been widely in use, given its availability, affordable price of less than $3 per dose, and ease of logistics.**

As per the interim plan of **COVAX, about 336 million doses of AstraZeneca-Oxford vaccine will be available from February end.**

About 240 million of those doses will be supplied by Serum Institute of India (SII), which has a license with AstraZeneca to manufacture and distribute the vaccine in India and other low- and middle-income countries.

COVAX facility, which is co-led by WHO, Gavi, the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) and the UN Children's Fund, **plans to cover at least three percent of the total population of 145 countries in the first half of the year, enough to protect the most vulnerable groups, such as healthcare workers.**

In comparison, 1.2 million doses of Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine is available for distribution under COVAX. Pfizer vaccine is expensive and requires -70-degree centigrade cold chain to store the vaccine. India too has deployed the AstraZeneca vaccine for internal consumption and for giving it to neighbouring and friendly countries as part of her vaccine diplomacy.

Return to Timeline

https://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2021-02/a-spu021121.php

Feb. 12

Study: UK vaccination program on target and will very quickly reduce deaths

A new modelling study https://associationofanaesthetists-publications.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/anae.15442 shows that the UK's coronavirus vaccination program is already reducing daily deaths. However, reductions of hospital and intensive care (ICU) admissions will likely take several weeks longer, with large reductions seen by the end of March and continuing into April.

...**[The UK] ...aims to have vaccinated close to 15 million people** in the first four priority groups **by next Monday, February 15**. The latest data suggests the government will meet and possibly exceed this target. ...

...

The **model predicts** that with most of groups 1- 4 vaccinated, **daily deaths will reduce by some 88% by the second half of March**. At the same time, **hospital admissions will have fallen by around two thirds (66%) and ICU admissions by only a little more than one third (36%)**.

The authors also highlight the benefits that will be seen if high vaccination rates are continued into the next three priority groups: group 5 (all those aged 65 and over), group 6 (adults aged 16 to 65 years in an at-risk group) and group 7 (all those aged 60 years and over). The authors say: "Vaccinating through groups 5-7 in addition to groups 1-4 will have a substantial impact on all three factors: reducing deaths by 96%, hospital admissions by more than 80% and ICU admissions by almost two thirds."

At the current rate of progress, most people in groups 1-7 will have received their first dose by the end of March, so these reductions will be seen in the second half of April.

The study provides some support for the UK government strategy of delaying the second dose of vaccine, as within approximately three months half of the adult population can be vaccinated with their first dose. The authors say that this strategy **"will optimise the impact of vaccination on deaths and healthcare service pressures"**. They add that the data generally supports the government's organisation of priority groups, and highlight that the decision to vaccinate health and social care workers early will support the hospitals and care services that are needed over a prolonged period as the pandemic is brought under control.

In addition, r**apidly vaccinating groups 1-7 will reduce viral circulation in the community and this may reduce spread among the unvaccinated.** The authors explain: "This in turn **could reduce the evolutionary pressure on the virus, thereby reducing the risks of emergence of higher risk viral strains** including those that may be able to evade the vaccines developed so far."

...

Also, there has been extensive discussion in recent weeks about how countries can best share their vaccines to help shortfalls in other countries. The authors say: **"Vaccination is a global imperative and once the UK has substantially reduced its COVID-19-related deaths, hospital and ICU admissions, it may also be rational and moral to consider whether UK stocks of vaccine might also be redistributed to support the global attempts at vaccination** in countries with lower access to vaccines." ...

Return to Timeline

https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/worldwide-graphs/#total-deaths

Select live link for current number

Feb. 13

Death toll from coronavirus tops 2,500,000

Return to Timeline

https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2021/02/should-you-mix-and-match-covid-19-vaccines-scientists-are-seeking-answers

Feb. 13

Should you mix and match COVID-19 vaccines? Scientists are seeking answers

With **nine vaccines** now showing they can powerfully prevent severe illness and death from COVID-19—**and vaccines in short supply**—researchers are mulling an issue that, even a few months ago, was only hypothetical: Should people mix and match vaccines that require two shots?

If some combinations work, they may provide needed flexibility whenever production of a vaccine falters, as often happens. And t**here's even a chance that mixing doses of two different vaccines may boost the protection** against COVID-19.

One **mixed vaccine trial is already underway**: It is examining matching a dose of the **Sputnik V vaccine** made by Russia's Gamaleya Research Institute of Epidemiology and Microbiology **with a booster dose of a similar vaccine made by AstraZeneca and the University of Oxford**. A **second trial, examining a combination of the AstraZeneca-Oxford and Pfizer-BioNTech vaccines, which mixes two different technologies**, **is just getting started, and others are under discussion.**

Until these trials produce results, however, health officials are urging caution. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has discouraged people from mixing vaccines unless there are "exceptional situations," such as a shortage of the vaccine they received first because of production or distribution hiccups. In the United Kingdom, Public Health England has taken a similar position.

But the scarcity of COVID-19 vaccines—and the urgency of stepping up vaccination rates—is pushing the mix-and-match issue to the fore. "**As we have more products that are the interchangeable, that's going to have a huge implications for the conduct of this mass vaccination campaign in a setting of uncertain supplies**," ...

...

Mixing and matching COVID-19 vaccines raises several potential complications. One is regulatory: What if, say, only one is authorized for emergency use? Another is immunological: Whereas some vaccines share the same underlying technology platforms—such as the messenger RNA technology used by both the Pfizer-BioNTech collaboration and Moderna—others do not.

...

The **United Kingdom**'s National Immunisation Schedule Evaluation Consortium **is moving ahead with an elaborate mix-and-match study of the AstraZeneca-Oxford and Pfizer-BioNTech vaccines. It has eight different strategies that will involve giving the vaccines in different orders and at different intervals.** Van-Tam hopes the trial will produce "greater insight into how we can use vaccines to stay on top of this nasty disease."

Gellin, for one, is frustrated that more mix-and-match trials aren't already up and running. "It's got to be a top priority for someone," he says. But Gellin concedes the regulatory issues are daunting. "This is something that companies should do, and maybe they'll be able to do it," he says. "But they'll probably require more lawyers than volunteers."

Return to Timeline

https://www.thelancet.com/action/showPdf?pii=S0140-6736%2821%2900306-8

Select live link for
"Challenges in ensuring global access to COVID-19 vaccines: production, affordability, allocation, and deployment

Feb. 13

Summary of the characteristics of leading vaccine candidates

	Development and production			Affordability	Allocation		Deployment	
	Authorised by a stringent regulatory body or WHO*	Efficacy in phase 3 trials†	Estimated production capacity for 2021	Lowest price offered (US$ per course)‡	Percentage of doses pre-purchased by HICs for 2021 (based on known deals)	Supply agreement with COVAX§	Number of doses	Storage requirement during transport
AnGes with Osaka University	-	-	-	-	-	No	2	-70°C
Anhui Zhifei with CAMS	-	-	300 m	-	-	No	2 or 3	2-8°C
AstraZeneca with Oxford University	Yes	62%¶	3 bn	$5	27%	Yes	2	2-8°C
Bharat Biotech	No	-	700 m	$6	0%	No	2	2-8°C
Biological E	-	-	-	-	-	No	2	2-8°C
BioNTech with Pfizer	Yes	95%	2 bn	$14	77%	Yes	2	-70°C
CAMS with IMB	-	-	-	-	-	No	2	2-8°C
CanSino	-	-	320 m‖	-	0%	No	1	2-8°C
Clover Pharmaceuticals with Dynavax	-	-	1 bn	-	-	No	2	2-8°C
Covaxx with Nebraska University	-	-	1 bn	-	0%	No	2	2-8°C
CureVac	-	-	300 m	$24	100%	No	2	5°C
Gamaleya	Yes	92%	1 bn	$6	0%**	No	2	-18°C
Inovio	-	-	100 m	-	-	No	2	2-8°C
Johnson & Johnson	-	66%††	1 bn‖	$9	38%	Yes	1††	2-8°C
Medicago	-	-	80 m	-	100%	No	2	2-8°C
Moderna	Yes	94%	1 bn	$31	97%	No	2	-20°C
Novavax	-	89%††§§	2 bn	$6	31%	Yes	2	2-8°C
RIBSP	No	-	60 m	-	-	No	2	2-8°C
Sanofi with GlaxoSmithKline	-	-	-	$19	73%	Yes	2	2-8°C
SII with Max Planck Institute	-	-	-	-	-	No	-	-50°C to -15°C
Sinopharm with Beijing Institute	Yes	79%††	1 bn	$62	8%	No	2	2-8°C
Sinopharm with Wuhan Institute	No	-	600 m	$62	8%	No	2	2-8°C
Sinovac	No	50-91%††¶¶	1 bn	$21	18%	No	2	Room temperature
SK Biosciences	-	-	-	-	-	No	-	2-8°C
University of Hong Kong	-	-	-	-	-	No	-	-50°C to -15°C
Vector Institute	No	-	11 m	-	-	No	2	2-8°C

...
Candidates shown in this figure have been approved or authorised on an emergency basis for human use in one or more countries, are in phase 3 clinical testing, or are under contract with CEPI or the COVAX Facility, as of Feb 3, 2021.

Where there are no entries, either the data are unavailable or it is too early to know (eg, for vaccines in the early stages of development).
....

Return to Timeline

https://www.helix.com/pages/helix-covid-19-surveillance-dashboard ← Select live link to access interactive dashboards updated weekly

Feb. 14

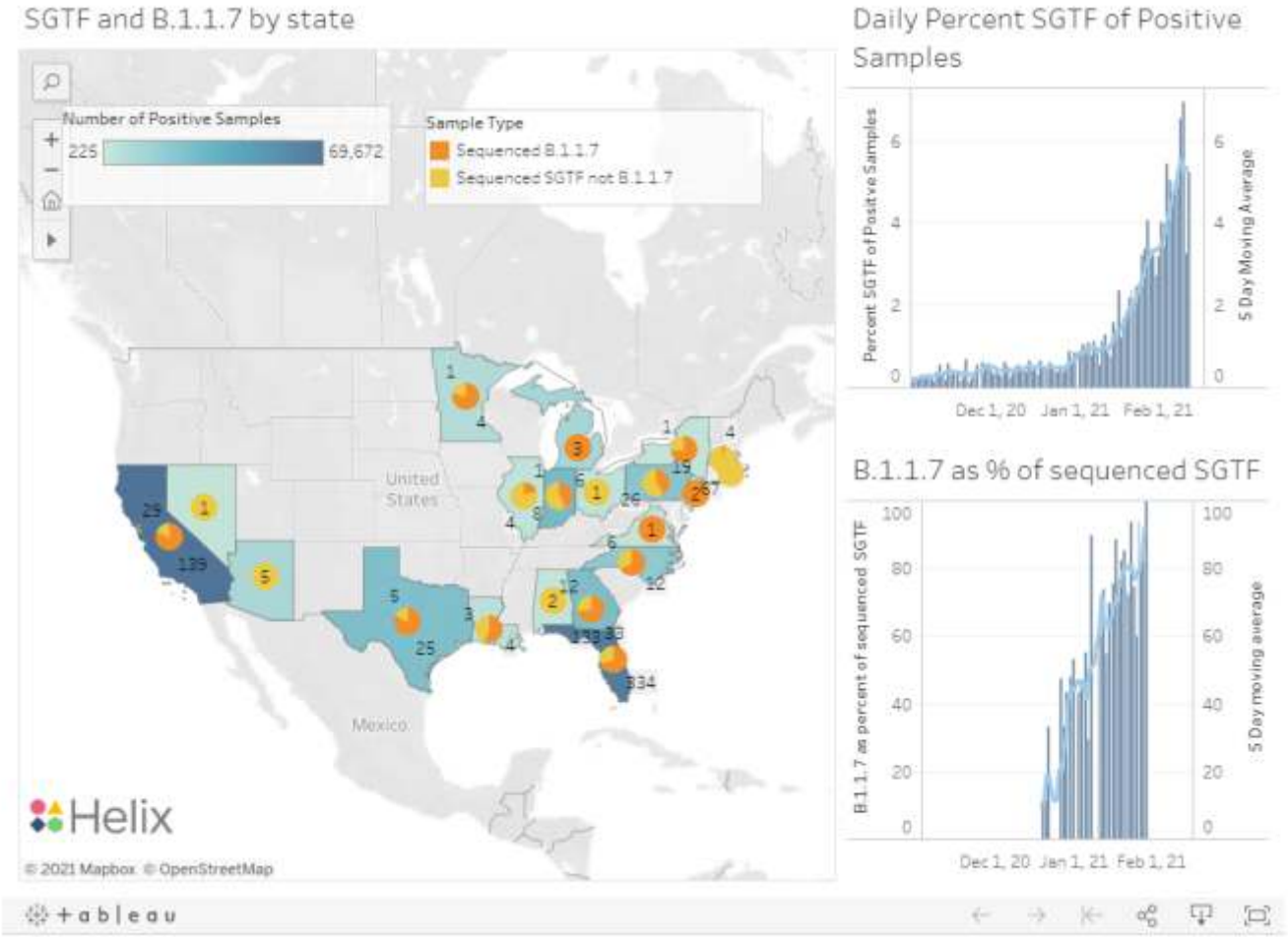
The B.1.1.7 [UK] strain major challenge ahead for US

as the basis of US covid-19 infections, is now ~5% overall with much geographic heterogeneity. **With higher infectious and virulence properties, it represents our major challenge ahead**

https://twitter.com/EricTopol/status/1360728255456706560

Key Trends

- The number of Helix-identified B.1.1.7 cases has been **steadily increasing**
- Most of these cases have been clustered in specific areas – including California and Florida **[now identified in 37 states, but likely in all** - select live link at top of page 124 of this document for current number]
- Through contact tracing efforts, however, we know that **many of these cases have involved individuals with no recent history of international travel** – indicating it is spreading throughout communities



Return to Timeline

https://youtu.be/QMEksFyzrzs ← Link to YouTube video

Feb. 15

A Visual Guide to the New Coronavirus Variants (from Scientific American)

The SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus seems to be suddenly acquiring mutations at a rapid rate. The most worrying variants, first discovered in South Africa and Brazil, increase the virus's contagiousness and may even help it evade the human immune system. These characteristics are helping the new variants outcompete the original virus, allowing them to spread quickly around the world.

Viruses, including SARS-CoV-2, are constantly evolving and acquiring mutations that don't affect the virus much. **The reason public health experts are concerned is that the new mutations improve the virus's spike protein, which helps the pathogen enter cells and is the target of most vaccines.**

If the spike protein evolves sufficiently, the virus may eventually be able to reinfect individuals who have already had COVID-19 or been vaccinated against it.

But scientists say it will likely be years before the vaccine stops working entirely—if it ever does. In the meantime, social distancing remains the best way to fight the new mutants. After all, the more viruses that exist in the world, the greater the chance that one will evolve a dangerous mutation.

In this video, [Scientific American] explains what the new variants actually are, how they arise and spread, and what they could mean for the future of our ability to vaccinate ourselves against the virus.

Return to Timeline

https://www.washingtonpost.com/weather/2021/02/15/texas-oklahoma-record-cold/

Feb. 15

Deadly cold snap shuts down central U.S. Texas is ground zero

A severe cold snap has turned the central and southern parts of the country into an extension of the Arctic, with **dangerously low temperatures not seen in decades** and a blast of snow and ice which has shut down population centers in multiple states.

The excessive cold has sent energy demand skyrocketing. In Texas, 4.3 million customers were without electricity as of 8:45 p.m. Eastern, according to poweroutage.us, ahead of what was expected to be one of the state's coldest nights on record, with most areas falling to the single digits or lower.
...
For the first time, the entire state of Texas had been placed under a winter storm warning Sunday. These warnings for hazardous amounts of ice and snow expanded Monday to cover all of Arkansas and most of Louisiana, Mississippi, and western and northern Alabama, while extending northeast through much of the Tennessee and Ohio valleys, and interior Northeast.

In the next 36 hours, more snow, sleet and ice is likely to fall from Oklahoma to New Hampshire, with a foot and a half of snow possible in Little Rock, Ark. and around 10 inches in Chicago.
...
Farther north, wind chills early Monday plunged as low as **minus-40 and minus-50 in parts of Nebraska, Kansas and Colorado.**

Widespread power outages

In Texas, the millions of power outages were tied to record-high demand, an electricity grid that is independent from surrounding states, low natural gas supplies, along with sky-high prices and reduced output from the state's numerous wind turbines, Oncor, Texas' largest electricity utility, which serves 10 million customers, said Monday morning that electricity supply shortfalls are forcing much longer power outages than originally expected. "Outages due to this electric emergency could last for hours & we ask you to be prepared," it wrote.
...
Oklahoma Gas and Electric Company, the [Oklahoma's] largest utility, also announced Monday it implemented intermittent controlled service interruptions — an unprecedented measure for the company. The blackouts were in effect for about two hours Monday but may return depending on the utility's capacity, spokesman Brian Alford said.
...
Extreme weather amid pandemic

Among other things, the cold weather has effectively frozen efforts to vaccinate people from the coronavirus.

As people who qualify for the vaccine have long-awaited their first or second dose, **several cities and counties in Texas and Tennessee reported they had shut down their inoculation sites, canceling appointments. For some, it's unclear when those appointments will become available again. Texas officials said that shipments of the vaccine from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention were put "on hold," due to the weather.**

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/india-dramatic-fall-coronavirus-cases-199585f8d5cb023abe241c4c463d88ce

Feb. 16

India's dramatic fall in virus cases leaves experts stumped

NEW DELHI (AP) — When the coronavirus pandemic took hold in India, there were fears it would sink the fragile health system of the world's second-most populous country. Infections climbed dramatically for months and at one point India looked like it might overtake the United States as the country with the highest case toll.

But **infections began to plummet in September**, and now the country is reporting about 11,000 new cases a day, compared to a peak of nearly 100,000, leaving experts perplexed.

They have suggested **many possible explanations** for the sudden drop — seen in almost every region — including that some areas of the country may have reached **herd immunity** or that **Indians may have some preexisting protection from the virus.**

The Indian government has also partly attributed the dip in cases to **mask-wearing, which is mandatory in public in India** and violations draw hefty fines in some cities. But experts have noted the situation is more complicated since the decline is uniform even though mask compliance is flagging in some areas.
...
India, like other countries, misses many infections, and **there are questions about how it's counting virus deaths**. But the strain on the country's hospitals has also declined in recent weeks, a further indication the virus's spread is slowing. When recorded cases crossed 9 million in November, official figures showed nearly 90% of all critical care beds with ventilators in New Delhi were full. On Thursday, 16% of these beds were occupied.

That success can't be attributed to vaccinations since India only began administering shots in January — but as more people get a vaccine, the outlook should look even better, though experts are also concerned about variants identified in many countries that appear to be more contagious and render some treatments and vaccines less effective.

... **A nationwide screening for antibodies by Indian health agencies estimated that about 270 million, or one in five Indians, had been infected by the virus before vaccinations started — that's far below the rate of 70% or higher that experts say might be the threshold** for the coronavirus, though even that is not certain.
...
Another possibility is that many Indians are exposed to a variety of diseases throughout their lives — cholera, typhoid and tuberculosis, for instance, are prevalent — and this exposure can prime the body to mount a stronger, initial immune response to a new virus.

"If the COVID virus can be controlled in the nose and throat, before it reaches the lungs, it doesn't become as serious. Innate immunity works at this level, by trying to reduce the viral infection and stop it from getting to the lungs," said Jameel, of Ashoka University.
...
With the reasons behind India's success unclear, experts are concerned that people will let down their guard. Large parts of India have already returned to normal life. In many cities, markets are heaving, roads are crowded and restaurants nearly full...

Return to Timeline

http://www.pharmatimes.com/news/lifearc_provides_5m_funding_for_covid-19_genomics_study_1363413

Feb. 16

UK Study hopes to determine why some people are more genetically predisposed to a severe response to COVID-19

LifeArc, a medical research charity, has announced it will provide £5m in funding to support the **GenOMICC COVID-19 study**, which is **aiming to understand the role of genetic risk factors in patient responses to COVID-19**.

The study, led by the GenOMICC consortium in partnership with Genomics England, is utilising genomics to evaluate why some people are affected more severely by COVID-19.

The partnership between the consortium and Genomics England was formed to allow for the **large-scale and rapid whole genome sequencing and analysis of NHS COVID-19 patients.**

“At Genomics England, we are proud to be working with the NHS, the University of Edinburgh and other partners in the fight against COVID-19, to understand why people respond so differently to this terrible infection,” said Chris Wigley, chief executive officer at Genomics England.

“Genomics is already giving us critical insights, as the partnership’s recent Nature paper and many others have shown. LifeArc’s support will allow us to accelerate and scale these insights and continue to feed them into clinical trials, clinical practice and fundamental research,” he added.

In addition to the LifeArc funding, the GenOMICC COVID-19 study has already received £4.6m in additional funding from the UK Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC). The funding will support the costs of patient enrolment, sample acquisition, sample processing and bioinformatics analysis of patients.

As part of the study, scientists will aim to **compare the genomes of people who had severe illness caused by COVID-19 with those who had a more moderate experience of the disease.**

This will **potentially enable them to identify genetic factors associated with the body’s response to COVID-19.** “It is hoped that this programme will **provide rapid insights that can inform accurate diagnostics, and potential targets for drug development**,” said Melanie Lee, chief executive officer of LifeArc.

“We hope this work will also help inform the 15 clinical studies that we have funded into investigating existing drugs for efficacy in COVID patients, as part of the £27 million LifeArc has now allocated to research projects to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic,” she added.

Return to Timeline

https://www.msn.com/en-us/health/medical/covid-experts-warn-this-surprise-is-still-to-come/ar-BB1dJI0Z?li=BBnb7Kz

Feb. 17

Is the US headed for the next wave of growth?

After a devastating couple of months in the COVID-19 pandemic, the United States seems to have turned a corner with the number of infections, hospitalizations, and deaths on the decline. However, according to top experts we are not out of the woods yet. In fact, over the next few months, things could go from bad to worse.

...

The "Next Wave of Growth" May be From Variants, Warn Experts

On Monday, Andy Slavitt, the White House COVID-19 response team's senior adviser, revealed that the **B.1.1.7 variant out of the United Kingdom could be responsible for another large surge of COVID cases**, despite ongoing vaccinations.

"We should be assuming that the next wave of case growth, to the extent that we have it, is going to be with B117," Slavitt told MSNBC.

"Unfortunately we can't predict the future and we know that this virus has been nothing but full of surprises for us since its come and I think there are more surprises to come. But I don't think we are anywhere close [to] out of the woods. I don't expect that we are going to be seeing just smooth sailing from here."

Michael Osterholm, director of the Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy at the University of Minnesota, also predicted to CBS This Morning that the next few months could be a nightmare.

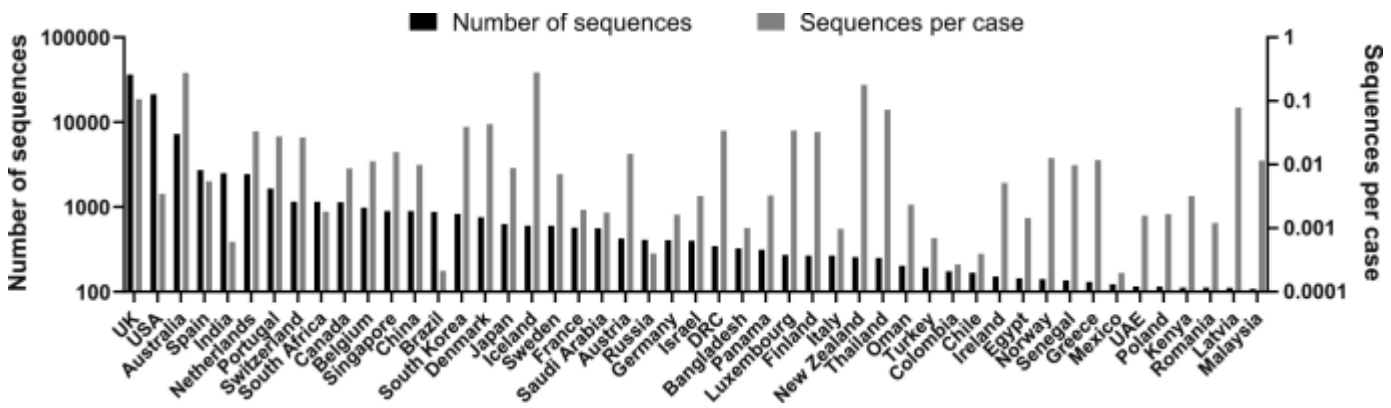
"The next 14 weeks I think will be the worst of the pandemic," he said. "People don't want to hear that, but if we look at what these variants are doing, **particularly this one from the United Kingdom, and see what it did in Europe, see what it's done in the Middle East, it's now beginning to start that here in the U.S.** We are going to see that unfold."...

---

https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1201971220325571

Genomic sequencing effort by country during the pandemic

... Forty-nine countries have published >100 genomic sequences. The **UK** (**38.9%**) and the **USA** (**22.7%**) **accounted for the majority of all published genomic sequences** (N = 93,817)



https://www.cbsnews.com/news/japan-covid-vaccinations-worries-olympics/?ftag=CNM-00-10aac3a

Feb. 17

Japan begins COVID vaccinations amid worries over staging Olympics

Months after other major economies, Japan began giving the first coronavirus vaccines to front-line health workers Wednesday. Many are wondering if the campaign will reach enough people, and in time, to save a Summer Olympics already delayed a year by the worst pandemic in a century.

Despite recent rising infections, **Japan has largely dodged the kind of cataclysm that has battered other wealthy countries' economies, social networks and healthcare systems.** But the fate of the Olympics, and the billions of dollars at stake should the Games fail, makes Japan's vaccine campaign crucial.

Japanese officials are also well aware that China, which has had success eradicating the virus, will host next year's Winter Olympics, something that heightens the desire to make the Tokyo Games happen.

A big problem as the vaccines roll out - first to medical workers, then the elderly and then, possibly in late spring or early summer, to the rest of the population - are worries about shortages of the imported vaccines Japan relies on, and a long-time reluctance among many Japanese to take vaccines because of fears of relatively-rare side effects that have been played up by the media in the past.

The late rollout will make it impossible to reach so-called "herd immunity" against the virus before the Olympics begin in July, experts say.

The vaccination drive has the support of the government, but there's widespread wariness, even opposition, among citizens to having the games at all. **About 80% of those polled in recent media surveys support cancellation or further postponement of the Olympics because of the virus worries.**

...

Japan lags behind many other countries. The government only gave its first vaccine approval Sunday for the shots developed and supplied by Pfizer Inc.

Britain started inoculations on Dec. 8, while the United States began its campaign on Dec. 14, with about 15 million people vaccinated by mid-February. Vaccines were rolled out in Germany, France, Italy and many European countries in late December.

Japan fell behind their pace because it asked Pfizer to conduct clinical trials with Japanese people, in addition to trials already conducted in six other nations. Japanese officials said this was necessary to address worries in a country with low vaccine confidence.

...

Japan, where development of its own vaccines is still in the early stages, must rely on foreign-developed vaccines initially. Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga on Wednesday acknowledged the importance to strengthen vaccine development and production capability as "important crisis management" and pledged to provide more support.

Supplies of imported vaccines are a major worry because of supply shortages and restrictions in Europe, where many are manufactured.

Supplies of imported vaccines will determine the progress of the vaccination drive in Japan, Kono said.

The first batch of the Pfizer vaccine that arrived Friday is enough to cover the first group of medical workers. The second batch is set for delivery next week. ...

Return to Timeline

https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/17/health/coronavirus-variant-sequencing.html

Feb. 18

US to ramp up work on genome sequencing

... Public health laboratories, universities and programs run by the **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention sequenced more than 9,000 genomes last week**, according to the database GISAID. The agency **hopes to increase its own contribution to 25,000 genomes a week.**

...

The program is the administration's most significant effort to date **to address the looming danger of more contagious variants of the virus**. A concerning variant first identified in Britain has infected at least 1,277 people in 42 states, although scientists suspect the true number is vastly higher.

Doubling about every 10 days, the B.1.1.7 variant that emerged in Britain threatens to slow or reverse the rapid drop of new coronavirus cases. What's more, Dr. Walensky said that the nation had seen its first case of B.1.1.7 that had gained a particularly worrying mutation that has been shown in South Africa to blunt the effectiveness of vaccines.

Other worrisome variants have also cropped up in the United States, including one that was first found in South Africa and weakens vaccines.

The F.D.A. is preparing for a potential redesign of vaccines to better protect against the new variants, but those efforts will take months. In the short term, **experts say, it is critical to increase sequencing efforts, which are too small and uncoordinated to adequately track where variants are spreading, and how quickly.**

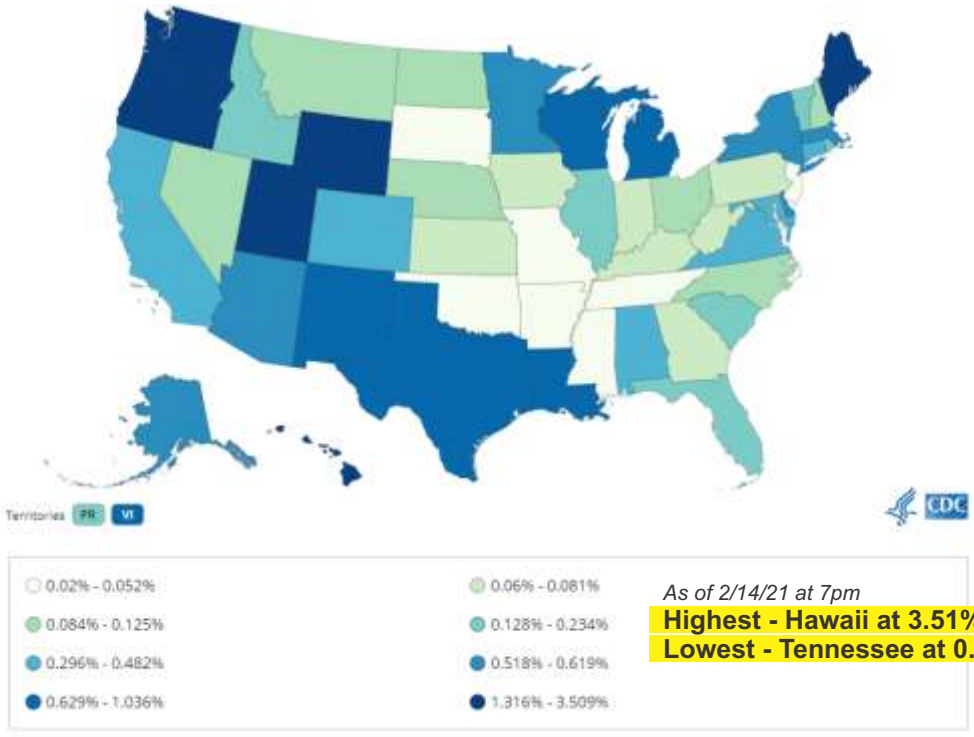
...

Dr. MacInnis said that the **"minimal gold standard" would be sequencing 5 percent of virus samples. If cases continue to fall, then 25,000 genomes a week would put the country near that threshold,** she said, which is "where we need to be to be detecting not only known threats, but emerging threats."...

Select live link for interactive chart

https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/cases-updates/variant-surveillance/genomic-surveillance-dashboard.html

Percentage of cumulative cases sequenced by state that have been published in public repositories from January 2020 to present



https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/booster-shots-against-scary-covid-virus-variants-are-in-the-works1/

Feb. 18

Vaccine makers are designing follow-up shots, based on new mutations, to keep the disease at bay

Since the pandemic began, its viral cause—SARS-CoV-2—**has been mutating**. These genetic changes appeared inconsequential at first. But **recently some alterations have produced variants with the unsettling potential to make the new COVID vaccines less effective**, just as the shots have begun to make their way into people's arms. Now, drug makers are responding by developing different follow-up shots against these variants to keep the disease at bay. These efforts mark the next phase in what's shaping up to be a long battle between an ever-changing virus and the immunizations deployed against it.

The worrisome new variants change the behavior of the virus. One, called **B.1.1.7**, was detected first in the **United Kingdom**. It contains several mutations, including one that helps the virus transmit more easily between people, and it also could be lethal than the original version. Scientists predict it could be the dominant strain in the United States by March. Another disturbing variant, called **B.1.351**, was noticed first in **South Africa**. This one contains mutations that make it far more difficult for immune system antibodies to interfere with the coronavirus' spike protein. Spike is the viral component that latches onto cells to start infection, and thus it is a major target for natural antibodies and those produced by vaccination. In a recent preprint, a research paper that has not yet been peer-reviewed, scientists reported that antibodies taken from the blood of people who got two shots of the new **Moderna vaccine were 8.6 times less effective at neutralizing B.1.351 in laboratory samples than they were at neutralizing earlier versions of the virus.** That same study indicated that the new vaccine made by **Pfizer was 6.5-fold less active against that new variant.**

These reductions may not hamper vaccine effectiveness, however, particularly against the severe levels of disease that put people in the hospital. Antibody levels induced by the vaccines are so elevated to begin with that such drops still leave enough antibodies to offer protection, according to virologist Roberto Burioni from the Vita-Salute San Raffaele University, Milan, who noted his view on Twitter.

Real-world evidence also offers positive news, indicating that the current vaccines protect against the worst forms of COVID. **In a clinical trial that included South Africa, where B.1.135 has become widespread, Johnson & Johnson's vaccine reduced the average person's risk of getting severe disease by 85 percent and reduced the risk of hospitalizations and death by 100 percent. Overall, it reduced risk of symptomatic infections by 57 percent.** Lance Baldo, chief medical officer at San Francisco–based Adaptive Biotechnologies, which makes tests to evaluate immune responses to viral infection, says protection against severe disease likely is because the vaccines produce broad antivirus activity that extends beyond antibodies, and probably involves T cells, which recognize and kill infected cells.

Paul Offit, a pediatrician and director of the Vaccine Education Center at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia agrees. It "is good news" that **vaccines in general protect against severe COVID, he says, and keeping people out of the hospital is a top priority. "If fully vaccinated people start winding up hospitalized with one of these variants, then we need to worry more. So far that line hasn't been crossed**," he says.

UPDATED SHOTS

To boost protection against even mild disease, vaccine makers think they can adapt the existing shots to the variants without too much trouble. Vaccines based on genetic material, such as the Moderna and Pfizer immunizations, are especially well suited to these modifications, since scientists can easily swap in new genetic sequences as needed. ....

Return to Timeline

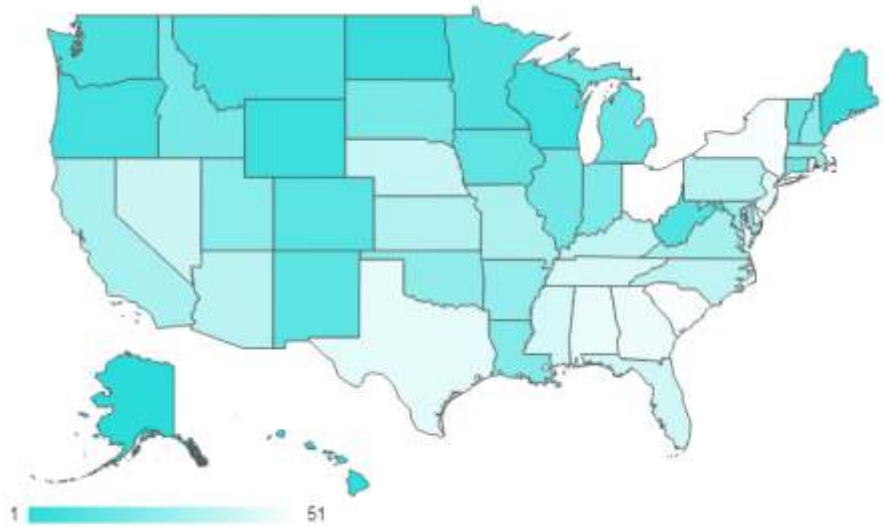
https://wallethub.com/edu/safest-states-during-covid/86567 ← Select live link for interactive map (did not read that they would be updating)

Feb. 19

How the US States rank for safety during COVID

WalletHub compared the 50 states and D.C. across **five key metrics**

1. *Rates of COVID-19 transmission*
2. *Positive testing*
3. *Hospitalizations*
4. *Deaths*
5. *Share of the eligible population getting vaccinated*



Safest ↘

1	**Alaska**	86.52
2	Hawaii	79.22
3	Maine	78.42
4	North Dakota	77.71
5	Wyoming	75.93
6	Wisconsin	74.95
7	Oregon	73.79
8	Washington	73.39
9	Montana	71.87
10	Minnesota	71.07
11	West Virginia	70.67
12	Colorado	70.31
13	New Mexico	69.71
14	Iowa	69.52
15	Vermont	69.52
16	Michigan	68.73
17	Connecticut	68.43
18	Illinois	67.98
19	Idaho	67.69
20	South Dakota	67.09
21	Indiana	66.47
22	Louisiana	64.98
23	New Hampshire	64.54
24	Utah	64.44
25	Oklahoma	63.84
26	Arkansas	63.38
27	Massachusetts	62.55
28	Maryland	62.43
29	D.C.	62.22
30	Virginia	62.17
31	California	62.16
32	Missouri	61.92
33	Kansas	59.82
34	Pennsylvania	59.66
35	Arizona	59.08
36	North Carolina	58.62
37	Kentucky	58.15
38	Nebraska	57.73
39	Nevada	57.37
40	Florida	56.76
41	Mississippi	56.47
42	Tennessee	55.43
43	Delaware	54.82
44	New Jersey	54.47
45	Texas	54.35
46	Alabama	49.81
47	Georgia	49.11
48	Rhode Island	48
49	New York	44.84
50	South Carolina	43.99
51	**Ohio**	29.71

Return to Timeline

https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-021-00450-z

Feb. 20

Can COVID vaccines stop transmission? Scientists race to find answers

... **Preliminary analyses suggest that at least some vaccines are likely to have a transmission-blocking effect.** But confirming that effect — and how strong it will be — is tricky because a drop in infections in a given region might be explained by other factors, such as lockdowns and behaviour changes. Not only that, the virus can spread from asymptomatic carriers, which makes it hard to detect those infections.

...

During the trial of **Moderna**'s vaccine, produced in Boston, researchers swabbed all participants to see if they had any viral RNA. They **saw a two-thirds drop in the number of asymptomatic infections among people who received the first shot of the two-dose vaccine**, compared with those who received a placebo. **But they tested people only twice, about a month apart, so might have missed infections.**

The UK trial of the vaccine produced by the University of Oxford and **AstraZeneca swabbed participants every week, and estimated a 49.3% reduction in asymptomatic infections** among a subset of vaccinated participants compared with the unvaccinated group.

Pfizer, based in New York City and maker of another leading COVID-19 vaccine, says that it **will start swabbing participants every two weeks in vaccine trials taking place in the United States and Argentina**, to see whether the shot can prevent infection.

Less infectious?

It's possible that vaccines won't stop or significantly lessen the chances of infection. But **jabs might make infected people less able to pass the virus on**, or make them less infectious, and so reduce transmission.

Several research groups in Israel are measuring 'viral load' — the concentration of viral particles in vaccinated people who later test positive for SARS-CoV-2. Researchers have found that **viral load is a good proxy for infectiousness.**

In preliminary work, one team observed a significant drop in viral load in a small number of people infected with SARS-CoV-2 in the two to four weeks after receiving their first dose of the Pfizer vaccine, compared with those who caught the virus in the first two weeks after the injection2. "The data is certainly intriguing and **suggestive that vaccination may reduce the infectiousness of COVID-19 cases, even if it does not prevent infection altogether**," says Virginia Pitzer, an infectious-diseases modeller at Yale School of Public Health in New Haven, Connecticut. The Oxford–AstraZeneca trial also observed a larger reduction in viral load in a small group of vaccinated participants than in the unvaccinated group.

But whether these observed reductions in viral load are sufficient to make someone less infectious in real life is not yet clear, say researchers. ...

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/europe-europe-coronavirus-pandemic-bd6d355e8c5f3c1b2d007c1ceb5a7453

Feb. 21

UK speeds up vaccinations: All adults get 1st jab by July 31

...The new target also aims for **everyone over 50 or with an underlying health condition to get a vaccine shot by April 15**, rather than the previous target of May 1.

The makers of the two vaccines that Britain is using, Pfizer and AstraZeneca, have both experienced supply problems in Europe. But U.K. Health Secretary Matt Hancock, who announced the new targets, said “we now think that we have the supplies” to speed up the vaccination campaign.

The early success of **Britain’**s vaccination campaign is welcome good news for a country that **has had more than 120,000 coronavirus deaths, the highest toll in Europe**. More than 17.2 million people, **almost a third of the country’s adults, have been given the first of two doses of vaccine since inoculations began on Dec. 8.**

Britain is delaying giving second vaccine doses until 12 weeks after the first in order to give as many people as possible partial protection quickly. The approach has been criticized in some countries — and by Pfizer, which says it does not have any data to support the delay — but is backed by the U.K. government’s scientific advisers.

...

The government has stressed that economic and social reopenings will be slow and cautious, with nonessential shopping or outdoor socializing unlikely before April. **Many children will go back to school beginning March 8 and nursing home residents will be able to have one visitor from the same date.**

Johnson’s Conservative government has been accused of reopening the country too quickly after the first lockdown in the spring.

The number of **new confirmed cases, hospitalization and deaths are all declining but remain high**, and Johnson says his reopening road map would follow “data, not dates.”

...

John Edmunds, a member of the government’s scientific advisory group, said British hospitals are still treating about 20,000 coronavirus patients, half the January peak but almost as much as height of the first surge in the spring.

“If we eased off very rapidly now, we would get another surge in hospitalizations” and deaths, he told the BBC.

Edmunds said there is added uncertainty because of new virus variants, including one identified in South Africa that may be more resistant to current vaccines.

Hancock told Sky News that the government would take a “cautious but irreversible approach” to reopening the economy.

https://edition.cnn.com/2021/02/20/health/us-coronavirus-saturday/index.html

Feb. 21

Covid-19 hospitalizations in the US dip to lowest level since November

About 59,800 Covid-19 patients were in US hospitals on Friday -- **down about 55% from a pandemic peak** of more than 132,470 **on January 6,** according to The COVID Tracking Project.

Friday's number is the first below 60,000 since November 9, when daily cases, hospitalizations and deaths were on a several-month incline through the holidays.

Averages for daily new cases and deaths also have been declining for weeks after hitting all-time peaks around mid-January. **Public health experts have been pressing for faster vaccinations, before more transmissible variants have a chance to spread, fearing they could reverse recent progress.**

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has said an apparently more-transmissible variant first identified in the United Kingdom could be the dominant strain in the US by next month.

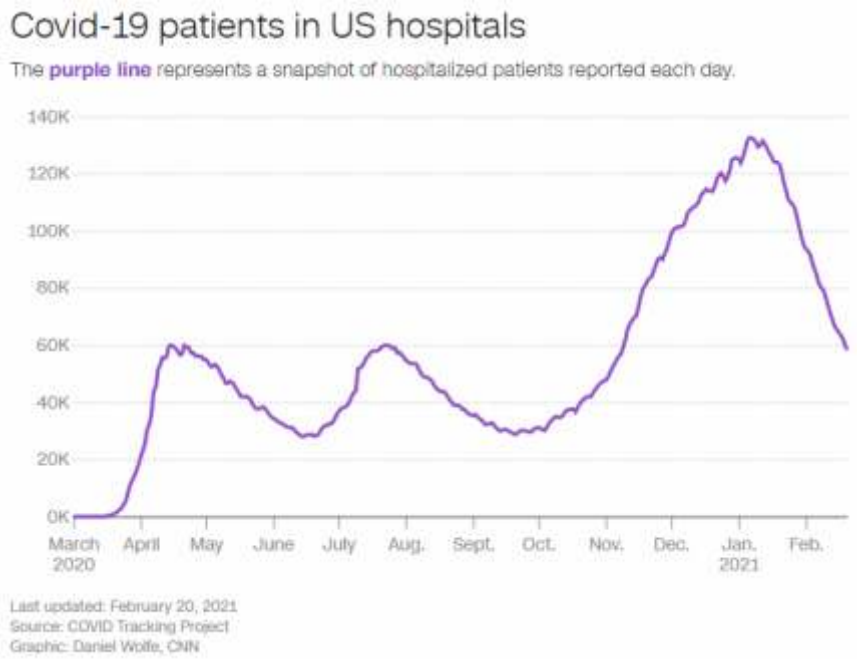
"This is why **we're telling people to not stop masking, not stop avoiding indoor social gatherings quite yet,** because we don't really know what's going to happen with this variant," Dr. Megan Ranney, and emergency medicine physician with Rhode Island's Brown University, told CNN Saturday.

"And we saw what happened last winter when we didn't take Covid seriously enough."

The **national test positivity rate** -- or the percentage of tests taken that turn out to be positive **-- averaged about 4.8%** over the last week as of early Saturday, according to The COVID Tracking Project.

That's the first time the average has dropped below 5% since October, and it's f**ar below a winter peak of about 13.6% near the start of January.**

The World Health Organization has recommended governments not reopen until the test positivity rate is 5% or lower for at least two weeks.



Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/israel-health-middle-east-coronavirus-pandemic-coronavirus-vaccine-375e1147aecef7283b1ac84d26de317c

Feb. 21

Israel starts reopening economy after two-month lockdown

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israel lifted many of its coronavirus restrictions and started reopening its economy Sunday as the country's vaccination drive and third nationwide lockdown have started to bring down infections.

Most grade school and high school classes have reopened after a nearly two-month closure, along with museums, libraries, malls and markets. Some restrictions on the number of people in attendance remain in place. **The entire education system is expected to return to normal operations early March.**

Gyms, pools, cinemas and restaurants are opening back up for people who have received two doses of the coronavirus vaccine.

Israel **unveiled its plan to allow the vaccinated to attend cultural events, fly abroad and patronize restaurants and health clubs by using a "green badge" app** on Saturday ahead of the reopening of the economy. The rollout of the app has been fraught with technical difficulties.

After striking a deal with Pfizer to trade data for doses, Israel's vaccine campaign became the world's speediest in the past two months. Almost half its population of 9.3 million have received the first dose of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine. Nearly 3 million have gotten the second shot.

Israel has faced international criticism for largely excluding Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip from its highly successful vaccination campaign. The dispute highlights the Palestinians' reliance on Israel even as they struggle to combat the pandemic on their own. Last week, Israel facilitated the transfer of the first 2,000 doses of Russia's Sputnik V vaccine from the West Bank to the Gaza Strip.

The coronavirus is still spreading rapidly in Israel, however, and restrictions on movement and assembly have remained in place since the government imposed a countrywide lockdown in late December.

Israel has recorded at least 743,000 cases of COVID-19 and at least 5,521 deaths since the start of the pandemic last year. Its three lockdowns have paralyzed the economy and driven unemployment to over 20%

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu talks to the media during a visit to the Fitness gym ahead of the re-opening of the branch in Petah Tikva, Israel, on Saturday, Feb. 20, 2021. (AP Photo/Tal Shahar, Yediot Ahronot, Pool)

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/donald-trump-pandemics-public-health-kansas-city-michael-brown-d940129b78c861003287e0ddb0389308

Feb. 22

US coronavirus death toll approaches milestone of 500,000

... A year into the pandemic, the running total of lives lost was about 498,000 — roughly the population of Kansas City, Missouri, and just shy of the size of Atlanta. The figure compiled by Johns Hopkins University surpasses the number of people who died in 2019 of chronic lower respiratory diseases, stroke, Alzheimer's, flu and pneumonia combined.

"It's nothing like we have ever been through in the last 102 years, since the 1918 influenza pandemic," the nation's top infectious disease expert, Dr. Anthony Fauci, said on CNN's "State of the Union."

The nation could pass this next grim milestone [today] President Joe Biden will mark the U.S. crossing 500,000 lives lost from COVID-19 with a moment of silence and candle lighting ceremony at the White House.

Biden will deliver remarks at sunset to honor the dead, the White House said. He's expected to be joined by first lady Jill Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris and her husband, Doug Emhoff.

The first known deaths from the virus in the U.S. happened in early February 2020, both of them in Santa Clara County, California. It took four months to reach the first 100,000 dead. The toll hit 200,000 deaths in September and 300,000 in December. Then it took just over a month to go from 300,000 to 400,000 and about two months to climb from 400,000 to the brink of 500,000.

...

The global death toll was approaching 2.5 million, according to Johns Hopkins.

While the count is based on figures supplied by government agencies around the world, **the real death toll is believed to be significantly higher**, in part because of inadequate testing and cases inaccurately attributed to other causes early on.

Despite efforts to administer coronavirus vaccines, a widely cited model by the University of Washington projects the U.S. death toll will surpass 589,000 by June 1.

"People will be talking about this decades and decades and decades from now," Fauci said on NBC's "Meet The Press."

Return to Timeline

https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-health-coronavirus-britain-safrica-idUSKBN2AL083?taid=6032870c7b821800012a45c6&utm_campaign=trueAnthem:+Trending+Content&utm_medium=trueAnthem&utm_source=twitter

Feb. 22

South African variant outbreak shrinking in Britain

LONDON (Reuters) - Britain believes it is getting on top of outbreaks of a South African variant of the coronavirus and is also seeing signs that hospitalisations are falling quickly following the vaccine roll-out, the health secretary said on Sunday.

Hancock told the BBC there had been around 300 cases of the South African variant, which may undermine the vaccination programme, but that they were from over a month ago.

“The latest data shows that there’s around a dozen new ones, so a much, much smaller number, and each time we find a new one we absolutely clamp down on it,” he said.

Asked what impact the vaccine roll-out was having so far, he said there were signs that it was reducing transmission and that the numbers in hospital were falling much more sharply than they did in the first wave of the pandemic.

https://twitter.com/EricTopol/status/1363551912021221377

New confirmed cases in South Africa

Seven-day rolling average

Eric Topol states **“The good news is that South Africa is back to its pre-B.1.351 baseline in covid cases. There's no proof this variant is more infectious. Its immune evasion is enough to explain how it took off. And the descent occurred without vaccines.”**

https://www.coronavirustoday.com/2021/02/21/south-africas-virus-variant-found-less-infectious

Return to Timeline

https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/02/22/world/coronavirus-world-turnaround.html

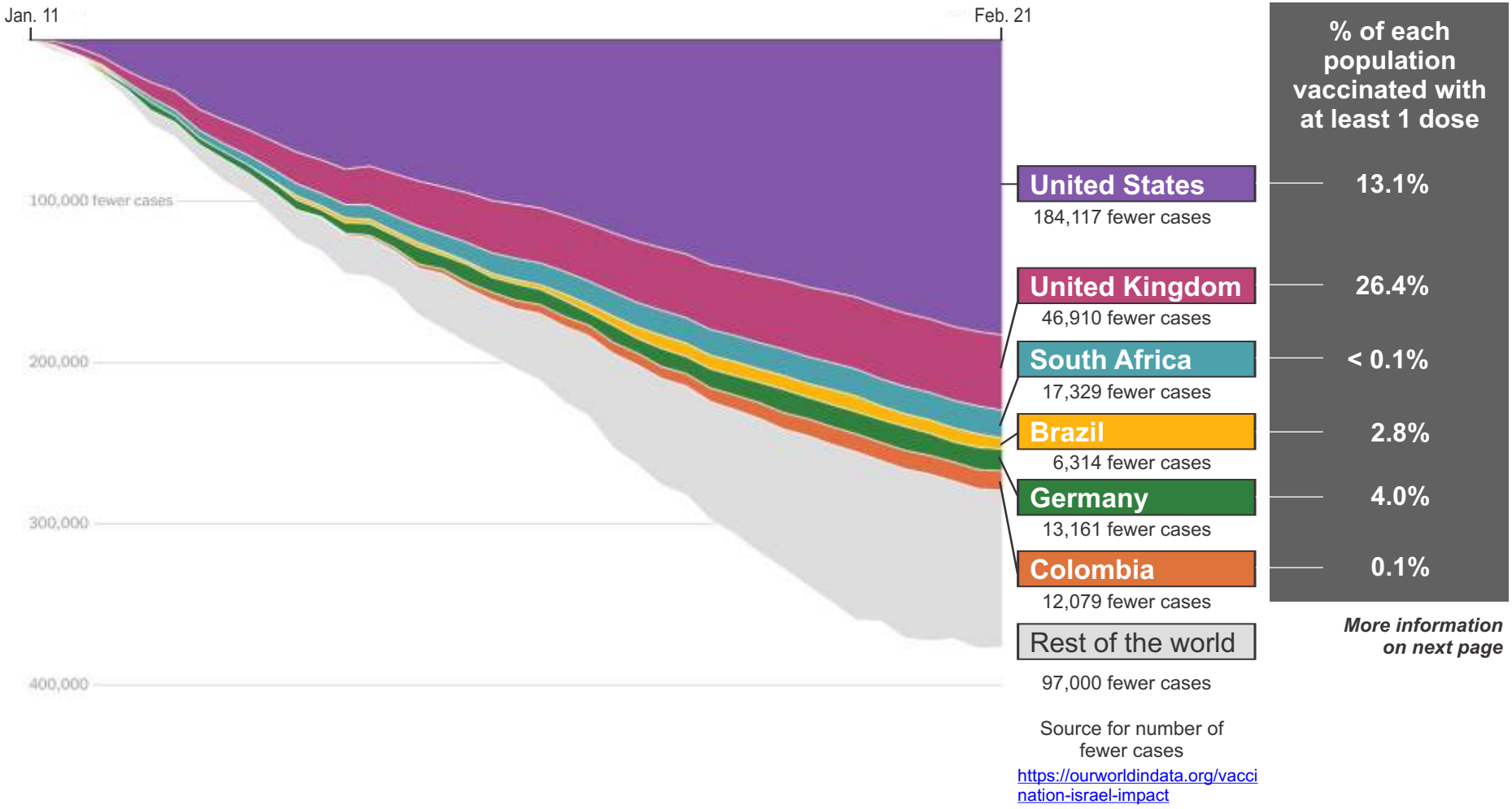
Select live link for interactive chart
(Subscription may be required)

Feb. 23

Six countries account for most of the global reduction in new cases

(Reduction in cases between Jan 11- Feb 21))

https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/world/covid-vaccinations-tracker.html



Source for number of fewer cases
https://ourworldindata.org/vaccination-israel-impact

More information on next page

Return to Timeline

Feb. 23
Reuters COVID-19 Tracker

United States

United Kingdom

South Africa

Brazil

Germany

Colombia

Select bar for each country for information on:

- **Daily reported trends**
  - New infections
  - Deaths
- **Vaccination**
- **Lockdown**
  - Schools
  - Workplaces
  - Stay-at-home
  - Borders
- **Comparison to other countries**
  - Total infections and deaths
  - Total per population
  - Average daily reported
  - Average change from last week

Return to Timeline

https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-9290029/Britains-coronavirus-lockdown-one-toughest-WORLD-study-claims.html

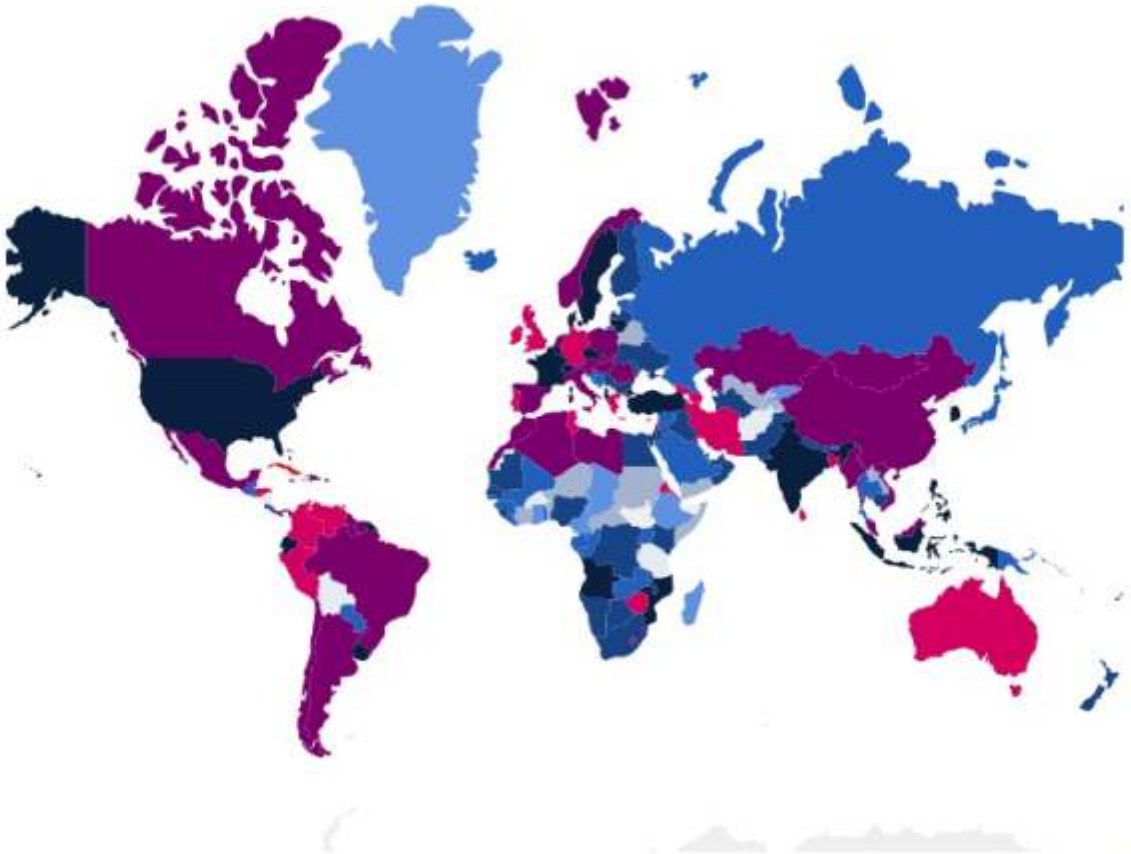
Feb. 24

Ireland, Britain, Cuba, Eritrea, Honduras and Lebanon have some of the most strict lockdown rules in the world

University of Oxford experts ranked the pandemic responses of 180 countries

Select live link to slide through dates or choose a date range

https://covidtracker.bsg.ox.ac.uk/stringency-map



Return to Timeline

https://www.vox.com/22285256/covid-19-vaccine-predictions

Feb. 24

Dr. Hilda Bastian predicts what's next

... .**a time in the future when we may need Covid-19 vaccine boosters every year ...**
...
[On discounting .. lower-income countries and overestimating the wealthier ...ones] there's this really interesting juxtaposition between Cuba and Canada, ironically. In Canada [where the vaccine rollout has been slow] there's a debate about why did they let their capacity to produce vaccines dwindle away to next to nothing.

Cuba had the exact opposite. Cuba had to become self-sufficient at pretty well everything, and that included producing drugs and producing medical teams. Cuba now exports a lot of medical care to poorer countries. **The first two of their vaccines are looking really quite good. The first one's just about to start its big phase 3 trial, and they've got three others coming up behind.**
...
[On vaccines to watch] **Johnson & Johnson** vaccine is a single dose. They were also doing trials that were seriously geared at international needs. They **ran the biggest trial in the most countries**, and that matters a lot to people from different ethnic groups.

Even though the actual doses are a bit more expensive [for Johnson & Johnson's vaccine], the cost of actually vaccinating people is enormously lower if you've only got to vaccinate everybody once. And Johnson & Johnson also committed to affordable, nonprofit vaccine for the emergency. It's going to depend a lot on how many doses actually get delivered in the end, and what happens with variants. ...
...
Novavax is an important one to watch, if the results continue to be as good as their first ones, which were **similar to the mRNA vaccines**. It's a more traditional form of vaccine, so there's more capacity to manufacture it.

There are others that could be important globally, like **one from Thailand** that will be cheap and both profit- and royalty-free for lower-income countries, and **another that UNICEF is supporting** that's also aiming at preventing infection.
...
We need to reduce the chances of the virus morphing into more dangerous variants — vaccines might not protect communities enough from new variants sweeping through. And many of the rich countries will have trouble getting enough people vaccinated anyway. The notion that there can be countries where there's going to be 40-year-olds and 30-year-olds vaccinated while there are terrible outbreaks in other parts of the world, and even the health care practitioners are unprotected, isn't okay on any level.
...
For me, **one of the things that is a really huge unknown is what happens with long Covid**. ...

To some extent, it's going to depend on how disabling long Covid turns out to be, and for how many people? Are we looking at a really serious big wave of decades-long disability? Because if we are, that is a really profound sudden change in societies.

Return to Timeline

https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/worldwide-graphs/#total-deaths

Select live link for current number

Feb. 24

Death toll from coronavirus tops 2,600,000

Return to Timeline

https://ktul.com/news/local/the-similarities-between-covid-and-spanish-flu-in-tulsa-and-the-hospital-there-for-it-all?fbclid=IwAR09bszQsh2M5zb0eP-IA_9M3sT9XPOa1MSVKcnWkdg27B24D2d-snghHCA

Feb. 25

Similarities between COVID and Spanish Flu in Tulsa, Oklahoma

More than a century ago, Tulsa was in the midst of fighting another pandemic, the **Spanish Flu**.

Influenza plagued the city and the world. It's **estimated 675,000 Americans died and up to 50 million people worldwide**.
...
Fast forward more than a century and Tulsa Historian, Rhys Martin, became curious in today's quarantine and dug through Tulsa World articles to see how the city handled the previous pandemic.

“It's shocking to me just how **many parallels** we have not just from the sickness and vaccine timeline," Martin said, "But then the behavioral timeline and everything."

The first case of Spanish Flu is suspected to have been in Fort Riley, Kansas in March of 1918, but the first mention of the deadly virus doesn't get printed in Tulsa's paper until June 1918.

"It starts very similarly," Martin said, "You have some mentions, 'Oh this is a problem overseas and it's probably going to come over here, but it won't be that big of a deal.'"

A few months later, the Tulsa community quickly realizes, their predictions were wrong.

October of 1918 cases are reported to be in Tulsa on the front pages of The Tulsa World.

"It was shocking how quickly it went from, 'Oh we actually have a few cases in Tulsa,' to, 'Oh we've got people that are dying,' to a field hospital being set up," Martin said, "Things really changed very quickly."

October 7, 1918 the first deaths are reported. The city closes theatres, churches, schools, the courthouse and public meetings the next day.
...
Tulsa created a response plan in partnership with the Red Cross.
...
Dolly Brown McNulty ... **came to Tulsa to care for flu patients.**

In 1918, McNulty founded Morningside Hospital out of a home at Fifth and Boulder. ...McNulty broke ground years later on **what is now Hillcrest.**

Kevin Gross, CEO and president of Hillcrest, said it's safe to say Hillcrest was born out of a pandemic.

Now being at the hospital's helm, Gross reflected on how McNulty paved the way more than a century ago.

"I think she was a pioneer really," Gross said, "She came to an area with the idea of responding to a call, to a need where she saw people were sick and she decided she could put together a hospital." ...

"She must have been a very courageous woman and a very strong-willed woman," Gross said.

Present-day, the will of Hillcrest's staff is being tested through its second pandemic.

Dr. Guy Sneed, Chief Medical Officer for Hillcrest, has led the healthcare system through today's pandemic.
...
The Spanish Flu took nearly 7,500 Oklahoma lives.
...
In February of 2021, Oklahoma deaths have surpassed 4,200 and in the U.S. have surpassed 500,000...

5 minute video

https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-56186965

Feb. 25

FDA finds the single-shot Johnson & Johnson vaccine is safe and effective

It paves the way for it to become the **third Covid-19 vaccine to be authorised in the US, possibly within days.**

The vaccine would be a cost-effective alternative to the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines, and **can be stored in a refrigerator instead of a freezer.**

Trials found it prevented serious illness but was 66% effective overall when moderate cases were included.

The company has agreed to provide the US with 100 million doses by the end of June. The UK, EU and Canada have also ordered doses and 500 million doses have also been ordered through the Covax scheme to supply poorer nations.

What does trial data say?
The briefing document published by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) gives more detail on the data submitted by Janssen, a pharmaceutical branch of Johnson & Johnson, to the regulator. The FDA concludes that the Johnson & Johnson vaccine has "known benefits" in reducing both symptomatic and severe illness.

It comes after the firm released data last month.

Results from trials conducted in the US, South Africa and Brazil found its efficacy against the worst outcomes of the virus was "similarly high" but overall protection was lower in South Africa and Brazil, where virus variants have become dominant.

Data showed it was more than 85% effective at preventing serious illness, but only 66% effective overall when moderate cases were included, when considering cases at least 28 days after vaccination.

Notably, there were **no deaths among participants who had received the vaccine and no hospital admissions after 28 days post-vaccine.**

What happens now?
An external committee of **experts will meet on Friday to recommend whether the FDA should authorise the vaccine**, possibly adding to a coming surge in vaccine availability in the US.

A White House official said the administration anticipated distributing at least three million doses of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine next week, should it receive emergency authorisation from the FDA.

The company says it plans to deliver 20 million doses in total by late March, in line with an agreement to supply the US with 100m doses by the end of June.

Not only will the vaccine require fewer doses than its two-shot Pfizer and Moderna counterparts, it will also require fewer vaccine appointments and medical staff as a result.

Who else has ordered the Johnson & Johnson jab?
UK - 30 million doses
EU - 200 million doses
Canada - 38 million doses
Covax nations - 500 million doses

Return to Timeline

https://www.fiercepharma.com/pharma/moderna-aims-to-produce-up-to-1b-doses-vaccine-doses-2021-targets-1-4b-for-2022?mkt_tok=eyJpIjoiT1RBeVlUSXdNekZqTUdKbCIsInQiOiJwZ3pKUzRrTXRUd3VRNFlxNWIwTDlWaExVMVVOM3htY3RnS25Na1MxSVlyZlR2WTZ0bzdrREd2QzBtNEJ3Tjk2ZE44RThTYXlYQXRcL0RWMkpuZWRSck1FVnNKNFBLT0V3cUR2bDRiNWM1VHVJOWt6UmxJbUtJZ1kxY3g1ZlBxT1QifQ%3D%3D&mrkid=936491

Feb. 25

Moderna sends booster shot for NIH testing and hikes production goals

In the span of about a year, Moderna has gone from being a clinical-stage biotech with no marketed products to a key partner in the global COVID-19 vaccination effort. Now, it's doubling down on its manufacturing push, with more than 2 billion doses in its sights.

Moderna on Wednesday said it's now on track to produce 700 million vaccine doses this year, and it's still aiming for 1 billion at the high end. Last year, the company had said 500 million would be its minimum output this year, and it ratcheted up that minimum to 600 million in January.

And for 2022, the biotech is planning for 1.4 billion doses—or perhaps even 2 billion, depending on the dose required for booster shots targeting new variants. **The company has shipped a booster candidate to the National Institutes of Health for testing**, according to Wednesday's statement; it's **targeted specifically at the South Africa variant** now worrying public health experts.

To support the scale-up, Moderna on Wednesday said it's planning new investments at manufacturing sites, whether in its own network or sites operated by partners.

For next year, Moderna's 1.4 billion target is based on the assumption that potential vaccine boosters will require the 100-µg dose. If boosters end up using a lower dose, such as 50 µg, the company could potentially churn out more than 2 billion doses in 2022, CEO Stephane Bancel said in a statement.

So far in its global rollout, Moderna has shipped 60 million doses worldwide. Most of those, 55 million, have gone to the U.S. Meanwhile, the biotech says its ex-U.S. supply chain is "in the process of ramping up." The company plans to deliver 100 million doses to the U.S. before the end of next month and another 200 million by the end of July.

Part of the company's work to ramp up production includes identifying bottlenecks, and Moderna offered one example of progress on that front. The biotech and its partners found that fill-and-finish services were slowing down the overall manufacturing timelines, so Moderna is exploring the potential of 15-dose vials to relieve those services and reduce the need for "consumable materials that are in high demand."

Even as Moderna scales up its original shot, mRNA-1273, the company is laying plans to tackle variants. The biotech plans to test its original shot as a half-dose booster and variant-specific and multivariant boosters at 50 µg and lower in people who've already had the standard vaccine regimen, today's announcement said.

In addition, the company is planning to study those variant-specific and multivariant vaccine candidates as primary vaccines for people who don't yet have antibodies.

Moderna is one of the leading players in the COVID-19 vaccine push, but it isn't alone in its aggressive efforts to scale up capacity. Pfizer and BioNTech are pushing to produce 2 billion doses in 2021, while Johnson & Johnson has pledged hundreds of millions of doses to the U.S. and other governments.

AstraZeneca has tapped a global network of manufacturing partners and is aiming to produce 200 million doses per month. Novavax, for its part, laid out a production goal of 150 million doses per month with the help of partners, its CEO said in January.

During a congressional hearing earlier this week, execs for Pfizer, Moderna and J&J said the companies could provide a combined 140 million new doses to the U.S. by the end of March. An AstraZeneca exec said the company could provide 50 million doses by the end of April, but that drugmaker hasn't yet submitted its program to the FDA. Novavax is awaiting phase 3 trial results from a U.S. study, expected early next quarter.

Return to Timeline

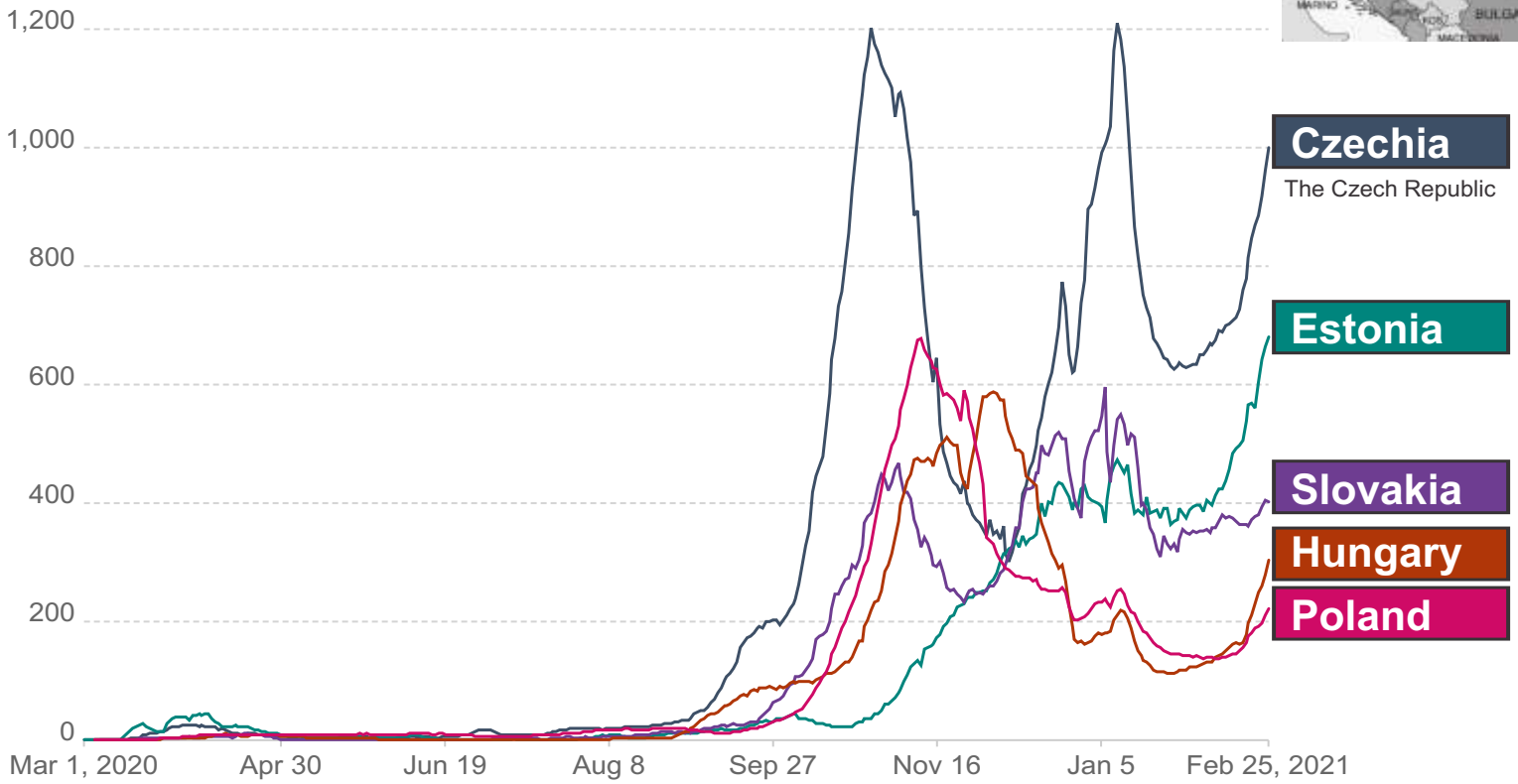
https://ourworldindata.org/coronavirus#coronavirus-country-profiles

Feb. 26

Countries in Eastern Europe seeing a rise in cases

Daily new confirmed COVID-19 cases per million people

Shown is the rolling 7-day average. The number of confirmed cases is lower than the number of actual cases; the main reason for that is limited testing.



Why?

Link to article for possible explanation

Source: Johns Hopkins University CSSE COVID-19 Data – Last updated 26 February, 10:02 (London time)

CC BY

https://www.cnn.com/2021/02/27/health/us-coronavirus-saturday/index.html

Feb. 26

Johnson and Johnson vaccine is authorized for emergency use

... The FDA is expected to act on the recommendation quickly, meaning the vaccine **may be available early next week.**

...

The 22 members of the **FDA's Vaccines and Related Biological Products Advisory Committee voted unanimously to recommend the Johnson & Johnson vaccine**, which one member said was an "easy call."

"It clearly gets way over the bar and it's nice to have a single-dose vaccine," said Dr. Eric Rubin, editor in chief of the New England Journal of Medicine and a professor at the Harvard TH Chan School of Public Health.

But some officials worry that the public views it as "second class," a misconception public health leaders will need to address.

"It's difficult to make an apples-to-apples comparison between vaccines authorized, based on data collected before new variants are believed to have been in widespread circulation," said Sarah Christopherson, the policy advocacy director at the National Women's Health Network.

Johnson & Johnson's vaccine may appear to have a lower efficacy rate than its earlier counterparts. But that does not make it a worse option because **it appears to protect against some variants**, another member of the committee to recommend the vaccine said.

"One dose will keep you out of the hospital, keep you out of the intensive care unit and keep you out of the morgue," Dr. Paul Offit told Blitzer.

Several public health experts told Congress on Friday that people who have the Johnson & Johnson vaccine made available to them should get it.

"If I had a J&J vaccine available today and a Moderna vaccine available tomorrow, I would be happy to take the J&J today. I don't feel like I would need to wait. They are all terrific vaccines for the things that we care about," Dr. Ashish Jha, dean of the Brown University School of Public Health, told a House Ways and Means Health Subcommittee hearing.

Return to Timeline

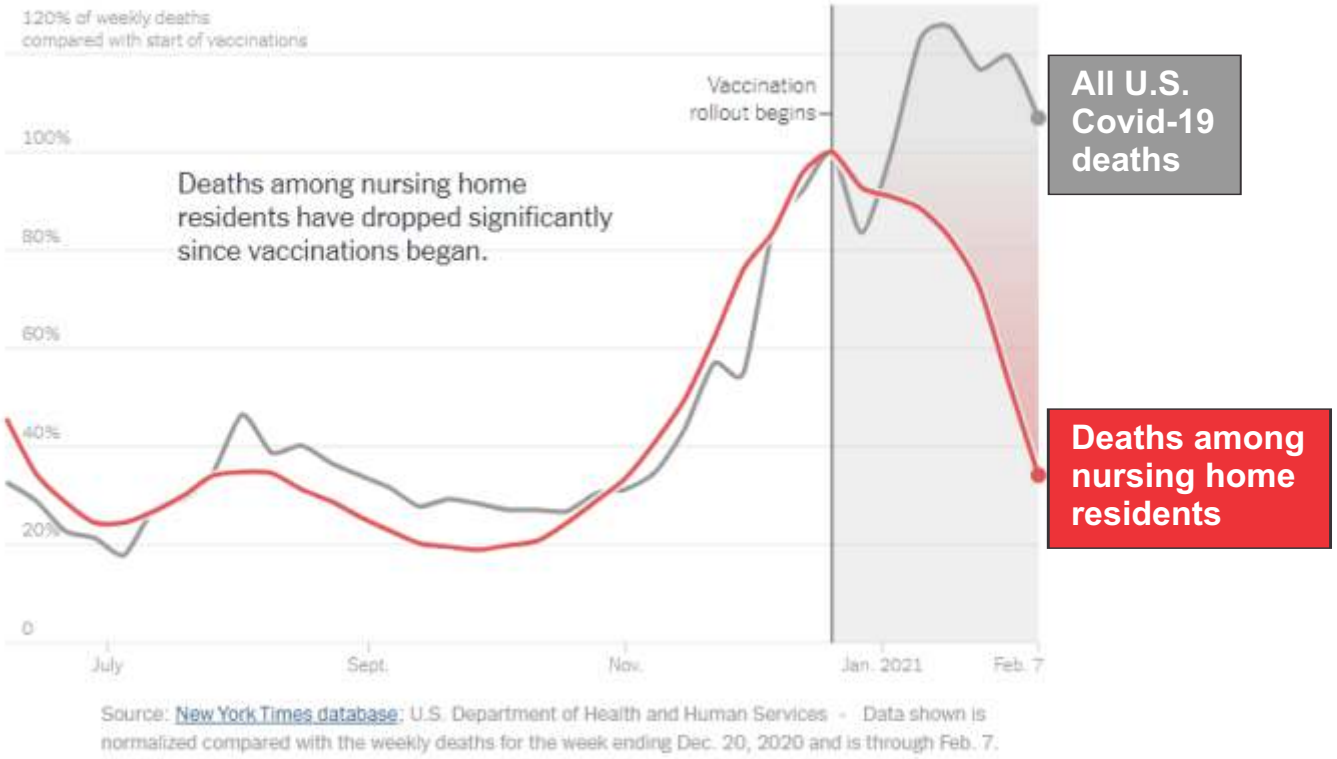
https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/02/25/us/nursing-home-covid-vaccine.html

Feb. 26

Nursing Homes, Once Hotspots, Far Outpace U.S. in Covid Declines

... Since the arrival of vaccines, which were prioritized to long-term care facilities starting in late December, new cases and deaths in nursing homes, a large subset of long-term care facilities, have fallen steeply, outpacing national declines, according to a New York Times analysis of federal data. **The turnaround is an encouraging sign for vaccine effectiveness** and offers an early glimpse at what may be in store for the rest of the country, as more and more people get vaccinated.

From late December to early February, **new cases among nursing home residents fell by more than 80 percent, nearly double the rate of improvement in the general population**. The trendline for deaths was even more striking: Even as fatalities spiked over all this winter, **deaths inside the facilities have fallen, decreasing by more than 65 percent** ...

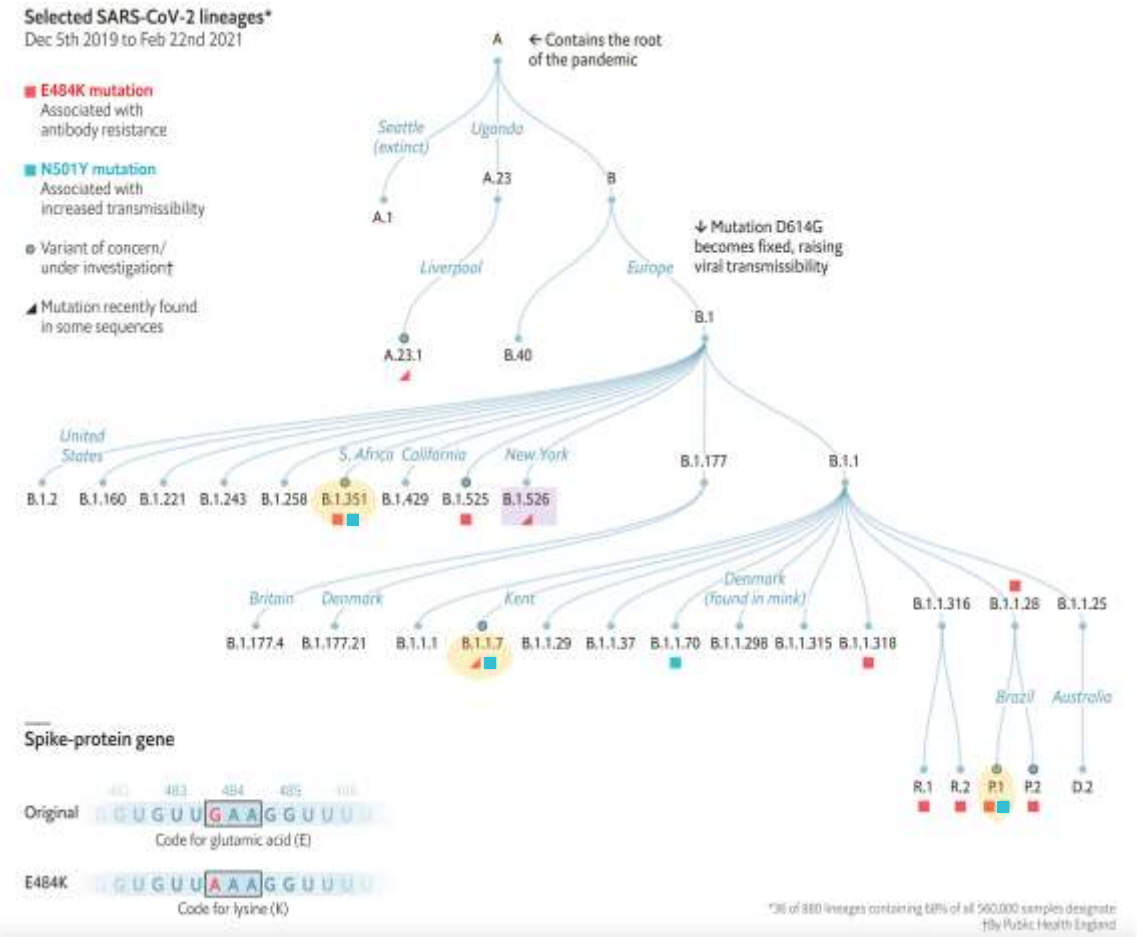


Return to Timeline

https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2021/02/27/the-same-covid-19-mutations-are-appearing-in-different-places

Feb. 27

The same covid-19 mutations are appearing in different places



All trees begin with an initial sample from Wuhan sequenced in January 2020, with subsequent samples as descendants. Sequences with similar new features are grouped into “lineages”, using criteria and a nomenclature developed by researchers at the universities of Edinburgh and Oxford. **So far 41,000 mutations have been documented, falling into 880 lineages**.

Only a handful of these mutations make the virus more dangerous. Most occur within the 3,800 letters used for the virus’s spike protein, which helps it bind to its host. Sometimes they can combine to pose several new threats, as they seem to have done in a Californian lineage that is worrying scientists. New studies suggest that this lineage may be more infectious, evade antibodies and cause more severe illness. Sequencing done in the state shows that this variant could already be responsible for a majority of cases there.

Two common mutations have appeared in many other worrying lineages. As with the wings of birds and bats, these familiar foes have evolved independently in different places. The first mutation, known as **N501Y, increases transmissibility.** It is present in the “Kent” lineage that has run riot in Britain since December, as well as some lineages elsewhere. The second, known as **E484K, enables the virus to partially avoid the host’s antibodies.** It is prevalent in Brazil and South Africa. E484K has also recently been spotted in new lineages in America and Europe, including Britain ...

Return to Timeline

https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/feb/26/covid-vaccine-mask-will-i-have-to-wear-after-jab-science-how-it-works

Select live link for animated presentation

Feb. 28

Why we should keep wearing masks - explained graphically

... “We know now the vaccines can protect, but what we haven’t had enough time to really understand is – does it protect from spreading?” said Avery August, professor of immunology at Cornell University.

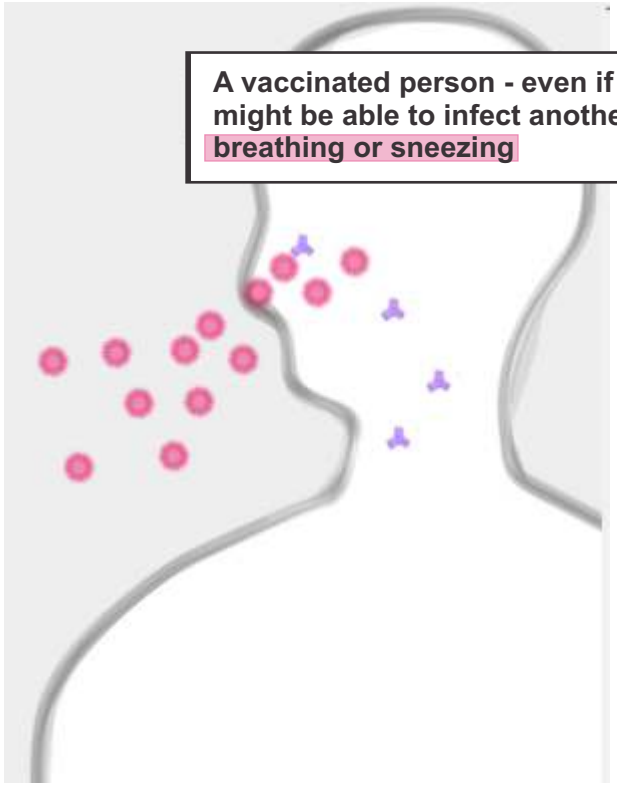
That is because the the SARS-CoV-2 **virus may still colonize the respiratory tract, even as systemic immune cells protect the overall body from the disease it causes – Covid-19.**

...

Studies on the extent to which vaccines protect against transmission are continuing, and promising, but incomplete. It is unlikely the vaccines will provide complete, or “sterilizing”, protection. Only a handful of vaccines are able to make that claim, including for example the smallpox vaccine. However, if a vaccine significantly reduced transmission, it would be very good news for the world’s ability to contain the virus.

Under normal circumstances, these kinds of questions might have been answered in years-long vaccine clinical trials. In this emergency situation, stopping the disease was a more important goal, and available vaccines do that very effectively.

“We would probably know as more and more people get vaccinated, somewhere near the middle of September,” said August...



Return to Timeline

https://www.statnews.com/2021/02/28/johnson-and-johnson-covid19-vaccine-distribution/

Mar. 1

J & J vaccine to start shipping soon, but early supply could be uneven

Health care providers will begin receiving **the first 3.9 million doses** of Johnson & Johnson's newly authorized Covid-19 vaccine **as early as Tuesday morning**, **though supply will be uneven in the coming weeks**, senior Biden administration officials said.

The first shipments account for the entirety of J&J's current inventory. Officials expect **another 16 million doses to be available by the end of March**, though J&J told the federal government that the doses will be delivered mostly toward the second half of the month.

"We do not expect any additional deliveries next week and we expect deliveries to be uneven during the weeks of March. We're getting doses out the door as soon as they're available to ensure vaccines get into the arms as quickly as possible," one senior administration official said.

The federal government has purchased 100 million doses of the J&J vaccine, which requires only a single shot, **but supplies are expected to be scarce until at least April.** The vaccine will be sent beginning Sunday night, one day after its emergency use authorization by the Food and Drug Administration.

The Biden administration has decided to distribute the J&J vaccine **proportional to states' populations — the same formula used to send the Moderna and Pfizer vaccines**, even though the J&J vaccine is authorized for one dose instead of two, and carries less stringent refrigeration requirements.

Though each vaccination site may not have all three vaccines available, officials intend for all three vaccines to be available in all communities.

"All three authorized vaccines will be available in the suburbs, all three available in the cities, and all three available on the coast, and in the heartland," another official said.

Officials said that **individuals should know what vaccine they are signing up for ahead of time, but have also stressed that individuals are unlikely to have a choice in which vaccine they receive at this stage of the rollout.** They encouraged people not to slow down the pace of immunizations by waiting for a particular vaccine.

Vials of a Covid-19 vaccine developed by Johnson & Johnson.
PHILL MAGAKOE/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGE

Return to Timeline

https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/to-beat-covid-we-may-need-a-good-shot-in-the-nose/

Mar. 2

Could intranasal vaccines stop the spread of the coronavirus more effectively?

...Although injected vaccines do reduce symptomatic COVID cases, and prevent a lot of severe illness, they may still allow for asymptomatic infection. A person might feel fine, but actually harbor the virus and be able to pass it on to others. The reason is that the **coronavirus can temporarily take up residence in the mucosa—the moist, mucus-secreting surfaces of the nose and throat** that serve as our first line of defense against inhaled viruses. Research with laboratory animals suggests that a **coronavirus infection can linger in the nose even after it has been vanquished in the lungs.** That means it might be possible to spread the coronavirus after vaccination.

Enter the intranasal vaccine, which abandons the needle and syringe for a spray container that looks more like a nasal decongestant. With a quick spritz up the nose, **intranasal vaccines are designed to bolster immune defenses in the mucosa, triggering production of an antibody known as immunoglobulin A, which can block infection**. This overwhelming response, called sterilizing immunity, reduces the chance that people will pass on the virus.

We have seen this movie before. The first successful polio vaccine, developed by Jonas Salk and licensed for use in 1955, was injected. Like current coronavirus vaccines, it substantially reduced the risk of illness, but did not always prevent infection.

Poliovirus is spread through food or water contaminated with human excrement. The virus enters the body through the mucosa of the gut, then infects the nervous system, where it can cause paralysis. In 1960, Albert Sabin introduced a new polio vaccine, which contained a weakened form of poliovirus, rather than the completely inactivated virus in the Salk vaccine. But the most striking difference was that Sabin's vaccine was swallowed, in the form of a sugar cube or a liquid. In this way, it could come into direct contact with the gut mucosa. This made it more effective than the Salk vaccine in blocking poliovirus infection.

So there is precedent for designing a vaccine that strengthens our immune defenses on the front lines. This is true for respiratory viruses as well as for those that infect the gut. We have flu vaccines, for instance, because before the SARS outbreak in 2003--also caused by a novel coronavirus--the respiratory virus most feared for its potential to spark a pandemic was influenza. The 1918 flu pandemic claimed 50 million lives worldwide. Today although injected influenza vaccines are more familiar, intranasal versions exist and have a long history. **First used in the 1960s in the former Soviet Union, intranasal influenza vaccines have proved to be effective. They are currently being manufactured in the U.S. and India.**

...

Intranasal vaccines have some practical advantages, too. Unlike an injection, a nasal spray is painless. The absence of a needle might allay the concerns of those who are now hesitant about vaccination. **An intranasal vaccine can also be self-administered at home, with minimal instruction. And some of the intranasal vaccines now being tested require no refrigeration**, making them easy to transport and store, especially in low-resource countries.

All of these factors will become even more important if periodic booster vaccinations are needed to protect us against emerging coronavirus variants. Simply mailing someone a nasal spray is far more convenient than arranging for an in-person injection.

...

Return to Timeline

https://www.fiercepharma.com/marketing/j-j-s-covid-vaccine-gets-fda-ok-but-can-pharma-hurdle-66-perception?mkt_tok=eyJpIjoiTUdNeU1qQTVNVEprWXpSaiIsInQiOiJ3cCthbGRJdldBZ2VKaFhJQ0krZHNOK0s2b3Ywb2JzM29uUXNqTDFUdzZjaWZTMWUzUEpCUEI1WjFNWEdpQ3NxMnpScXRpSVAzNU8ramZ5cDBcL1lVcGVzcUFid1JsREo2dU40eUd6U0Q2NnFsek0xNWpXdm9pTlFQa29ocVpUXC83In0%3D&mrkid=936491

Mar. 2

J&J's hurdling the '66%' perception to win over a vaccine-hesitant public

With an FDA green light for emergency use, Johnson & Johnson's COVID-19 shot now faces a communications hurdle. How will the company handle the comparisons with its vaccine rivals?

Already, there's wide and spreading chatter on social media and real-world word-of-mouth discussions about the J&J shot's 66% overall effectiveness rate. The company's response has been communication—and lots of it, with some help from its friend in public health.

J&J CEO Alex Gorsky, government officials—and even Pfizer board member and ex-FDA chief Scott Gottlieb—took to multiple media outlets on Sunday and Monday to lay out the detailed facts and nuances in the data.

Gorsky hit the media circuit Monday morning, appearing on CBS' Good Morning America, NBC's Today Show and CNBC news.

His repeated answer to the 66% question when compared to Pfizer and Moderna's 95% and 94% effectiveness rates? **Different trial timing—namely, after new variants emerged—and the global nature of J&J's testing delivered different outcomes.**

While **40% of its trial participants were in the U.S., another 40% were in Latin America and 15% were in South Africa, where almost all trial participants faced the more-contagious B.1.351 variant.**

Plus, in all his interviews, Gorsky pointed to the vaccine's **85% effectiveness rate against serious illness and 100% effectiveness at preventing death.**

"Our data actually includes these most challenging, pernicious, virulent strains and what we saw was an 85% effectiveness rate in the severe disease," Gorsky said on CNBC.

...

While J&J's vaccine may face greater communications challenges than the first two COVID-19 vaccines did, the company and public health officials should continue to aim for transparency and simple, clear messages, experts said.

"One of the most important things is not overgeneralizing the message and saying 'Oh, you should just get it whatever it is,' " said Rob Jekielek, managing director at The Harris Poll. "Because there are people who are hesitant because they don't think they have enough access to information or they don't understand it. So it's really important to be specific. … **[M]ost important, across the board, is that the vaccines directly address severe COVID-19."**

Vaccine makers should also look to make sure physicians and nurses on the front lines are informed, because they remain American's most trusted sources of vaccine information, according to Harris Poll data.

"As you have new drugs coming in and new data being released, it's going to cause confusion with people, but it's particularly critical you don't have that confusion with healthcare providers," Jekielek said.

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/technology-santiago-chile-diplomacy-coronavirus-pandemic-0382aefa52c75b834fbaf6d869808f51

Mar. 2

Chinese vaccines sweep much of the world, despite concerns

... China's vaccine diplomacy campaign has been a surprising success: It has **pledged roughly half a billion doses of its vaccines to more than 45 countries**, according to a country-by-country tally by The Associated Press. With just four of China's many vaccine makers claiming they are able to produce at least 2.6 billion doses this year, **a large part of the world's population will end up inoculated not with the fancy Western vaccines boasting headline-grabbing efficacy rates, but with China's humble, traditionally made shots.**

Amid a dearth of public data on China's vaccines, hesitations over their efficacy and safety are still pervasive in the countries depending on them, along with concerns about what China might want in return for deliveries. Nonetheless, inoculations with Chinese vaccines already have begun in more than 25 countries, and the Chinese shots have been delivered to another 11, according to the AP tally, based on independent reporting in those countries along with government and company announcements.

It's a potential face-saving coup for China, which has been determined to transform itself from an object of mistrust over its initial mishandling of the COVID-19 outbreak to a savior. Like India and Russia, China is trying to build goodwill, and has **pledged roughly 10 times more vaccines abroad than it has distributed at home.**

...

China has targeted the low- and middle-income countries largely left behind as rich nations scooped up most of the pricey vaccines produced by the likes of Pfizer and Moderna. And despite a few delays of its own in Brazil and Turkey, China has largely capitalized on slower-than-hoped-for deliveries by U.S. and European vaccine makers.

Like many other countries, Chile received far fewer doses of the Pfizer vaccine than first promised. In the month after its vaccination program began in late December, only around 150,000 of the 10 million Pfizer doses the South American country ordered arrived.

...

China's vaccines, which can be stored in standard refrigerators, are attractive to countries like Indonesia, a sweltering nation that straddles the equator and could struggle to accommodate the ultracold storage needs of vaccines like Pfizer's.

...

In Europe, China is providing the vaccine to countries such as Serbia and Hungary -- a significant geopolitical victory in Central Europe and the Balkans, where the West, China and Russia are competing for political and economic influence. This stretch of Europe has offered fertile ground for China to strengthen bilateral ties with Serbia and Hungary's populist leaders, who often criticize the EU.

Serbia became the first country in Europe to start inoculating its population with China's vaccines in January. The country has so far purchased 1.5 million doses of Sinopharm's vaccine, which makes up the majority of the country's supply, and smaller amounts of Russia's Sputnik V and Pfizer's vaccines.

...

Neighboring **Hungary**, impatient over delays in the European Union, soon **became the first country in the EU to approve the same Chinese vaccine**. On Sunday, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban got the Sinopharm shot, after recently saying he trusted the Chinese vaccine the most.

Many leaders have publicly supported the Chinese shots to allay concerns. Early on, "people had all these microchip theories in their heads, genetic modification, sterilization, running around on social media platforms," said Sanjeev Pugazhendi, a medical officer in the Indian Ocean island nation of the Seychelles, whose president recently received a Sinopharm shot on camera. "But the moment we started giving out the vaccines to leaders, religious leaders and health workers, that started to subside."

Beijing's vaccine diplomacy efforts are good for both China and the developing world, experts say. ...

Return to Timeline

https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/gov-greg-abbott-lift-texas-mask-mandate-open-state-100-n1259329

Mar. 3

16 US States have lifted mask mandates

The governors of Texas and Mississippi both announced on Tuesday they would be lifting their states' mask mandates and rolling back many of their Covid-19 health mandates, just one day after the CDC warned against complacency in the face of emerging coronavirus variants.

"It is now time to open Texas 100 percent," Texas Gov. Greg Abbott said Tuesday afternoon at Montelongo's Mexican Restaurant in Lubbock.

"Covid has not suddenly disappeared," he said, "but state mandates are no longer needed."

Shortly after Abbott's announcement, Gov. Tate Reeves announced that he would end Mississippi's statewide mask mandate, effective Wednesday of this week...

[All states with no mask mandate]

1. Alaska
2. Arizona
3. Florida
4. Georgia
5. Idaho
6. Iowa
7. Mississippi
8. Missouri
9. Montana
10. Nebraska
11. North Dakota
12. Oklahoma
13. South Carolina
14. South Dakota
15. Tennessee
16. Texas

Too soon?

Cautionary tales ...

Brazil

Italy

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/europe-coronavirus-pandemic-berlin-germany-coronavirus-vaccine-9533c6481af31a1602384238f1114bed

Mar. 3

Tactical shift: Europe seeks vaccine 'overdrive' to catch up

... With its stockpile of AstraZeneca vaccine doses set to top 2 million, **Germany** is looking to make more people eligible for the shots that have so far been restricted to a fraction of the population: people in the top priority group who are under 65.

France changed tactics earlier this week, allowing some people over 65 to get the AstraZeneca vaccine after initially restricting its use to younger people. Health Minister Olivier Veran said the shot would soon also be available to people over 50 with health problems that make them more vulnerable.

France, which at more than 87,000 dead has among the highest coronavirus tolls in Europe, had used only 25% of the 1.6 million AstraZeneca vaccines it has received as of Tuesday.
...
In **Italy**, Premier Mario Draghi's new government ousted the COVID-19 emergency czar this week and put an army general with expertise in logistics and experience in Afghanistan and Kosovo in charge of the country's vaccination program.

Denmark, meanwhile, stands out as an EU vaccination success story. The Scandinavian nation leads the bloc's vaccination tables along with tiny Malta and expects to vaccinate all adults by July — far ahead of the EU goal of 70% of adults vaccinated by September.

Rather than hold back doses for the required second shot, Danish health authorities followed the British model of using all available vaccines as they came in — an approach more EU countries are now considering.

And all of Denmark's 6 million people have digital health records linked to a single ID number, allowing authorities to pinpoint exactly who is eligible for vaccination and reach out to them directly. British authorities also text people directly to set up shots.

"There are historical reasons why we don't have a centralized register like in Denmark," said von Gaudecker, citing Germany's grim history of state oppression under Nazism and Communism.

"Of course a state can do terrible things with data," he said. "But it can also potentially do great things with data."

Better targeting available doses for those who need them is one way European countries hope to stay ahead of the virus in the coming months, as more contagious variants spread.

France and Spain plan to give just one shot of the two-dose vaccines to some people who have recovered from COVID-19, arguing that recent infections act as partial protection against the virus.

Italy, France and the Czech Republic are prioritizing vaccinations in outbreak hotspots. **Hungary**'s leader got a Chinese COVID-19 shot over the weekend and his country and **Slovakia** are buying Russia's Sputnik V to supplement other vaccines delivered by the EU. Poland's president has suggested that his country may follow Hungary's lead in getting Chinese vaccines. ...

Return to Timeline

https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/mar/03/brazil-covid-global-threat-new-more-lethal-variants-miguel-nicolelis

Mar. 4

Scientist sees Brazil's outbreak as a global threat

... Miguel Nicolelis, a Duke University neuroscientist who is tracking the crisis, urged the international community to challenge the Brazilian government over its failure to contain an epidemic that has **killed more than a quarter of a million Brazilians – about 10% of the global total.**

...

He said: "It's that **if you allow the virus to proliferate at the levels it is currently proliferating here, you open the door to the occurrence of new mutations and the appearance of even more lethal variants."**

Already, **one particularly worrying variant (P1) has been traced to Manaus, the largest city in the Brazilian Amazon**, which suffered a devastating healthcare breakdown in January after a surge in infections. Six cases of that variant have so far been detected in the UK.

"Brazil is an open-air laboratory for the virus to proliferate and eventually create more lethal mutations," warned Nicolelis. "This is about the world. It's global."

The alert came as Brazil entered the most deadly chapter of its year-long Covid crisis, with hospitals around the country collapsing or on the verge of collapse and the average weekly death toll hitting new heights. **A record 1,726 deaths were reported on Tuesday, the highest number since the pandemic began.**

"It's a battlefield," a doctor in the southern city of Porto Alegre told local television after his hospital's intensive care unit and mortuary ran out of space.

Nicolelis said Bolsonaro's failure to halt the outbreak and launch an adequate vaccination campaign had created a domestic tragedy from which Latin America's most populous nation was unlikely to emerge until late 2022.

"We've now gone past 250,000 deaths, and my expectation is that if nothing is done we could have lost 500,000 people here in Brazil by next March. It's a horrifying and tragic prospect, but at this point it's perfectly possible," he said, predicting a traumatic month as public and private hospitals buckled.

"My forecast is that **if the world was appalled by what happened in Bergamo in Italy and what happened in Manaus a few weeks ago, it's going to be even more shocked by the rest of Brazil if nothing is done."**

The scientist, who has been advising state governments on their Covid response, called for the creation of a special Covid commission to fill the leadership vacuum left by Bolsonaro and an immediate 21-day nationwide lockdown. That, however, seems virtually unthinkable given Bolsonaro's position. **On Wednesday, the Brazilian president will reportedly deliver an address to the nation in which he is expected to again denounce lockdown measures.**

...

"To this day, Brazil doesn't have a national plan to combat Covid-19," Temporão complained, attacking Bolsonaro's failure to secure sufficient vaccines by striking deals to buy shots made by companies such as Pfizer, Moderna and Johnson & Johnson. **Just 3.3% of Brazil's population has so far been vaccinated, compared to 15.2% in the US, 18% in Chile and 29.9% in the UK.**

"I don't think there is any other leader who is so obtuse, so backward, who has such a mistaken and warped vision of reality as the president of Brazil," Temporão said. "History will condemn these people."

Return to Timeline

https://www.cnbc.com/2021/03/03/who-warns-of-uptick-in-covid-cases-globally-after-weeks-of-decline.html

Mar. 4

New cases across the world are up 7% from prior week

... The reversal **could be caused by the emergence of several new, more contagious variants of the coronavirus, relaxing public measures and so-called pandemic fatigue, in which people become tired of following precautions**, the WHO said in its weekly report. Maria Van Kerkhove, head of the WHO's emerging diseases and zoonosis unit, said during a Q&A event at the organization's headquarters in Geneva on Wednesday that the global health agency is trying to better understand what's causing the reversal in trends in each region and country.

"I can tell you what we're worried about is with the introduction of vaccines and vaccination in a number of countries, **we still need people to carry out their individual-level measures**," she said, urging people to **practice physical distancing and continue to wear masks when around others.**

"By seeing this one week of increase in trends, it's a pretty stern warning to all of us that we need to stay the course," Van Kerkhove said. "We need to keep adhering to these measures at hand."

Dr. Mike Ryan, executive director of the WHO's health emergencies program, suggested that the uptick could be because "we may be relaxing a little before we've got the full impact of vaccination." He added that he understands the temptation to socialize more and to revert to more normal behavior, but "the problem is every time we've done that before the virus has exploited that."

Ryan reiterated that the cause of the uptick in cases remains unclear, but added that the tried-and-true public health measures that have been emphasized throughout the pandemic are still effective.

"When cases are decreasing it's never everything we do and when they're increasing it's never all our fault," he said.

Ryan noted that **deaths have not yet risen with cases**, but that could change in the coming weeks. **Hopefully, he said, a rise in deaths can be avoided due to the vaccination** of those most vulnerable to the disease.

While the rollout of vaccines is cause for optimism in some countries, Ryan noted that many nations across the world have not yet received doses. He said that **80% of doses have been administered in just 10 countries.**

The WHO remarks echo those made recently by federal officials in the United States. Dr. Rochelle Walensky, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, has been warning for days that the decline in daily **new cases in the U.S. has stalled out and ticked upward.**

Over the past seven days, the U.S. reported an average of more than 65,400 daily new cases, according to data compiled by Johns Hopkins University. That's far below the peak of about 250,000 new cases every day that the country was reporting in early January, but it's still well above the rate of infection the U.S. saw over the summer when the virus swept across the Sun Belt.

"At this level of cases, with variants spreading, we stand to completely lose the hard-earned ground we have gained," Walensky said Monday. "With these statistics, I am really worried about more states rolling back the exact public health measures we have recommended to protect people from Covid-19."

"Please hear me clearly: At this level of cases with variants spreading, we stand to completely lose the hard-earned ground we have gained," she said.

https://www.cnn.com/2021/03/05/world/covid-tanzania-turkmenistan-north-korea-intl/index.html?utm_medium

Mar. 5

The countries making dubious claims over Covid-19 -- and what that means for the world

For the past year, countries around the world have shared data on Covid-19 cases and deaths with the World Health Organization (WHO) -- information that is crucial in informing the global fight against the disease.

However, t**hree countries stand out as appearing either less than transparent or in denial about the scale of the problem.** The East African nation of **Tanzania has not updated its Covid-19 data since early May**, leaving the last number of reported confirmed cases at 509 and the death toll at 21.

The Central Asian nation of **Turkmenistan**, a secretive, highly authoritarian state, "**has not reported any Covid-19 cases to WHO to date**," according to a WHO statement. But human rights groups say the disease is spreading widely there.

North Korea similarly **has not recorded a single case of Covid-19**. Most experts view that claim as suspect, however. The reclusive country has tested only a fraction of its nearly 26-million-strong population and has a shared border with China, where the pandemic began.

Dr. Dorit Nitzan, regional emergency director for the WHO Regional Office for Europe, told CNN **14 countries have so far reported zero cases, adding that the organization "cannot independently verify whether zero report.**

The WHO's Covid-19 dashboard doesn't differentiate between countries reporting zero cases of the virus and countries that haven't submitted any data. However, in contrast to Turkmenistan and North Korea, the other zero-case locations are tiny, isolated island communities such as St. Helena, Kiribati and Tuvalu.

"We encourage all countries to share data -- publicly or to WHO -- as this allows us to track the disease globally," Nitzan added. "As **Covid-19 is a communicable disease, tracking cases is especially important, aiding in a prompt and appropriate public health response**."
...
North Korea's isolation may protect it to a degree. But as vaccinations gradually open up the prospect of a return to normal life, the **corners of the globe where the virus lingers out of sight will present an ever greater threat.**

Fighting Covid-19 is everyone's responsibility, and diplomatic pressure should be applied to those countries that don't meet their obligations, said Drobac.

"The longer we let this virus rage anywhere, the more lottery tickets we're giving the virus to be able to come up with a cool new mutation that's going to make our lives really difficult," he said. "It's not just a potential tragedy for the country's own people, it's a risk for all of us."

Return to Timeline

https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/us/coronavirus-us-cases.html#states

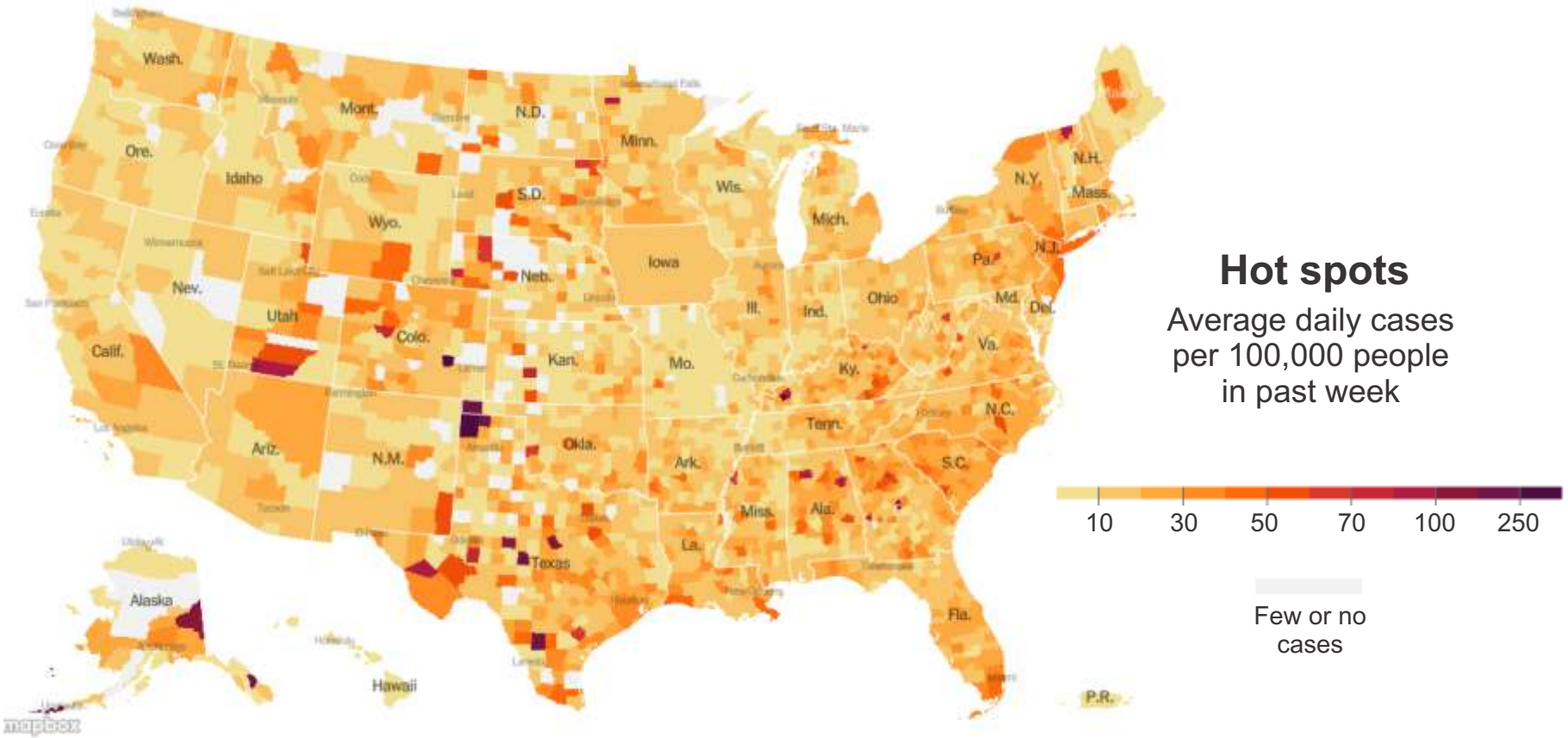
Select live link for interactive map

Mar. 5

US reports rising case numbers in 29 states

... On Sunday, for the first time in more than a month, at least 29 states reported rising case counts. And coronavirus variants continue to spread rapidly across the U.S., capable of spreading more easily, dodging some treatments and immunities, or both.

On the last day of January, the U.S. knew of 471 cases of variants. On the last day of February, that number was 2,463.



Return to Timeline

https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/health/2021/03/05/fewer-americans-getting-covid-tests-amid-vaccines-doctors-worry/4578032001/

Mar. 6

As Americans get vaccinated, fewer are getting tested for coronavirus

... Though the testing slowdown may be the result of fewer infections, it also might signal too many Americans are growing complacent as the second year of COVID-19 marches on and millions get vaccinated every week.

Testing remains a staple of the effort to control COVID-19, along with wearing masks, social distancing, avoiding crowded indoor places and hand hygiene. Though officials are optimistic vaccines will offer protection, some warn the nation might be letting its guard down before enough Americans are protected from the virus.

"A lot of people are just kind of done with the pandemic," said Mary Hayden, professor of internal medicine and pathology at Rush Medical College in Chicago.

In January, labs and other testing sites completed an average of nearly 1.9 million tests each day as cases reached record levels. **Average daily testing dropped to 1.5 million in February and 1.3 million in March**, according to figures from the COVID Tracking Project.

Hayden said the nation's testing never reached levels that public health officials thought were "adequate or optimal" to control the virus.

“We never quite got there," said Hayden, an Infectious Diseases Society of America fellow. "And now we’re dropping."

...

"What we do know is the virus is circulating in our communities," Weintraub said. "And so one of the most effective ways to understand, either am I infected or could I be infected, is to get tested."

The College of American Pathologists said members noted a "significant decrease" in the number of tests at health care institutions nationwide.

In metro Seattle, testing has dropped in tandem with new cases. At the University of Washington's lab, tests surged in the late fall. Tests are about half of fall's peak, said Geoffrey Baird, the university's acting chair of laboratory medicine and pathology.

The vaccine rollout is a pivotal period that Baird and others are watching. If vaccination efforts slow, more states relax mask mandates and virus variants gain traction, it could lead to another big spike in cases, Baird said.

"All of us in the testing business are wondering what will occur in the coming month or two," he said.

Hayden said the public must remain vigilant, even as more and more people get vaccinated.

"While the infection rates are much lower, they are still high," Hayden said. "I don’t think we're at a place yet where we can really relax our overall strategies and reduce testing."

https://www.cnn.com/2021/03/07/health/us-coronavirus-sunday/index.html

Mar. 7

US is at a tipping point of another Covid-19 surge

With each day and each vaccination, the US inches closer to the finish line of what has been a brutal battle against Covid-19.

But it's not over just yet.

Infection numbers, after weeks of declines, now seem to have plateaued at high levels. The US has averaged more than 60,000 Covid-19 cases daily in the past week. More than 41,000 people remain hospitalized with the virus nationwide, according to the COVID Tracking Project. And **an average of more than 1,700 US Covid-19 deaths were reported every day for the past seven days.**

And **highly contagious variants that are already circulating** have experts worried **another Covid-19 spike could be just weeks away. More than 2,700 cases** of variants first spotted in the UK, South Africa and Brazil **have been reported in the US**, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention -- **but** the agency has cautioned **that's not the total number of cases in the country, but rather those that have been spotted with the help of genomic sequencing.**

The **vast majority of these cases** -- at least 2,672 -- **are the more contagious variant known as B.1.1.7, first spotted in the UK.** The variant has been found in 46 states, Puerto Rico and Washington, DC.

"That strain is increasing exponentially, it's spiking up," infectious diseases specialist and epidemiologist Dr. Celine Gounder told CNN Saturday. "So we are probably right now on a tipping point of another surge."

Speaking on the dangers of that variant, Michael Osterholm, director of the Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy at the University of Minnesota, warned CNN on Friday, "that virus is about to take off in the United States." **The variants are a big reason why experts have repeatedly warned that now is the time to double down on measures that work to curb the spread of the virus -- and not ease Covid-19 restrictions.**

"There are so many reasons why you don't want to pull back just now," Dr. Anthony Fauci told CNN late last week. "You want to plan that you will be able, within a reasonable time, to pull back. But not at a time when we have circulating variants and when you have what looks like a plateauing of the decline in the cases."

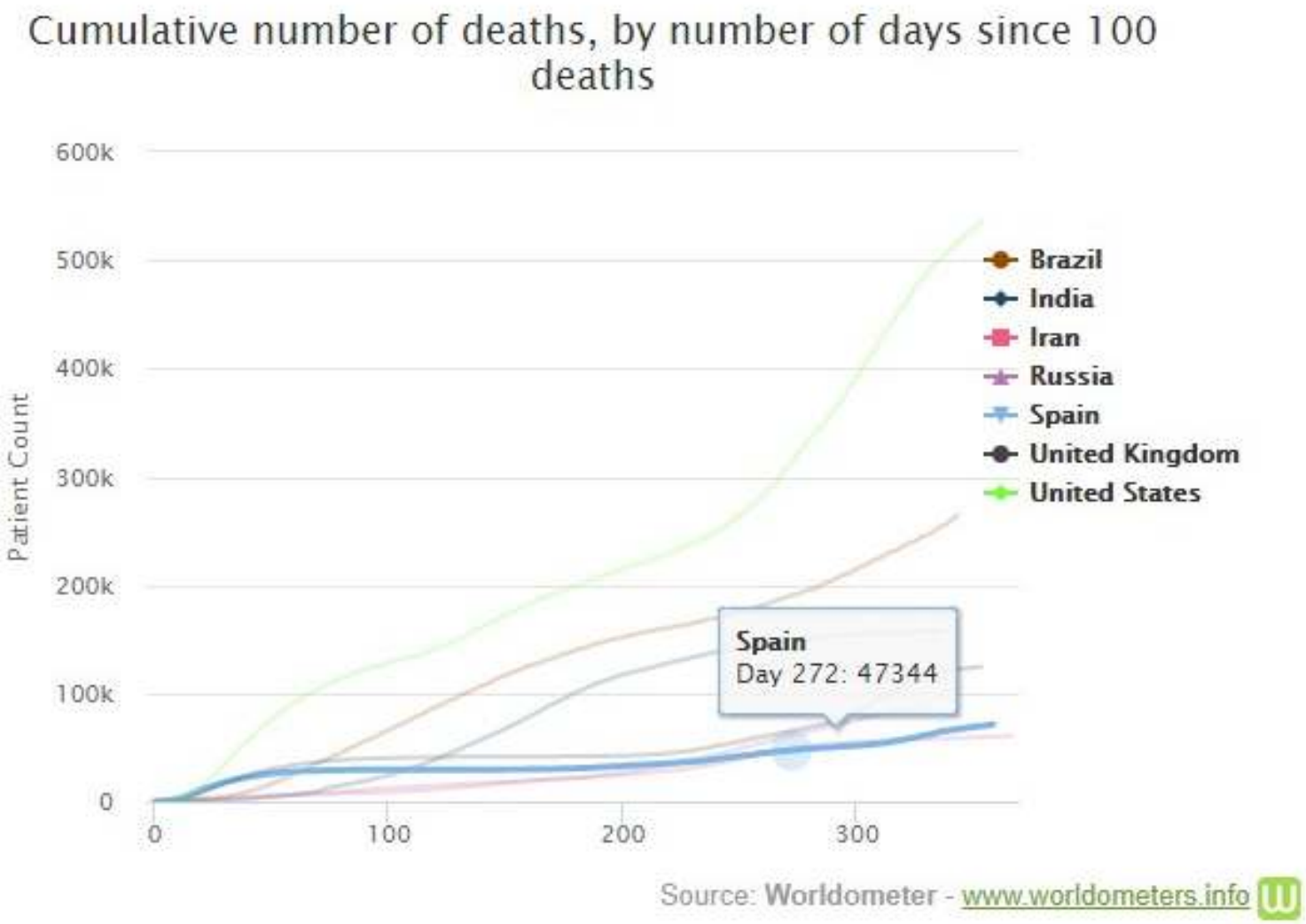
Return to Timeline

https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/worldwide-graphs/#total-deaths

Select live link for current number and to access interactive version of the line chart below

Mar. 7

Death toll from coronavirus tops 2,700,000



https://www.pharmacytimes.com/view/fda-issues-eua-for-covid-19-diagnostic-test-to-confirm-recent-or-prior-covid-19-infection

Mar. 8

FDA Issues EUA for COVID-19 T-Cell Response Test

...The diagnostic test is T cell-based and is the first indication for the test, which resulted from a recent collaboration between Adaptive Biotechnologies Corporation and Microsoft.

“People who have been unsure about a prior infection will now have another way to know if they had the virus,” said Chad Robins, chief executive officer of Adaptive Biotechnologies, in a press release. “The authorization of T-Detect COVID represents a true breakthrough for patients and a pivotal milestone for the diagnostic testing paradigm. We have proven that it is possible to read how T cells detect disease in the blood, and this is just the beginning of a pipeline of tests for many other indications.”

The FDA based its assessment of the issuance of the EUA on **a clinical validation study that demonstrated that the diagnostic test has a sensitivity of 97.1% through the use of RT-PCR.** Since sensitivity is the ability of a diagnostic test to accurately identify a positive case of COVID-19, or present with a true positive, the significant level of sensitivity demonstrates a high level of diagnostic accuracy, according to the FDA.

Additionally, the FDA found that the diagnostic test had a specificity of 100%. Specificity evaluates the test’s ability to accurately identify a negative COVID-19 case, or present with a true negative, and 100% specificity shows the test has complete accuracy in this area.

Although COVID-19 is the first indication for the diagnostic test, it is being developed for multiple disease states. The diagnostic capacity of the T cell-based test is a translation of the diagnostic capability of T cells into the clinical practice domain.

T cells, which are the adaptive immune system’s first responders in the detection of any virus, multiply and circulate in the blood in order to defend the body against a virus upon its detection. Due to their role in the immune system, **T cells contain information that may provide a trackable measure of the body’s immune response to COVID-19, as T cells “remember” prior infections** in order to more effectively kill pathogens upon reappearance.

Since research has demonstrated that antibodies to SARS-CoV-2 may decline over time, T cells may be a valuable source of information to help researchers assess how long patients remain resistant to reinfection. Because T cells circulate freely in the blood, they are also an easy way to assess exposure to SARS-CoV-2 and potentially immunity as well.

“This is the first commercially available T-cell test that confirms recent or prior SARS-CoV-2 infections in people. T-Detect is accurate and what I find especially remarkable is how rapidly it was developed. Going from the lab to real-world human impact in a matter of months demonstrates the true value of our collaboration and the power of merging biology with cloud-scale machine learning technology,” said Peter Lee, corporate vice president, Research & Incubations, Microsoft, in the press release. “We are hopeful that this technology will have a meaningful impact not only in the global fight against COVID-19, but in many other disease areas in the future.”

Return to Timeline

https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2021/03/08/vaccinated-people-cdc-guidance/

Mar. 9

CDC guidelines give the fully vaccinated more freedom

... The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said **people who are two weeks past their final shot may visit indoors with unvaccinated members of a single household at low risk of severe disease, without wearing masks or distancing.** That would free many vaccinated grandparents who live near their unvaccinated children and grandchildren to visit them for the first time in a year. The guidelines continue to discourage visits involving long-distance travel, however.

The CDC also said fully vaccinated people **can gather indoors with those who are also fully vaccinated. And they do not need to quarantine, or be tested after exposure to the coronavirus, as long as they have no symptoms**, the agency said.

Peter Hotez, co-director of the Texas Children's Hospital Center for Vaccine Development, applauded the advice but said it has taken too long for the CDC to tell an exhausted public when their masks can come off.

"The sooner we move to telling people if you're fully vaccinated you don't have to wear masks, that will be an incentive for people to get vaccinated," Hotez said.

For those who have made it through the rocky vaccine rollout, **the five pages of guidelines offer a road map of sorts to resuming aspects of daily life that have been on hold for more than a year.** They come as states have begun reopening and as government and public health officials are racing to vaccinate people as fast as possible to outpace highly transmissible versions of the virus spreading in nearly every state.

After a slow start, the pace of inoculations is accelerating, with 60 million people in the United States having received one shot and more than 31 million people fully vaccinated as of Monday, or about 9 percent of the population, according to the CDC. On Saturday, 2.9 million doses were administered, a record, while about 2.2 million people on average are getting vaccinated daily. President Biden has vowed to have enough supply for every adult who wants a shot by late May, raising hopes of a return to normal life.

The country is "starting to turn a corner," Andy Slavitt, White House senior adviser for the coronavirus response, said in a briefing Monday, with the guidance highlighting "what a world looks like where we move beyond covid-19."

CDC Director Rochelle Walensky said the recommendations sought to balance potential risk to those who are unvaccinated and impacts on community transmission against the benefit of "getting back to some of the things that we love in life" for those who are inoculated. She and others warned that millions more people need to be vaccinated before everyone can stop following coronavirus precautions.

The CDC will continue to update this initial guidance, perhaps loosening travel restrictions if new infections continue to decrease as vaccinations increase, Walensky said. But with over 90 percent of the population still unvaccinated and levels of virus high, even those who have received the shots "might get breakthrough infections with lesser amounts of virus," she said, referring to a fully vaccinated person getting infected.

Return to Timeline

https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-health-coronavirus-variant-britain/uk-covid-19-variant-has-significantly-higher-death-rate-study-finds-idUSKBN2B212Q

Mar. 10

UK COVID-19 variant has significantly higher death rate, study finds

LONDON (Reuters) - A highly infectious variant of COVID-19 that has spread around the world since it was first discovered in Britain late last year is **between 30% and 100% more deadly** than previous dominant variants, researchers said on Wednesday.

In a study that compared death rates among people in Britain infected with the new SARS-CoV-2 variant - **known as B.1.1.7** - against those infected with other variants of the COVID-19-causing virus, scientists said the new variant's mortality rate was "significantly higher".

The B.1.1.7 variant was first detected in Britain in September 2020, and has since also been found in more than 100 other countries.

It has 23 mutations in its genetic code - a relatively high number - and some of them have made it far more easily spread. Scientists say it is about **40%-70% more transmissible** than previous dominant variants that were circulating.

In the UK study, published in the British Medical Journal on Wednesday, infection with the new variant led to 227 deaths in a sample of 54,906 COVID-19 patients, compared with 141 among the same number of patients infected with other variants.

"Coupled with its ability to spread rapidly, this makes B.1.1.7 a threat that should be taken seriously," said Robert Challen, a researcher at Exeter University who co-led the research.

Independent experts said this study's findings add to previous preliminary evidence linking infection with the B.1.1.7 virus variant with an increased risk of dying from COVID-19.

Initial findings from the study were presented to the UK government earlier this year, along with other research, by experts on its New and Emerging Respiratory Virus Threats Advisory Group, or NERVTAG, panel.

Lawrence Young, a virologist and professor of molecular oncology at Warwick University, said the precise mechanisms behind the higher death rate of the B.1.1.7 variant were still not clear, but "could be related to higher levels of virus replication as well as increased transmissibility".

He warned that the UK variant was likely fuelling a recent surge in infections across Europe.

Return to Timeline

https://www.fiercepharma.com/pharma/lilly-covid-19-antibody-combo-cuts-hospitalizations-and-deaths-by-87?mkt_tok=Mjk0LU1RRi0wNTYAAAF7vQg4P9qhZ39oTIbCBUB_GPAFCrXkeCn1fATk_fHgFBNQNv2bsE07sf5z859G2Y0MOo4tue-Lt0efyKLtMJe70lZSuzg70HdEzwf6h4V1KLHrh9Y&mrkid=936491

Mar. 10

COVID-19 antibody cuts hospitalizations and deaths by 87%

In **trial data** released [today], the company said its **bamlanivimab-etesevimab duo slashed the risk of hospitalization and death** by a whopping **87% versus placebo.** Investigators tested a combination of 700 mg of bamlanivimab and 1400 mg of etesevimab in a trial comprising 769 patients total.

It's the starkest reduction in hospitalizations and deaths for a COVID-19 therapeutic seen so far, and in a "fairly sizable" sample size, Lilly's COVID-19 therapeutics platform leader Janelle Sabo said in an interview.

Lilly's combo previously posted a 70% reduction in hospitalizations and deaths at higher doses of 2800 mg each. The new trial used the doses now authorized by the FDA in newly diagnosed patients at high risk of severe disease—the same population the combo is approved to treat.

The new trial reinforces other data Lilly has seen to date and shows the FDA's authorization covers the right doses in the right patients, Sabo added.

The combo scored its emergency nod last month on the heels of the earlier data. Lilly has partnered with Amgen to help produce up to 1 million doses of the cocktail this year.

Patients over 65, or those under 65 but who are overweight or have multiple health problems, qualify as high-risk for treatment with the drug. For patients under 65, it's "about looking at the combination of weight" and other factors, Sabo said.

In the new study, investigators tracked four hospitalizations and zero deaths among patients who received the Lilly antibody combo. That compared with 11 hospitalizations and four deaths for patients on placebo.

In the two phase 3 cohorts so far, zero patients who received the antibody combination have died, while 14 patients died on placebo. Thirteen of those placebo deaths were deemed to be related to COVID-19.

After its FDA authorization, Lilly inked another supply deal with the U.S. government covering 100,000 doses for $210 million. The doses will be delivered before the end of the month, and the government has the option to purchase 1.1 million more doses through Nov. 25 depending on demand.

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/brazil-rio-de-janeiro-health-coronavirus-pandemic-jair-bolsonaro-04931a387c7fb128266235635a1422a1

Mar. 11

Brazil's hospitals are faltering as coronavirus variant tears through the country

... "We have reached the limit across Brazil; rare are the exceptions," Dias, who leads the governors' forum, said. "The chance of dying without assistance is real."

Those deaths have already started. **In Brazil's wealthiest state**, **Sao Paulo, at least 30 patients died this month while waiting for ICU beds**, according to a tally published Wednesday by the news site G1. **In southern Santa Catarina state, 419 people are waiting for transfer to ICU beds. In neighboring Rio Grande do Sul, ICU capacity is at 106%.**

Alexandre Zavascki, a doctor in Rio Grande do Sul's capital Porto Alegre, described a constant arrival of hospital patients who struggle to breathe.

"I have a lot of colleagues who, at times, stop to cry. This isn't medicine we're used to performing routinely. This is medicine adapted for a war scenario," said Zavascki, who oversees infectious disease treatment at a private hospital. "We see a good part of the population refusing to see what's happening, resisting the facts. Those people could be next to step inside the hospital and will want beds. But there won't be one."

...

The **most recent surge is driven by the P1 variant**, which Brazil's health minister said last month is three times as transmissible as the original strain. It first became dominant in the Amazonian city Manaus and in January forced the airlift of hundreds of patients to other states.

Brazil's failure to arrest the virus' spread since then is increasingly seen as a concern not just for Latin American neighbors, but also as a warning to the world, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, director of the World Health Organization, said in a March 5 press briefing.

"In the whole country, aggressive use of the public health measures, social measures, will be very, very crucial," he said. "Without doing things to impact transmission or suppress the virus, I don't think we will be able in Brazil to have the declining trend."

Last week's tally of more than 10,000 deaths was Brazil's highest since the pandemic began, and t**his week's toll is on track to be even greater after the country posted nearly 2,300 deaths on Wednesday — blowing away the prior day's total that was also a record.**

...

"Every day is a new surprise, a new variant, a city whose health system enters collapse," Romano said. "We're now in the worst phase. Whether this will be the worst phase of all, unfortunately we don't know what's yet to come."

Return to Timeline

https://twitter.com/segal_eran/status/1369897891888779269

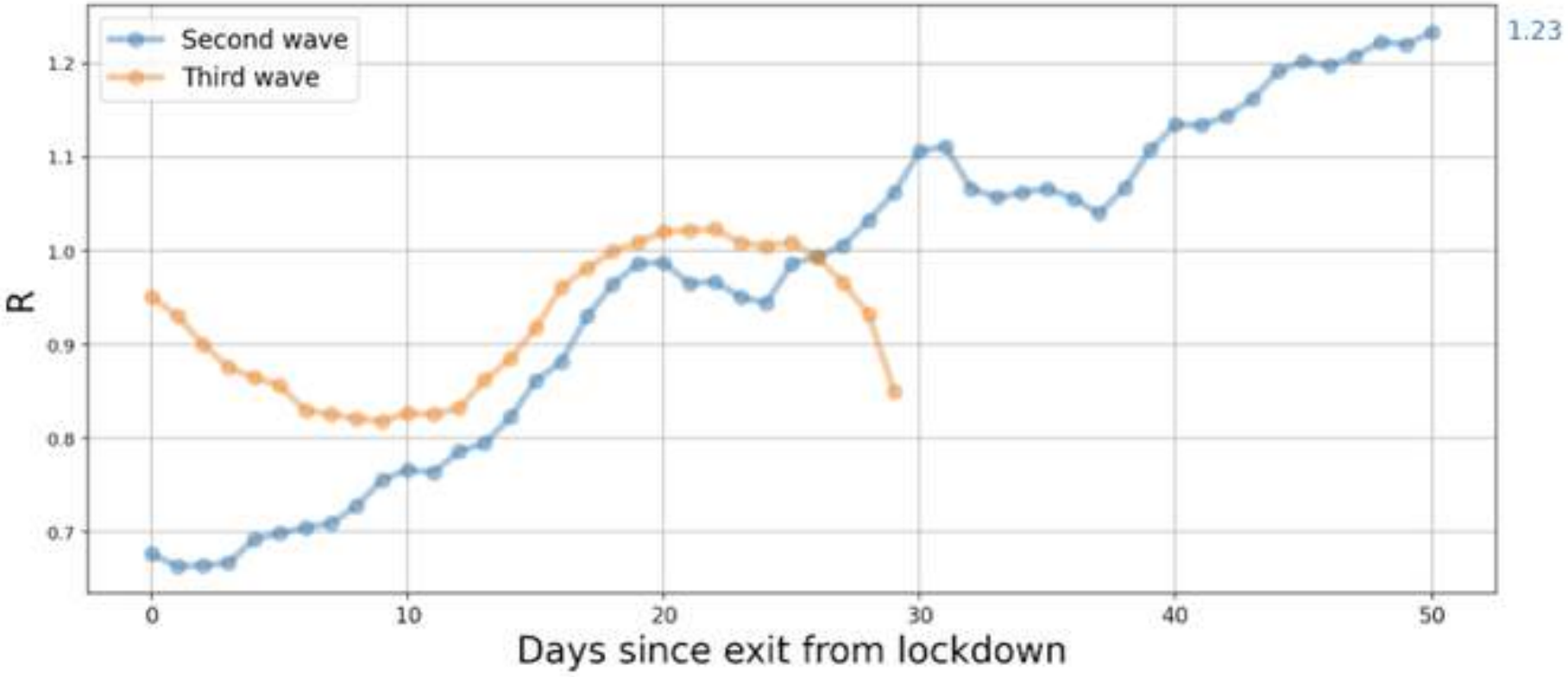
Mar. 11

Israel's cases drop after exit from 3rd lockdown

Israel: This week the economy opened nearly fully a month after exit from 3rd lockdown, cases are dropping at a ~30% weekly rate

At this stage after exit from 2nd lockdown, without B117 and with less of the economy open, cases increased

Infected / vaccinated above age 16: 86%!



Return to Timeline

https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-vaccines-novavax-idUSKBN2B32ZO

Mar. 11

Novavax vaccine 96% effective against original coronavirus, 86% vs British variant in UK trial

... There were no cases of severe illness or deaths among those who got the vaccine, the company said, in a sign that it could stop the worse effects of new variants that have cropped up.
...
In a **smaller trial conducted in South Africa** - where volunteers were primarily exposed to another newer, more contagious variant widely circulating there and spreading around the world - the Novavax vaccine was **55% effective**, based on people without HIV, but still fully prevented severe illness.

Novavax Chief Medical Officer Filip Dubovsky said the performance in South Africa suggests there may still be a case for using it in areas where the South African variant is dominant.

Novavax is also developing new formulations of its vaccine to protect against emerging variants and plans to initiate clinical testing of these shots in the second quarter of this year.

Results from the final analysis of the UK trial were largely in line with interim data released in January.

The company expects to use the data to submit for regulatory authorization in various countries. **It is not clear when it will seek U.S. authorization or if regulators will require it to complete an ongoing trial in the United States.**

Novavax expects data from a 30,000-person trial in the United States and Mexico by early April.

Dubovsky said that Novavax is still planning to file for authorization from UK regulators early in the second quarter of 2021.

The **UK trial**, which enrolled **more than 15,000 people aged 18 to 84**, assessed efficacy of the vaccine during a period with high transmission of the UK virus variant now circulating widely.

The shot's effectiveness in the South Africa trial declined to around 49% when the analysis included data from HIV-positive participants.

The vaccine could be cleared for use in the United States as soon as May if U.S. regulators decide the UK data is enough to make a decision. It could take a couple months longer if they insist on first seeing data from the U.S. trial, its chief executive told Reuters earlier this month.

"Ultimately, they have to decide whether the data we can bring to the table is adequate or whether they would prefer to wait on data from our U.S. study," Dubovsky said on Thursday.

Novavax's vaccine **production plants should all be fully functional by April, executives said on a March investor call. The drugmaker expects to have tens of millions of doses stockpiled and ready to ship in the United States when it receives authorization**, CEO Stanley Erck told Reuters.

Novavax plans to produce its two-shot vaccine at eight manufacturing locations, including the Serum Institute of India.

If authorized, it would follow three COVID-19 vaccines previously approved for use in Britain from Pfizer and partner BioNTech, Moderna Inc and the AstraZeneca shot developed with Oxford University.

The Maryland-based company has received $1.6 billion from the U.S. government in funding for the vaccine trial and to secure 100 million doses.

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/joe-biden-ap-top-news-coronavirus-pandemic-4de42d355f18b8a1352f1206b5253814

Mar. 12

Biden aims for quicker shots, 'independence from this virus'

... President Joe Biden pledged in his first prime-time address to **make all adults eligible for vaccines by May 1** and raised the **possibility of beginning to "mark our independence from this virus" by the Fourth of July**. He offered Americans fresh hope and appealed anew for their help.

Speaking in the White House East Room Thursday night, Biden honored the "collective suffering" of Americans over the past year in his 24-minute address and then offered them a vision for a return to a modicum of normalcy this summer.

...

The speech came just hours after Biden signed into law a $1.9 trillion relief package that he said will help defeat the virus, nurse the economy back to health and deliver direct aid to Americans struggling to make ends meet.

Some cash distributions could begin arriving in the bank accounts of Americans this weekend.

..

Most noticeable to **many Americans are provisions providing up to $1,400 in direct payments and extending $300 weekly emergency unemployment benefits into early September.** Also included are **expanded tax credits over the next year for children, child care and family leave** — some of them credits that Democrats have signaled they'd like to make permanent — **plus spending for renters, food programs and people's utility bills.**

I...

Biden announced an expansion of other efforts to speed vaccinations, including **deploying an additional 4,000 active-duty troops to support vaccination efforts** and **allowing** more people — such as **medical students, veterinarians and dentists — to deliver shots**. He is also **directing more doses toward some 950 community health centers and up to 20,000 retail pharmacies, to make it easier for people to get vaccinated closer to their homes.**

Biden added that his administration is **planning to launch a nationwide website to help people find doses**, saying it would address frustrations so that there would be "no more searching day and night for an appointment."

Even as he offered optimism, Biden made clear that the **July 4 timetable applied only to smaller gatherings**, not larger ones, and **requires cooperation from Americans to continue to wear face coverings, maintain social distancing and follow federal guidelines** meant to slow the spread of the virus in the near term. He also called on them roll up their sleeves to get vaccinated as soon as they're eligible.

This is **"not the time to not stick with the rules,"** Biden said, **warning of the potential for backsliding just as the nation is on the cusp of defeating the virus.** "I need you, the American people," he added. "I need you. I need every American to do their part."

...

On Monday, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released initial guidance for how vaccinated people can resume some normal activities. On Wednesday, Congress approved the president's $1.9 trillion "American Rescue Plan," aimed at easing the economic impact of the virus on tens of millions of people. And **the nation was on pace to administer its 100 millionth dose of vaccine as soon as Thursday.** ...

https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-two-doses-of-pfizer-or-oxford-vaccine-reduce-risk-of-transmission-by-more-than-half-study-shows-12243898

Mar. 13

Researchers in Scotland find Pfizer and Astra-Zeneca vaccines reduce risk of transmission

Researchers in Scotland found that people living with health workers who had been given **one dose of a coronavirus vaccine were 30% less likely** to get it themselves.

The same study found that households of health workers who had received **both doses were 54% less likely to contract the virus.**

The findings are the first in the UK to provide direct evidence that COVID-19 vaccines not only prevent severe disease and death - but also transmission.

Experts from Public Health Scotland and the University of Glasgow who carried out the research noted that both are low estimates - as household members could still have contracted the virus from elsewhere.

They carried out the study on 300,000 NHS workers and their households between 8 December - when the first vaccines were given out in Scotland - and 3 March.

Dr Dianne Stockton, the Public Health Scotland lead for the coronavirus vaccination surveillance programme, said the results are "encouraging", but stressed this should not make the public complacent.

"Despite this good news, it is important to remember that infection prevention and control practices in healthcare settings remain of paramount importance, as do the mitigations to prevent spread in our daily lives," she said. She added that the risk of transmission did not go down to zero after individual healthcare workers were vaccinated.

Dr David McAllister, of Glasgow University, said: "Our study has important implications for informing vaccination strategies.

"The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation in the United Kingdom recently commented on the lack of real-world evidence evaluating the role of vaccination programmes on transmission.

"We provide the first direct evidence that vaccinating individuals working in high-exposure settings reduces the risk to their close contacts - members of their households."

The UK vaccination programme is set to get a boost next week, with staff on standby to go to "maximum capacity" and administer twice as many jabs as they have been.

It comes as supplies increase, raising hopes that the target of having every adult vaccinated by the end of July could arrive sooner.

The latest figures show that 23,053,716 people in the UK have now received a first dose.

That is the equivalent of 43.8% of people aged 18 and over.

Return to Timeline

https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-philippines-cases/update-2-philippines-detects-brazil-local-covid-19-variants-as-cases-surge-idUSL1N2LB04I

Mar. 13

Philippines detects Brazil, local COVID-19 variants as cases surge

The Philippines on Saturday reported a spike in coronavirus infections and its **first case of the highly contagious variant first identified in Brazil, while confirming nearly 100 infections of a new variant discovered locally.**

A Filipino returning from Brazil tested positive for the P.1 Brazil variant after 752 samples were sequenced at the genome centre, the health ministry said in a statement.

It also reported that **98 cases were of the similar P.3 variant** first detected in the Southeast Asian country early this month.

The ministry reported **5,000 new coronavirus cases, the largest single-day increase in more than six months, and 72 additional deaths.** Confirmed cases have increased to 616,611 while confirmed deaths have reached 12,766.

“At present, the P.3 is not identified as a variant of concern as current available data are insufficient to conclude whether the variant will have significant public health implications,” the ministry said.

It reported 59 new infections of the B.1.1.7 variant first detected in Britain, and 32 cases of the B.1.351 variant discovered in South Africa. This brings cases for those variants to 177 and 90, respectively.

“Correct and consistent adherence to the minimum public health standards will prevent the transmission of these variants,” the ministry said.

The Philippines, which has the *second-highest COVID-19 cases and deaths in Southeast Asia, is battling a renewed surge as it ramps up a vaccination drive that started on March 1.

**Indonesia has the highest (if China’s reported numbers are accurate); Laos the lowest*

Return to Timeline

https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-03-14/astrazeneca-s-eu-vaccine-disaster-deepens-on-clots-nationalism?utm_campaign=news&utm_medium=bd&utm_source=applenews

Mar. 14

AstraZeneca's EU Vaccine Woes Deepens on Clots, Nationalism

AstraZeneca Plc's European vaccine nightmare is worsening, with a number of countries halting shots over safety fears as further delivery delays prompt governments around the world to hoard doses they've already got.

Ireland on Sunday joined a growing list of about a dozen countries moving to suspend the shot over concerns about possible side effects from two batches of the vaccines. While Europe's medicines regulator said there was no indication of any issues, **reports of serious blood clotting after inoculation triggered a spate of suspensions stretching as far as Thailand.**

...

But the **various issues mean Astra will only be able to deliver about 100 million doses to the EU in the first half of the year, it said Friday, about a third of the number originally planned.** Thirty million doses are due to be delivered by the end of this quarter, with the rest coming in the next three months.

Italy has already responded with direct action, making use of a new EU measure to **stop Astra from shipping some doses to Australia.** Prime Minister Mario Draghi hinted on Friday that he'll do that again if he has to.

...

Support for the vaccine in the developing world, where the relative low price and ability to store the shot without special refrigeration fueled its initial appeal, could also be hurt by suspensions. **AstraZeneca has pledged significant supplies to the Covax program, a facility that aims to distribute vaccines equitably around the world.**

The number of incidents reported -- about 30 from a group of around five million -- is no greater than what would have occurred naturally in that size of population, according to regulators and scientists.

"Genuine problems with a batch are very rare and almost always relate to contamination by bacteria or physical" particles like glass detected by the manufacturer, said Stephen Evans, a professor at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine. "Pausing the use in this case is not evidence-based."

The U.K. has administered more than 25 million vaccine doses -- many of those being the Astra shot -- without raising any alarms over clotting. Safety data covering more than 17 million Astra doses administered "has shown no evidence of an increased risk of pulmonary embolism, deep vein thrombosis or thrombocytopenia," the company said in a statement Saturday after the Norwegian decision.

The Astra vaccine has become an emblem for growing pandemic nationalism as countries race to inoculate populations as quickly as possible. The U.S. has already ordered nearly enough vaccines from the three manufacturers with authorization from the Food and Drug Administration to immunize its adult population twice over. ...

Return to Timeline

https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-australia-idUSKBN2B502Q

Mar. 14

Australia records first local COVID-19 case in two weeks

... after a doctor tested positive for the coronavirus, triggering restrictions in area hospitals.

Queensland state Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk said the **unnamed doctor last week treated two patients who had recently returned to Australia and had tested positive for the UK variant.**

"We know this doctor, who assessed these two COVID-positive patients was at the hospital at the time. Now, she developed symptoms," Palaszczuk told reporters in the state capital, Brisbane. **It was Australia's first local infection since Feb 24.**

The doctor, whose name was not released, treated patients, forcing authorities into urgent contact-tracing, Palaszczuk said. The **authorities have yet to determine how many people the doctor treated.**

As officials seek to determine the size of the outbreak, Palaszczuk said, all hospitals in the state capital will be closed to visitors.

Australia has reported just over 29,000 coronavirus infections and 909 COVID-19 deaths, far fewer than many developed countries, helped by international border closures, lockdowns and strict social-distancing rules.

In neighbouring **New Zealand**, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said on Saturday the country **will reopen its borders for the first time to allow residents of Niue, a small Pacific country, to enter.**

They will not have to quarantine on their arrival from March 24, Arden said.

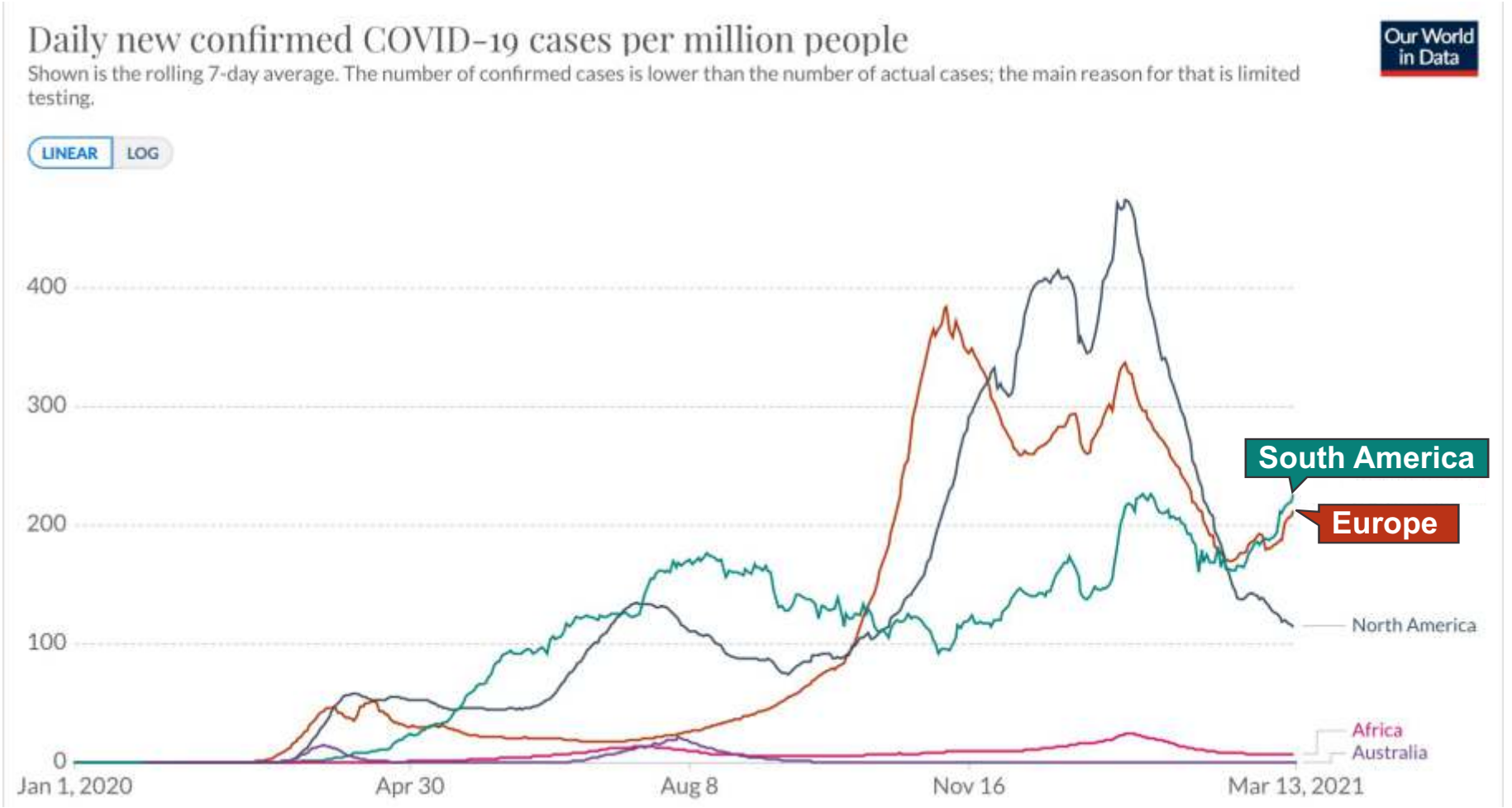
"Niue has no reported cases of COVID-19 and its stringent border controls mean we can be confident it is safe to commence quarantine-free travel to New Zealand from Niue," Ardern said in an emailed statement.

Return to Timeline

https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/biweekly-growth-covid-cases?tab=chart&stackMode=absolute&time=2020-04-21..latest&region=World

Mar. 15

A new wave is taking hold in Europe and South America



Return to Timeline

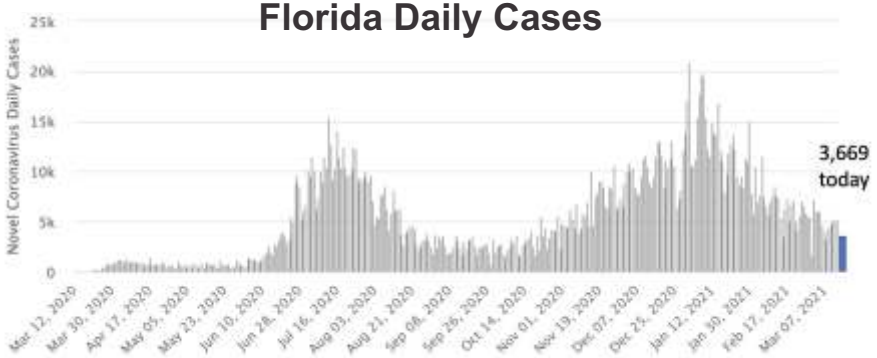
https://twitter.com/EricTopol/status/1371176664244187143

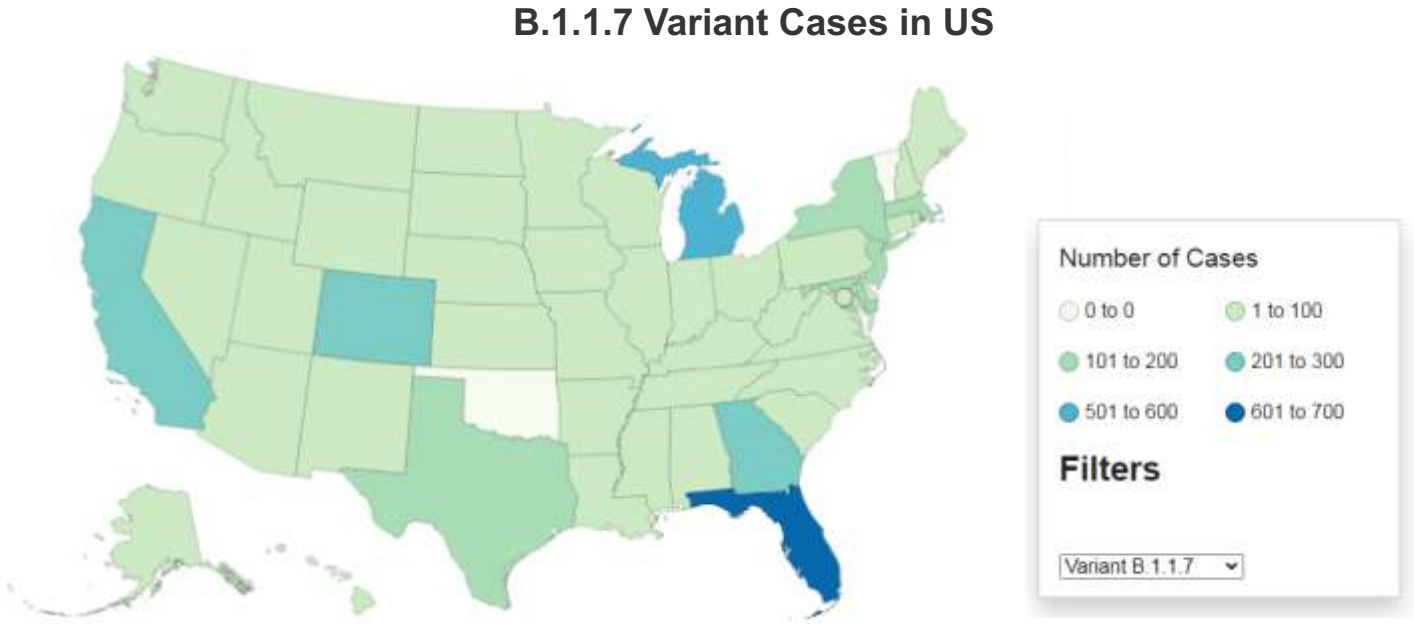
Mar. 15

Florida is the US bellwether for B.1.1.7

Eric Topol states “Florida is the US bellwether for B.1.1.7, now exceeding 50% of infections. **Still no sign of any increase in cases.**

Every day we continue to see this is encouraging. **Track for the next couple of weeks before we can say we've dodged it.**





https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/transmission/variant-cases.html

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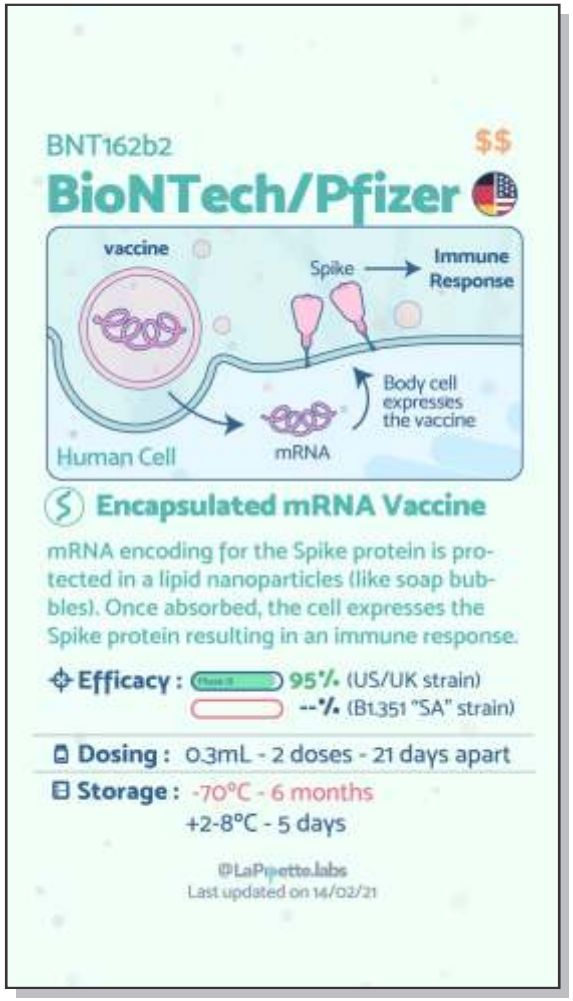
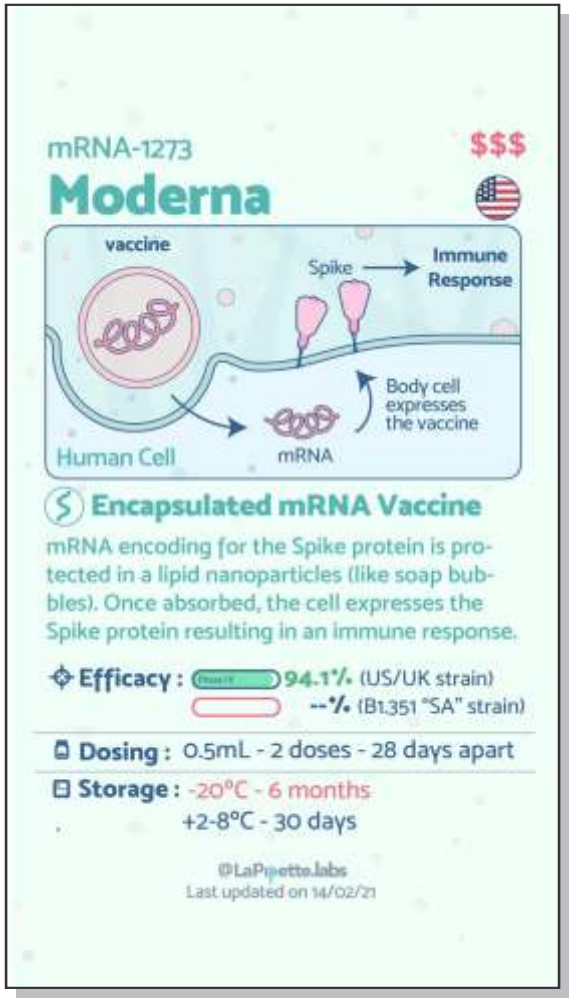
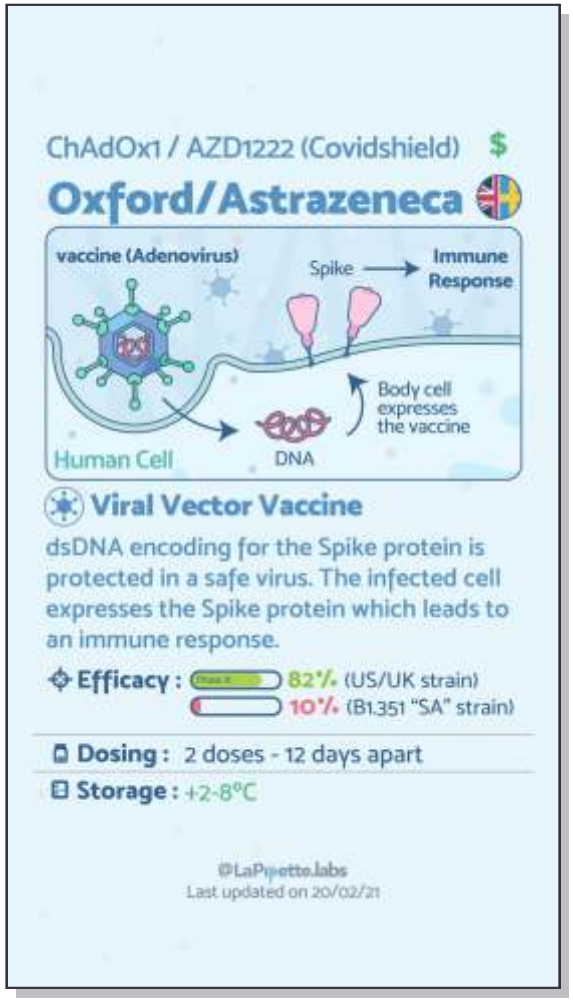
https://lapipette.com/vaccine_cards#free-download-and-translations ← Select live link to download full sized .PNG files, check for updates or for translations into French, Chinese, Spanish, Portuguese and Italian. More translations are “in the pipeline”

Mar. 16

Scientist Etienne Raimondeau gives us “Flash Cards” of the major vaccines







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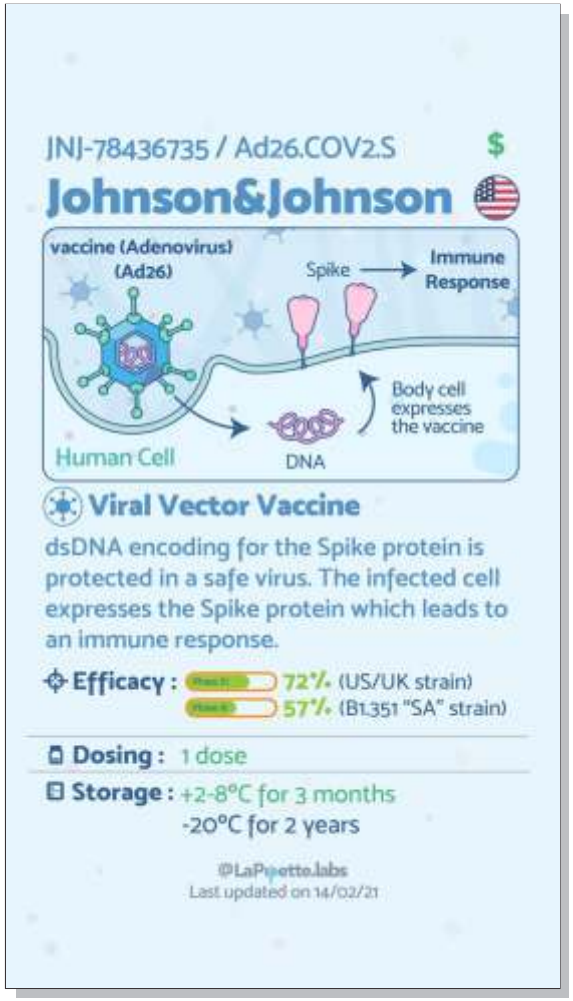

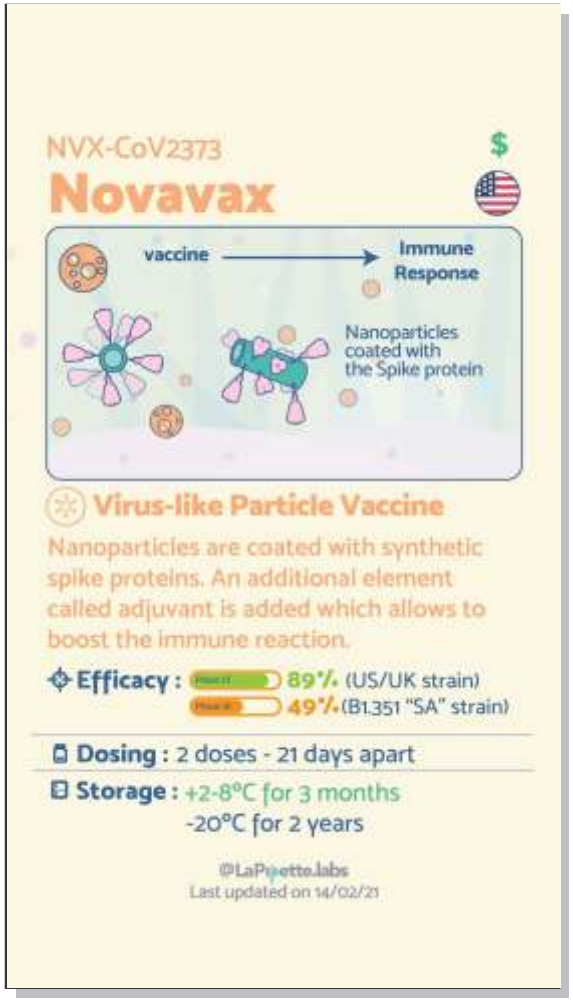

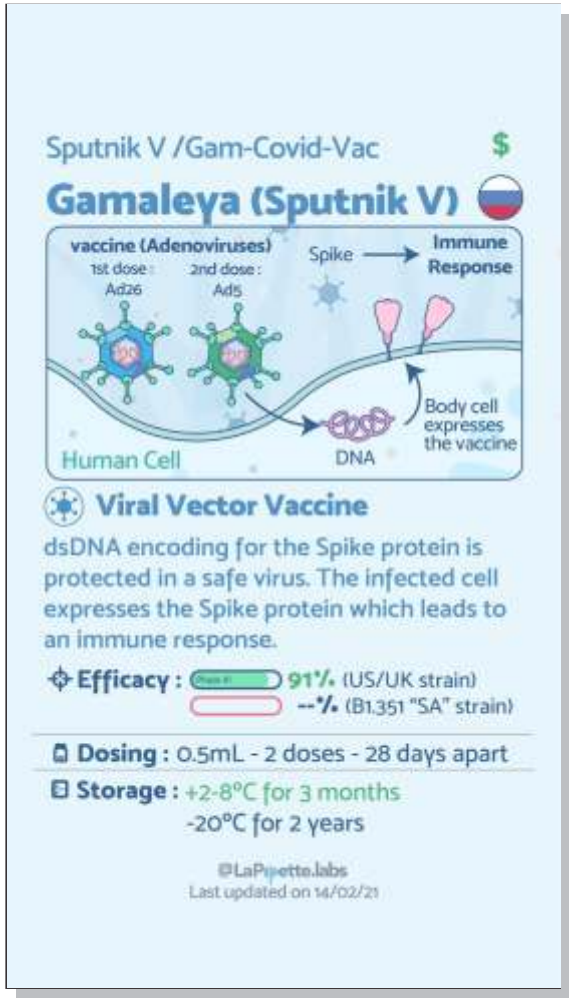

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Return to Timeline

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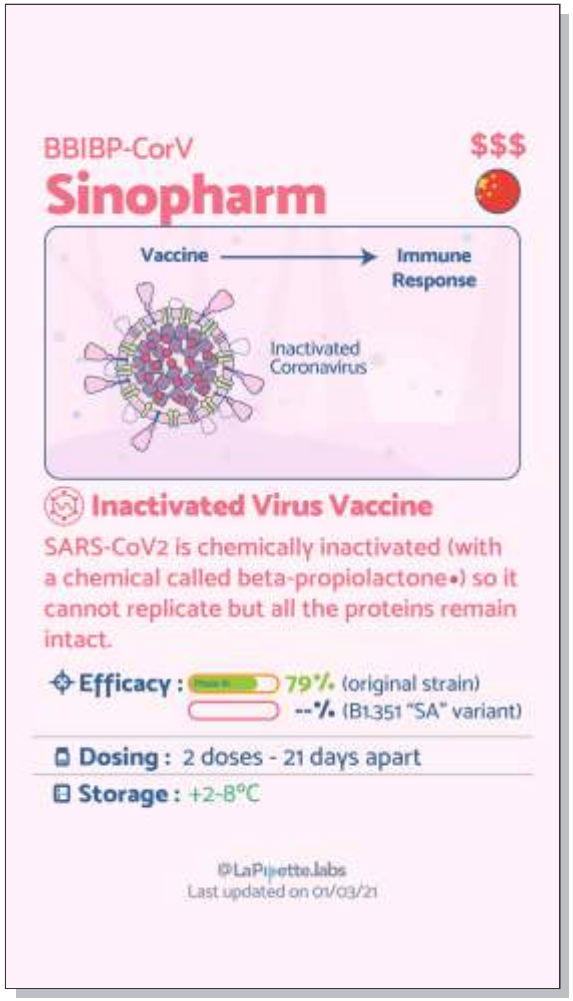
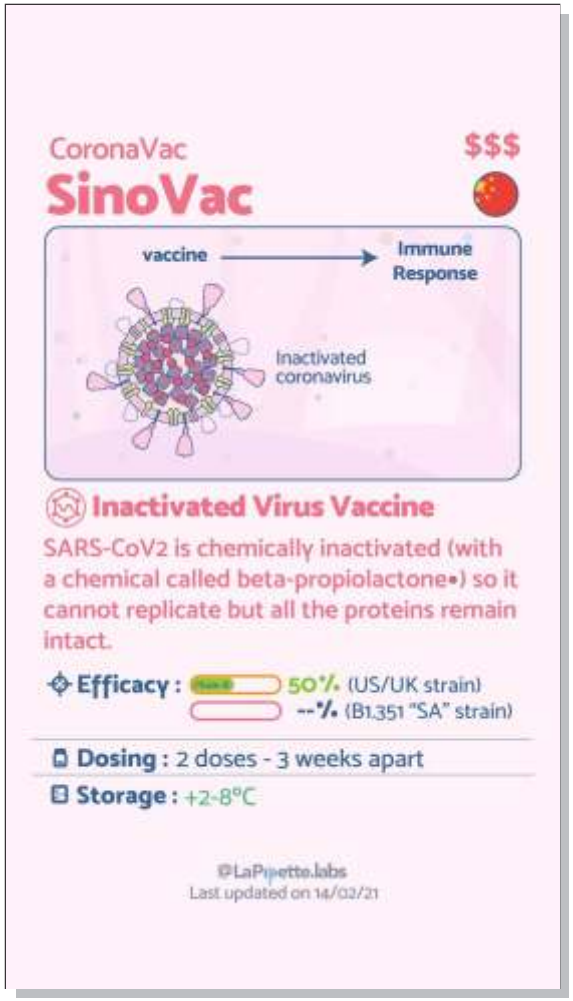
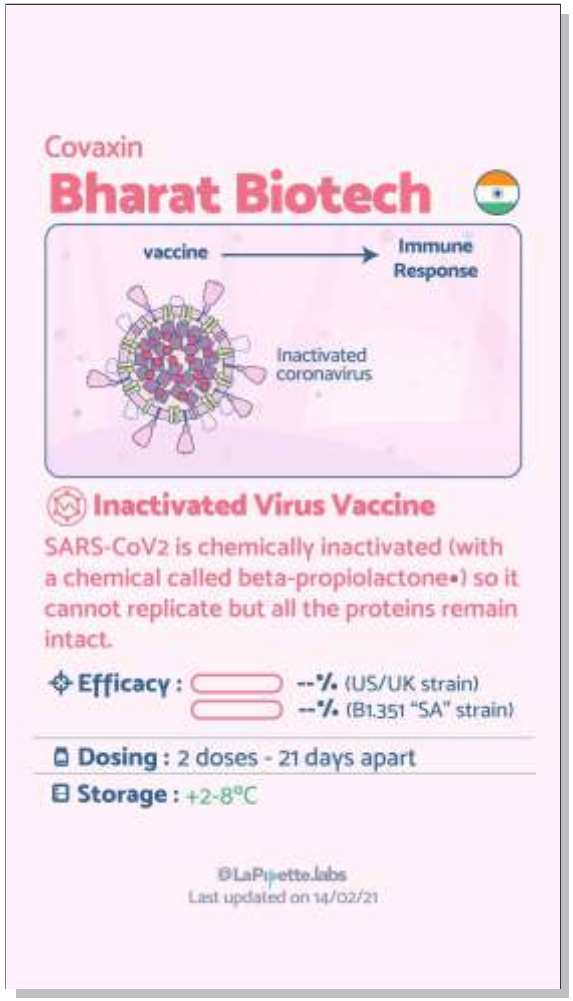






https://apnews.com/article/europe-australia-south-korea-india-coronavirus-pandemic-3ee32b99b6c25c2b5cb429fd414ed592

Mar. 16

Thai PM gets AstraZeneca jab, Indonesia suspends the vaccine

also, Sweden pauses use

... **Thailand last week was the first country outside Europe to temporarily suspend using the AstraZeneca vaccine. Indonesia followed** on Monday, saying it was waiting for a full report from the World Health Organization regarding possible side effects.

But Thailand's health authorities decided to go ahead with AstraZeneca, with Prayuth and members of his Cabinet receiving the first shots.

A large number of European countries — including **Germany, France, Italy and Spain — suspended use of the AstraZeneca vaccine Monday** over reports of dangerous blood clots in some recipients, though the company and international regulators say there is no evidence the shot is to blame.

The EU's drug regulatory agency called a meeting for Thursday to review experts' findings on the AstraZeneca shot and to decide whether action needs to be taken.

Other countries in the Asia-Pacific region also said they would press ahead with vaccination programs.

In the **Philippines**, presidential spokesperson Harry Roque said his country **would not suspend usage because the benefits outweighed any risks.** The country has so far received 525,00 doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine under the World Health Organization's COVAX arrangement and has administered 12,788 doses so far. Several million more doses have been ordered by the government and private companies.

"There is still no clear data that shows that the blood clotting was caused by AstraZeneca. If such data will come out, maybe we will also stop the use of AstraZeneca," Roque said. "As of now, our experts are saying again that the benefits we get from using AstraZeneca are larger than the side effects of this vaccine."

Australian Health Minister Greg Hunt said his country **would not suspend vaccinations**. Australia has vaccinated about 200,000 people so far and plans to import and manufacture 70 million vaccine doses from AstraZeneca.

"The government clearly, unequivocally, absolutely supports the AstraZeneca rollout, clearly, unequivocally, absolutely. And the reason why is very simple — it will help save lives and protect lives, and it's done so on the basis of the medical advice," Hunt told Parliament.

Australia's chief medical officer, Paul Kelly, said there was no evidence so far that the vaccine causes blood clots.

"Blood clots happen, they happen in Australia fairly commonly," he said. "But, from my perspective, I do not see that there is any specific link between the AstraZeneca vaccine and blood clots, and I'm not alone in that opinion."

By far the largest user of the AstraZeneca vaccine is India.

India is using two vaccines — the AstraZeneca shot made by Serum Institute of India, and another one by Indian vaccine maker Bharat Biotech — to immunize its vast population. Of the more than 25.6 million people in India who have received at least one shot of a vaccine, **over 23.4 million have received the AstraZeneca shot**, according to government data.

Health officials told the Press Trust of India news agency on Saturday that **a total of 234 adverse events, including 71 deaths, had been reported after receiving either vaccine — but that no causal link had been found.** The government is now reviewing the cases for a final assessment.

Serum Institute of India, the world's largest vaccine maker, has been contracted by AstraZeneca to make a billion doses of vaccine for developing nations. By March 4, India had exported over 48.1 million doses of vaccine, including 11.9 million doses to COVAX and 28.8 ...

Return to Timeline

https://www.politico.eu/article/new-french-coronavirus-variant-might-bypass-pcr-tests/

Mar. 17

New French coronavirus variant appears to bypass standard tests

PARIS — French authorities are warning of a new **coronavirus variant in the northwestern region of Brittany** that escapes detection by standard PCR tests.

While harder to detect, the "initial analyses of this new variant doesn't suggest either increased severity or increased transmissibility," the health ministry said in statement late Monday.

The **World Health Organization has placed this new strain in its category of "variant under investigation" due to its bypassing PCR tests.** This category includes most of the thousands of variants that occur naturally — of which only a small proportion will pose public health problems — **as opposed to the "variant of concern" category, which includes strains found in Brazil, the U.K. and South Africa.**

An in-depth investigation is underway in Brittany, after eight cases were identified as carriers of the variant from sequencing in a cluster of 79 cases in the town of Lannion.

The announcement came as **France battles a resurgence in coronavirus cases**, with President Emmanuel Macron warning that **new lockdown measures could come in coming days.**

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/world-news-papua-new-guinea-australia-coronavirus-pandemic-scott-morrison-4a2a943fe62131607f02efe029e988d2

Mar. 17

Australia gives COVID-19 shots to virus-hit Papua New Guinea

Australia will send COVID-19 vaccines from its own supply to its near-neighbor Papua New Guinea and will ask AstraZeneca to send more to try to contain a concerning wave of infections, Australia's prime minister said Wednesday.

...

Papua New Guinea is a poor country of almost 9 million culturally diverse people who speak more than 800 languages and mostly live in traditional villages. The extent of the pandemic there is difficult to gauge because of a lack testing.

Australian Chief Medical Officer Paul Kelly said **half the women attending hospitals in the capital Port Moresby due to pregnancy were testing positive. Large numbers of front-line health workers were also contracting COVID-19.**

"These are all signs that there is a major epidemic in the community," Kelly said.

Marape warned this week that one in three or four people in Papua New Guinea could soon be infected.

...

Papua New Guinea is separated from the Australian mainland by an archipelago across the Torres Strait where residents have island-hopped between the two countries for generations.

Morrison announced new flight restrictions between the countries Wednesday. The sea border has been closed due to the pandemic, but is difficult to police. Several recent COVID-19 cases detected in the Australian state closest to Papua New Guinea, Queensland, originated across the border.

Morrison said the **Papua New Guinea emergency "presents very real risks to Australia."**

...

Australia has been among the most successful countries in the world in containing community spread of the disease. One of the reasons for Australia's success is that it does not share a land border with any country. ...

https://www.aol.com/news/experts-virus-surge-europe-cautionary-160432996-180258783.html

Mar. 18

There has been a sharp spike in infections in several European countries

... Health experts in the U.S., though, say **what's happening in Europe should serve as a warning against ignoring social distancing or dropping other safeguards too early.**

"Each of these countries has had nadirs like we are having now, and each took an upward trend after they disregarded known mitigation strategies," said Dr. Rochelle Walensky, director of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "They simply took their eye off the ball."

The result has been a **sharp spike in new infections and hospitalizations in several European countries over the past few weeks.**

Poland's rate of new COVID-19 cases has more than doubled since February, straining its health care system and leading to a three-week nationwide lockdown announced Wednesday for shopping malls, theaters, galleries and sports centers.

Italy closed most of its classrooms at the beginning of this week and expanded areas where restaurants and cafes can do only takeout or delivery. The country's health experts say they're seeing an increasing number of patients who are middle-aged and younger.

In **France**, officials imposed weekend lockdowns around the French Riviera in the south and the English Channel in the north, and are preparing new restrictions for the Paris region and perhaps beyond to be announced Thursday.

COVID-19 patients occupy 100% of standard intensive care hospital beds in the area surrounding the nation's capital.

"If we don't do anything, we're heading toward catastrophe," Remi Salomon, a top official in the Paris public hospital authority, told BFM television.

Serbia announced a nationwide lockdown for the rest of the week, closing all nonessential shops and businesses. The country of 7 million people reported more than 5,000 new cases on Tuesday, its highest number in months.

The trends are far more encouraging in the U.S., which has recorded about 537,000 deaths overall, more than any other country.

Deaths per day in the U.S. have plunged to an average of just under 1,300, down from a high of about 3,400 two months ago. New cases are running at about 55,000 per day on average after peaking at more than a quarter-million per day in early January.

...

The European Union's overall vaccination efforts lag far behind those of Britain and the U.S because of shortages and other hurdles. **Roughly 1 in every 5 people in the U.S. has received at least one dose, while in most of the European countries, it's fewer than 1 of every 10.**

In another troubling turn, many European countries — including Germany, France, Spain and Italy — have suspended use of AstraZeneca's COVID-19 vaccine over reports of dangerous blood clots in a small number of recipients, though regulators say there is no evidence the shot is to blame.

Many European nations haven't vaccinated quickly enough to stay ahead of the more contagious variants, said Dr. Amesh Adalja, a senior scholar at the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security in Baltimore, Maryland. Those variants are also taking hold in the U.S.

...

Europe's "rapid relaxation of distancing requirements in a lot of places, combined with populations letting their guard down as they look ahead to the light at the end of the long pandemic tunnel, helped set the stage for the current surges," he said.

The lesson for the the U.S., he said, is to keep vaccinating those at risk as fast as possible, keep an eye on variants, and "keep slow and steady with the easing of social distancing requirements."

Return to Timeline

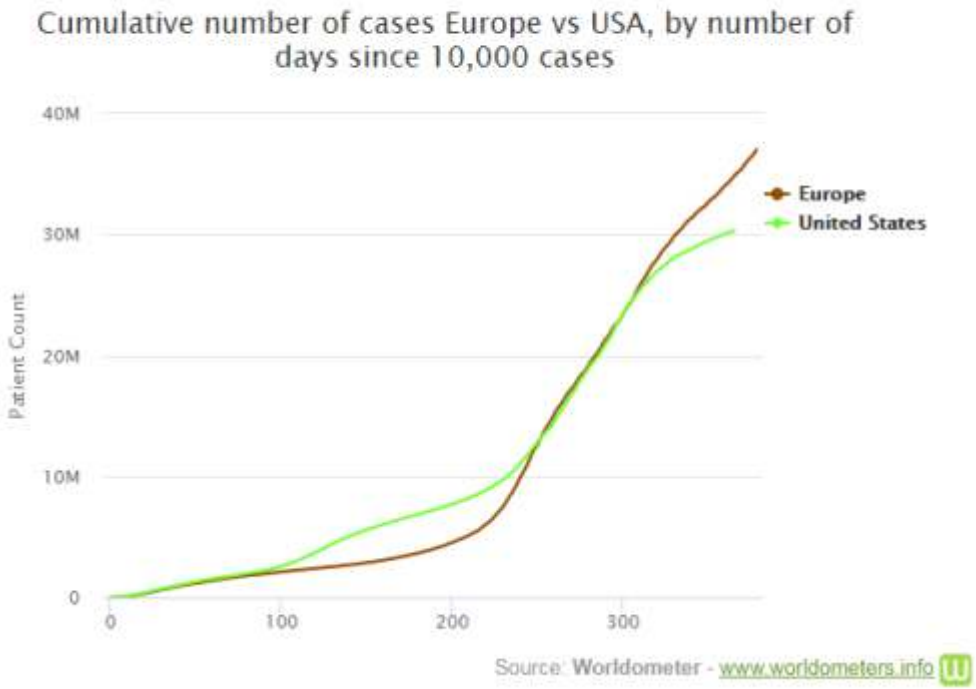
https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/worldwide-graphs/#total-deaths

Select live link for current number and to access interactive version of the line chart below

Mar. 18

Death toll from coronavirus tops 2,800,000

Cumulative number of cases Europe vs USA (by number of days since 10,000 cases)



Return to Timeline

https://abcnews.go.com/Health/experts-urge-caution-15-states-uptick-covid-19/story?id=76512738

Mar. 19

Experts urge caution as 15 states see uptick in COVID-19 infections

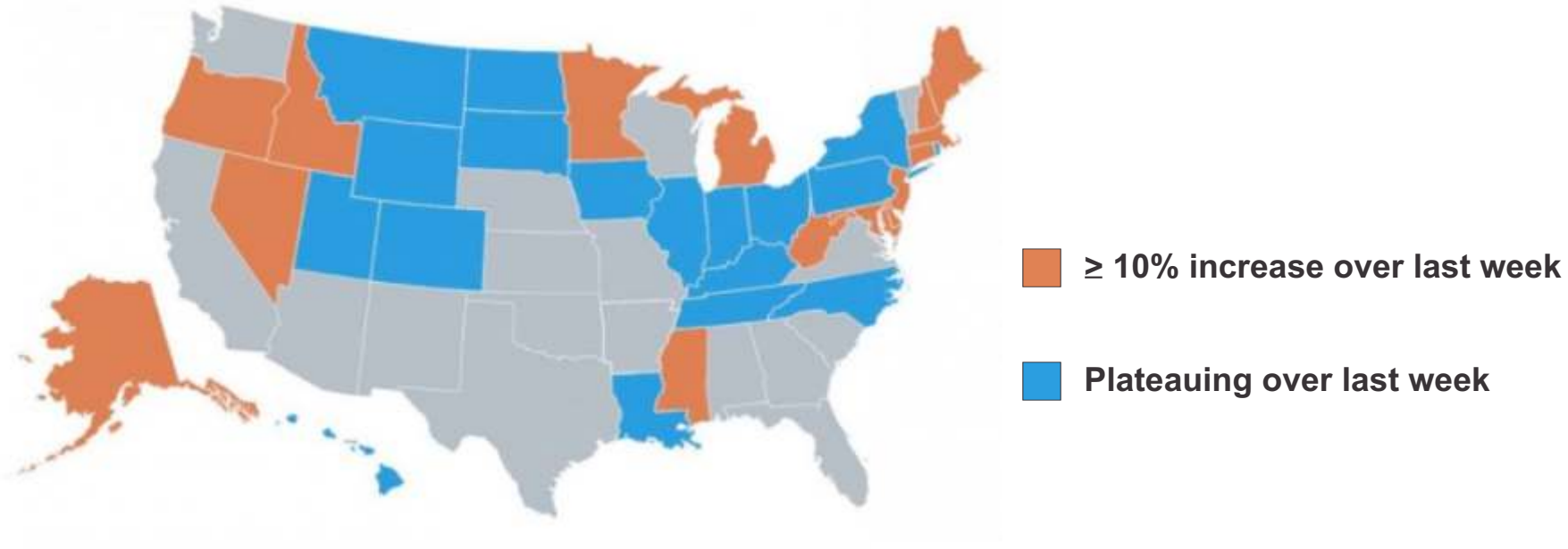
Even with the race to vaccinate as many Americans as possible accelerating, some experts are warning that if Americans do not also follow proper safety and mitigation measures, the U.S. could see a COVID-19 resurgence.

Although the country's national daily case average continues to fall -- about 32.5% over the last month -- nearly a third of all states have seen their average number of cases rise at least 10%.

Those 15 states are: **Alaska, Connecticut, Delaware, Idaho, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Oregon and West Virginia**, according to an ABC News analysis of state data compiled by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Several states -- **Delaware, Idaho, Minnesota, Nevada, Oregon and West Virginia -- have seen their case averages increase by at least 25% in the last week.**

"**Minnesota**, I think, **is really a harbinger of things to come**. We're loosening up all the restrictions we've had, and in some ways creating a perfect storm moment for virus transmission, whether it's a variant or not," Michael Osterholm, an epidemiologist and head of the University of Minnesota's Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy, told ABC



Return to Timeline

https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2021/03/michigan-covid-19-coronavirus-outbreak/618332/

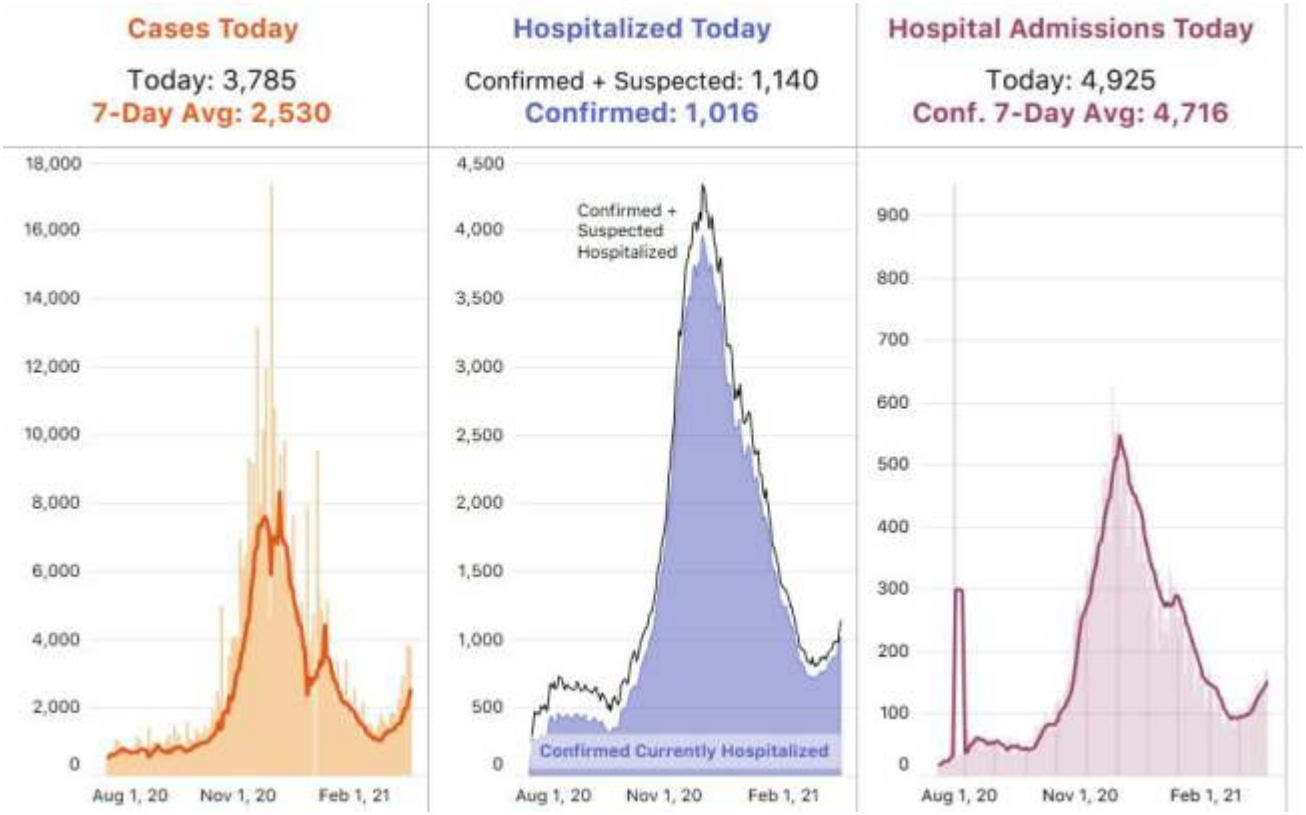
Mar. 19

Signs the pandemic could get worse

The number of people **hospitalized with a confirmed case** of COVID-19 in the United States **has been plummeting since early January. Until about three weeks ago**, **hospitalizations in Michigan were following the same pattern:** More people with COVID-19 were leaving the hospital than were being admitted.

But in the past few weeks, data from the CDC and the Department of Health and Human Services have shown that **hospitalizations have risen by 45 percent from the state's recent low on February 25**. According to federal data, among U.S. metropolitan areas with more than 1 million people, **the Detroit area now ranks fourth in hospital admissions—and first in a metric that combines increases in test positivity and cases.**

...



Key Michigan COVID-19 Metrics

July 15, 2020 to March 17, 2021

https://www.cnn.com/2021/03/20/health/variant-b117-vaccines-work/index.html

Mar. 20

B.1.1.7 variant is likely 20-30% of US infections

A new, **more contagious and potentially more deadly** variant of the coronavirus is spreading across the US, and health officials are worried.

The B.1.1.7 variant, first spotted in the UK, is not only more easily transmitted, but it also appears to be more deadly. Dr. Anthony Fauci warned about it Friday in a White House coronavirus update.
It was **first spotted in Colorado at the end of December**, said Fauci, the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases and the chief medical adviser to President Biden.

"**Since then it has been detected in 50 jurisdictions in the United States, and likely accounts now for about 20 to 30% of the infections in this country. And that number is growing,"** Fauci said.

"Of concern is that there are about **50% increase in transmission** with this particular variant that has been documented in the UK and there's **likely an increase in severity of disease** if infected with this variant," he said.
Fauci pointed to one study showing a 64% increased risk of death for people infected with B.1.1.7 compared to those infected with the older, so-called wild-type variant. He showed a second study that indicated a 61% higher risk of death with B.1.1.7.

But vaccines appear to protect well against B.1.1.7 and treatments such as monoclonal antibodies also appear to work against this particular variant, Fauci said.

That makes it more important than ever to get people vaccinated quickly, he said.
...
Real-life use of the Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna vaccines indicate that while the B.1.1.7 variant can elude, somewhat, the immune response prompted by immunization, it's not enough to make the vaccines any less effective in protecting people. That's because the **vaccines cause a broad immune response so that even if it's a little weakened, it's still powerful enough to prevent serious disease and death.**

There's less evidence about the vaccine made by Johnson & Johnson's Janssen vaccine arm, although it was tested in the US after B.1.1.7 started circulating.
...
Several experiments indicate that the B.1.351 and P.1. variants may much more easily evade the immune response prompted by vaccines and also by some monoclonal antibody treatments, which deploy lab engineered immune system proteins to boost immune response.

Not as many experiments have been done using the more recently authorized Johnson & Johnson vaccine, but it was tested in the US after B.1.1.7 was starting to spread; in South Africa after B.1.351 was already the most common variant; and in Brazil after P.1 became widespread.

While it was less effective against moderate disease in South Africa and Brazil than in the US, it nonetheless strongly protected people against severe disease, hospitalizations and deaths in clinical trials.

Viruses mutate all the time, and a few of the mutations have taken hold in variants that have arisen in the US, notably in California and New York. The changes they carry include some of the changes that make the B.1.351 and P.1 variants so much more dangerous than B.1.1.7. So Fauci and the CDC say that makes it even more important to get as many people vaccinated as possible before those variants can spread.

Return to Timeline

https://thehill.com/policy/healthcare/544164-1-in-6-us-adults-has-been-fully-vaccinated-for-covid-19-cdc-says

Mar. 21

1 in 6 US adults has been fully vaccinated for COVID-19, CDC says

Roughly one in every six U.S. adults has been fully vaccinated for the coronavirus, according to new data released Saturday by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

The CDC's vaccine tracker, which was updated Saturday afternoon, shows that **16.7 percent of the adult population** has been fully vaccinated. **More than 40 percent of adults aged 65 years and older are also fully vaccinated.**

More than 121 million doses in total have been administered, and nearly 43 million adults are fully inoculated.

Three different vaccines for the coronavirus have been approved for emergency use by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) from Pfizer, Moderna and Johnson & Johnson. The Pfizer and Moderna shots require two doses for full efficacy, while the Johnson & Johnson vaccine requires just one inoculation.

More than **21 million** of the fully vaccinated adults **received the Pfizer shot**, followed by **19.8 million who received the Moderna vaccine** and **2.15 million who got the Johnson & Johnson shot**, which was just recently released.

The Biden administration has already surpassed its goal of administering 100 million shots in its first 100 days as it ramps up its distribution efforts, but public health experts are urging people to continue to take precautions like wearing a mask and social distancing to prevent the further spread of the virus.

Despite the increased availability of the vaccines, **only half of health care workers have gotten the vaccine**, according to a recent poll by The Washington Post-Kaiser Family Foundation. **A majority of unvaccinated health care workers** have not decided whether they would get it, and **have expressed concerns about side effects and the newness of the vaccine**.

A sizable group of Americans throughout the country have also expressed similar concerns and hesitancy surrounding the shot.

Public health experts, including the nation's top infectious diseases expert Anthony Fauci, stated that in order to achieve herd immunity in the country, up to 85 percent of the population would need to be vaccinated.

The news from the CDC comes the same day that **the United Kingdom announced that half of its adult population has received at least one dose** of the coronavirus vaccine. The number represents a milestone in a country that has been forced into lockdown after the emergence of a new COVID-19 variant.

https://apnews.com/article/lifestyle-pandemics-connecticut-cincinnati-coronavirus-pandemic-8811d0cdef3fa0334861dff0e869c1c3

Mar. 21

Grandparents in the pandemic: a lost year, but now some hope

...The first 12 months of the pandemic represent a lost year for many in the largest group of grandparents in U.S. history. Most of the nation's some 70 million grandparents are in the fourth quarter of their lives, and the clock has kept running.

"Working with older adults, I'm seeing a lot of depression, a lot of increases in loneliness," says Nick Nicholson, a nursing professor and researcher on aging at Quinnipiac University in Hamden, Connecticut. "It's been really difficult **... the anxiety, the despair, the social isolation. Over time, there are so many adverse effects. The sooner we expand the bubble, the better, so people can start healing together."**

The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention last week offered some beginning steps forward for Year 2, saying **fully vaccinated grandparents could visit in a single household with healthy children and grandchildren without masks or other special precautions.**
...
Joaniko Kohchi, who heads the Institute for Parenting at Adelphi University in Garden City, New York, says grandparents and other family members need to be cautious as they try to return to something that passes for normalcy.

"There's going to be unquestionably a period of adjustment that will continue; planning and flexibility is really important," she says.

Also unknown: how much some older adults have been hurt not only emotionally but mentally by losing in-person contacts and other activity outside their homes for a year.

"I think seeing the same two to three people all time, it can be really tough," says Arman Ramnath, whose India-born grandmother Vijaya Ramnath, 94, has lived with his parents in Columbus, Ohio, since before he was born. "It kind of ages you faster."

While many grandparents are keeping in touch by phone, text and video chats, others lack access or ability to use such technology. A study conducted last September and October found resilience among older Americans, but also signs of trouble, with many reporting decreased happiness and some reporting increased loneliness and depression heading into winter.
...
Many grandparents actively help out their children by baby-sitting and school or daycare pickups, so pandemic barriers against that have made for "a lose-lose" situation for families, Nicholson says.

One in 10 U.S. grandparents now live in the same household with at least one grandchild. In some Asian cultures, that has long been common. In Ramnath's family, his India-born maternal grandmother, Saroja Seetharaman, rotates among her three children and their six grandchildren, in Dallas, Atlanta and his Columbus home.

Ramanth, 27, has been nervous about getting near his older grandmother, Vijaya, especially whenever he has just returned from Washington, where he is a Georgetown University Law School student. He is studying remotely but sometimes must visit school such as to pick up books.

Like the grandparents who lament time lost with their growing grandchildren, grandchildren can feel badly about missed opportunities with their aging loved ones.

Ramanth would have liked to have spent time with her in the past year learning more about the family's history. She once met Mohandas K. Gandhi, India's late famed leader and proponent of nonviolence. She attended a tea hosted by Queen Elizabeth II. And he's seen photos of her late husband, a high-ranking Indian Navy officer, with the late Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi.

"This is a time when I wish I could talk to her more about her life, as she's getting older," says Ramanth, who hopes to have more contact soon now that she's been fully vaccinated. "At times it can be kind of sad. You don't get to spend as much time with someone even if they're living with you."

Return to Timeline

https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-health-coronavirus-astrazeneca-usa/astrazeneca-vaccine-79-effective-in-u-s-trial-panel-finds-no-higher-risk-of-clots-idUSKBN2BE0NN

Mar. 22

AstraZeneca vaccine safe and effective in new trial data

FRANKFURT/LONDON (Reuters) - AstraZeneca's COVID-19 vaccine developed with Oxford University was **79% effective in preventing symptomatic illness** in a large trial in Chile, Peru and the United States, the company said on Monday, **paving the way for it to apply for U.S. approval.**

The vaccine was also **100% effective against severe or critical disease** and hospitalisation, and was safe, the partners said on Monday, releasing results of the late-stage human trial study of more than 32,000 volunteers across all age groups.

The data will give credence to the British shot after results from earlier, separate late-stage studies raised questions about the robustness of the data.

It will also help to allay safety concerns that have disrupted its use in the European Union after a small number of reports of rare blood clots in people who received the vaccine.

After briefly halting its use, **many European countries have resumed using the shot in their inoculation programmes after a regional regulator said it was safe**, while several country leaders are also taking the vaccine to boost confidence.

AstraZeneca said an independent safety committee conducted a specific review of the blood clots in the U.S. trial, as well as cerebral venous sinus thrombosis (CVST), which is an extremely rare blood clot in the brain, with the help of an independent neurologist.

The London-listed company said the panel found "no increased risk of thrombosis or events characterised by thrombosis among the 21,583 participants receiving at least one dose of the vaccine. The specific search for CVST found no events in this trial."

"These results are great news as they show the remarkable efficacy of the vaccine in a new population and are consistent with the results from Oxford-led trials," Andrew Pollard, who runs the Oxford Vaccine Group, said.

AstraZeneca said it was preparing to submit the data to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and for a launch in the United States should it win Emergency Use Authorization.

University of Oxford professor Sarah Gilbert told BBC radio that work to prepare the submission **will take a few weeks.**

The efficacy read-out was above a rate of about 60%, cited by the European Union's drugs regulator in its December recommendation.

It was, however, in line with the maximum efficacy found by Britain's Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA), based on cases with a three-month gap between the first and the second dose.

In the trial, participants received either two standard doses of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine or a placebo vaccine, at a four-week interval.

Amongst participants in the interim analysis, about 79% were white/Caucasian, 8% black/African American, 4% native American and 4% Asian, and 22% of participants were Hispanic, the company said.

About 20% of participants were 65 years and over, and approximately 60% had co-morbidities associated with an increased risk for progression of severe COVID-19, such as diabetes, severe obesity or cardiac disease.

https://apnews.com/article/astrazeneca-vaccine-reputation-missteps-01332124d4c18aba556a53b1a57bcc84

Mar. 23

Missteps could mar long-term credibility of AstraZeneca shot

AstraZeneca's repeated missteps in reporting vaccine data coupled with a blood clot scare could do lasting damage to the credibility of a shot that is the linchpin in the global strategy to stop the coronavirus pandemic, potentially even undermining vaccine confidence more broadly, experts say.

The latest stumble for the vaccine came Tuesday, when **American officials issued an unusual statement expressing concern that AstraZeneca had included "outdated information" when it reported encouraging results** from a U.S. trial a day earlier. That may have provided "an incomplete view of the efficacy data," according to the statement.

AstraZeneca responded that the results, which showed its shot was about 79% effective, included information through Feb. 17 but appeared to be consistent with more up-to-date data. It promised an update within 48 hours.

"I doubt it was (U.S. officials') intention to deliberately undermine trust in the AstraZeneca vaccine," said Dr. Paul Hunter, a professor of medicine at the University of East Anglia. "But **this will likely cause more vaccine hesitancy."**

...

Partial results from its first major trial — which Britain used to authorize the vaccine — were clouded by a manufacturing mistake that researchers didn't immediately acknowledge. Insufficient data about how well the vaccine protected older people led some countries to initially restrict its use to younger populations before reversing course. U.S. officials suspended an AstraZeneca study for an unusual six weeks while they sought details about problems reported in Britain before deciding the vaccine wasn't to blame. Meanwhile, the European Union has complained about delays in vaccine deliveries from the company.

Then **last week, more than a dozen countries temporarily halted their use of the AstraZeneca shot after reports of rare blood clots** in some people who received it. The European Medicines Agency concluded the shot did not increase the overall incidence of clots, but the unwanted attention appears to have left a mark.

In **Norway**, a top official warned Monday it might not be able to resume its use of the vaccine because so **many people were rejecting it.**

...

Last week in Bucharest, **Romania**, vaccination coordinator Valeriu Gheorghita said **33,000 AstraZeneca immunization appointments had been canceled in 24 hours and that about a third of the 10,000 people scheduled to receive the vaccine did not show up**. In Belgrade, **Serbia**, a sprawling **exhibition center set up for people to get the AstraZeneca vaccine was mostly deserted on Monday.**

...

But some experts have worried that the skepticism in Europe could eventually cast a pall over the vaccine worldwide. They suggested one measure that could reassure a jittery public: a green light from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

"If the U.S. regulator looks at this data and authorizes AstraZeneca, that will carry a lot of weight," said Jimmy Whitworth, a professor of international public health at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.

AstraZeneca said it would be submitting its data to the FDA within weeks.

It's still possible the vaccine can bury the doubts. At a vaccination center in Lisbon, 68-year-old Rui Manuel Martins dismissed the concerns, saying millions had been immunized with very few ill effects.

"There's always some cases of people rejecting any medications," he said before receiving his first dose. "It's better to be vaccinated rather than not."

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/angela-merkel-europe-germany-coronavirus-pandemic-dff83a9caed765de74667a1ac28abb1f

Mar. 23

Germany extends virus lockdown till mid-April as cases rise

Germany has extended its lockdown measures by another month and imposed several new restrictions, including largely shutting down public life over Easter, in an effort to drive down the rate of coronavirus infections.

Speaking early Tuesday after a lengthy video call with the country's 16 state governors, Chancellor Angela Merkel announced that restrictions previously set to run through March 28 will now **remain in place until April 18.**

Coronavirus infections have increased steadily in Germany **as the more contagious variant first detected in Britain has become dominant**, and the country's daily number of cases per capita has passed that of the United States.
...
Officials agreed to largely shut down public life from April 1-3, adding a public holiday and shutting down most stores for the period. Public gatherings will be banned from April 1-5, to encourage people to stay at home.

Amid concern over the rise in Germans traveling abroad on holidays, authorities also agreed on a **blanket requirement for air travelers to be tested for COVID-19 before boarding a flight to Germany.**

Drawing up legally watertight rules has proved a headache at times. A court in Germany's most populous state, North Rhine-Westphalia, said Monday it struck down rules requiring people to get appointments to visit shops. It said they violated a requirement that businesses get equal treatment.

The state government promptly reinstated the rules, tightening them for some businesses — such as bookshops and garden centers — that were previously exempt.

According to Tuesday's agreement, authorities will aim to offer free tests to all students and teachers in German schools, many of which have only recently reopened after months of remote teaching.

Merkel said Germany, which had comparatively low deaths during the first phase of the pandemic last spring, has seen "successes but also of setbacks" and insisted that the situation would improve as more people get vaccinated.

Germany's vaccination campaign has so far lagged behind expectations, with only about 9% of the population receiving at least a first shot and 4% receiving both doses by Sunday.

"It's difficult for longer than we thought," said Merkel. "But there's definitely light visible at the end of the tunnel."

Asked about the EU's plans to restrict the export of vaccines and components, Merkel said she supported efforts by the bloc's executive Commission to ensure contracts are fulfilled, citing the supply problems the EU has had with the AstraZeneca shot.

Britain, which left the EU last year, has strongly protested against the plans, fearing it could get cut off from deliveries ...

https://apnews.com/article/pandemics-angela-merkel-germany-coronavirus-pandemic-64baf934e39a94e2ef635676b92222cb

Mar. 24

Germany drops Easter shutdown plan, Merkel apologizes

BERLIN (AP) — Chancellor Angela Merkel on Wednesday dropped plans for a five-day shutdown in Germany over Easter, which had prompted confusion and criticism. She called the idea a mistake and apologized to Germans.

Merkel announced the decision after calling a hastily arranged videoconference on Wednesday with Germany's 16 state governors, who are responsible for imposing and lifting restrictions. The same group had come up with the unexpected plan for deeper restrictions over Easter, which was announced early Tuesday.

The plan was to make Thursday next week — the day before Good Friday — a "rest day," with all shops closed, and only allow supermarkets to open on Easter Saturday. Since the Friday and Monday are already holidays, that would have created a five-day shutdown of public life — on top of existing lockdown restrictions, which were extended through April 18.

The plan had raised many questions about logistical details, which remained unresolved, **and also was criticized because there had been no public discussion of it before it emerged** in the small hours of Tuesday following lengthy haggling.

"The idea of an Easter shutdown was drawn up with the best intentions, because we must urgently manage to slow and reverse the third wave of the pandemic," Merkel said. "However, the idea ... was a mistake — there were good reasons for it but it could not be implemented well enough in this short time."

"This mistake is my mistake alone," she told reporters. "A mistake must be called a mistake, and above all it must be corrected — and if possible, that has to happen it time."

"At the same time, of course I know that this whole matter triggers more uncertainty — I regret that deeply and I apologize to all citizens," she said.

I**nfection numbers in Germany have been rising again as the more contagious variant of the virus that was first detected in Britain has become dominant in the country.**

Germany has registered more than 75,000 deaths since the outbreak of the pandemic a year ago. **The country's disease control center also reported 15,815 new infection cases in the past 24 hours on Wednesday — a week ago there were 13,435 new cases.**

Merkel said that, even without the Easter shutdown, decisions she has taken with the state governors offer a "framework" to beat back the new wave of coronavirus infections.

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/pandemics-geneva-coronavirus-pandemic-china-united-nations-478237854902672ac53ab6d9dbfe59ec

Mar. 25

1 report, 4 theories: Scientists mull clues on virus' origin

GENEVA (AP) — A team of international and Chinese scientists is poised to report on its joint search for the origins of the coronavirus that sparked a pandemic after it was first detected in China over a year ago — with four theories being considered, and one the clear frontrunner, according to experts.

The lengthy report is being published after months of wrangling, notably between U.S. and Chinese governments, over how the outbreak emerged, while scientists try to keep their focus on a so-far fruitless search for the origin of a microbe that has killed over 2.7 million people and stifled economies worldwide.

It wasn't immediately clear when the report will be released after its publication was delayed earlier this month. By many accounts, the report could offer few concrete answers, and may raise further questions.
...
Team member Vladimir Dedkov, an epidemiologist and deputy director of research at the St. Petersburg Pasteur Institute in Russia, summarized the four main leads ... in order of likelihood: **from a bat through an intermediary animal; straight from a bat; via contaminated frozen food products; from a leak from a laboratory** like the Wuhan Institute of Virology.

Officials in China, as well as Chinese team leader Liang Wannian, have promoted the third theory — the cold-chain one — while the U.S. administration under President Donald Trump played up the fourth one, of the lab leak. But Dedkov said those two hypothesis were far down the list of likely sources.

He suggested frozen products on which the virus was found were most likely contaminated by infected people. An infected person also likely brought and spread the virus at the Wuhan market associated with the outbreak, where some of the contaminated products were later found.

"In general, all the conditions for the spread of infection were present at this market," Dedkov said in an interview. "Therefore, most likely, there was a mass infection of people who were connected by location."

"At this point, there are no facts suggesting that there was a leak" from a lab, Dedkov said. "If suddenly scientific facts appear from somewhere, then accordingly, the priority of the version will change. But, at this particular moment, no."
...
"Based on what we have heard so far I expect that **the report will likely lend some credence to a link between wildlife farming and COVID-19**, but without full evidence about exactly how the move from animals into humans might have occurred," he said.

Dedkov said planning of "real-time research" is next, but noted there's no guarantee future trips will find all the answers.

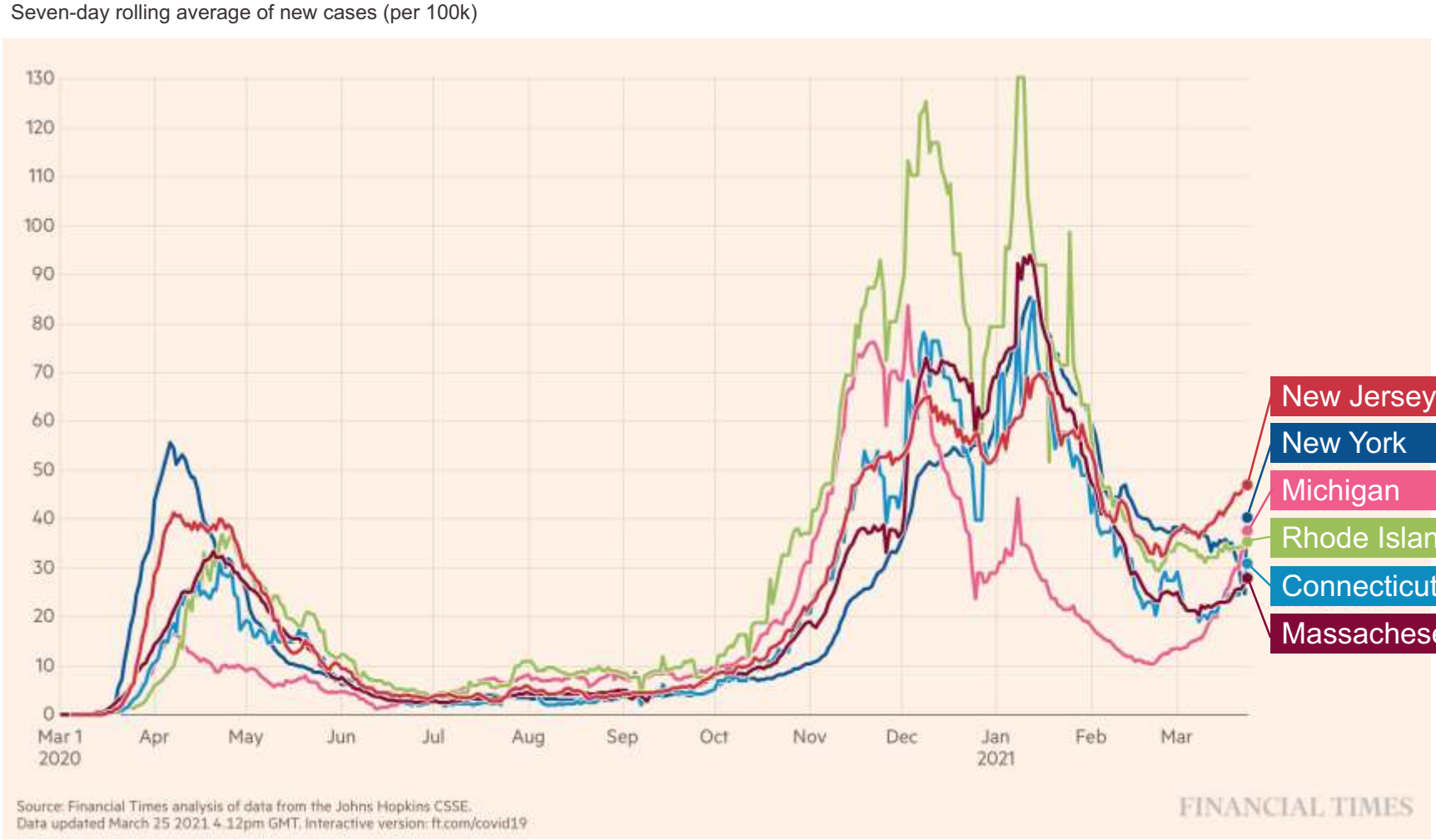
"But one can try," he added. "Of course, if the source of the origin of the virus is found, it will help answer many questions and, in general, will dissipate this unnecessary political tension around the virus."

https://twitter.com/EricTopol/status/1375256095644479488/photo/1

Mar. 26

2 emerging US surges: Michigan (B.1.1.7) and Northeast (B.1.1.7+ B.1.526)

Both variants are vaccine responsive. They need very aggressive vaccination efforts + avoid relaxing mitigation

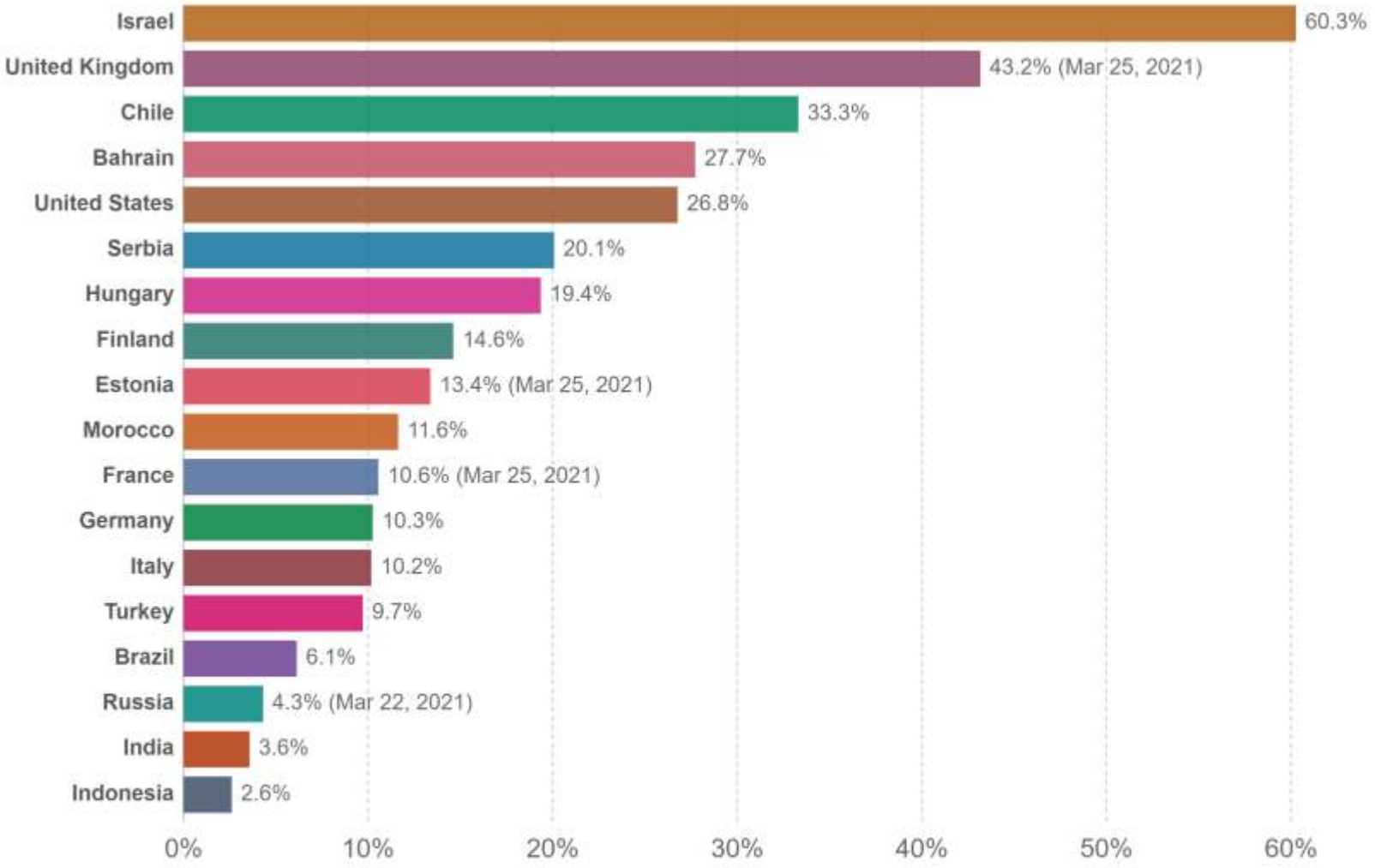


Return to Timeline

https://ourworldindata.org/covid-vaccinations

Mar. 27

Share of people who received at least one dose of COVID-19 vaccine (as of Mar 26)



Source: Official data collated by Our World in Data – Last updated 27 March, 11:45 (London time)

OurWorldInData.org/coronavirus • CC BY

https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2021/03/rare-clotting-disorder-may-cloud-worlds-hopes-astrazenecas-covid-19-vaccine

Mar. 28

A rare clotting disorder may cloud the world's hopes for AstraZeneca vaccine

In the tumultuous rollout of AstraZeneca's COVID-19 vaccine, all eyes were on the United States this week, where the company had a highly public communication breakdown over the vaccine's efficacy with an expert panel overseeing a large study in the Americas. But on the other side of the Atlantic, the vaccine faces new concerns about safety as an explanation gains ground for the **unusual strokes and clotting disorders** recorded in at least 30 recipients.

Many European countries suspended use of AstraZeneca's vaccine earlier this month following initial reports of the symptoms, which have led to at least 15 deaths. Most resumed vaccinations after the European Medicines Agency (EMA) recommended doing so on 18 March, saying the benefits of the vaccine outweigh any risks. EMA is continuing to investigate the matter and will convene a wideranging committee of experts on 29 March.

Now, a group of researchers led by German clotting specialist Andreas Greinacher of the University of Greifswald says the **highly unusual combination of symptoms—widespread blood clots and a low platelet count, sometimes with bleeding**—resembles a rare side effect of the blood thinner heparin, called heparin-induced thrombocytopenia (HIT).

The scientists, who first described their findings during a 19 March press conference, recommend a way to test for and treat the disorder and say this can help ease worries about the vaccine. **"We know what to do: how to diagnose it, and how to treat it,**" says Greinacher, who **calls the syndrome vaccine-induced prothrombotic immune thrombocytopenia, or VIPIT.** Greinacher says he has submitted a manuscript to the preprint server Research Square.

Even if Greinacher's mechanism isn't the whole story, **multiple researchers told Science they were convinced that the vaccine was causing the rare set of symptoms. If that turns out to be true, it could have major consequences for the vaccine, which is one of the cornerstones of the World Health Organization's push to immunize the world.** AstraZeneca is working with partners around the globe to make and distribute billions of doses in low- and middle-income countries, which might have a harder time identifying and treating rare side effects.

Europe is relying heavily on the vaccine as well; the European Union bought 400 million doses. The company's failure to deliver on time has delayed vaccine rollouts on the continent, but now, dented confidence is exacerbating the delays. And even if the risk is very low, it may make sense to use the vaccine only in those who also stand to gain the most from it: elderly people at high risk of dying from COVID-19. Several European countries have started to do this. The situation has scientists walking a tightrope: They want to make the medical profession aware of their concerns without sowing panic.

But Greinacher's hypothesis is being taken seriously. Two German medical societies put out press releases lauding him for solving the issue. In the Netherlands, the Dutch Internal Medicine Society urged internists to be aware of the symptoms and the recommended course of action. The United Kingdom has officially reported only 5 cases—despite administering 11 million doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine—but the British Society of Haematology has urged its members to be aware of "an important and emerging area of haemostasis and thrombosis practice" and to report any possible cases. The Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation has recommended against giving any COVID-19 vaccine to people with a history of HIT.

It is not yet clear how the vaccine could trigger VIPIT, and not everyone thinks the case is closed. "It's intriguing, but I am not entirely convinced," says Robert Brodsky, a hematologist at Johns Hopkins University. AstraZeneca, meanwhile, has not directly responded to the reports of the rare constellation of symptoms except to say that they did not appear in any of the company's clinical trials.

"People are absolutely working like crazy behind the scenes to provide ...

https://www.cnn.com/2021/03/29/health/us-coronavirus-monday/index.html

Mar. 29

At least 27 states have averaged at least 10% more cases each day this past week

Much of America's recent progress against Covid-19 has been erased as new infections jump nationwide.

Now the director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said she's afraid of what will happen next.
"What we've seen over the last week or so is a steady rise of cases," said CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky on Monday.

... "A lot of the spread is happening among younger people," said Dr. Ashish Jha, dean of the Brown University School of Public Health. "That's the group that is moving around, kind of relaxing, getting infected."

Spring break crowds swelled in popular beach destinations, including South Florida, where local leaders said the vacationers were more than they could handle. Air travel has broken pandemic records this month, with millions of Americans boarding planes.

And some state governors and local officials recently relaxed safety mandates, despite warnings from health experts to keep them in place a bit longer.

"We're weeks away from a point where we can begin to do these things a bit more safely," Jha said. "But I think states have just moved too fast."

Michigan is already suffering another Covid-19 surge, driven largely by young people ages 10 to 19, said Dr. Joneigh Khaldun, the state's chief medical executive.

Khaldun attributed the rise in cases to a number of factors, like more gatherings, more mobility, business reopenings and specific outbreaks in some prisons and schools.

Illinois officials are planning to deploy rapid response vaccination teams to several counties and expand vaccine eligibility after a "concerning possible trend in increasing COVID hospitalizations and case rates."

"Recent increases in hospital admissions and test positivity are concerning new developments and we don't want to go down the same path we've seen before and experience a resurgence in the pandemic," Dr. Ngozi Ezike, director of the Illinois Department of Public Health, said in a statement.
"We cannot move forward if our metrics are going backward."

Vermont just reported its worst day for new cases reported since this pandemic started, with more than 250 new infections reported Friday.
...
New Hampshire has recently suffered not just an increase in new cases, but also increasing test positivity rates. And the number of infections is increasing among young people, especially in teenagers and young adults, officials said.
Gov. Chris Sununu said he expects New Hampshire to endure a "spring surge."...

Return to Timeline

https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/worldwide-graphs/#total-deaths

Select live link for current number

Mar. 29

Death toll from coronavirus tops 2,900,000

https://kfor.com/news/local/the-wait-is-over-oklahoma-enters-phase-4-of-covid-19-vaccine-plan/

Mar. 30

“The wait is over,” Oklahoma enters Phase 4 of COVID-19 vaccine plan

OKLAHOMA CITY (KFOR) – **It’s official: anyone 16 and older in Oklahoma who wants a COVID-19 vaccination can get it.**

Governor Kevin Stitt and other state health officials announced the roll out of Phase 4 of the Oklahoma vaccination plan yesterday at the State Capitol.

Officials say the numbers show the state’s vaccination efforts are working, and now that all Oklahomans 16 and over are eligible, they say it’s time to keep momentum going.

“If you have been waiting to receive your COVID-19 vaccine, the wait is over. Now is the best time for you to get the vaccine,” said Keith Reed, Deputy State Health Commissioner.

State health officials calling it a time to celebrate as they kick off Phase 4 of the vaccine plan.

Oklahomans 16 and 17 will need parental consent but are eligible to receive the Pfizer vaccine. Everyone older than that can receive any one of the three options.

Col. Lance Frye, State Commissioner of Health, ”I strongly recommend all Oklahomans consider getting the vaccine. Let me be clear this vaccine is very safe and it works.”

Official say nearly 1.2 million or 30% of all Oklahomans have gotten at least one dose of the vaccine.

With the 7 day rolling average of new cases and hospitalization numbers down over 90% from their peaks in January, officials say the roll out is working.

“**We are going to get our summer back** Oklahoma and light at the end of the tunnel has never been brighter,” said Governor Kevin Stitt.

Stitt received the Johnson and Johnson shot today, joining the close to 700K Oklahomans that are fully vaccinated.

“I wanted to wait until our most vulnerable had the choice but, now that we are at Phase 4, I’m going to lead by example and I’m going to do it,” said Stitt.

Availability for the vaccine is increasing everywhere. The Oklahoma State Health Department has opened up their website to all Oklahomans over 16, the Oklahoma City County Health Department is holding walkup clinics throughout the metro, and Walgreens Oklahoma officials confirmed to News 4 that select locations are offering shots by appointment inside their pharmacies.

“We are still doing a lot of these vaccine clinics or mega pod,” said J.T. Harrison of IMMY Labs

IMMY Labs in Norman is hosting another large vaccination event slated for the Oklahoma State Fairgrounds this Wednesday. Officials say they are doing smaller ones at the Embassy Suites in Norman in the evenings.

“We are trying to get more convenient times for people in the late afternoon and evenings for people that can’t come during the day,” said Harrison.

H**ealth officials say if you have had COVID you no longer need to wait the 90 days after recovery. You can get a shot now.** They also stress to continue to be safe, wash your hand, wear a mask and social distance especially when gathering in groups.

https://www.cnn.com/2021/03/29/americas/canada-astrazeneca-vaccine-intl/index.html

Mar. 30

Canada halting AstraZeneca vaccine shots for people 55 and younger

Canada's National Advisory Committee on Immunization recommended Monday that the AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccine should not be used in adults under age 55 while rare cases of serious blood clots following vaccination are being investigated, according to a release from the committee.

The rare cases of serious blood clots, known as vaccine-induced prothrombotic immune thrombocytopenia (VIPIT), have recently been reported in Europe following post-licensure use of the AstraZeneca vaccine, **primarily in women under the age of 55.**

According to the vaccine committee, the rate of this adverse event is still to be confirmed and information is being gathered to be more accurate.

"Following population-based analyses of VIPIT assessing risk of COVID-19 disease by age, and considering that alternate products are available (i.e., mRNA vaccines), from what is known at this time, **there is substantial uncertainty about the benefit of providing AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine to adults under 55 years of age given that the potential risks associated with VIPIT,** particularly at the lower estimated rates," committee officials said.

As a precautionary measure, while Health Canada carries out an updated risk versus benefit analysis based on emerging data, the committee is recommending that the vaccine not be offered to adults younger than 55 but will continue to **reassess based on "rapidly evolving evidence."**

The committee said because the **AstraZeneca vaccine was expected to only make up a small proportion of the Covid-19 vaccines available for use in Canada, vaccinations "will not be significantly delayed."** CNN reached out to the drugmaker for comment but didn't get an immediate response.

AstraZeneca's development of the vaccine has hit multiple bumps, from news that two volunteers developed neurological symptoms last fall to a stall in the rollout of the vaccine in several European countries amid fears it might have caused blood clots. **The European Medicines Agency has since said there's no evidence the vaccine can cause blood clots.**

The agency's executive director Emer Cooke said several weeks ago the agency had "come to a clear scientific conclusion: this is a safe and effective vaccine."

Cooke said the group did not find that the vaccine causes clotting, though it could not rule out definitively a link to a rare blood clotting disorder, of which seven cases have been reported out of several million doses given.

She said the benefits of using the vaccine outweighed the risk. An agency committee "concluded that the vaccine is not associated with an increase in the overall risk of thromboembolic events, or blood clots," Cooke said.

More than a dozen European countries had halted their use of the vaccine. Some nations have resumed vaccinations while others have continued their pauses.

The World Health Organization has also said there is no relationship between the vaccine and common clotting disorders.

Canada received a boost from the Biden administration in recent weeks when the two countries struck a deal that will see the US release 1.5 million of its AstraZeneca doses to Canada at some point. The US is stockpiling the AstraZeneca vaccine until it receives FDA authorization, which is not likely until at least next month.

Canada has reported almost 970,000 presumed or confirmed cases of the coronavirus since the start of the pandemic and has recorded more than 22,000 deaths.

https://apnews.com/article/epidemics-paris-coronavirus-pandemic-emmanuel-macron-france-b5ead689529516dc369170f695bfdf58

Mar. 31

Macron to address the nation as France's epidemic surges

French President Emmanuel Macron is expected to impose new virus restrictions in a televised address to the nation Wednesday night, amid growing pressure to act more boldly to combat surging coronavirus hospitalizations.

Among options he is considering are closing all French schools and banning travel within the country, according to a government official, who was not authorized to be publicly named.

Any such nationwide move would be a departure from the government's policy in recent months, which has focused on regionalized restrictions. School closures in particular had been seen as a very last resort.

A debate is scheduled in parliament Thursday that will address the virus situation and the new measures.

"The key factor in our decision-making remains the situation in hospitals," government spokesman Gabriel Attal said Wednesday after Macron hosted his weekly coronavirus strategy meeting and a Cabinet meeting.

After Paris hospital officials warned they would have to start refusing needy patients for lack of space, he said, "One thing is clear: France will not refuse care for any sick patients. Choosing patients is not an option."

Attal said "decisions were made" at the virus meeting but he did not divulge them before the president speaks. Whatever path is chosen, he warned, "we have difficult weeks ahead of us."

Previous nationwide lockdowns in March and October 2020 were announced by Macron in televised speeches. His office said Wednesday that Macron will address the nation at 8 p.m. (1800 GMT), without saying what he will announce.

The total number of COVID-19 patients in intensive care in France surged past 5,000 on Tuesday, the first time in 11 months that the figure has been that high.

After an overnight shift at an ICU in the northern French city of Amiens, Dr. Pauline Caillard described growing numbers of patients and growing strain on medical staff.

"It is moving very fast," she said. "I hope we do not have to make choices" between patients.

Short of a full lockdown, Macron is running out of alternatives to make a major dent in the renewed surge of infections that has led to growing questions about his government's virus strategies. With presidential elections scheduled for 2022, Macron is having to weigh both political and health considerations.

An overnight nationwide curfew has been in place since January, and all France's restaurants, bars, gyms, cinemas and museums have been closed since October. In Paris and other regions where the virus is spreading rapidly, residents already have extra restrictions on movement and nonessential stores are closed.

https://twitter.com/EricTopol/status/1377363376305664002/photo/1

Apr 1

Update on the 3 major variants

	B.1.1.7	B.1.351	P.1
Alternate name	501Y.V1	501Y.V2	501Y.V3
Country identified	United Kingdom	South Africa	Brazil
Mutations	23	21	17
Spike mutations	8	9	10
Key RBD, spike mutations beyond N501Y in all	E69/70 deletion, P681H 144Y deletion, A570D	E484K, K417N, orf1b deletion	E484K, K417T, orf1b deletion
Other mutations, including N-terminal	T7161, S982A, D1118H	L18F, D80A, D215G, Δ242-244, R264I, A701V	L18F, T20N, P26S, D138Y, R190S, H655Y, T10271
Transmissibility Δ	Increased ~70%	Not established	Increased, % unresolved
Lethality Δ	Increased 60%	?	?
Immune evasion	Minimal	Yes	Yes, less than B.1.351
Vaccine efficacy Clinical Trials	Minimal reduction <10% point decline in 2 trials (Novavax, AZ)	60% Efficacy Novavax 64% Efficacy J&J No AZ efficacy vs mild/mod infections	No clinical trials (only P.2) Sera from vaccinees for mRNA and AZ all very encouraging vs P.1
Countries reported	114	68	36
US States reported	49	31	22

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/technology-business-pandemics-coronavirus-pandemic-7fb625eacadc17dc03fb5353e3143200

Apr. 2

US employers add 916,000 jobs in March as hiring accelerates

...The March increase — the most since August — was nearly double February's gain of 468,000, the Labor Department said Friday. **The unemployment rate declined from 6.2% to 6%.**

Even with last month's robust increase, **the economy remains more than 8 million jobs short of the number it had before the pandemic erupted** a little over a year ago. But with the recovery widely expected to strengthen, many forecasters predict enough hiring in the coming months to recover nearly all those lost jobs by year's end.
...
Last month, hiring strengthened across the economy. **Restaurants, hotels and bars** — the sector that was most damaged by the virus — **added 216,000 jobs**. **Construction companies**, aided by better weather after severe storms in February, **gained 110,000**.

Manufacturers added 53,000. And **professional and business services**, which include such well-paying fields as engineering and architecture, gained **66,000**.

In another encouraging sign, about **500,000 women returned to the workforce last month** and found jobs, in part a reflection of school re-openings around the country. Women disproportionately quit jobs or stopped looking for work during the pandemic, in many cases because they had to care for children attending school online from home. A reversal of that trend will be important as employers seek to rapidly rehire.

A survey found that **manufacturing grew in March at its fastest pace since 1983**. And vaccinations are increasingly being administered, although new confirmed infections have risen from lower levels in recent weeks.
...
Besides the 8.4 million fewer jobs that now exist in the U.S. economy than just before the virus struck, an additional 2 million or so jobs would have been added in the past year under normal circumstances. That means t**he U.S. economy still needs roughly 11.5 million more jobs to regain** something close to full health. ...

US Unemployment Rate

Select live link at top of page for interactive version of this chart

Return to Timeline

https://www.cnn.com/2021/03/30/health/states-covid-19-vaccine-eligibility-bn/index.html

Apr. 2

All 50 states now have expanded or will expand Covid vaccine eligibility to everyone 16 and up

...timeline for when those and other states have said they will **open vaccination eligibility to the general public**:

March 9: Alaska
March 16: Mississippi
March 22: West Virginia
March 24: Utah and certain state-run sites in Arizona
March 25: Georgia
March 29: Oklahoma, Texas, Ohio, North Dakota, Louisiana and Kansas
March 30 Minnesota, Arkansas
March 31: Indiana, South Carolina
April 1: Montana, Connecticut
April 2: New Hampshire, Colorado
April 5: Michigan, Tennessee, Idaho, Iowa, Florida, Nevada, Wisconsin
April 6: New York, Delaware
April 7: North Carolina, Maine
April 9: Missouri
April 12: Illinois, Kentucky
April 15: California, Washington
April 18: Virginia
April 19: Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Pennsylvania
April 27: Maryland
April - no set date: New Mexico, Wyoming
May 1: Oregon, South Dakota, Nebraska, Hawaii, Alabama, New Jersey

For all states currently vaccinating anyone 16 and older, **people ages 16 or 17 can only receive a Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine**, as it is the only option authorized for use in that population so far.

The vaccines made by Moderna and Johnson & Johnson are authorized for use in adults 18 and older.

https://arstechnica.com/science/2021/04/real-world-data-shows-vaccines-kicking-butt-including-against-scary-variant/

Apr. 3

Real-world data shows vaccines are working against South African variant

In a small trial, the Pfizer/BioNtech vaccine fully protected people from symptomatic COVID-19 caused by the worrisome B.1.351 coronavirus variant widely circulating in South Africa, the companies announced in a press release.

Though researchers will need more data to confirm the result, it is just the latest bit of positive news to come out this week about how the vaccines are performing with real-world conditions and in real-world settings.

On Monday, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released real-world data showing that the Pfizer/BioNTech mRNA vaccine and Moderna mRNA vaccine were, collectively, 90 percent effective at preventing infections in fully vaccinated health care, frontline, and essential workers.

On Wednesday, Pfizer and BioNtech announced that their vaccine is highly effective in adolescents 12- to 15-years old—not just the adult part of the population. And on Thursday, the companies announced the B.1.351 news as well as new data on durability. That is, the latest monitoring data on people vaccinated in a Phase III trial suggests the vaccine is still 91 percent effective at preventing symptomatic disease up to six months after the second dose. That's longer efficacy than was previously established, but researchers will need more data still to assess efficacy beyond six months.

"The bottom line message is that vaccines work very well in the real-world setting," top infectious disease expert Anthony Fauci said in a White House COVID-19 press briefing Friday. "They work against variants, although we need further data to confirm that. They are durable for at least six months and they work in adolescents. Very, very good reason for everyone to get vaccinated as soon as its becomes available to you."

While all the data is good news, the variant data is particularly heartening. Numerous laboratory experiments have suggested that antibodies produced by vaccines are less potent at knocking back some of the variants, particularly B.1.351. But according to the new data released by Pfizer and BioNTech, their mRNA vaccine showed "efficacy of 100 percent."

The assertion is based on data from 800 trial participants who live in South Africa, where B.1.351 is widely circulating. Among the 800 participants, there were nine cases of COVID-19, all of which were in people who had received a placebo. Of those nine cases, genetic analysis found that six of them were caused by the B.1.351 variant.

The numbers are small, Fauci noted in today's press briefing. However, "they showed in the setting of the troublesome B.1.351 South African variant there were six cases in the placebo [group] and zero in the vaccinated group, strongly suggesting the efficacy of the vaccines that we're using now against problematic variants."

http://www.digitaljournal.com/life/health/usa-hits-covid-19-milestone-as-vaccinations-top-4-million/article/587918

Apr. 4

U.S. hits COVID-19 milestone as vaccinations top 4 million

America edged closer to approaching a degree of normalcy on Saturday when the Biden administration announced the U.S. set a new record for the number of COVID-19 shots administered in one day, inoculating over 4 million people.

Dr. Cyrus Shahpar, White House COVID-19 Data Director, tweeted Saturday that over 4.08 million doses had been administered in the last 24 hours. He noted that it was the first time the **U.S. was averaging over 3 million doses per day over the past week**, reports The Hill.

He added: Wow a record reporting day!! +4.08M doses reported administered over the total yesterday. First day w/ 4M or more. Also first time averaging more than 3M per day over the past week," Shahpar tweeted. "Millions coming together to accelerate our progress toward controlling the pandemic!"

The CDC's Vaccination Tracker gives us a more detailed look at the vaccinations across the country. The agency puts the number at 4,081,959 doses, bringing the 7-day average to 3,072,527 doses—the first time the 3 million mark has been passed.

In 109 days of vaccinations, some **104 million Americans have received a shot, with 59 million of them being fully vaccinated, which is about 30 percent of the population**, according to CNN. The **experts say the nation needs to reach a 75 to 85 percent vaccination rate to reach "herd immunity.**"

With more than 30.6 million people having been infected with the virus and 554,522 people who have died of it, experts and officials are racing to get the population vaccinated before a possible fourth surge of cases.

https://apnews.com/article/england-coronavirus-pandemic-london-boris-johnson-europe-9753a509168eab788c52b87def0b415f

Apr. 5

UK eyes mass testing as it takes next steps out of lockdown

LONDON (AP) — **All adults and children in England will be able to have routine coronavirus tests twice a week** as a way to stamp out new outbreaks, the British government said Monday as it prepared to announce the next steps in lifting the nation's months-long lockdown.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said regularly testing people who don't have COVID-19 symptoms would help "stop outbreaks in their tracks, so we can get back to seeing the people we love and doing the things we enjoy."

The government said free lateral flow tests will be **available free starting Friday by mail, from pharmacies and in workplaces**. Lateral flow tests give results in minutes but are less accurate than the PCR swab tests used to officially confirm cases of COVID-19.

The government insists they are reliable. Health Minister Edward Argar said the tests produced a false positive rate — showing someone has the virus when they don't — in less than 1 in every 1,000 tests.

"So that is still a highly accurate test which can play a really important part in reopening our country and our businesses, because it is so simple to take," Argar told Sky News.

Johnson is scheduled later Monday to announce the next steps on the country's road map out of its three-month lockdown. He is **expected** to confirm at a news conference that hairdressers, **non-essential shops and pub and restaurant patios will reopen as planned in England on April 12**. Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are following slightly different timescales.

Britain has recorded almost 127,000 coronavirus deaths, the highest toll in Europe. But **infections and deaths both have fallen sharply during the lockdown and since the start of a vaccination campaign that so far has given a first dose to more than 31 million people, or six in 10 adults.**

Johnson is unlikely to tell Britons when or where they will be able to go abroad on vacation, something that is currently banned by law. The government has said **it will not lift the travel ban before May 17**. British officials are considering a traffic-light system ranking countries as green, yellow or red based on their level of infections. People returning from green countries would not have to self-isolate.

The government also is considering a system of certificates, or "vaccine passports," that would allow people seeking to travel or attend events to show they either have received a coronavirus vaccine, recently tested negative for the virus, or recently recently had COVID-19 and therefore have some immunity.

The issue of vaccine passports has been hotly debated around the world, raising questions about how much governments, employers, venues and other places have a right to know about a person's virus status. The idea is opposed by a wide swath of British lawmakers, from left-of-center opposition politicians to members of Johnson's Conservative Party.

Conservative legislator Graham Brady said vaccine passports would be "intrusive, costly and unnecessary." The leader of the opposition Labour Party, Keir Starmer, called the idea "un-British."

The government plans a series of trial mass events in April and May, including soccer matches, comedy shows and marathon runs, to see whether large crowds can return to sports and entertainment venues. Those attending will be tested for the virus both before and after, but the government has said the events won't initially involve vaccine passports.

Return to Timeline

https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-michigan-cases-idUSKBN2BT0N0?taid=606c395ca0a3570001acd4c0&utm_campaign=trueAnthem:+Trending+Content&utm_medium=trueAnthem&utm_source=twitter

Apr. 6

Michigan coronavirus cases at record, tops daily tally among U.S. states

(Reuters) - Michigan reported a record number of coronavirus cases on Monday to top the daily tally among U.S. states, about a month after easing restrictions when new cases showed a downward trend.

It reported **11,082 cases on Monday, surpassing a previous daily peak of 10,140 hit on November 20** and bringing the total case load to 779,974.

Michigan is **currently the worst affected U.S. state in terms of new cases and hospitalizations** per 100,000 people in the week to April 5. It is t**he only state to report more than 7,000 new cases on Monday.**

Following a slew of other states, Michigan began loosening restrictions around gatherings by increasing the capacity of gyms, restaurants, pubs, retail stores and entertainment venues in March. The relaxations are set to last till April 19.

Around the time when restrictions were eased in March, the state reported about 1,800 new infections a day. In the seven days to April 5, the average has surged to over 6,700 cases a day.

Nationwide, new virus infections were up for a third week in a row and hospitalizations also broke an 11-week streak of falling admissions.

Twenty-seven out of 50 U.S. states have reported increases in new cases in the past week compared with the previous seven days. ...

https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/04/23/upshot/five-ways-to-monitor-coronavirus-outbreak-us.

US Metro Areas the Outbreak Is Worst

✓ in Michigan

Average daily cases, last two weeks

	METRO OR MICRO AREA	POPULATION	RECENT CASES	DAILY PER 100K
1	✓Jackson, Mich.	158,510	1,778	80.1
2	✓Detroit	4.3 mil.	43,556	72.0
3	✓Flint, Mich.	405,813	3,853	67.8
4	✓Monroe, Mich.	150,500	1,390	66.0
5	✓Owosso, Mich.	68,122	621	65.1
6	✓Lansing, Mich.	482,269	4,203	62.3
7	New York City area	20.0 mil.	149,725	53.5
8	✓Battle Creek, Mich.	134,159	999	53.2
9	Peoria, Ill.	366,221	2,684	52.3
10	✓Bay City, Mich.	103,126	735	50.9
11	✓Grand Rapids, Mich.	1.1 mil.	7,334	48.8
12	Atlantic City, N.J.	263,670	1,793	48.6
13	✓Mount Pleasant, Mich.	69,872	473	48.4
14	✓Kalamazoo-Portage, Mich.	340,743	2,254	47.2
15	Beckley, W.Va.	115,767	760	46.9
16	DuBois, Pa.	79,255	517	46.6
17	✓Holland, Mich.	118,081	769	46.5
18	Allentown, Pa.	844,052	5,460	46.2
19	East Stroudsburg, Pa.	170,271	1,080	45.3
20	✓Ionia, Mich.	64,697	409	45.2

https://www.aol.com/news/nearly-half-us-virus-infections-194227189-090742645.html?error=login_required&error_description=login_required

Apr. 7

Nearly half of new U.S. virus infections are in just 5 states

... **New York, Michigan, Florida, Pennsylvania and New Jersey** together reported **44% of the nation's new COVID-19 infections**, or nearly 197,500 new cases, in the latest available seven-day period, according to state health agency data compiled by Johns Hopkins University. Total U.S. infections during the same week numbered more than 452,000.
...
The spike in cases has been **especially pronounced in Michigan**, where the seven-day average of daily new infections reached 6,719 cases Sunday — **more than double what it was two weeks earlier**. **Only New York reported higher case numbers.** And California and Texas, which have vastly larger populations than Michigan, are reporting less than half its number of daily infections.

Though Michigan has seen the highest rate of new infections in the past two weeks, Democratic Gov. Gretchen Whitmer has said she does not plan to tighten restrictions. She has blamed the virus surge on pandemic fatigue, which has people moving about more, as well as more contagious variants.
...
In **New Jersey**, where the seven-day rolling average of daily new infections has risen over the past two weeks, from 4,050 daily cases to 4,250, Democratic Gov. Phil Murphy said he is constantly talking to the White House about demand for the coronavirus vaccine, though he stopped short of saying he was lobbying for more vaccines because of the state's high infection rate.
...
New virus variants are clearly one of the drivers in the increase, said Dr. Kirsten Bibbins-Domingo, chair of the department of epidemiology and biostatistics at the University of California at San Francisco. Failure to suppress the rise in cases will lead to more people getting sick and dying, she said, and drive increases in other parts of the country.
...
In **Florida**, relaxed safeguards during a busy spring break season likely helped spread virus variants, said University of South Florida epidemiologist Jason Salemi. The state's seven-day average of daily **new infections** has exceeded 5,400, **an increase of 20% in the past two weeks.**
...
The five states seeing the most infections stand out. As of Tuesday, **31 U.S. states were reporting seven-day averages of fewer than 1,000 new daily cases.**

White House coronavirus coordinator Jeff Zients said Tuesday more than 28 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines will be delivered to states this week. That allocation will bring the U.S. total to more than 90 million doses distributed in the past three weeks.

The news came as Biden announced more than 150 million coronavirus shots have been administered since he took office, and that all adults will be eligible to receive a vaccine by April 19.

About 40% of U.S. adults have now received at least one COVID-19 shot, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. **About 23% of American adults have been fully vaccinated — including more than half of Americans 65 and older.**

Geng said the nation should take a step back and go slow. Even just a few more weeks of Americans sticking with social distancing and other precautions could make a huge difference.

“The take-home message here is, let's not jump the gun," ...

Return to Timeline

https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/worldwide-graphs/#total-deaths

Select live link for current number

Apr. 7

Death toll from coronavirus tops 3,000,000

Return to Timeline

https://www.foxbusiness.com/healthcare/colorado-vaccination-adverse-reactions-johnson-johnson

Apr. 8

Colorado vaccination site closes early after reactions to J & J vaccine

A vaccination site in Colorado closed early Wednesday after a "limited number" of people began having adverse reactions to the Johnson and Johnson COVID-19 vaccine, resulting in hundreds of people who waited in line for hours being sent home without receiving a shot.

The site at Dick's Sporting Goods Park in Commerce City, eight miles northeast of Denver, closed around 90 minutes early... More than **1,700 people received vaccine shots at the site Wednesday.**

"Following the administration of the J&J vaccine and during onsite observation, we saw a limited number of adverse reactions to the vaccine," a statement from Centra Health, which runs the site, to Fox News reads. "We followed our protocols and in an abundance of caution, made the decision – in partnership with the state – to pause operations for the remainder of the day."

Around 640 who stood in line for a shot were sent home...

The company did not say how many people had **reactions** but said it **amounted to 0.8% of those who received a vaccine dose** Wednesday. It did not specify what kinds of reactions people were having.

Reactions to COVID-19 vaccines have been reported, with some being serious. A Virginia man was recently recovering from a hospital stay after suffering a skin reaction to what doctors believe was from a Johnson & Johnson vaccine.

A recent production error resulted in million of Johnson & Johnson vaccine doses being discarded. A mix-up at Emergent BioSolutions, a production facility in Baltimore, prompted the Food and Drug Administration to delay vaccine shipments.

Around 15 million doses were ruined.

https://www.conehealth.com/services/infectious-disease/johnson--johnson-covid-19-vaccine-6-facts-you-should-know/

J & J vaccine information

The Johnson & Johnson vaccine has been tested in many countries, some of which had variant COVID-19 circulation .. [and] is ...**100% effective in preventing hospitalizations and death from COVID-19**.

85% effective in preventing severe COVID-19 that does not require hospitalization.

72% effective in the US. The overall efficacy is 66% when including all countries.
...
requires only 1 shot, compared to two shots for the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines.
...
... **does not contain the virus that causes COVID-19**. ... Scientists have used adenovirus, the shell of the virus, to carry the gene, or DNA, for the coronavirus spike protein into your cells so that antibodies can be produced. **The adenovirus has been modified so that it can enter cells but cannot replicate to make you sick with a cold.** The DNA quickly degrade in the human body and does not affect human chromosomes. When injected, **the adenovirus causes production of the spike protein and immunity is created against COVID-19. The Johnson & Johnson vaccine cannot cause infection.**

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/countries-worldwide-hit-new-records-coronavirus-cases-deaths-29b18a267fbe972766403f8de0fee415

Apr. 9

Countries worldwide hit new records for virus cases, deaths

... **The disease surged even in some countries that have kept the virus in check.**
...
Brazil this week became just the third country, after the U.S. and Peru, to report a 24-hour tally of COVID-19 deaths that exceeded 4,000**. India** hit a peak of almost 127,000 new cases in 24 hours, and **Iran** set a new coronavirus infection record for the third straight day, reporting nearly 22,600 new cases.

In the state of **Rio de Janeiro**, emergency services are under their biggest strain since the pandemic began, with ambulances carrying patients of all ages to overcrowded hospitals struggling to care for everyone. Authorities say over 90% of the state's intensive-care unit beds are taken by COVID-19 patients, and many cities are reporting people dying at home due to lack of available medical treatment.

"We're already living the third wave. We have three times more calls," in comparison with previous waves, said Adriano Pereira, director of the mobile emergency care service in Duque de Caxias, an impoverished city outside Rio.

Brazil's death toll has risen past 340,000, the second-highest total in the world behind the U.S., where nearly 560,000 people have been confirmed killed. [Brazil's population is 64% the size of the US population]

Rio state's 14-day moving average of COVID-19 daily deaths climbed from 112 to 207 between March 1 and April 7, with some health analysts **expecting even worse days** in the next couple of weeks. **Many hospitals warn about the risk of shortages of oxygen and sedatives for intubation.**
...
South Korea reported 700 more cases, the highest daily jump since Jan. 5. Health authorities were expected to announce measures to strengthen social distancing following a meeting Friday.

In **Thailand**, which has reported only 95 deaths during the pandemic, **health officials reported the country's first local cases of the coronavirus variant first detected in Britain**. The news comes at a time when only 1% of the population has been vaccinated and as Thais prepare to celebrate the traditional Songkran New Year's holiday next week, typically a time of widespread travel.

[The UK] is more contagious, and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said this week that **it is now the most common variant in the United States, raising concerns it will drive infections and cause more people to get sick.** ...

Apr. 10

Wearing masks could save at least 14,000 people from Covid-19 deaths by August, model predicts

An influential Covid-19 model has predicted the total number of US deaths from the virus by August 1, a number that researchers say will be impacted by how many Americans continue to wear masks as vaccinations continue.

A model from the University of Washington Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation's (IHME) predicts about 618,523 people will have died from coronavirus in the US by August 1. If 95% of the US population wore masks, the projection drops to 604,413 deaths.

In the worst-case scenario, in which fully vaccinated people return to pre-pandemic levels of mobility, the prediction grows to 697,573, the IHME forecasted. The projection factors in the rate of vaccine distribution as well as the concerning spread of more transmissible variants.

All 50 states are on track to open vaccines to Americans 16 and older starting April 19. Though the increased inoculations are an important step in defeating the virus, health experts warn the country is in a race against variants, like the B.1.1.7 first identified in the UK, that have the potential to cause another surge in cases.

The US on Friday reported at least 80,157 new cases, the third day in a row and the fourth day in the last week the US reported at least 75,000 or more cases, according to Johns Hopkins University. Overall, more than 561,000 people have died from coronavirus to date, according to the tally.

Vaccines are an effective tool against virus spread, but they are not perfect and should be supplemented by precautions like wearing masks and avoiding indoor gatherings, said Dr. Anthony Fauci.

"I don't think I would -- even if I'm vaccinated -- go into an indoor, crowded place where people aren't wearing masks," the director of the National Institute for Allergy and Infectious Diseases told Business Insider.

Pfizer looking to expand vaccinations to Americans as young as 12

To date, the youngest Americans eligible for the vaccines are 16.

But on Friday the Food and Drug Administration acting commissioner Dr. Janet Woodcock said the agency will evaluate "as quickly as possible" Pfizer's request to expand the emergency use authorization of the drug maker's Covid-19 vaccine to include people ages 12-15.

"While the FDA cannot predict how long our evaluation of the data and information will take, we will review the request as expeditiously as possible using our thorough and science-based approach," Woodcock said on Twitter.

The pharmaceutical company said it will seek similar ...

https://apnews.com/article/middle-east-coronavirus-pandemic-united-nations-b52bf58e35031e71a5ff85f7a59244f8

Apr. 10

Stalled at first jab: Vaccine shortages hit poor countries

... **As many as 60 countries**, **including some of the world's poorest**, might be stalled at the first shots of their coronavirus vaccinations because nearly all deliveries through the global program intended to help them are **blocked until as late as June**.

COVAX, the global initiative to provide vaccines to countries lacking the clout to negotiate for scarce supplies on their own, has in the past week shipped more than 25,000 doses to low-income countries only twice on any given day. Deliveries have all but halted since Monday.

During the past two weeks, according to data compiled daily by UNICEF, fewer than 2 million COVAX doses in total were cleared for shipment to 92 countries in the developing world — the same amount injected in Britain alone.

...

The vaccine shortage stems mostly from India's decision to stop exporting vaccines from its Serum Institute factory, which produces the overwhelming majority of the AstraZeneca doses that COVAX counted on to supply around a third of the global population at a time coronavirus is spiking worldwide.

...

Internal WHO documents obtained by the AP show the uncertainty about deliveries "is causing some countries to lose faith in the COVAX (effort)." That is prompting **WHO to consider speeding up its endorsement of vaccines from China and Russia**, which have not been authorized by any regulators in Europe or North America.

...

Concern over the link between the AstraZeneca shot and rare blood clots has also "created nervousness both around its safety and efficacy," WHO noted. Among its proposed solutions is a decision to "expedite review of additional products" from China and Russia.

WHO said last month it might be possible to greenlight the Chinese vaccines by the end of April.

Some experts have noted that Sinopharm and Sinovac, two Chinese-made vaccines, lack published data, and there are reports of people needing a third dose to be protected.

...

"In the absence of high vaccination coverage globally, we risk dragging out the pandemic for several more years," said Lavanya Vasudevan, an assistant professor at Duke University's Global Health Institute. "**Every day that the virus is in circulation is an opportunity for it to mutate into a more deadly variant**."

Earlier this month, the WHO appealed to rich countries to urgently share 10 million doses to meet the U.N. target of starting COVID-19 vaccinations in every country within the first 100 days of the year. So far, countries have pledged hundreds of millions of dollars to COVAX. But there are simply no doses to buy, and no country has agreed to immediately share what it has.

...

COVID-19 cases and deaths last month surged in numerous crisis-hit countries: by 322% in Kenya, 379% in Yemen and 529% in northeast Syria. ...

Return to Timeline

https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/4/10/out-of-control-brazils-covid-surge-sparks-regional-fears

Apr. 11

‘Out of control’: Brazil’s COVID surge sparks regional fears

... Since the start of the year, an **uncontrollable second wave** has pushed Brazil over the 300,000 death mark. As the country continues to hit grim milestones – **a record 4,247 deaths on Thursday alone** – the entire South American nation is **now the global COVID-19 epicentre, with experts warning that 5,000 Brazilians could lose their lives in a single day in April.**

Much of the fear is being directed to the **P1 variant**, linked to the Brazilian Amazon. If Brazil cannot control its high transmission rate, experts fear the country’s healthcare tragedy **could endanger the world**. If the virus is **left to circulate freely, it could create the ideal breeding ground for new and even more deadly variants.**

Brazil’s neighbours have sealed off their borders to the country in a desperate attempt to prevent new variants from bleeding into the rest of the continent and harming vaccine efficiency.

“We’re very concerned. The staggering amount of deaths in Brazil in just a few months is our biggest worry,” virologist and researcher Humberto Debat, from the National Institute of Agricultural Technology told Al Jazeera.

...

Experts have said a lack of social distancing measures has created the ideal environment for variants to mutate.

Since June 2020, Brazil’s infections and deaths marooned at a steady plateau of approximately 1,000 deaths a day, leading many to believe the worst was over. For months, Brazilians commuted on crammed public transport and packed its beaches, bars and nightclubs.

As Brazilians continued to flout containment measures, the P1 variant hatched, believed to have emerged in the Brazilian Amazon at the tail end of 2020. Weeks later, Manaus’ health system had all but collapsed.

According to the Fiocruz research institute, the **P1 variant now accounts for more than 80 percent of cases** in populous states, Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. **Three months ago, it was 0 percent.**

...

Officials and experts are concerned about the speed with which the **P1 variant**, which is **likely more infectious**, is spreading and the damage it could pose globally.

“The virus has become ‘synchronised’ in the whole country, with intensive care units in several states at over 90 percent capacity,” said epidemiologist Daniel Villela from the Fiocruz branch in Rio de Janeiro.

As Brazil’s health system caves in, with intubation drugs and oxygen stocks critically low, Villela also told Al Jazeera that oversaturated hospitals were causing more deaths.

Meanwhile, Brazil’s painfully slow vaccine rollout, the result of disorganisation and a lack of urgency from Bolsonaro is worrying. To date, **fewer than 10 percent of Brazil’s 212 million people have been vaccinated.**

...

Despite promising news on Wednesday of preliminary results from a continuing study finding China’s Sinovac vaccine to be 50 percent effective against the P1 strain, **experts have warned that the speed with which the virus is mutating could spell disaster for current vaccine campaigns.**

...

The P1 variant has also been detected in Argentina, Paraguay, Colombia, Peru and Chile, as well as Canada and the United States. ...

https://apnews.com/article/beijing-immunizations-chengdu-coronavirus-pandemic-china-675bcb6b5710c7329823148ffbff6ef9

Apr. 11

Chinese vaccines' effectiveness low

... **Chinese vaccines "don't have very high protection rates,"** said the director of the China Centers for Disease Control, Gao Fu, at a conference Saturday in the southwestern city of Chengdu.

Beijing has distributed hundreds of millions of doses abroad while trying to promote doubt about the effectiveness of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine made using the previously experimental messenger RNA, or mRNA, process.

"**It's now under formal consideration whether we should use different vaccines from different technical lines for the immunization process,"** Gao said.
...
Experts say mixing vaccines, or sequential immunization, might boost effectiveness. Researchers in Britain are studying a possible combination of Pfizer-BioNTech and the traditional AstraZeneca vaccine.

The coronavirus pandemic, which began in central China in late 2019, marks the first time the Chinese drug industry has played a role in responding to a global health emergency.

Vaccines made by **two state-owned drug makers, Sinovac and Sinopharm, have been exported to 22 countries including Mexico, Turkey, Indonesia, Hungary, Brazil and Turkey**, according to the foreign ministry.

The effectiveness of a **Sinovac vaccine at preventing symptomatic infections was found to be as low as 50.4% by researchers in Brazil, near the 50% threshold at which health experts say a vaccine is useful. By comparison, the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine has been found to be 97% effective.**

Health experts say **Chinese vaccines are unlikely to be sold to the United States, Western Europe and Japan due to the complexity of the approval process.**

A Sinovac spokesman, Liu Peicheng, acknowledged varying levels of effectiveness have been found but said that can be due to the age of people in a study, the strain of virus and other factors.

Beijing has yet to approve any foreign vaccines for use in China.

Gao gave no details of possible changes in strategy but cited mRNA as a possibility.

"Everyone should consider the benefits mRNA vaccines can bring for humanity," Gao said. "We must follow it carefully and not ignore it just because we already have several types of vaccines already."

Gao previously questioned the safety of mRNA vaccines. He was quoted by the official Xinhua News Agency as saying in December he couldn't rule out negative side effects because they were being used for the first time on healthy people.

Chinese state media and popular health and science blogs also have questioned the safety and effectiveness of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine.

As of April 2, some **34 million people in China have received both of the two doses required for Chinese vaccines and about 65 million received one**, according to Gao.

The Sinovac spokesman, Liu, said studies find protection "may be better" if time between vaccinations is longer than the current 14 days but gave no indication that might be made standard practice.

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/health-bangkok-coronavirus-pandemic-thailand-5188c5b8ba8702324a39150126ff066c

Apr. 11

Thailand hits new daily record with nearly 1,000 virus cases

... The ministry confirmed **967 new infections, the highest ever in a 24-hour period**, bringing Thailand's total to 32,625 cases since January last year — including 97 deaths. The expanding outbreak comes after the country kept the virus largely in check for most of last year.

If the number of cases is still rising in two weeks, measures beyond the current restrictions on nightlife and longstanding social distancing rules will need to be put in place, said Dr. Sophon Iamsirithaworn, deputy director general of the Department of Disease Control.

Most of the **recent cases have been traced to an outbreak that originated last month at several nightlife entertainment venues in Bangkok**, Sophon said. He said people should be working from home and exercise vigilance.

Tests among those infected at the Bangkok nightspots found some patients infected with the **U.K. variant** of the coronavirus, which has been found to be more infectious than the original strain.

The **rapid rise in cases has been most marked in the capital, Bangkok, and the tourist destinations of Chiangmai in the north and Chonburi province in the east, home to the seaside resort town of Pattaya.**
...
Chiang Mai provincial health officials are requiring visitors from Bangkok and four surrounding provinces to self-quarantine for the duration of their stay, up to 14 days, the state Thai News agency reported. A 280-bed field hospital has been set up to treat COVID-19 patients.

Bangkok Criminal Court on Saturday sentenced the managers of two clubs to which the outbreak was traced to two months in jail for violating emergency measures instituted last year covering health regulations to guard against the virus, said Maj. Gen. Sophon Sarawat, chief of the district where the establishments are located.

The outbreak has become a political issue because of charges that senior members of government may have patronized the clubs and flouted health regulations. The country's transport minister tested positive for the virus, but he and other Cabinet members have denied the allegations.

Dr. Sophon explained that another reason **the situation is "worrisome" is because the age groups among which most cases are found are in the 20-29 and 30-39 age brackets.**...

A longer-term concern is that **Thailand has been lagging in vaccinating its 69 million population**, making it more difficult to bounce back from the latest outbreak. According to Deputy Government Spokesperson Traisuree Taisaranakul a total of 537,380 coronavirus vaccine doses were administered in 77 provinces though Friday.

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/us-news-boston-coronavirus-pandemic-8c46ab65afc4538cb060c320ed94fc54

Apr. 12

US colleges divided over requiring student vaccinations

BOSTON (AP) — U.S. colleges hoping for a return to normalcy next fall are weighing how far they should go in urging students to get the COVID-19 vaccine, including whether they should — or legally can — require it.

Universities including **Rutgers, Brown, Cornell and Northeastern recently told students they must get vaccinated before returning** to campus next fall. They hope to achieve herd immunity on campus, which they say would allow them to loosen spacing restrictions in classrooms and dorms.

But some colleges are leaving the decision to students, and others believe they can't legally require vaccinations. At **Virginia Tech, officials determined that they can't** because the U.S. Food and Drug Administration has only allowed the emergency use of the vaccines and hasn't given them its full approval.

The question looms large as more colleges plan to shift back from remote to in-person instruction. Many schools have launched vaccination blitzes to get students immunized before they leave for the summer. At some schools, the added requirement is meant to encourage holdouts and to build confidence that students and faculty will be safe on campus.

"It takes away any ambiguity about whether individuals should be vaccinated," said Kenneth Henderson, the chancellor of Northeastern University in Boston. "It also provides a level of confidence for the entire community that we are taking all appropriate measures."

Northeastern and other colleges requiring shots believe they're on solid legal ground. It's not unusual for colleges to require students to be vaccinated for other types of diseases, and **a California court last year upheld a flu shot requirement at the University of California system.**

But legal scholars say the COVID-19 vaccines' emergency use status moves the issue to a legal gray area that's likely to be challenged in court, and some colleges may take a more cautious approach to avoid litigation.

Harvard Law professor Glenn Cohen, who teaches health law and bioethics, said there's no legal reason colleges wouldn't be allowed to require COVID-19 vaccinations. It makes no difference that the shots haven't been given full approval, he said, noting that many colleges already require students to take coronavirus tests that are approved under the same FDA emergency authorization. But there's also no federal guidance explicitly permitting vaccination mandates.

The biggest clashes could come in states taking a stance against vaccination requirements, he said.

In Florida, Gov. Ron DeSantis this month banned all businesses from requiring customers to show proof of vaccination. The order raises questions about Nova Southeastern University's plan to require students and staff to get vaccinated. The college's president said he's still confident in the plan, but he also promised to "respect the laws of our state and all federal directives."

The governor of Texas, the country's second-largest state, issued a similar order.

There's a parallel debate about whether to require vaccination for faculty and staff, an issue that employers across the nation are grappling with. **At the University of Notre Dame, one of the latest schools to require student vaccinations, shots are still optional for workers. Northeastern is considering whether to extend its mandate to employees.**

Even at schools making shots mandatory, there are exemptions ...

Return to Timeline

https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/13/us/politics/johnson-johnson-vaccine-blood-clots-fda-cdc.html?searchResultPosition=1

Apr. 13

U.S. calls for pause on Johnson & Johnson Vaccine after clotting cases

WASHINGTON — Federal health agencies on Tuesday called for an immediate pause in use of Johnson & Johnson's single-dose coronavirus vaccine after **six recipients in the United States developed a rare disorder involving blood clots within about two weeks of vaccination.**

All six recipients were women between the ages of 18 and 48. One woman died and a second woman in Nebraska has been hospitalized in critical condition, officials briefed on the cases said.

Nearly seven million people in the United States have received Johnson & Johnson shots so far, and roughly nine million more doses have been shipped out to the states, according to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"Today FDA and @CDCgov issued a statement regarding the Johnson & Johnson #COVID19 vaccine. **We are recommending a pause in the use of this vaccine out of an abundance of caution**," the Food and Drug Administration announced on Twitter at 7 a.m. A news conference is scheduled for 10 a.m.

While the move was framed as a recommendation to health practitioners in the states, the federal government is expected to pause administration of the vaccine at all federally run vaccination sites. Federal officials expect that state health officials will take that as a strong signal to do the same.

Federal officials are concerned that doctors may not be trained to look for the rare disorder if recipients of the vaccine develop symptoms of it. The F.D.A. said Tuesday morning that "treatment of this specific type of blood clot is different from the treatment that might typically be administered."

Scientists with the F.D.A. and C.D.C. will jointly examine possible links between the vaccine and the disorder and determine whether the F.D.A. should continue to authorize use of the vaccine for all adults or limit the authorization. An emergency meeting of the C.D.C.'s outside advisory committee has been scheduled for Wednesday, officials said.

The move could substantially complicate the nation's vaccination efforts at a time when many states are confronting a surge in new cases and seeking to address vaccine hesitancy. **Regulators in Europe and elsewhere are concerned about a similar issue with another coronavirus vaccine, developed by AstraZeneca** and Oxford University researchers. That concern has driven up some resistance to all vaccines, even though the AstraZeneca version has not been authorized for emergency use in the United States...

https://apnews.com/article/australia-coronavirus-pandemic-coronavirus-vaccine-a62809171ea3eb595ee515b9fa92b8ad

Australia rules out adding J&J vaccine to inoculation plan

The Australian government said Tuesday it had decided against buying the single-dose Johnson & Johnson coronavirus vaccine and identified a second case of a rare blood clot likely linked to the AstraZeneca shot.

The government had been in talks with the New Jersey-based pharmaceutical giant, which had asked the Australian regulator, Therapeutic Goods Administration, for provisional registration.

But Health Minister Greg Hunt ruled out a J&J contract because its vaccine was similar to the AstraZeneca product, which Australia had already contracted for 53.8 million doses.

Hunt said the government was following the advice of Australia's scientific and technical advisory group...

https://www.cnn.com/2021/04/13/sport/japan-covid-tokyo-olympics-100-days-dst-intl-hnk/index.html

Apr. 14

100 days out from Olympics, Japan has vaccinated less than 1% of population

... already postponed a year due to the coronavirus pandemic, questions remain over how Tokyo can hold a massive sporting event and keep volunteers, athletes, officials -- and the Japanese public -- safe from Covid-19.

That **concern has been amplified by Japan's battle with a looming fourth wave. The country passed 500,000 total coronavirus cases on Saturday**, and some prefectures are again tightening their Covid-19 restrictions as daily infections grow. Hideaki Oka, a professor at Saitama Medical University, said Japan may not be able to contain the latest wave before the Games begin on July 23.

While Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga reiterated Monday his pledge to secure 100 million vaccine doses by the end of June, so far Japan has only **vaccinated about 1.1 million of its 126 million people** -- less than 1% of the population. **Only 0.4% have received two doses**.

Holthus said supporting the Games was meant to be a "once-in-a-lifetime" opportunity. "But now it's just a really dangerous experience," she said.
In a statement to CNN, Tokyo 2020 organizers said they were preparing to hold "a safe and secure Games without presuming there will be a vaccine and even without vaccines."

"On the other hand, we hope that vaccines will be properly administered at home and abroad and that the infection will, therefore, be reduced as a whole," the statement said.

With a $25 billion Olympics to host, arguably no country in Asia had more incentive than Japan to get its Covid-19 cases under control and vaccinate its population.

Yet **Japanese regulators were slow to approve Covid-19 vaccines**, compared to other governments, taking more than two months to allow the use of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine. **Its rollout did not begin until February, and senior citizens only began to receive their doses on April 12**, according to Kyodo News.
...
International spectators have been banned from the Games to try to lower the risk of Covid-19 spreading at the event. But **more than 11,000 athletes from over 200 countries are expected to participate**.

Without plans to vaccinate athletes, the tens of thousands of volunteers taking part stand little chance of protection.

Holthus said Tokyo 2020 President Hashimoto Seiko told volunteers during a Zoom call she was relying "on your smile" to make the Olympics a success -- a particularly jarring claim because they would all be wearing masks.

"(We were told) 'Your smile is going to make the Olympics exist' and you wonder, are you kidding me?" said Holthus, who is scheduled to volunteer as a ticket collector.

One volunteer, who attended an 80-minute lecture on infectious disease control for Games volunteers, said a top Japanese expert in infectious diseases told them they shouldn't count on being vaccinated ahead of the event.

"(He said) unless you are elderly there won't be enough time for ordinary people to get vaccinated," said the volunteer, who asked to remain anonymous to avoid being excluded from her role in the Olympics. She said she felt angry and scared after the presentation.

The volunteer, who had taken part in previous Olympics, said she was considering dropping out unless all volunteers were vaccinated. "Not doing so is showing reckless disregard for our lives, and the optimal safe environment that Japan as a host country is obligated to provide," she said.

Tokyo 2020 didn't respond to questions on the content of the ...

Return to Timeline

https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/worldwide-graphs/#total-deaths

Select live link for current number

Apr. 15

Death toll from coronavirus tops 3,100,000

https://apnews.com/article/migrant-workers-mumbai-weddings-india-coronavirus-pandemic-766287564341fc7b4281b208bfdad630

Apr. 15

India's biggest cities shut down as new virus cases hit 200,000

NEW DELHI (AP) — India's two largest cities imposed stringent restrictions on movement and one planned to use hotels and banquet halls to treat coronavirus patients as new infections in the country shot past 200,000 Thursday amid a devastating surge that is straining a fragile health system.

The soaring cases and deaths come just months after India thought it had seen the worst of the pandemic — and have forced the country to delay exports of vaccines abroad. **India is a major producer of COVID-19 shots**, and its pivot to focus on domestic demand has weighed heavily on global efforts to end the pandemic.

New Delhi announced stay-at-home orders for the weekend, though essential workers will be able to move about if they have a pass from local authorities. **Restaurants, malls, gyms and spas will be shut down**. Movie theaters will close on weekends, but can operate on weekdays at a third of their capacity.

Arvind Kejriwal, Delhi's top elected official, said that despite rise in infections, 5,000 hospital beds are still available in the capital and more capacity is being added. But still, more than a dozen hotels and wedding banquet halls were ordered to be converted into COVID-19 centers where doctors from nearby hospitals will treat the moderately ill.

"The surge is alarming," said S.K. Sarin, a government health expert in New Delhi.

The moves in the capital came after similar measures were imposed in the worst-hit state of **Maharashtra**, home to financial capital, Mumbai. The bustle of India's biggest city ebbed after authorities closed most industries, businesses and public places Wednesday night and **put limits on the movement of people for 15 days**. Train and plane travel was still allowed, however.

In recent days, the city has seen an exodus of panic-stricken day laborers, hauling backpacks and flocking to overcrowded trains.

Dozens of other towns and cities have also imposed nighttime curfews.

...

The **200,739 new infections recorded Thursday are about twice the number of daily cases that were recorded during the last peak, in September.** The Health Ministry also reported 1,038 deaths from COVID-19 in the past 24 hours, pushing the toll over 173,000.

India's toll of 14 million cases puts it second behind the United States. It ranks fourth in deaths after the U.S., Brazil and Mexico — though, with nearly 1.4 billion people, it has a much larger population than any of those countries. Experts say even these figures are likely an undercount.

As it struggles with the caseload, India is ramping up its vaccination drive. The Health Ministry said the total vaccinations crossed 114 million with more than 3 million doses administered on Wednesday.

When infections began plummeting in India in September, many concluded the worst had passed. Masks and social distancing were abandoned. When cases began rising again in February, authorities were left scrambling.

Return to Timeline

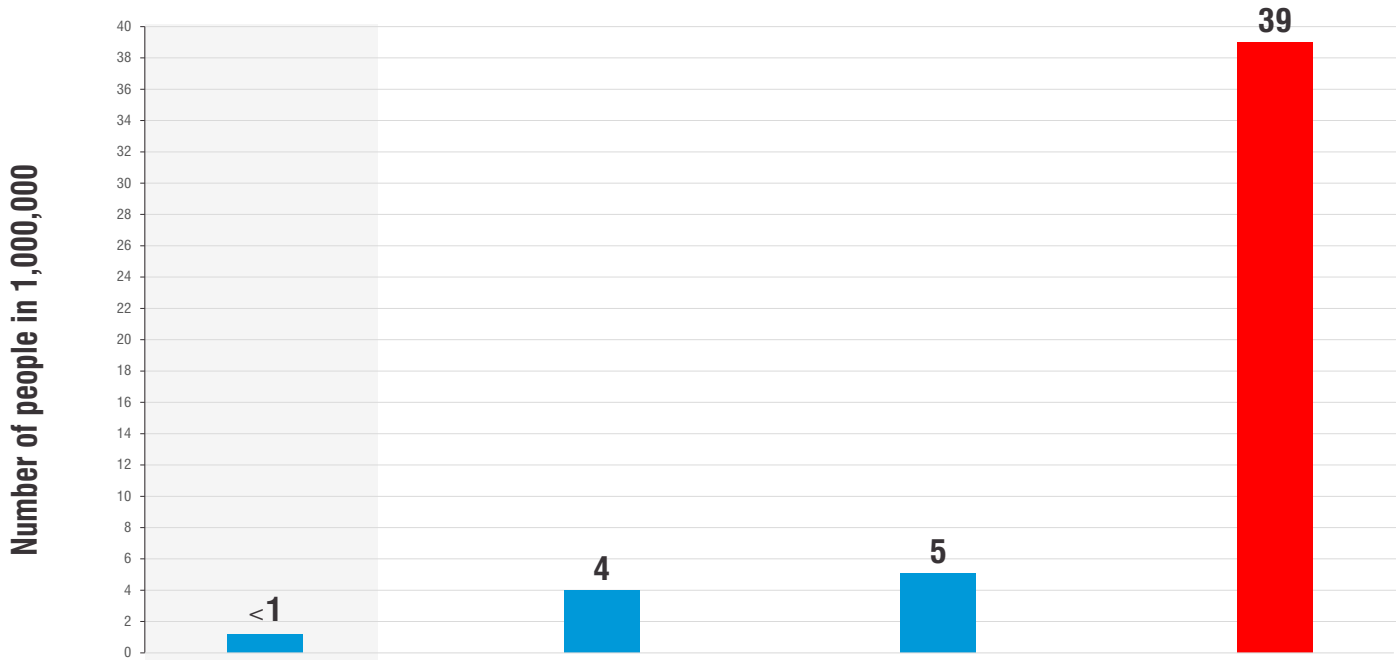
https://www.ox.ac.uk/news/2021-04-15-risk-rare-blood-clotting-higher-covid-19-vaccines

Apr. 16

Study: Risk of rare blood clotting higher for COVID-19 than for vaccines

... risk of the rare blood clotting known as cerebral venous thrombosis (CVT) following COVID-19 infection is around 100 times greater than normal, several times higher than it is post-vaccination or following influenza.

The study authors ... **counted the number of CVT cases diagnosed in the two weeks following diagnosis of COVID-19, or after the first dose of a vaccine**. The[y] then compared these to calculated incidences of CVT following influenza, and the background level in the general population.



https://www.fda.gov/news-events/press-announcements/joint-cdc-and-fda-statement-johnson-johnson-covid-19-vaccine → 6 in 6.8 MM

https://twitter.com/jburnmurdoch/status/1383103434283491336

Apr. 17

New variant first discovered in India appears to be spreading in the UK

Each variant as a share of all sequenced cases in the UK, by number of days since it was first identified in the UK

Each varient as a share of all sequenced cases in the UK (log scale), by number of days since it was first identified in the UK

https://www.cnn.com/2021/04/17/india/covid-vaccine-shortage-covishield-covaxin-intl-hnk-dst/index.html

Apr. 18

The world's biggest vaccine producer is running out of Covid-19 vaccines

In **India, the world's biggest vaccine producer**, millions of people are waiting for Covid-19 vaccines amid a devastating second wave of infections.

India typically **produces more than 60% of all vaccines sold globally**, and is home to the Serum Institute of India (SII), the world's largest vaccine maker. Its vast manufacturing capability is why the country signed on as a major player in COVAX, the global vaccine-sharing initiative that provides discounted or free doses for lower-income countries. Under the initial agreement announced last year, SII would manufacture up to 200 million doses for up to 92 countries.

But the situation in India is markedly different from just a few months ago. **Its second wave began in March, quickly surpassing the first**, which had peaked last September at more than 97,000 coronavirus cases a day.

On Sunday, the country reported 261,500 new cases -- its highest single-day figure so far, according to data from the Indian Ministry of Health. India added a million new cases in less than a week, surpassing 14 million total cases on Thursday.
...
India is administering two vaccines domestically: the Oxford-AstraZeneca one, also known as Covishield, and its homegrown Covaxin, developed jointly by Bharat Biotech and the government-run Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)

The country started its vaccination program in January for health care workers and priority groups, with the goal of fully inoculating 300 million people by August. But the program had a sluggish start, facing logistical issues as well as vaccine hesitancy among the population -- especially towards Covaxin, which was approved for emergency use before the efficacy data of its third phase trial were released.

T**o date, only 14.3 million people have been fully vaccinated** -- **just over 1% of India's population** of 1.3 billion, according to Johns Hopkins University.
...
Prime Minister Narendra Modi has made a point of praising India's vaccination effort as a success. During a meeting with state governors on Wednesday, Modi "highlighted that India has become the fastest nation to reach the landmark of 10 crore vaccinations (100 million doses)," according to a statement from his office.

India took 85 days to reach 100 million doses. By comparison, the US took 89 days and China 102 days, according to Modi's office.

And on Tuesday, Rajesh Bhushan, the health ministry's secretary, said the problem was poor planning and management -- not supply. "We are making doses available to states in a timely manner," he said, adding that states should "look at how many unutilized doses there are at each cold chain point."

Their statements were met with outrage from local and state leaders. Shah's assertion was "factually completely incorrect," tweeted Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot on April 10.

And though a last-minute shipment from the central government had saved Uttarakhand from a complete shortage, it's far from a perfect solution and "the supply is unpredictable," said health department official Kuldeep Martolia on Monday.

But even the possibility of importing foreign vaccines won't be a quick fix, since companies like Pfizer and Moderna have other orders to fulfill first, including supplying vaccines for the US. India just granted emergency use authorization for Russia's Sputnik vaccine -- but "by the time they build up manufacturing capacities and manufacturing requirements, it will be five to six months," Ganguly said...

https://www.aol.com/news/fauci-says-expects-j-j-144743162-201008178.html?error=login_required&error_description=login_required

Apr. 19

Half of US adults have received at least one COVID-19 shot

... Almost **130 million people 18 or older** have received at least one dose of a vaccine, or **50.4% of the total adult population**, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported. Almost 84 million adults, or about **32.5% of the population, have been fully vaccinated**.
...
The country's vaccination rate, at 61.6 doses administered per 100 people, currently falls behind Israel, which leads among countries with at least 5 million people with a rate of 119.2. The U.S. also trails the United Arab Emirates, Chile and the United Kingdom, which is vaccinating at a rate of 62 doses per 100 people, according to Our World in Data, an online research site.
...
The states with the highest vaccination rates have a history of voting Democratic and supporting President Joe Biden in the 2020 election: New Hampshire at the top, with 71.1%, followed by New Mexico, Connecticut, Massachusetts and Maine, CDC data show.

The demand has not been the same in many areas of Tennessee — particularly, rural ones.

Tennessee sits in the bottom four states for rates of adults getting at least one shot, at 40.8%. It's trailed only by Louisiana, Alabama and Mississippi — three other Southern states that lean Republican and voted for Donald Trump last fall.
...
A poll conducted in late March found that 36% of Republicans said they will probably or definitely not get vaccinated, compared with 12% of Democrats. Similarly, a third of rural Americans said they were leaning against getting shots, while fewer than a fourth of people living in cities and suburbs shared that hesitancy.

Overall, though, willingness to get vaccinated has risen, polling shows.

In January, 67% of adult Americans were willing to get vaccinated or had already received at least one shot. The figure has climbed to 75%, according to the latest AP-NORC poll.

Nationwide, 24% of Black Americans and 22% of Hispanic Americans say they will probably or definitely not get vaccinated, down from 41% and 34% in January, respectively. Among white Americans, 26% now say they will not get vaccinated. In January, that number was 31%.

Dr. Anthony Fauci, the nation's top infectious disease expert, said the goal is to get community figures, from athletes to clergy, to encourage vaccinations, particularly as the seven-day national average of cases remains over 60,000 new infections per day.
...
The J&J vaccine was thrown in limbo after the CDC and the Food and Drug Administration said last week they needed more evidence to decide if a handful of unusual blood clots were linked to the shot — and if so, how big the risk is.

The reports are rare — six cases out of more than 7 million U.S. inoculations with J&J vaccine. The clots were found in women between the ages of 18 and 48. One person died.

Authorities stressed they have found no sign of clot problems with the most widely used COVID-19 vaccines in the U.S. — from Moderna and Pfizer.

Return to Timeline

https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/health/2021/04/20/covid-vaccine-variant-cdc-tests/7296416002/

Apr. 20

Coronavirus spreads at record pace globally despite vaccines

Even as the U.S. and other countries press ahead with their COVID-19 vaccination programs, infections are increasing faster than ever globally.

A record 5,363,616 new cases were reported in the week ending Saturday, a USA TODAY analysis of Johns Hopkins University data shows. At that pace, **nearly nine cases are being reported every second**. The growth in cases is being pushed by a stunning spike in **India**, which is **now reporting more than 1.5 million infections every week**. Just a month ago, that figure was about 200,000.

The **United States**, which opened vaccination eligibility for all adults Monday, **Brazil** and **Turkey** are the other nations reporting more than 400,000 cases per week. With **India**, the four countries **account for most of the world's new cases**, the USA TODAY analysis shows.

COVID-19 deaths are still below the peak of more than 100,000 per week. About 83,000 weekly deaths are now being reported, a pace of about **eight people dying every minute.**

US State Department raises alert level for most countries due to COVID

... "As travelers face ongoing risks due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Department of State **will begin updating its travel advisories this week** to better reflect the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's science-based Travel Health Notices that outline current issues affecting travelers' health," the department said in a statement. **"Our advisories also take into account logistical factors, including in-country testing availability and current travel restrictions for U.S. citizens."'**

The agency said approximately **80% of countries will now carry the "Do not travel"** label, a level 4.

Today, just 34 of 209 countries, or about 16% have rated a level 4. Nearly 150 countries, or about 70%, fall into level 3.

The State Department said the pandemic continues to pose "unprecedented risks" to travelers.

"In light of those risks, the Department of State strongly recommends U.S. citizens reconsider all travel abroad."
...

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/world-news-health-india-coronavirus-92f65583dc0df307f84b01e070e81d86

Select live link for 18 AP photos

Apr. 21

India's surge of coronavirus cases

India has been overwhelmed by hundreds of thousands of new coronavirus cases daily, bringing pain, fear and agony to many lives as lockdowns have been placed in Delhi and other cities.

India's Health Ministry reported 295,041 new cases on Wednesday with 2,023 deaths, taking total fatalities to 182,553. **India has since the start of the pandemic recorded 15.6 million cases, the second highest behind the United States.**

Newly reported cases have exceeded 200,000 each day for a week — with people being infected faster than they can be tested.

"This time, infection is spreading so fast that people are not getting time to get medicines. Many people are dying before we can get a test report," said Dr. S K Pandey of Ram Manohar Lohia Institute of Medical Sciences in Lucknow, capital of the northern state of Uttar Pradesh.

Many have blamed politicians for allowing super-spreader events such as mass gatherings to take place.

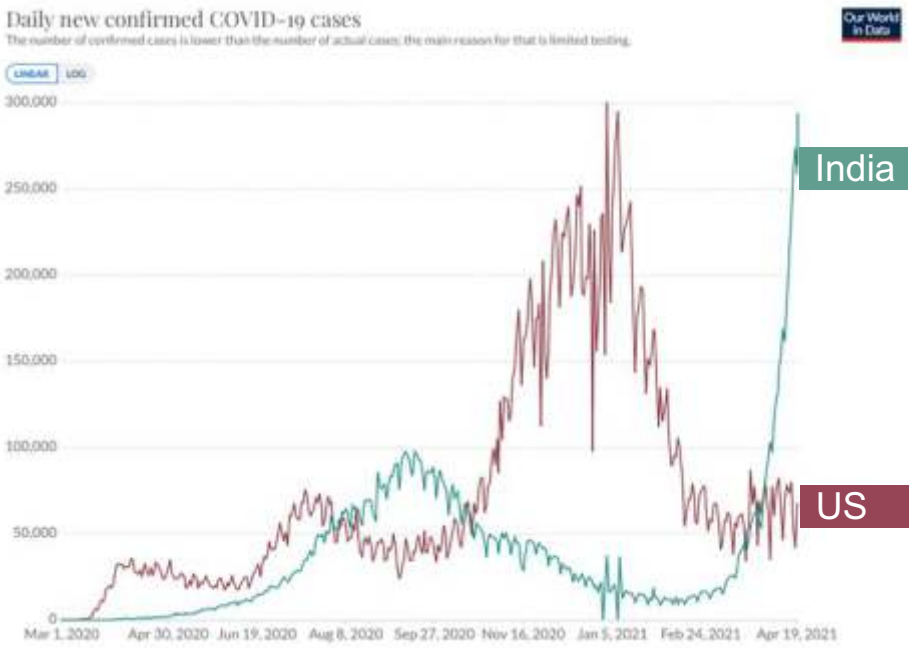
Religious leaders and hundreds of thousands of devout Hindus descended on the banks of the Ganges River in the northern Indian city of Haridwar last month for a major Kumbh festival. They believe that a dip in holy water will wash away their sins and prevent rebirth. One prominent Hindu religious leader died of COVID-19 shortly after.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah as well as opposition politicians took part in mass election rallies in five populous states with with tens of thousands of supporters not wearing masks or social distancing.

Tens of thousands of farmers protesting new agricultural reform laws have been camping on the outskirts of the Indian capital in crowded tents and makeshift townships since November.

Modi tried to boost spirits in a nationwide address on Tuesday night by saying the government and the pharmaceutical industry were stepping up efforts to meet the shortages of hospital beds, oxygen, tests and vaccines.

But, he admitted, the "surge in infections has come like a storm and a big battle lies ahead."



https://www.nejm.org/?query=featured_home&doi=10.1056%2FNEJMoa2101544

Apr. 21

The J&J vaccine phase 3 trial results published in NEJM

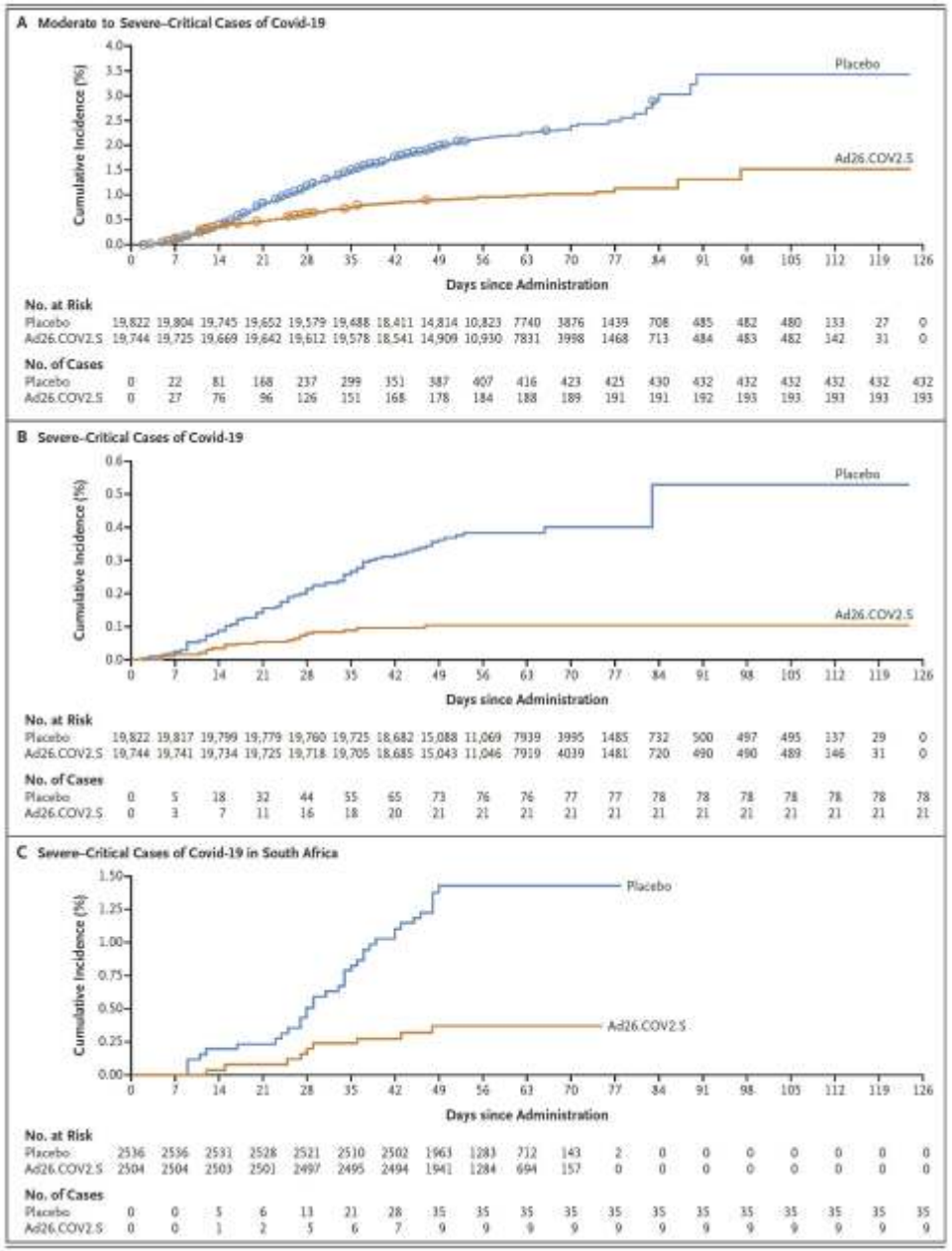
At post

>14 days 67% efficacy

>28 days 75%
(**85% vs severe/critical**)

and

strong efficacy against [South Africa] variant



Return to Timeline

https://www.fiercepharma.com/pharma/counterfeit-versions-pfizer-covid-19-vaccine-found-poland-mexico?mkt_tok=Mjk0LU1RRi0wNTYAAAF8lS0EE9WHu1DN_tSm1Pfwx1FzTNjnp6y2ezhHabpWcmSZ19lA6Gylw8_SxemyUfIcM53_6BbaMHPbEjoVz

Apr. 22

Counterfeit vaccines found in Mexico, Poland, South Africa and China

Pfizer discovered the first counterfeits of its COVID-19 vaccines—the latest fakes amid the worldwide push for vaccinations.

The vials, recovered in Mexico and Poland, contained water and anti-wrinkle treatments, the pharma told The Wall Street Journal.

At a clinic in **Mexico**, where **80 people paid $1,000 per dose**, vials were seized with fraudulent Pfizer labels with incorrect expiration dates and lot numbers. **The fake vaccines were actually distilled water** and delivered in beach-style coolers. Recipients were unharmed.

In a separate investigation in **Poland**, phony Pfizer **vials containing an anti-wrinkle treatment were found in a man's apartment before they could be distributed.**

The Pfizer fakes are the latest in worldwide discoveries of counterfeit COVID-19 vaccines and deceptive websites hawking non-existent vaccines.

Last month vials were seized in South Africa and Mexico. The **South African warehouse** haul included 2,400 doses and resulted in the arrest of three Chinese nationals and a Zambian. An **investigation revealed a network also selling fake vaccines in China, where an additional 80 were arrested.**

In Mexico, a **private plane was headed to Honduras with 5,700 doses of supposed Sputnik V vaccines** from Russia when it was seized.

“This is only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to COVID-19 vaccine related crime,” Interpol Secretary General Juergen Stock told Reuters.

In December, Interpol issued an alert across its 194-nation network, warning of COVID-related organized crime.

In the **U.S. and several other countries, fake websites are purporting to sell COVID-19 vaccines with the purpose of obtaining people's personal information.** The U.S. Department of **Homeland Security** told the WSJ that it **took down 30 websites and captured 74 web domains** seeking to take advantage of the demand for COVID-19-related products.

Scammers are also using telemarketing calls, text messages and door-to-door visits to access personal information, according to the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

In February, **three men from Baltimore were charged with conspiracy to commit wire fraud and faced up to 20 years in prison for running a scam website to sell Moderna COVID-19 vaccines for $30 each.**

Their site was designed to appear like Moderna’s right down to its logo, markings and text. The scammers also used the web address modernatx.shop, closely mimicking the company’s actual URL, modernatx.com.

HHS has yet to uncover any counterfeit vaccines in the U.S. Its pursuit of fake drugs is long established as the industry generates more than $200 billion annually.

Return to Timeline

https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/worldwide-graphs/#total-deaths

Select live link for current number

Apr. 23

Death toll from coronavirus tops 3,200,000

https://www.pbs.org/newshour/health/covid-19-hospitalizations-tumble-among-u-s-senior-citizens

Apr. 23

COVID-19 hospitalizations tumble among U.S. senior citizens

COVID-19 hospitalizations among older Americans have **plunged 80 percent since the start of the year**, dramatic proof the vaccination campaign is working. Now the trick is to get more of the nation's younger people to roll up their sleeves.

...

Overall, COVID-19 deaths in the U.S. have plummeted to about 700 per day on average, compared with a peak of over 3,400 in mid-January. All told, the scourge has killed about 570,000 Americans.

...

The trends mirror what is happening in other countries with high vaccination rates, such as Israel and Britain, and stand in stark contrast to the worsening disaster in places like India and Brazil, which lag far behind in dispensing shots.

According to U.S. government statistics, **hospitalizations are down 60 percent overall**, but most dramatically among senior citizens, who have been eligible for shots the longest and have enthusiastically received them.

Two-thirds of American senior citizens are fully vaccinated, versus just one-third of all U.S. adults. Over 80 percent of senior citizens have gotten at least one shot, compared with just over 50 percent among all adults.

...

At the same time, **however, overall demand for vaccinations in the U.S. seems to be slipping**, even as shots have been thrown open to all adults across the country. The **average number of doses administered per day appeared to fall in mid-April from 3.2 million to 2.9 million**, according to CDC figures.

"My concern is whether the vaccine uptake will be as strong in these younger age groups," Guest said. "If it's not, we will not see the positive impact for vaccines in these younger age groups that we've seen in our older population."

Also, **new virus cases in the U.S. have been stuck at worrisome levels since March, averaging more than 60,000 per day, matching numbers seen during last summer's surge. The new cases are increasingly among people in their 30s, 40s and 50s, who also make up a larger portion of hospitalizations.**

...

With enough people vaccinated, COVID-19 cases should eventually begin to fall as the virus finds fewer and fewer people to infect. Guest and other experts say Israel appeared to reach that threshold last month after it fully vaccinated roughly 40 percent of its population of 9 million people.

...

The challenge will be quickly vaccinating younger Americans, who feel they are less vulnerable to the coronavirus but are mainly the ones spreading the disease.

"To really feel that we're out of the woods we've got to see a lot less cases than we're seeing now," said Dr. Jesse ...

Return to Timeline

https://slate.com/technology/2021/04/covid-19-vaccine-breakthrough-infections-cdc-data.html

Apr. 23

“Breakthrough” cases we’re seeing is even lower than expected

... Last week, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that more than **5,800 out of 75 million** fully vaccinated people in the U.S. have been infected with COVID-19. **Of these “breakthrough cases,” 396 were hospitalized and 74 people died**. The CDC defines a breakthrough case as someone who gets sick, either symptomatically or asymptomatically, 14 or more days after full vaccination. A few headlines about the report implied, rather irresponsibly, that the breakthroughs happened because the vaccines didn’t work. CNN, for instance, put it this way: “So far, 5,800 fully vaccinated people have caught Covid anyway in US, CDC said.”

The reality is that breakthrough cases are normal and expected after vaccination. That’s because **none of the three vaccines available in the U.S. (or, indeed, anywhere else) are 100 percent effective at preventing disease from COVID-19.** The **Pfizer/BioNTech** vaccine, for instance, is **95 percent effective**. That’s impressively high, but a few breakthrough infections, hospitalizations, and deaths are still expected to occur in people who get the vaccine. (One slightly confusing thing about investigating breakthrough infections is that research is using the term differently. There’s the CDC’s definition of an infection two weeks after full vaccination. But some studies have also investigated breakthrough infections in people who have received only one vaccine dose, like Viterbo. Other research addressing infections after vaccination doesn’t use the term breakthrough at all.)

“If it were 95 percent protection, **you would expect 5 percent of the [75] million people who’ve been vaccinated not to be protected**,” said Barry Bloom, a professor of public health and an immunologist at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health on a press call on Friday. The same logic applies to the **Moderna** vaccine, which is **94 percent effective**, and the **Johnson & Johnson** vaccine, which was **72 percent effective** in a U.S. trial. In fact, the number of breakthrough COVID cases was “less than I expect,” said Bloom. “Far less.” **Of the 75 million vaccinated people in the U.S., the 5,800 breakthrough cases represent just 0.0075 percent.**

When you take these percentages into account, it’s easier to see that the proportion of breakthrough cases is very low, according to Syra Madad, an infectious disease epidemiologist and senior director of the special pathogens program at New York City Health and Hospitals.

The numbers are “not concerning to me at all,” she said. Much of the media coverage has needlessly raised alarm because it lacked this context, she added.

It’s comforting to remember that breakthrough cases regularly happen with other common vaccines. The annual flu shot, for example, is usually only 40 percent to 60 percent effective, which means that up to 40 percent to 60 percent of vaccinated people may still get the flu if exposed to it. Despite this, said Madad, the flu shot prevented an estimated ...

https://apnews.com/article/health-science-business-europe-coronavirus-vaccine-839bf6a7c857b25df04078402b4d7b8a

Apr. 24

US to resume J&J COVID vaccinations despite rare clot risk

U.S. health officials lifted an 11-day pause on COVID-19 vaccinations using Johnson & Johnson's single-dose shot on Friday, after scientific advisers decided its benefits outweigh a rare risk of blood clot.

The government uncovered **15 vaccine recipients who developed a highly unusual kind of blood clot out of nearly 8 million people given the J&J shot. All were women, most under age 50. Three died, and seven remain hospitalized.**

But ultimately, **federal health officials decided that J&J's one-and-done vaccine is critical to fight the pandemic** — and that the small clot risk could be handled with warnings to help younger women decide if they should use that shot or an alternative.
...
The U.S. decision — similar to how European regulators are rolling out J&J's shot — comes after advisers to the CDC debated in a daylong meeting just how serious the risk really is. **Panelists voted 10-4 to resume vaccinations without outright age restrictions, but made clear that the shots must come with clear warnings about the clots.**
...
European regulators earlier this week made a similar decision, deciding the clot risk was small enough to allow the rollout of J&J's shot. But how Americans ultimately handle J&J's vaccine will influence other countries that don't have as much access to other vaccination options.

Dr. Paul Stoffels, **J&J's chief scientific officer, pledged that the company would work with U.S. and global authorities "to ensure this very rare event can be identified early and treated effectively."**

At issue is a weird kind of blood clot that forms in unusual places, such as veins that drain blood from the brain, and in patients with abnormally low levels of the platelets that form clots. Symptoms of the unusual clots, dubbed "thrombosis with thrombocytopenia syndrome," include severe headaches a week or two after the J&J vaccination — not right away — as well as abdominal pain and nausea.

The government initially spotted six cases of the rare clots, with nine more cases coming to light in the last week or so. But even the first handful of reports raised alarm because **European regulators already had uncovered similar rare clots among recipients of another COVID-19 vaccine, from AstraZeneca. The AstraZeneca and J&J shots, while not identical, are made with the same technology.**

European scientists found clues that an abnormal platelet-harming immune response to AstraZeneca's vaccine might be to blame -- and if so, then doctors should avoid the most common clot treatment, a blood thinner called heparin.

That added to U.S. authorities' urgency in pausing J&J vaccinations so they could tell doctors how to diagnose and treat these rare clots. Six patients were treated with heparin before anyone realized that might harm instead of help.

Dr. Jesse Goodman of Georgetown University closely watched Friday's deliberations and said people should be made aware of the clotting risk but that it shouldn't overshadow the benefits of COVID-19 protection.

"We need to treat people as adults, tell them what the information is and give them these choices," said Goodman, a former vaccine specialist at the FDA.

Two-dose vaccines from Pfizer and Moderna, which are made differently and haven't been linked to clot risks, are the mainstay of the U.S. vaccination effort. But **many states had been counting on the easier-to-store, one-dose optio**n to also help protect hard-to-reach populations including people who are homeless or disabled. ...

https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/science/double-and-triple-mutants-of-coronavirus-one-and-the-same-vaccines-effective-on-it-scientist/articleshow/82216156.cms

Apr. 25

Mutants strains detected in India are one and the same; and current vaccine(s) appear to be protective against it

The double and triple mutant strains detected in India are one and the same variant of the coronavirus, and the available vaccines are effective on it, National Institute of Biomedical Genomics Director Soumitra Das said on Friday. Speaking at a webinar on 'Genome Sequencing of SARS-CoV-19', Das said double mutant and triple mutant terms are "colloquial" and both refer to the same variant -- B.1.617 variant of the coronavirus.

"Double and triple mutants are one and the same. Double and triple mutants are over-lapping terms and have been used differentially in different context," he said.

The National Institute of Biomedical Genomics in Kalyani is an institute under the Department of Biotechnology and is one of the 10 laboratories across the country involved in the genome sequencing of the coronavirus.

In fact, **these variants harbour 15 lineage defining mutations. B.1.617, initially termed double mutant, has three new spike protein mutations**, he said.

Two mutations -- E484Q and L452R -- are in the area important for antibody-based neutralisation.

"Initially we were signifying two mutations which are important for escape (the vaccine escape and antibody escape). That is why it is called the double mutant," he said.

But this mutant or variant also has another mutation which is called P681R. That mutation allows the virus to enter the cell little better.

"If you now take both the context, the escape variant, plus the entry or infectivity, then it is a triple mutant, but if you only consider about a new variant or escape variant, then it is a double mutant. If you take double and triple mutants, (they) are over-lapping and are one and the same," Das added.

There is apprehension among experts that the new variant could also increase infection rates and easily surpass immune defences.

"Variants found in India are not really escaping our vaccinated sera," Das said, suggesting that the available vaccines are effective on them.

He said that to avoid confusion, a uniform nomenclature for the variants should be used as recommended by the WHO.

Noted virologist Shaheed Jameel referred to the study done by Cellular and Molecular Biology, another lab involved in the sequencing of the coronavirus genomes, saying **preliminary results have shown that Covishield vaccine protects against the B.1.617 variant.**

https://apnews.com/article/health-gaza-strip-pandemics-ramadan-lifestyle-079024b5121bf4f46e64345311ac8895

Apr. 26

Virus surge in crowded Gaza threatens to overwhelm hospitals

... Gaza's main treatment center for COVID-19 patients warns that oxygen supplies are dwindling fast. In another hospital, coronavirus patients are packed three to a room.

For months, Gaza's Hamas rulers seemed to have a handle on containing the pandemic. But their decision to lift most movement restrictions in February — coupled with the spread of a more aggressive virus variant and lack of vaccines — has led to a fierce second surge.

At the same time, many of **Gaza**'s more than **2 million people** ignore safety precautions, especially during the current fasting month of Ramadan. In the daytime, markets teem with shoppers buying goods for iftar, the meal breaking the fast after sundown. Few wear masks properly, if at all.
...
From the start, the course of the pandemic in Gaza, one of the world's most crowded territories, was largely shaped by politics. A border closure — enforced by Israel and Egypt to varying degrees since the Islamic militant Hamas group seized control of Gaza in 2007 — helped slow the spread initially. In the early months, Hamas quarantined small groups of travelers coming from Egypt, and the first cases of community spread were only reported in August.

A first outbreak came in the fall. Hamas tried to contain it by closing schools, mosques and markets, and by imposing a nighttime curfew. By February, infections had dropped sharply.

At that point, Hamas lifted curfews. Students were back in schools, wedding halls reopened and street markets were back. Travelers from Egypt were no longer placed in quarantine or even tested. Instead they were waved through after a temperature check, on the assumption that they had already been tested in Egypt.

The decision to reopen was in part driven by economic concerns. The closures had further battered Gaza's long-suffering economy, where unemployment stands at roughly 50% and among young people at 70%.

Hamas may also have been concerned about prolonging unpopular measures ahead of Palestinian parliament elections. In the May 22 vote, Hamas is competing against the Fatah movement of West Bank-based Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas. There's no reliable polling, but Hamas appears vulnerable to a Fatah challenge in Gaza, even as it is expected to do well in the West Bank.

The start of Ramadan in mid-April, with its crowded markets and late-night mosque prayers, further fueled infections, as did the emergence of more aggressive virus variants.

Last week, the daily death toll rose above 20 on most days, compared to a one-time daily high of 15 in the first surge. **Daily infections of 1,000 to 1,500 are the new norm. The total number of infections is close to 100,000, with 848 deaths.**
...
The Health Ministry said almost all of Gaza has been designated a "red zone" because of widespread community transmission.

Dr. Majdi Dhair, a senior health official, said Gaza's limited medical infrastructure made the situation worse.

The severe shortage of vaccines poses another challenge.

Israel, whose own vaccination campaign has been a success, has been broadly criticized for refusing to accept responsibility for vaccinating the Palestinians. Rights groups say that under international law, Israel remains responsible for Palestinians in areas it occupied in the 1967 Mideast war, including Gaza, the West Bank and east Jerusalem. Israel says interim peace accords absolve it of that responsibility and that this is particularly true in Gaza, from which it withdrew in 2005, while keeping ... tight control over borders. ...

https://apnews.com/article/politics-health-business-government-and-politics-coronavirus-26fa41b98fab721218d9a51065351d9d

Apr. 27

US to share AstraZeneca shots with world after safety check

..."Given the strong portfolio of vaccines that the U.S. already has and that have been authorized by the FDA, and given that the AstraZeneca vaccine is not authorized for use in the U.S., we do not need to use the AstraZeneca vaccine here during the next several months," said White House COVID-19 coordinator Jeff Zients. "Therefore the U.S. is looking at options to share the AstraZeneca doses with other countries as they become available."

More than 3 million people worldwide have died of COVID-19, including more than 572,000 in the U.S. The U.S. has vaccinated more than 53% of its adult population with at least one dose of its three authorized vaccines from Pfizer, Moderna and J&J, and it expects to have enough supply for its entire population by early summer.

About 10 million doses of AstraZeneca vaccine have been produced but have yet to pass review by the FDA to "meet its expectations for product quality," Zients said, noting the U.S. regulator is recognized as the "gold standard" for safety around the world. That process could be completed in the next several weeks. **About 50 million more doses are in various stages of production and could be available to ship in May and June** pending FDA sign-off.

The U.S. has **yet to finalize where the AstraZeneca doses will go**, Zients said. Neighbors **Mexico** and **Canada** have asked the Biden administration to share more doses, while **dozens of other countries are looking to access supplies of the vaccine.**

...

The AstraZeneca **doses will be donated by the U.S. government, which has contracted with the company for a total of 300 million doses** — though the company has faced production issues.

...

In part because the AstraZeneca vaccine is not expected to play a significant factor in the U.S. virus response, the White House was **also moving to share raw materials for the production of the AstraZeneca vaccine with India, which has emerged as a global hotspot for the virus**, by diverting some of its orders to the vaccine manufacturer Serum Institute of India.

Zients told the AP that the Biden administration was working to satisfy other "key requests" from the Indian government, namely for personal protective equipment, tests, therapeutics and supplies of oxygen and respiratory assistance devices.

"The administration's identified U.S. commercial suppliers of therapeutics that are immediately available to help relieve the suffering of the COVID-19 patients in India," said Zients. "We've identified rapid diagnostic tests and supplies and PPE, and additional ventilators that are available to transferred to India."

Epidemiologists from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention were also expected to soon travel to India to assist the country with its virus response.

The additional quality review before the U.S. shares the AstraZeneca doses were in order because of issues at the facility that produced them, White House officials said.

AstraZeneca's doses in the U.S. were produced at an Emergent BioSolutions plant in Baltimore that has come under increased regulatory and public scrutiny after botching batches of the J&J vaccine. The U.S. pressed J&J to take over the plant and, as part of the effort to ensure the quality of newly produced vaccines, directed the facility to stop making the AstraZeneca shot. AstraZeneca is still looking to identify a new U.S. production facility for its future doses.

The U.S. government ordered enough for 150 million Americans before issues with the vaccine's clinical trial held up clearance. The company's 30,000-person U.S. trial didn't complete enrollment until January, and ...

https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2021/04/india-covid-19-crisis/618691/

Apr. 27
Why the world should worry about India

India considered itself to be “in the endgame” of the pandemic just a few weeks ago. Now it is the global epicenter. The country recently surpassed the devastating milestone of more than 345,000 new COVID-19 cases in a single day, the biggest total recorded globally since the pandemic began.

What is taking place in India isn’t so much a wave as it is a wall: Charts showing the country’s infection rate and death toll, which has also reached record numbers in the country, depict curves that have shot up into vertical lines. Public-health experts aren’t optimistic that they will slope down anytime soon.

India’s outbreak is an enormous tragedy for its own people, but it’s also a catastrophe for the rest of the world. **Ninety-two developing nations rely on India, home to the Serum Institute, the world’s largest vaccine maker, for the doses to protect their own populations, a supply now constrained by India’s domestic obligations. Meanwhile, the coronavirus is mutating.** Reports of double- and even triple-mutant strains of the virus, which experts fear could be driving the country’s latest surge, have prompted concerns that what has started in India won’t end there. **Despite efforts to restrict the spread of India’s new COVID-19 variant, called B.1.617, it has already been identified in at least 10 countries, including the United States and Britain.**

If ever there were a time for intervention, it would be now. But world leaders, who have so far only paid lip service to the need for global cooperation, have mostly been preoccupied by their own internal situations. Although this approach may have served vaccine-rich countries such as the U.S. so far, India could prove its limits.
...
Donating doses directly to countries that need them, including India, is a nonstarter for many countries. Most of those that have vaccines don’t have enough of them, and those with an immense surplus, such as the United States, aren’t yet confident enough in their supply to part with the excess.

But these countries can help in other ways. The first is by lifting export controls on the raw materials that are used to produce vaccines. This is what the CEO of the Serum Institute asked of the Biden administration weeks ago. On Sunday, the U.S. government heeded the request, announcing that it would look to immediately provide the raw materials necessary to help India produce the AstraZeneca vaccine, locally known as Covishield, as well as other medical supplies. The British and German governments also pledged their support.

Another option is for countries to support the appeal, put forward by India and South Africa, for the World Trade Organization to temporarily relax patent rights related to COVID-19 vaccines and treatments so that they can be manufactured, without fear of being sued, by countries that are still struggling to inoculate their populations. More than 70 former world leaders and 100 Nobel Prize laureates have appealed to the Biden administration to back the waiver, as have several U.S. lawmakers. “If we want to restore America’s global leadership in the post-Trump era, we should help other countries access the technical know-how they need to manufacture their own vaccines to fight COVID-19,” Senator Chris Murphy, one of the 10 Democratic senators who have called on the Biden administration to back the effort, told me in a statement. “It’s an easy, effective way for the United States to help.”

There is a host of other ways for countries to help, irrespective of their resources. Assisting India with its sequencing is one option. Donating the oxygen the country so desperately needs is another.

Though mass vaccination has provided an off-ramp from the pandemic for some countries, India is a stark reminder that, for many others, a long road lies ahead. **The world is on track to record more COVID-19 deaths this year than it did in 2020. The risks of allowing current outbreaks to ravage places such as India aren’t limited to those countries alone. Emerging variants and further delays to more equitable vaccine distribution stand to affect everyone, including vaccinated populations. India’s problem is the world’s problem.**

Return to Timeline

https://www.fiercepharma.com/pharma/gilead-merck-plan-production-boosts-for-covid-19-drugs-india-amid-surging-outbreak?mkt_tok=Mjk0LU1RRi0wNTYAAAF8tBl2FpuOImBlu6thvquLgWkMYqrvqI5lrJ2u9H7AMhvdtA4escRdiUrdUkVhBUgT3seigEcUWL5Mm_jazzjXraRZjqWMrAvZpl9hWpmEuRUlXoM&mrkid=936491

Apr. 28

Gilead, Merck step in to help India's drug manufacturers

India is in the midst of one of the world's grimmest COVID-19 outbreaks so far, but for weeks the country has struggled to meet local demand for life-saving drugs and vaccines. Now, drugmakers reliant on India for their own production needs are stepping in to help.

Gilead Sciences on Monday said it would help local manufacturers boost production of its COVID-19 antiviral drug remdesivir, marketed as Veklury. The drug is authorized in India for hospitalized adults and children with severe disease. Seven companies in India already produce the drug, but they're not able to keep up with demand amid the crisis.

Gilead plans to donate at least 450,000 vials of remdesivir "to help ease the immediate need for treatment." Supplies of remdesivir in India have been so tight a thriving black market has cropped up.

For its part, **Merck** followed suit on Tuesday, saying it had **entered into non-exclusive voluntary licensing agreements with five generic manufacturers in India for its oral COVID-19 antiviral therapeutic candidate molnupiravir**. The drug, which Merck has developed alongside Ridgeback Biotherapeutics, is currently in phase 3 trials for non-hospitalized patients.

Merck's agreements—with Cipla, Dr. Reddy's Laboratorie, Emcure Pharmaceuticals, Hetero Labs and Sun Pharmaceutical—will help accelerate molnupiravir's availability in India and other low- and middle-income countries once approved by local regulatory authorities, the company said.

Merck will also donate "more than $5 million worth of oxygen-production equipment, masks, hand sanitizer and financial aid."

...

The moves come weeks into India's battle against a surge of COVID-19 infections that has pushed its hospital systems to the brink. **India, one of the globe's largest manufacturers of drugs and vaccines, has posted more than 300,000 new infections per day, breaking the global record for six consecutive days**, The Washington Post reports.

On Monday, the nation asked the European Union to immediately send medical supplies, including oxygen additional doses of remdesivir, to help hospitals deluged with patients, Reuters reports.

India banned exports of Gilead's remdesivir and the active pharmaceutical ingredients (API) used to make it earlier this month in order to meet its own demand. Seven companies in the country currently produce Gilead's antiviral with enough capacity for some 3.9 million units per month.

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-government-and-politics-health-science-religion-d68e628a3af72e2d73adb67fbaa5b396

Apr. 28

Outdoor mask guidance echoes what many Americans already do

... On Tuesday, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention eased its guidelines **on the wearing of masks outdoors**, saying **fully vaccinated Americans don't need to cover their faces anymore unless they are in a big crowd of strangers**. And **those who are unvaccinated can go outside without masks in some situations, too.**

...

The decision marked the U.S. government's latest step toward normalcy, but came as much of the country already had moved on from mask rules. The CDC essentially endorsed what many Americans have already been doing.

On the same day the CDC updated its guidance, **Louisiana**'s governor **partially lifted the state's mask mandate**, the first Democratic governor to make such a move during Joe Biden's presidency. Elsewhere, local government leaders have been doing away with mask rules, and **in many states, face coverings are an infrequent sight indoors, let alone outside.**

In Montgomery, Alabama, 73-year-old Judy Adams said she hasn't worn a mask outside since the early days of the pandemic a year ago and only puts them on inside when stores mandate them. **Alabama had a statewide mask mandate until earlier this month, when the governor let it expire.**

...

everyone, fully vaccinated or not, should keep wearing masks at crowded outdoor events such as concerts or sporting events, **the CDC says.**

The agency continues to recommend masks at indoor public places, such as hair salons, restaurants, shopping centers, gyms, museums and movie theaters, saying that is still the safer course even for vaccinated people.

...

In the **Nebraska** school district, Superintendent Jorgensen said the district decided to eliminate its mask rule based on conditions in the area and in the state, which **never had a statewide mask mandate.**

The district did see an elevated risk of the virus last fall when cases statewide were peaking, but there hasn't been a single case in the district since January and fewer than a dozen cases had been reported in the two counties around the district when they made the decision.

Jorgensen said the district is still being careful and will require students to quarantine for 10 days if they test positive for the virus, but the mask mandate didn't seem necessary anymore.

"It's not like we've totally thrown everything out the window. We still are closely watching it and monitoring every situation we can. But it just seems that those seem a little bit extreme," Jorgensen said of the federal mask recommendations. "I think we have people here who can make some good local decisions, so that's why we did it the way we did it."

Return to Timeline

https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/health/2021/04/28/covid-vaccine-passport-variants-mask-cdc/4864047001/

Apr. 29

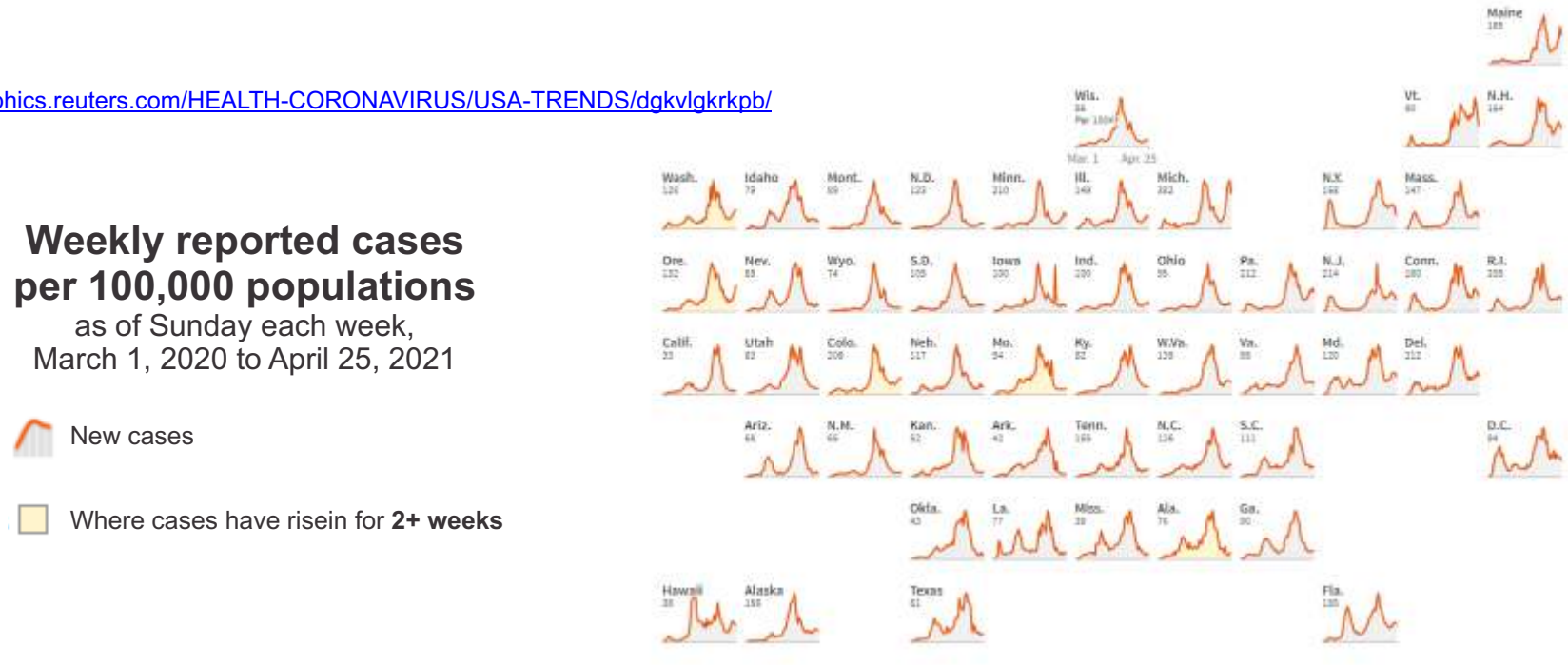
In 12 US states, new covid case numbers continue to climb

... **Colorado** and **Washington have seen cases more than doubled since their lulls in March.** The United States is still reporting about 376,000 cases per week, but that number has fallen about 24.5% in less than two weeks.

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown is putting **15 counties that encompass the state's biggest cities into the state's extreme risk category starting Friday, imposing restrictions that include banning indoor restaurant dining.** As Brown issued her order on Tuesday, she said rising COVID-19 hospitalizations threaten to overwhelm doctors. Washington Gov. Jay Inslee is expected to order new restrictions next week for several counties that would force businesses and churches to reduce their indoor gathering capacity from 50% to 25%.

[also **Tennessee, Arizona, Nevada, Louisiana, Wyoming, Alabama, Missouri, Utah and Texas**]

https://graphics.reuters.com/HEALTH-CORONAVIRUS/USA-TRENDS/dgkvlgkrkpb/



Return to Timeline

https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/worldwide-graphs/#total-deaths

Select live link for current number

Apr 30

Death toll from coronavirus tops 3,300,000

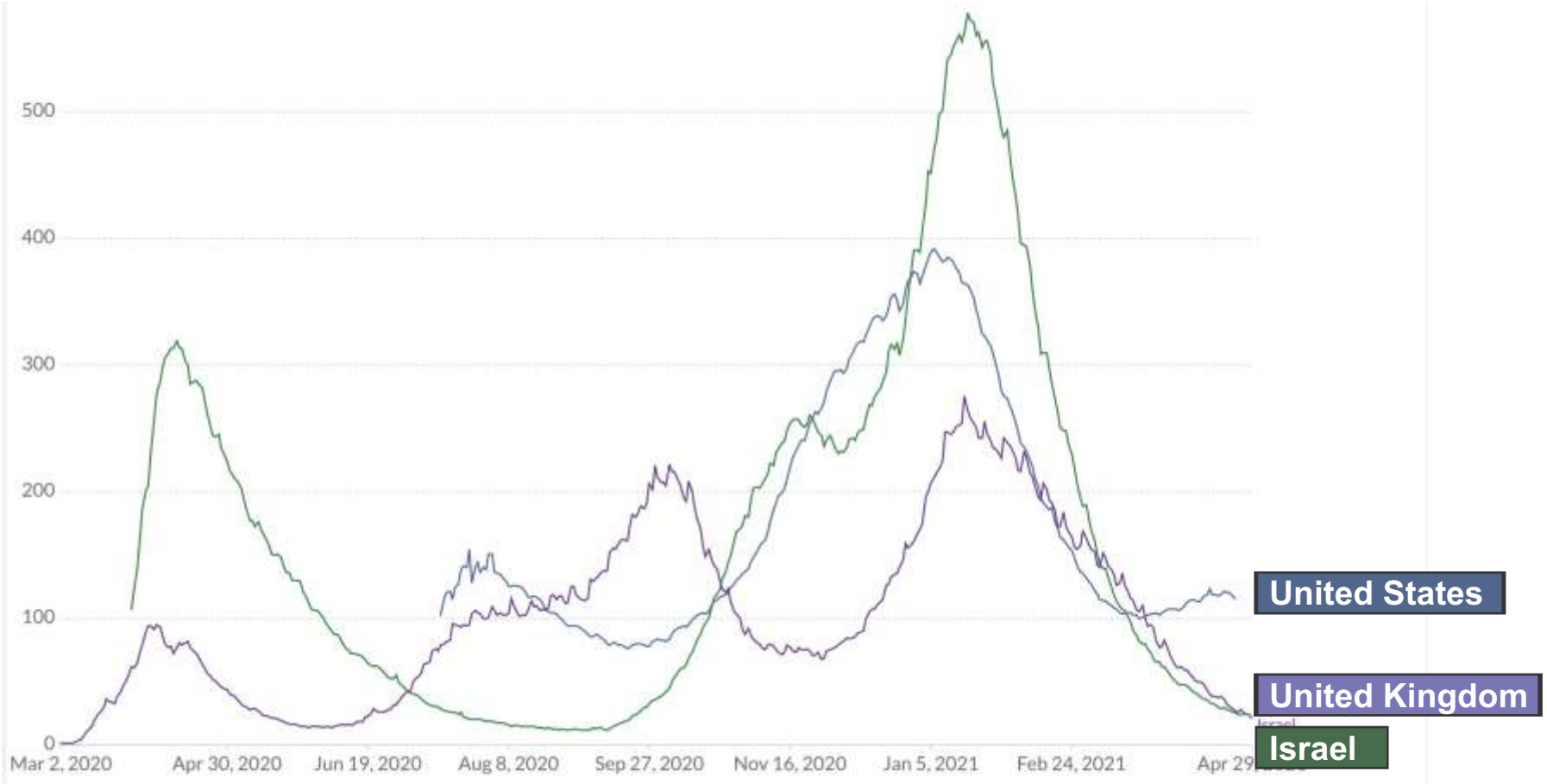
Return to Timeline

https://ourworldindata.org/covid-hospitalizations

Apr. 30

Number of COVID-19 patients in hospital per million

March 2, 2020 - April 29, 2021



https://www.latimes.com/business/story/2021-04-30/disneyland-disney-california-adventure-reopening-day

Apr 30

Disneyland reopens after 400 days of closure due to COVID

...In Disneyland's 66-year history, the theme park has been shut for extreme circumstances only a few times — after the assassination of President Kennedy and following the 1994 Northridge earthquake, for example. Before the pandemic struck in March of last year, none of those closures lasted longer than a day.

Now, with a slew of coronavirus safety adjustments, the Anaheim parks are welcoming back their fans.

Eager parkgoers began lining up hours before Disneyland's official 9 a.m. opening time, and a cheer greeted the announcement that the temperature-check station would start processing them for admission about an hour early. To prevent crowding in Disneyland's Main Street area, park employees invited the admitted guests to freely roam the grounds. Workers, alongside Walt Disney Co. Executive Chairman Bob Iger and Chief Executive Bob Chapek, waved at people as they entered.
...
Among other precautions, **park attendance is capped at 25%** of capacity. **Guests and employees must wear masks, and people who don't live together must maintain physical distance in queues and on rides.** On some attractions, that means leaving lots of seats empty. New hand-washing stations and designated eating areas dot the parks.

Parades and fireworks shows have been scrapped — those tend to cause excited parkgoers to cluster too closely together. **Costumed characters such as Mickey Mouse and Goofy aren't giving out hugs**, but they are posing for pictures and waving from balconies and stages.
...

The changes don't seem to be deterring hard-core fans. **Tickets to Disneyland are already sold out for the entire first seven weeks**, according to the Disneyland online reservation page. Tickets for Disney California Adventure are sold out for eight days during the first month. Park hopper tickets, which allow a visitor to attend both parks in the same day, are still available for a few dates in May and several in June.

The parks are **only allowing in California residents**. Visitors must attest that they are Californians when they buy tickets online, and Disney representatives suggest bringing a photo ID as backup confirmation.

In allowing theme parks to reopen this month, California initially prohibited them from accepting out-of-state visitors, but it has since ended that restriction. **Universal Studios Hollywood and SeaWorld San Diego are among the parks that have begun selling tickets to people who live outside California and are fully vaccinated**, but Disney has chosen to stick with the earlier restriction longer.
...it.
With the exception of the A Touch of Disney food event this spring, the Disney parks — a crown jewel of California's travel and tourism industry — had been closed to customers since mid-March 2020. State health guidelines released last month have allowed the parks to reopen while aiming to lower the risk of spreading the coronavirus.

Before the pandemic, California theme parks collectively generated $1.5 billion annually in federal, state and local taxes, according to a trade group for the parks.

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/hungary-europe-coronavirus-business-health-f09525d6f372b29cf9e940b7edd11aa5

May 1

Hungary reopens for people holding COVID-19 immunity cards

BUDAPEST, Hungary (AP) — Hungary on Saturday loosened several COVID-19 restrictions for people with government-issued immunity cards, the latest in a series of reopening measures that have followed an ambitious vaccination campaign.

As of Saturday, **individuals with the plastic cards may enter indoor dining rooms, hotels, theaters, cinemas, spas, gyms, libraries, museums and other recreational venues**. Opening hours for businesses were extended to 11 p.m. and an overnight curfew in place since November will now start later, at midnight.

Vaccinated people and those who have recovered from COVID-19 are eligible for the Hungarian immunity cards, which must be presented at establishments before entry. **Businesses can be issued heavy fines if they allow non-card holders to enter.**

Zoos also began admitting guests after nearly six months of mandatory closure. Budapest Zoo spokesperson Zoltan Hanga said the last time the zoological park in Hungary's capital was shut for so long was during World War II.

...

Hungary has administered 4 million first doses of coronavirus vaccines, reaching **about 40% of its population.** The country has the **second-highest vaccination rate in the European Union** and is the **only one of the EU's 27 nations to use vaccines from China and Russia in addition to Western jabs.**

But a devastating pandemic surge this spring also gave **Hungary the world's highest overall COVID-19 mortality rate per 1 million inhabitants**, according to Johns Hopkins University. The country of about 9.7 million people has reported over 27,500 deaths in the pandemic.

"In the past, we defended ourselves by closing, thereby slowing the spread of the virus. But now we are on the attack," Prime Minister Viktor Orban said Friday as he announced the reopening. "The vaccine is like a bulletproof vest. The virus bounces off of it."

The whole issue of immunity cards or so-called COVID-19 passports is fraught, with critics saying they discriminate against people in poorer nations who do not have access to vaccines. Hungary is also trying to counter possible EU moves to issue such documents only to people who have received vaccines approved by the European Medicines agency, which so far do not include the vaccines made in China and Russia.

A soccer match in Budapest on Saturday is expected to admit fans holding immunity cards. A competing club issued a statement saying masks would not be required in the stadium but urged fans to wear them anyway.

On Thursday, Hungary's foreign affairs minister, Peter Szijjarto, announced that **travel between Hungary, Serbia and Montenegro would be permitted without quarantines or testing requirements for immunity card holders from those countries. Negotiations for similar agreements are underway with Greece and Israe**l, he said.

https://www.nytimes.com/live/2021/05/01/world/covid-vaccine-coronavirus-cases#india-covid-record-cases

May 2

India again breaks world record with over 400,000 cases

It was supposed to be a day when India made a bold step forward in its fight against Covid-19, when everyone 18 and older in its vast population became eligible to be inoculated. Instead, several states reported that vaccine shortages had forced them to delay expanding access, and the country on Saturday reported **401,993 new cases, yet another global record.**

India's long, nightmarish day began with a hospital fire in the western state of Gujarat that killed at least 16 Covid-19 patients and two health care workers, the latest in a series of deadly accidents to strike the country's overwhelmed health system.

As families of the sick fill social media with pleas for oxygen and cremation grounds burn thousands of bodies daily, India has gone from declaring victory over Covid to suffering its gravest emergency in decades.

India has pushed the world record for daily new cases higher and higher, while averaging over 3,000 Covid deaths each day, with **more than 200,000 dead in total. And evidence suggests the official numbers vastly understate the toll.**

While **it is a global power in vaccine production, India didn't purchase enough doses to protect itself. When its cases were relatively low, it exported more than 60 million shots**; now exports have essentially been shut down. The chief executive of Serum Institute of India, the world's largest vaccine manufacturer, is in Britain, having come under increasingly intense pressure at home.

Less than 2 percent of India's 940 million adults have been fully vaccinated, according to data compiled from government sources by the Our World in Data project at the University of Oxford. Officials in Delhi, the capital, and big states like West Bengal and Karnataka have announced that the planned expansion of vaccine eligibility to everyone 18 and older is on hold because of shortages.

"As soon as vaccines arrive, we will let you know, then you can come for shots," said Delhi's chief minister, Arvind Kejriwal, the BBC reported. "We appeal to you not to crowd vaccine centers in the next few days."

As long as vaccines are in short supply and the virus is running rampant, experts warn that dangerous variants will evolve, spread and possibly evade vaccines. That could eventually pose a threat even for countries like the United States, where 40 percent of the population is fully vaccinated. Michael Diamond, a viral immunologist at Washington University in St. Louis, said that the only way to break the cycle is to ensure countries like India get enough vaccines.

...

India has a homegrown variant called B.1.617, which some in the news media and medical industry have concluded is responsible for the ferocious second wave.

Researchers outside of India, however, say the **limited data so far suggests that a better-known variant may be more to blame**: the **highly contagious B.1.1.7** variant that was first found in Britain and is now the most common source of new infection in the United States. All of the major vaccines in use have been shown to be effective against B.1.1.7. ...

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/pandemics-college-basketball-mens-college-basketball-lifestyle-coronavirus-2009983c7cc202adae06e934944b6ea2

May 3

Vegas hitting jackpot as pandemic-weary visitors crowd back

...Las Vegas has been almost elbow-to-elbow lately with pandemic-weary tourists looking for excitement and entertainment, after casinos rose from 35% to 50% occupancy March 15 under state health guidelines.

Capacity limits in Las Vegas casinos drop again Saturday — allowing 80% occupancy — while person-to-person distancing goes from 6 feet (1.8 meters) to 3 feet (0.9 meters). Masks are still required.
...
Among the first arrivals were people ages 60 and older who were recently vaccinated with time and disposable income, he observed.

Analysts said pent-up demand, available hotel rooms and $1,400 pandemic recovery checks from the federal government have contributed to the rush.
...
The Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority, which just launched a new ad campaign promoting freedom and a return to pre-pandemic normalcy, tallied **more than 2.2 million visitors in March.**

The figure was down **40% from March 2019, but a huge jump from a year earlier**, when casinos closed from mid-March to early June. **That drove the Nevada jobless rate in April 2020 above 30% — the highest ever in any state. The state now reports the rate at 8.1%.**

Every Sunday, another weekly measure of demand arrives: A nearly 20-mile (32-kilometer) line of vehicles jamming southbound Interstate 15 near the Nevada-California state line. Lanes reduce from three in Nevada to two in California.

“You have visitors coming throughout the week, all leaving at the same time,” Nevada Highway Patrol Trooper Travis Smaka said. “It’s very busy every Sunday.”

Carlo Santarelli, gaming analyst at Deutsche Bank Securities, said the boom “really accelerated in March, driven by increased vaccinations, spring break, and March Madness,” the NCAA basketball championship tournaments.

“It’s pool season, better weather,” said Lori Nelson-Kraft, senior spokeswoman for the Convention and Visitors Authority. “It’s still cold in the Midwest and Northeast.”

Restaurants now can go to 80% occupancy, accept walk-in diners and seat tables of 12. **Buffets can allow self-service supervised by employees.**

Casino day clubs and nightclubs can open, but designated dancing areas remain closed until a specified community vaccination rate is met.

Clark County plans to allow 100% casino and business occupancy once 60% of its 1.8 million eligible residents get a first COVID-19 vaccine dose.

As of Friday, 45% of people ages 16 and older in the county had received at least one shot, according to the state Department of Health and Human Services, and almost 33% were fully vaccinated.
...
The Democratic governor has set a **June 1 target for lifting almost all coronavirus mitigation restrictions statewide. Mask mandates will remain in place indefinitely.**

That will let the convention authority host its biggest event since March 2020 — the World of Concrete trade show beginning June 8 — and debut its nearly $1 billion Las Vegas Convention Center expansion.

It will also showcase a new $52.5 million underground Tesla vehicle people-mover system drilled beneath the convention center by Elon Musk.

Show attendees, exhibitors and staff members will have to wear masks ...

https://www.timesofisrael.com/only-13-new-covid-cases-diagnosed-in-24-hours-lowest-in-14-months/

May 4

Only 13 new COVID cases diagnosed in 24 hours, lowest in 14 months

As Israel continues its world-leading vaccination campaign, just 13 new coronavirus cases were diagnosed in the country on Saturday, the lowest rate in 14 months, according to Health Ministry data released Sunday.

According to the ministry, a total of 9,238 coronavirus tests were conducted Saturday, with 0.1 percent returning positive. While weekend numbers are generally significantly lower due to reduced testing, the new figures still represent a relative drop, with last weekend's positivity rate at 0.5%.

Of the 1,310 active cases in the country, there were 100 serious cases, including 60 people on ventilators, the Health Ministry data showed. The death toll stands at 6,366.

As infections have dwindled, Israel has rolled back restrictions on public life, including lifting the requirement to wear face masks outdoors, which ended last month.

With its aggressive vaccination drive, Israel has seen a sharp drop in daily mortality and infection rates since the pandemic peaked in late January.

Late last month, the Jewish state passed the milestone of over 5 million people having received both vaccine shots.

According to the Health Ministry on Sunday, 5,049,828 second doses were now in Israeli arms, accounting for **over 60% of the total population and more than 80% of the eligible population over the age of 16.** A total of 5,401,155 people have received at least one shot.

I**srael's vaccination program, which is based on the Pfizer-BioNtech two-shot vaccine, has seen it maintain the highest per capita inoculation rate in the world since it began in late December.**

The country is preparing to start vaccinating children aged 12-15 as soon as the US Food and Drug Administration approves vaccine use for children in that age bracket.

Earlier Sunday, the Israel Defense Forces declared itself coronavirus-free, as it recorded zero active cases of the disease among its ranks for the first time since the outbreak of the virus.

The military reported its first coronavirus case on March 2, 2020, when a soldier who worked part-time at a toy store tested positive for the disease. The number of conscripts, career officers, and civilian employees of the IDF diagnosed with the disease has risen and fallen in the interim 14 months, reaching a peak in February, with over 3,000 cases.

In March, the military declared that it had reached "herd immunity" from the disease as more than **80% of all servicemembers had been vaccinated or had recovered from the coronavirus.**

Return to Timeline

https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-05-05/two-pandemics-clash-as-doctors-find-that-covid-spurs-diabetes?utm_campaign=news&utm_medium=bd&utm_source=applenews

May 5

Doctors find that COVID-19 can spur diabetes

When Ziyad Al-Aly's research team told him how often diabetes appeared to strike Covid-19 survivors, he thought the data must be wrong, so he asked his five colleagues to crunch the numbers again.

Weeks later, they returned the same findings after sifting through millions of patient records. By then Al-Aly had also gone digging into the scientific literature and was starting to come to terms with an alarming reality: **Covid-19 isn't just deadlier for people with diabetes, it's also triggering the metabolic disease in many who didn't previously have it.**

...

Among Covid-19's many ripple effects, the worsening of the global diabetes burden could carry a heavy public-health toll. **The underlying mechanisms stoking new-onset diabetes aren't clear, though some doctors suspect the SARS-CoV-2 virus may damage the pancreas, the gland that makes insulin which is needed to convert blood-sugar into energy.** Sedentary lifestyles brought on by lockdowns could also be playing a role, as might late diagnoses after people avoided doctors' offices. Even some children's mild coronavirus cases can be followed by the swift onset of diabetes, scientists found.

Considered exclusively a lung disease in the early days of the pandemic, **Covid-19 is increasingly recognized for its ability to ravage multiple organs and bodily systems, causing persistent and sometimes debilitating symptoms in 1 in 10 sufferers months after their apparent recovery.**

Lingering metabolic complications, sometimes requiring high doses of insulin, suggest a subset of survivors are developing diabetes -- swelling the ranks of the more than the 463 million people living with the chronic condition.

Two Studies

The disease, in which the body fails to produce enough or properly use insulin, cost an estimated $760 billion in the year before Covid struck, driven by life-shortening complications spanning stroke and kidney failure to foot ulcers and blindness.

Al-Aly and colleagues were the first to measure the effect in the U.S. based on evidence from the national health-care databases of the Department of Veterans Affairs. They found that **Covid survivors were about 39% more likely to have a new diabetes diagnosis in the six months after infection than non-infected users of the VA health system.** The risk works out to about 6.5 additional diabetes cases for every 1,000 Covid patients who don't end up in the hospital. For those who do, the probability jumps to 37 per 1,000 -- and it's even higher for patients who required intensive care.

The numbers should be viewed in the context of Covid's sprawling reach, according to Al-Aly. During the winter peak, more than 130,000 patients were hospitalized with the coronavirus in the U.S. alone. Globally, SARS-CoV-2 is reported to have infected more than 153 million people, including over 20 million in India, the country with the most people living with diabetes after China.

Al-Aly's data was published last month in Nature, three weeks after a **study of almost 50,000 hospitalized Covid patients in England found that they were 50% more likely to have diabetes some 20 weeks after discharge** than matched controls.

...

Researchers have hypothesized pathways in which Covid might increase the likelihood of a diabetes diagnosis, including the **possibility that the pancreas's insulin-excreting beta cells are destroyed either by the virus or by the body's response to the infection.**

Other explanations may include an acute stress response to the infection, the use of steroid treatments that help survival but increase blood-sugar, **or just the unmasking of diabetes cases that had previously escaped diagnosis**, according to John Nicholls, a clinical professor of pathology at the University of Hong Kong...

Return to Timeline

https://www.goodnewsnetwork.org/donate-oxygen-india-covid-patients-mukesh-ambani/

May 5

India's richest man retools factories to provide free oxygen to covid patients

As India grapples with an unprecedented new wave of COVID-19, one of the country's major companies is working round-the-clock to get free oxygen out to people in need.

Traditionally, Reliance Industries is not a manufacturer of medical-grade liquid oxygen. But over a year into the pandemic, the company—which is owned by India's richest man Mukesh Ambani—has gone on to become the nation's largest producer from a single location, **supplying over 55,000 MT of medical-grade liquid oxygen to people since March 2020.**

At its refinery-cum-petrochemical complex in Jamnagar and other facilities, Reliance is **producing over 1000 MT of medical-grade liquid oxygen per day—or over 11% of India's total production**—meeting the needs of nearly every 1 in 10 patients needing the life-saving treatment across the nation.

"Nothing is more important than saving every life as India battles against a new wave of the COVID-19 pandemic," Chairman Mukesh Ambani said in a statement.

The switch-over to producing high-purity medical grade oxygen hasn't been too difficult for Reliance engineers—the main facility is already designed for refining and petrochemicals-grade oxygen.

That said, medical grade oxygen has to be produced in liquid form at -183°C with almost 99.5% purity, which poses extraordinary challenges and risks in production and maximizing tonnage.

"I am proud of our engineers at Jamnagar who have worked tirelessly, with a great sense of patriotic urgency, to meet this new challenge… [They've] risen to the occasion and delivered when India needs it the most," said Ambani of his staff, who are now bringing immediate relief to over 100,000 COVID-19 patients on a daily basis.

Mukesh Ambani Photo: Reuters

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/india-middle-east-coronavirus-pandemic-health-4b830485ce09b3e7eeea40c5522d4d21

May 6

India hits another grim virus record as oxygen demand jumps

...The **number of new confirmed cases breached 400,000 for the second time since the devastating surge began last month.** The 412,262 **new cases pushed India's official tally to more than 21 million.** The Health Ministry also reported **3,980 deaths in the last 24 hours, bringing the total to 230,168.** Experts believe both figures are an undercount.

...

Demand for hospital oxygen has increased sevenfold since last month, a government official said, as India scrambles to set up large oxygen plants and transport oxygen. India created a sea bridge on Tuesday to ferry oxygen tankers from Bahrain and Kuwait in the Persian Gulf, officials said.

Most hospitals in India aren't equipped with independent plants that generate oxygen directly for patients, As a result, hospitals typically rely on liquid oxygen, which can be stored in cylinders and transported in tankers. But amid the surge, supplies in hard-hit places such as New Delhi are running critically short.

Health Minister Harsh Vardhan said India has enough liquid oxygen but it's facing capacity constraints in moving it. Most oxygen is produced in the eastern parts of India while the demand has risen in northern and western parts.

K. Vijay Raghvan, a principal scientific adviser to the government, said this phase of the pandemic was "a very critical time for the country."

The United States, Britain, Germany and several other nations are rushing therapeutics, rapid virus tests and oxygen, along with materials needed to boost domestic production of COVID-19 vaccines to ease pressure on the fragile health infrastructure.

India's vaccine production is expected to get a boost with the United States supporting a waiver of intellectual property protections for COVID-19 vaccines.

Vaccine components from the U.S. that have arrived in India will enable the manufacturing of 20 million doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine, said Daniel B. Smith, the senior diplomat at the U.S. Embassy in New Delhi.

Last month, Adar Poonawalla, chief executive officer of the Serum Institute of India, the world's biggest vaccine maker, appealed to President Joe Biden to lift the embargo on U.S. export of raw materials, which he said was affecting its production of COVID-19 shots.

The government meanwhile described as "totally misleading" Indian media reports that it took seven days to come up with a procedure for distributing urgent medical supplies that started arriving on April 25.

The statement said a streamlined and systematic ...

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/tokyo-japan-olympic-games-coronavirus-pandemic-sports-48952a3a614559dbc247aaca317b059a

May 7

Japanese government extends a state of emergency in Tokyo and other areas

... As the coronavirus spreads in Japan ahead of the **Tokyo Olympics starting in 11 weeks, one of the world's least vaccinated nations is showing signs of strain, both societal and political.**

The government — desperate to show a worried public it is in control of virus efforts even as it pushes a massive sporting event that a growing number of Japanese oppose hosting in a pandemic — on Friday **announced a decision to expand and extend a state of emergency in Tokyo and other areas through May 31.**
...

The current state of emergency in Tokyo and Osaka, Kyoto and Hyogo prefectures in the west was scheduled to end Tuesday. Suga said his government has decided to extend it in those areas and expand it to Aichi in central Japan and Fukuoka in the south.
...
The extension deepens uncertainties over a speculated May 17 visit by International Olympics Committee President Thomas Bach, and whether Japan can safely host the Olympics postponed from last year and currently scheduled for July 23-Aug. 8.

Despite criticism for being slow to take virus measures, Suga has been reluctant to hurt the already pandemic-damaged economy and pledged to keep the state of emergency "short and intensive," though experts said just over two weeks would be too short to effectively slow the infections.

The ongoing emergency is Japan's third and came only a month after an earlier measure ended in the Tokyo area.

Less stringent, quasi-emergency measures will be expanded to eight prefectures from the current six, where bars and restaurants are required to close early.

Japan has had about 616,000 cases including about 10,500 deaths since the pandemic began.

Medical systems in hardest-hit Osaka have been under severe pressure from a COVID-19 outbreak there that is hampering ordinary health care, experts say. A number of patients died at home recently after their conditions worsened while waiting for vacancies at hospitals.

Past emergency measures authorized only non-mandatory requests. The government in February toughened a law on anti-virus measures to allow authorities to issue binding orders for nonessential businesses to shorten their hours or close, in exchange for compensation for those who comply and penalties for violators.

Shutdown requirements will be eased somewhat. **Bars, karaoke studios and most other entertainment facilities will be required to remain closed until the end of May, but department stores will be able to operate for shorter hours and stadiums and concert halls will be allowed to have up to 5,000 people or half their capacity.**

Wearing masks, staying home and other measures for the general public remain non-mandatory requests.

The government has also been criticized over its snail-paced **vaccination rollout**, which has fully covered **less than 1% of the population since inoculations began in mid-February.**

Return to Timeline

https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/worldwide-graphs/#total-deaths

Select live link for current number

May 8

Death toll from coronavirus tops 3,400,000

https://apnews.com/article/asia-pacific-nepal-coronavirus-pandemic-health-bd446ea929fc3f20c94f134ef8ec9ab6

May 8

Doctors in Nepal warn of major crisis as virus cases surge

KATHMANDU, Nepal (AP) — Across the border from a devastating surge in India, doctors in Nepal warned Friday of a major crisis as **daily coronavirus cases hit a record and hospitals were running out of beds and oxygen.**

Nepal reported 9,070 new confirmed cases on Thursday, compared to 298 a month ago. The number of fatalities also reached its highest with 58 on Wednesday and 54 on Thursday, for a total of 3,529.

“Right now there are no beds available today in any hospital that is treating COVID patients,” said Dr. Jyotindra Sharma, chief of Hospital for Advanced Medicine & Surgery in Kathmandu. “Even if any beds were made available, there is a huge scarcity of oxygen and we are not at the peak of this crisis.”

At the hospital, one of the leading facilities in Nepal for treating COVID-19 patients, extra beds were crammed to accommodate more people. They’ve all been taken and the only way to get admitted is through a waiting list.

“In the extreme situation, people could be dying in the streets,” Sharma said, adding it’s “just not possible to immediately increase the capacity of the hospitals.”

At the government-run Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital, several COVID-19 patients were lying in beds set up on the veranda and hooked to oxygen cylinder. They’re the lucky ones. Others were turned away because there’s not enough space or equipment.

“We are under-prepared, under-resourced, and under-capacitated to perform any thing that is expected,” said Dr. Bishal Dhakal, who has been working with coronavirus patients since the beginning of the pandemic.

A lockdown was imposed last month in major cities and towns, and **Nepal this week stopped both domestic and international flights.**

The government has pledged several times to increase the number of hospital beds and boost the treatment and preventive measures. However, there has not been any significant change.

Nepal began its vaccination campaign in January with 1 million doses of the AstraZeneca shots donated by India, but it had been suspended because of India’s refusal to allow exports as its crisis worsened.

The vaccination resumed when China donated 800,000 doses, and Nepal is negotiating with Russia for supplies of the Sputnik V shots.

Return to Timeline

https://www.sciencenews.org/article/coronavirus-pandemic-serrana-brazil-covid-mass-vaccine

May 9

Mass vaccination experiment in Serrano, Brazil: Projeto S

...**Brazil** surged to 3,000 on average a day, a high in a pandemic that has claimed more than 405,000 lives there — **the second worst death toll of any country in the world behind only the United States.** And as vaccines slowly trickle into the country, **only about 15 percent of the population has gotten at least one shot.**

Except in Serrana. There, nearly all the adults have gotten their shots. What happens next in this city could provide a glimpse of what the future of the pandemic could be — not only in Brazil but across the globe as vaccinations pick up.

The mass vaccination is an experiment dubbed Projeto S, which will measure the real-world effectiveness of the **Chinese-made CoronaVac vaccine**, including how well it protects against coronavirus variants. One variant called P.1, which first emerged in the Brazilian Amazon and is now widespread throughout Brazil, shows signs of being both more contagious and able to evade antibodies trained to recognize the coronavirus (SN: 4/14/21).
...
Serrana has the perfect ingredients for the Projeto S experiment. It's relatively small, with **45,600 residents, with roughly 30,000 adults**. It's **located near an important public health research center**, University of São Paulo's campus in nearby Ribeirão Preto. And the virus was clearly circulating in the community. A July 2020 study "showed that 5 percent of the population carried the active virus — that is one person in 20, a very high rate," Borges says.

The town's residents were eager to be vaccinated, however. When the project launched in February, the team at Instituto Butantan, a research facility and vaccine maker based in São Paulo state that is sponsoring the project, set a goal of vaccinating at least 80 percent of town residents over 18 years old. "We took into account that Brazil has a long tradition of good adhesion to vaccination, so we knew these 80 percent were within reach," says Borges.

By April 11, 27,722 adult volunteers had gotten the first shot and almost all of them, 27,160, had gotten the second jab by the end of that month, meaning **95.7 percent of Serrana's adults were fully vaccinated.** This success came even as Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro publicly shunned vaccines — CoronaVac in particular — on several occasions.

The vaccine was **developed by China-based Sinovac Biotech. It uses an inactivated, or "killed" version of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, that can't cause illness, but can train the body's immune system to recognize the coronavirus so it can fight back against an encounter with the real pathogen.**

In a Phase III clinical trial with 12,600 health care workers in São Paulo, **CoronaVac had an efficacy of roughly 50 percent two weeks after the second dose**, researchers report in a preliminary study posted April 15 at medRxiv.org. Fifty percent efficacy is the threshold the U.S. Food and Drug Administration set as a baseline for considering emergency use authorization of COVID-19 vaccines in the United States. **In comparison, in clinical trials, the Moderna and Pfizer mRNA vaccines had an efficacy of around 95 percent.**

Return to Timeline

https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/malaysia-declares-nationwide-lockdown-covid-19-cases-spike-2021-05-10/

May 10

Malaysia declares nationwide lockdown as COVID-19 cases spike

KUALA LUMPUR, May 10 (Reuters) - Malaysia on Monday imposed a new nationwide lockdown, as the country grapples with a surge in coronavirus cases and highly infectious variants that the government said are testing its health system.

Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin said **all inter-state and inter-district travel will be banned, along with social gatherings.**

Educational institutions will be shut but economic sectors will be allowed to continue, Muhyiddin said, without elaborating.

"Malaysia is **facing a third wave** of COVID-19 that could trigger a national crisis," Muhyiddin said in a statement, adding that the **lockdown measures will continue until June 7**.

The premier said the lockdown was necessary due to the existence of new coronavirus variants with higher infection rates and growing constraints on the public health system.

Malaysia has seen a spike in coronavirus infections in recent weeks, with the country reporting 3,807 new cases on Monday.

It has now seen a total of 444,484 cases and 1,700 deaths.

Malaysia is under a state of emergency, which was declared by Muhyiddin in January to curb the spread of COVID-19.

A police officer checks the documents of a driver at a roadblock during lockdown ahead of the Eid al-Fitr celebrations in an effort to prevent a large-scale transmission of the coronavirus disease.
Petaling Jaya, Malaysia May 10, 2021
REUTERS/Lim Huey Teng

Return to Timeline

www.reuters.com/world/us/new-us-covid-weekly-cases-fall-lowest-since-september-2021-05-10/

May 11

New U.S. COVID weekly cases fall to lowest since September

New cases of COVID-19 in the United States **fell for a fourth week in a row, dropping 17% last week** to just under 290,000, the lowest weekly total since September, according to a Reuters analysis of state and county data.

Deaths from COVID-19 fell 1.3% to 4,756 in the week ended May 9, **the fewest deaths in a week since July.**

More than a third of the country's population has been fully vaccinated as of Sunday, and 46% has received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The rate of vaccinations, however, has been slowing for three straight weeks. In the past seven days, an average of 2 million vaccine doses were administered per day, which is **down 17% from the previous week** and represents the biggest percentage drop reported under the Biden administration.

Only seven out of 50 states reported week-over-week increases in new cases, mostly rising by less than 10%.

Michigan still led the nation in new cases per capita, though that was down 23% from the previous week, according to the Reuters analysis. New cases also fell in Puerto Rico and Colorado, the areas with the next highest rates of infection based on population.

The lowest rates of infection based on population were in Oklahoma, California and Mississippi.

The average number of COVID-19 patients in hospitals fell 9%, the second weekly drop in a row.

Where the highest share of the population has been vaccinated

Most recent data as of May 9, 2021

State	First dose	Fully vaccinated
United States	**46.0%**	**34.8%**
Vermont	61.9%	43.4%
Massachusetts	60.6%	43.0%
Hawaii	58.8%	40.8%
New Hampshire	57.6%	33.2%
Connecticut	57.6%	45.0%
Maine	57.2%	44.5%
Rhode Island	55.2%	41.7%
New Jersey	54.5%	41.5%
New Mexico	53.2%	41.9%
Pennsylvania	52.7%	36.4%

Return to Timeline

https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/us/covid-19-vaccine-doses.html

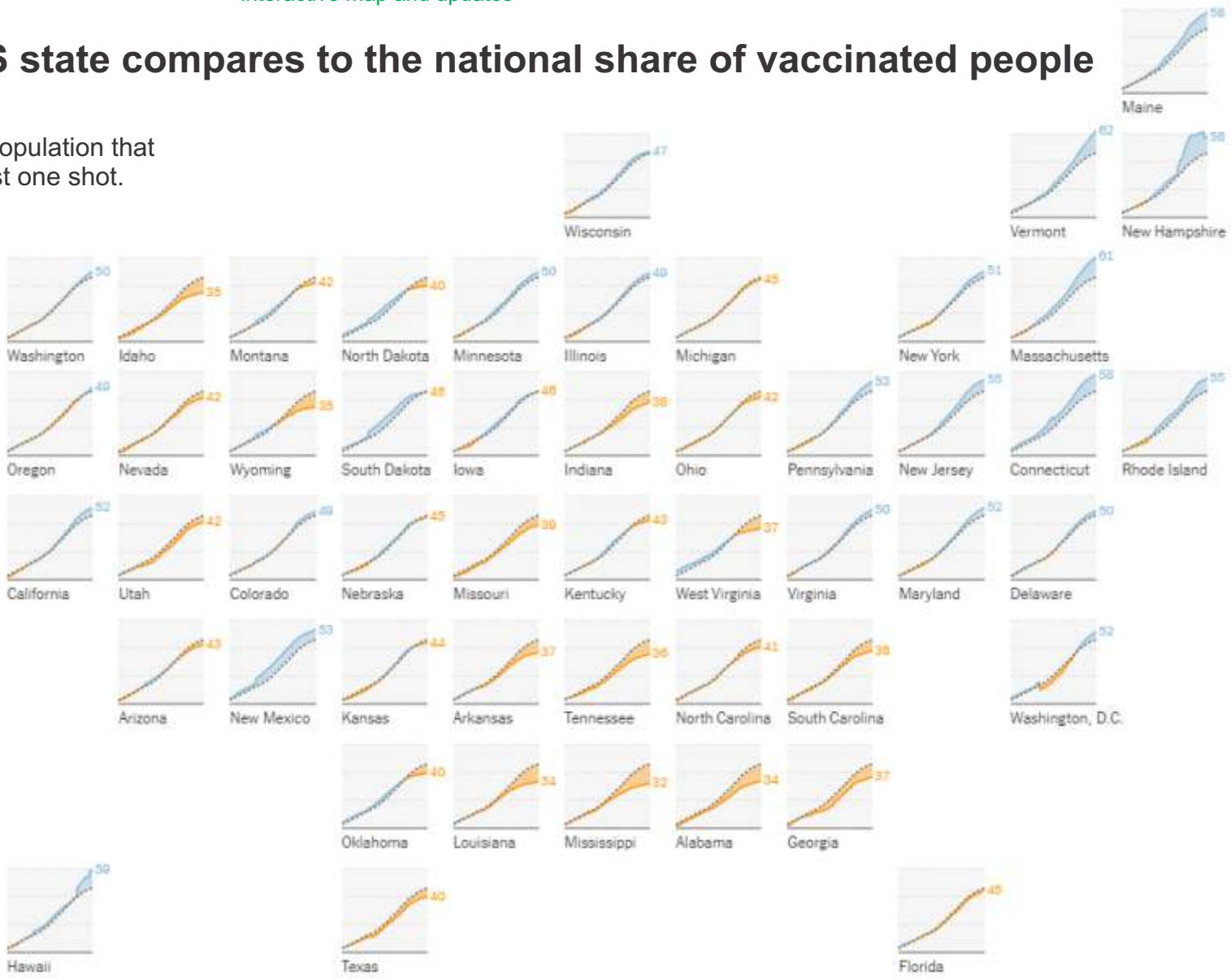
Select link the above link for interactive map and updates

May 12

How each US state compares to the national share of vaccinated people

Share of the state population that has received at least one shot.

- Above US share
- Below US share



Return to Timeline

https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/12/us/ohio-lottery-coronavirus-vaccine.html

May 13

Ohio lottery to give 5 people $1 million each to encourage vaccination

To the many propositions that governments have used to try to bolster slumping demand for the coronavirus vaccine, Gov. Mike DeWine of Ohio raised the ante considerably on Wednesday, announcing that the state would give five people $1 million each in return for having been vaccinated as part of a weekly lottery program.

The lottery, whose legality could raise questions, will be paid for by federal coronavirus relief funds, Mr. DeWine, a Republican, said during a statewide televised address.

The first of five weekly drawings will be held on May 26, according to Mr. DeWine, who said that Ohio Lottery would conduct them.

“I know that some may say, ‘DeWine, you’re crazy!’ ” Mr. DeWine said on Twitter. “‘This million-dollar drawing idea of yours is a waste of money.’ But truly, the real waste at this point in the pandemic — when the vaccine is readily available to anyone who wants it — is a life lost to COVID-19.”

At the same that Mr. DeWine promoted the lottery, he announced on Wednesday that Ohio would lift all of its health orders that were enacted during the pandemic on June 2, except for those affecting nursing homes and assisted-living facilities. About 36 percent of Ohio’s population has been fully vaccinated — compared with 35 percent nationally — and nearly 20,000 state residents have died from the virus, according to public health data.

The reaction online to the giveaway was mixed on Wednesday, with some people saying that it beat the seemingly meager offerings of other states like free beer, gift cards and savings bonds. Others questioned whether the money might be better spent on broader relief from the pandemic and whether the lottery complied with federal regulations. Even some other Republicans bristled at the plan.

...

Mr. DeWine said that **the lottery would be open to residents 18 years and older who had received at least one dose of the coronavirus vaccine. He also announced that five teenagers would be eligible for a full scholarship to one of the state’s public universities under a similar lottery program.**

Several states and cities, which are struggling to fill vaccine appointments as the demand wanes, are turning to an array of not-so-subtle incentives to get shots into the arms of more Americans.

In one of the more widely publicized plans to boost vaccination rates, Gov. Jim Justice of **West Virginia**, a Republican, said last month that the state would give **$100 savings bonds to 16- to 35-year-olds who get a Covid-19 vaccine.** Mr. Justice later said that he was looking at other incentives amid difficulties trying to set up a savings-bond program, WVNews reported.

New Jersey is offering a “shot and a beer” for residents who get their first vaccine dose in May and visit participating breweries in the state. Detroit is giving out $50 prepaid cards to anyone who drives a resident to a vaccine site. And as an enticement for state employees to get the vaccine, Maryland is offering a $100 payment, Gov. Larry Hogan announced on Monday.

Return to Timeline

https://www.axios.com/vaccination-rates-around-world-us-china-india-d4df5e3d-a949-4c18-b02a-9d4d80c507dd.html

Select link the above link for interactive map and updates

May 14

By the numbers: How countries are faring on COVID vaccinations

About 150 million vaccine doses were administered globally over the past week, the highest weekly total yet and a jump from 130 million last week.

Breaking it down: In the **U.S.**, daily vaccinations peaked in mid-April and fell sharply as demand waned, though they've ticked up over the past few days (**46% of the population has at least one dose**).

In **China**, daily vaccinations have more than doubled over the past month and are now on par with the U.S., adjusted for population, though there's still a big gap in the overall vaccination rate. China now **accounts for around one-third of every vaccination administered worldwide each day**.

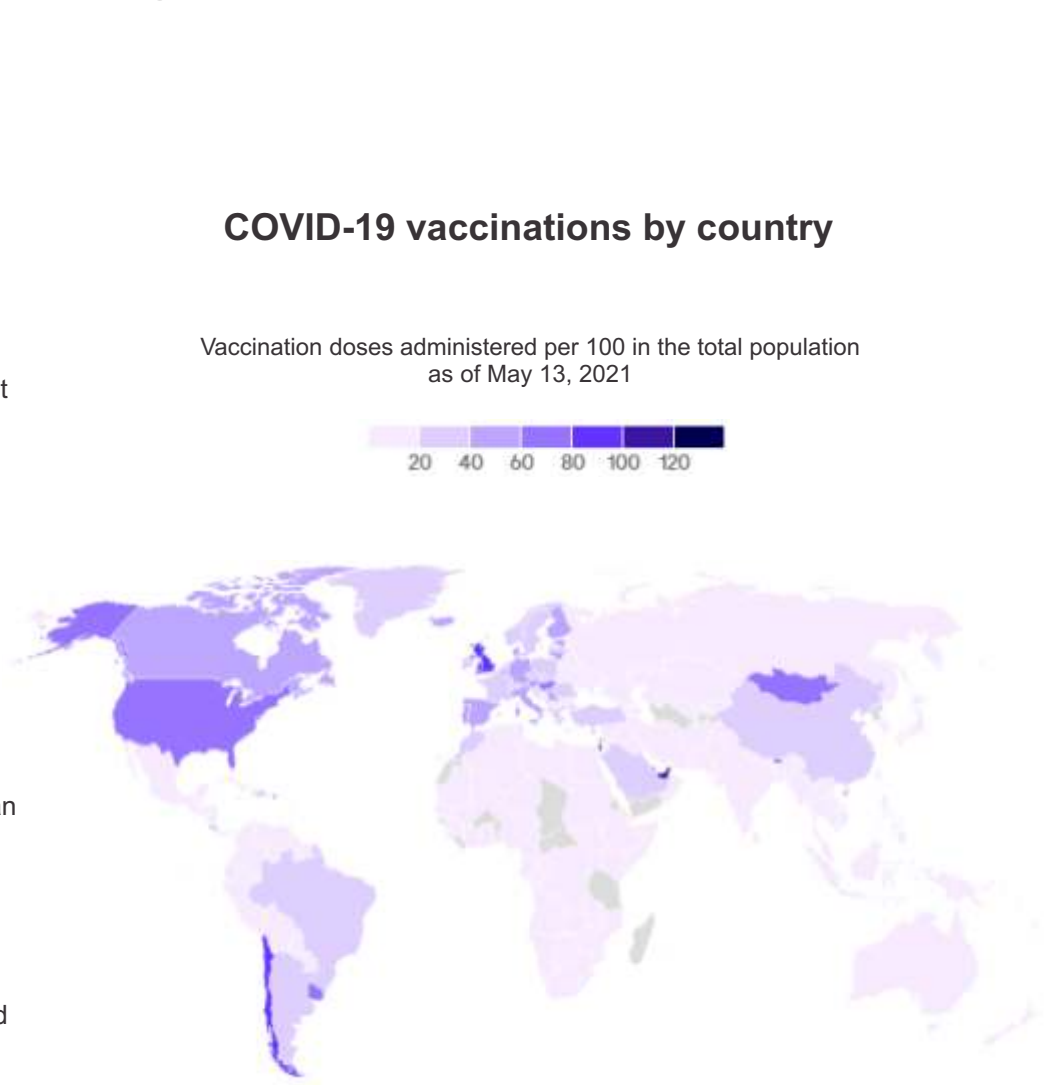
The **EU** is now carrying out more daily vaccinations per 100 residents than both the U.S. and China, having shaken off a slow initial rollout (**30% have one dose**).

India's vaccination rate has slowed significantly over the last month due to supply shortfalls (**10% have one dose**).

Russia's domestic rollout is moving remarkably slow due to a combination of manufacturing issues, widespread hesitancy and an emphasis on exports (**9% have one dose**).

Japan's start has been even slower, due in part to a low sense of urgency, though the numbers have been ticking up over the past few days (**3% have one dose**).

Across **Africa**, an average of 397,000 doses is being administered per day. At that rate, it would take 11 years for 60% of the continent's population to be fully vaccinated (**1% have one dose**).



Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-health-government-and-politics-a48e79a4e7a9445011999e91bb30135f

May 14

CDC eases mask wearing guidance for fully vaccinated

...[yesterday] allowing them to stop wearing masks outdoors in crowds and in most indoor settings.
...
The guidance still calls for wearing masks in crowded indoor settings like buses, planes, hospitals, prisons and homeless shelters, but it will help clear the way for reopening workplaces, schools and other venues — even removing the need for social distancing for those who are fully vaccinated.

The CDC and the Biden administration have faced pressure to ease restrictions on fully vaccinated people — those who are two weeks past their last required COVID-19 vaccine dose — in part to highlight the benefits of getting the shot. The country's aggressive vaccination campaign has paid off: **U.S. virus cases are at their lowest rate since September, deaths are at their lowest point since last April and the test positivity rate is at the lowest point since the pandemic began.**

Walensky said **the long-awaited change is thanks to the millions of people who have gotten vaccinated and is based on the latest science about how well those shots are working.**

"Anyone who is fully vaccinated can participate in indoor and outdoor activities — large or small — without wearing a mask or physically distancing," Walensky said. "If you are fully vaccinated, you can start doing the things that you had stopped doing because of the pandemic."

The new guidance is likely to open the door to confusion, since there is no surefire way for businesses or others to distinguish between those who are fully vaccinated and those who are not.

"Millions of Americans are doing the right thing and getting vaccinated, but essential workers are still forced to play mask police for shoppers who are unvaccinated and refuse to follow local COVID safety measures," said Marc Perrone, president of the United Food and Commercial Workers International Union. "Are they now supposed to become the vaccination police?"

Walensky and Biden said people who are not fully vaccinated should continue to wear masks indoors.

"We've gotten this far — please protect yourself until you get to the finish line," Biden said, noting that most Americans under 65 are not yet fully vaccinated. He said the government was not going to enforce the mask wearing guidance on those not yet fully vaccinated.

"We're not going to go out and arrest people," added Biden, who said he believes the American people want to take care of their neighbors. **"If you haven't been vaccinated, wear your mask for your own protection and the protection of the people who also have not been vaccinated yet."**
...
The announcement came as many states and communities have already been lifting mask mandates amid improving virus numbers and as more Americans have been shedding face coverings after getting shots.
...
To date more than 154 million Americans, nearly 47% of the population, have received at least one dose of COVID-19 vaccine, and nearly 119 million are fully vaccinated. T**he rate of new vaccinations has slowed in recent weeks, but with the authorization Wednesday of the Pfizer shot for children ages 12 to 15, a new burst of doses is expected in the coming days.**

There are some caveats. Walensky encouraged **people who have weak immune systems, such as from organ transplants or cancer treatment, to talk with their doctors before shedding their masks.** That's because of continued uncertainty about whether the vaccines can rev up a weakened immune system as well as they do normal, healthy ones. ...

Return to Timeline

https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/worldwide-graphs/#total-deaths

Select live link for current number

May 15

Death toll from coronavirus tops 3,500,000

Return to Timeline

https://www.indiaspend.com/covid-19/covid-vaccination-is-leading-to-fewer-cases-deaths

Select link the above link for interactive map and updates

May 15

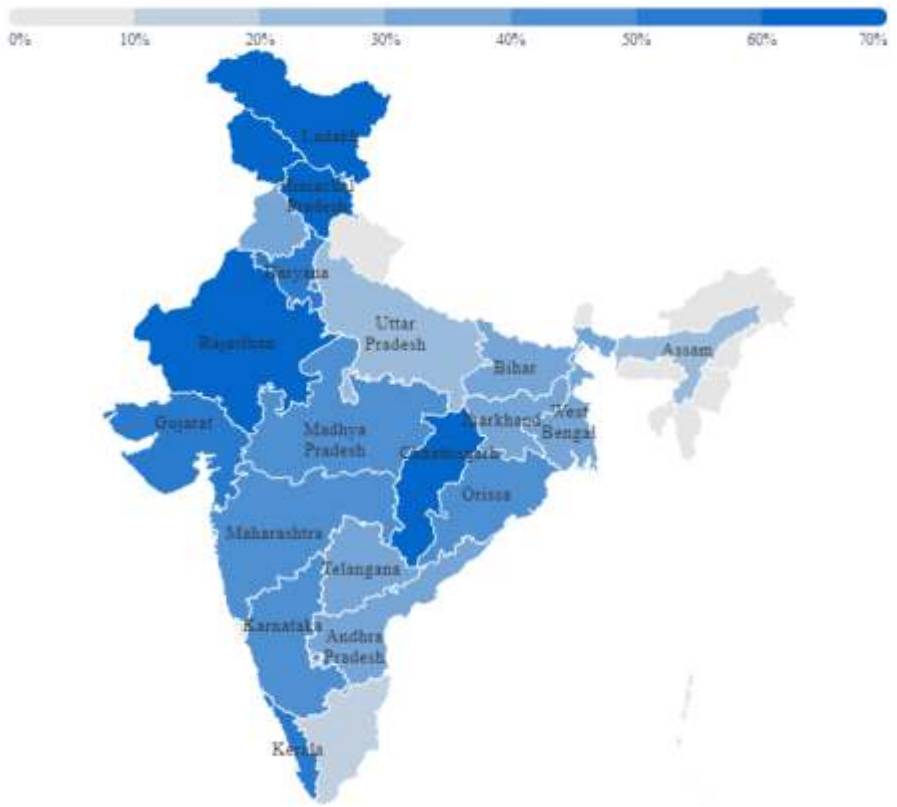
Early signs that India is seeing a vaccine effect

... In t**hree southern states and two major cities** for which data are available, the **share of the elderly in total deaths has begun to decline after vaccinations began** for this demographic, an IndiaSpend analysis of data and interviews with experts show. The decline in share is not necessarily because cases and deaths among younger people have increased.

India began vaccinating healthcare and frontline workers on January 16, 2021; people over the age of 60 (and those over 45 years, with comorbidities) from March 1; people between the ages of 45 and 59 from April 1; and people between the ages of 18 and 44 from May 1. As of 3.30 p.m. **on May 12, India has injected 137.3 million people with one dose of either Covishield or Covaxin**, and a further 37.8 million people with both doses. Among those aged 60 and above, **nearly 39% have received at least one dose of a vaccine and just under 12% have received both doses by May 11**.

Vaccination coverage varies substantially by region. Kerala has vaccinated over 54% of its population over the age of 60 with at least one dose, Karnataka 48% and Maharashtra 40%, while Tamil Nadu has the lowest at only 17%.

Both Covishield and Covaxin report a lowered likelihood of contracting mild, moderate and severe COVID-19 and of dying from COVID-19, two weeks after the first dose, and an even lower risk after receiving the second dose. ...



https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/italian-study-shows-covid-19-infections-deaths-plummeting-after-jabs-2021-05-15/

May 16

Italian study shows COVID-19 infections, deaths plummeting after jabs

COVID-19 infections in adults of all ages **fell by 80% five weeks after a first dose of Pfizer (PFE.N), Moderna (MRNA.O) or AstraZeneca (AZN.L) vaccine**, according to Italian research published on Saturday.

The first such study by a European Union country on the real-world impact of its immunisation campaign was carried out by Italy's National Institute of Health (ISS) and the Ministry of Health on **13.7 million people** vaccinated nationwide.

Scientists started studying data from the day Italy's vaccination campaign **began, on Dec. 27 2020, until May 3 2021.**

The analysis showed that the risk of SARS-CoV-2 infection, **hospitalisation, and death decreased progressively after the first two weeks following the initial vaccination.**

"As of 35 days after the first dose, there is an 80% reduction in infections, 90% reduction in hospitalisations, and 95% reduction in deaths," the ISS said, adding that the same pattern was seen in both men and women regardless of age.

"This data confirms the effectiveness of the vaccination campaign and the need to achieve high coverage across the population quickly to end the emergency," ISS president Silvio Brusaferro said in the statement.

Among the nearly 14 million people included in the Italian study, 95% of those who had taken Pfizer and Moderna had completed the vaccine cycle, while none of those given AstraZeneca had received a second dose.

Up until now, Italy has been following the makers' recommendations, giving a second dose of Pfizer three weeks after the first, a second dose of Moderna after a four week gap and a second dose of AstraZeneca after a 12 week gap.

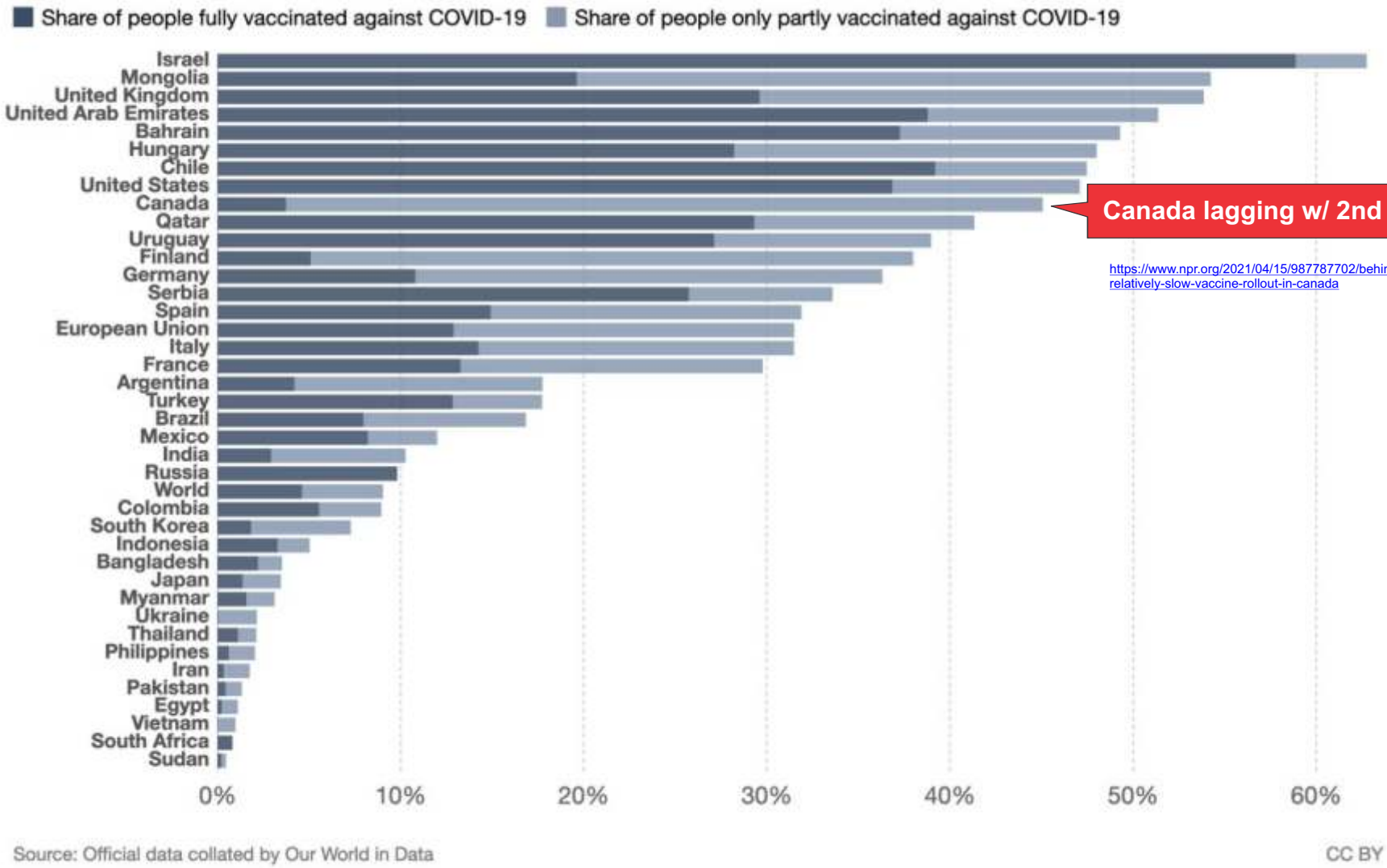
As of Saturday morning, some 8.3 million Italians, or **14% of the population, were completely vaccinated, while around 10 million people had received a first jab.**

Return to Timeline

https://twitter.com/DrEricDing/status/1394220334576934914

May 17

Share of people vaccinated against COVID-19 by country (1st and 2nd shot)



Canada lagging w/ 2nd shot

https://www.npr.org/2021/04/15/987787702/behind-the-relatively-slow-vaccine-rollout-in-canada

Return to Timeline

https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/5/18/tokyo-doctors-call-for-cancellation-of-olympic-games-over-covid

May 18

Tokyo doctors call for Olympics to be cancelled over COVID surge

A top medical organisation in Japan has thrown its weight behind calls to cancel the Tokyo Olympics, saying **hospitals are already overwhelmed as the country battles a spike in coronavirus infections less than three months from the start of the Summer Games.**

I**n an open letter to Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga, dated May 14 and posted online on Monday, the Tokyo Medical Practitioners Association said hospitals in the host city "have their hands full and have almost no spare capacity".**

"We strongly request that the authorities convince the International Olympic Committee (IOC) that holding the Olympics is difficult and obtain its decision to cancel the Games," the letter said.

The association, which represents about 6,000 primary care doctors, made the appeal amid a jump in infections that has resulted in a shortage of hospital beds in some parts of the Japanese capital and stoked alarm across the country.

Suga on Friday extended a third state of emergency in Tokyo and several other prefectures until May 31.

But the prime minister said that holding a "safe and secure" Olympic games was possible if tight preventive measures were implemented, including actions that would keep ordinary Japanese from coming into contact with those arriving in connection with the Games.

A majority of the Japanese public, however, **oppose hosting the Olympics this year.**

...

The Tokyo Medical Practitioner's Association, in its May 14 letter, said medical institutions dealing with COVID-19 already "have their hands full and have almost no spare capacity".

Soon, doctors would face the added difficulty of dealing with heat exhaustion in patients during the summer months, the letter said.

It added that if the Olympics contributed to a rise in deaths, "Japan will bear the maximum responsibility."

Other health experts and medical groups have voiced their concerns over the Olympics, with Kyoto University professor Hiroshi Nishiura – **an adviser to the government's pandemic response – urging authorities in April to postpone the Olympics for a further year to allow more time to vaccinate the public.**

Overall, Japan has avoided an explosive spread of the virus experienced by other nations, with 11,500 deaths recorded since the pandemic began.

But the government has come under sharp criticism for its sluggish vaccination rollout. **Only about 3.5 percent of its population of about 126 million has been vaccinated so far.**

Underscoring the challenges with the vaccinations, booking systems for mass inoculation sites being launched in Tokyo and Osaka – which started accepting bookings on Monday – were marred by technical glitches.

https://apnews.com/article/asia-coronavirus-pandemic-lifestyle-business-health-9e9e237d169e251ec4c00774104938f5

May 19

Restrictions reimposed as virus resurges in much of Asia

...Sparsely populated **Mongolia** has seen its death toll soar from 15 to 233, while **Taiwan**, considered a major success in battling the virus, has recorded more than 1,000 cases since last week and placed over 600,000 people in two-week medical isolation.

Hong Kong and **Singapore** have postponed a quarantine-free travel bubble for a second time after an outbreak in Singapore of uncertain origin. **China**, which has all but stamped out local infections, has seen new cases apparently linked to contact with people arriving from abroad.

The resurgence hasn't come close to the carnage wrought in India and parts of Europe, but it is **a keen reminder that the virus remains resilient, despite mask mandates, case tracing, mass testing and** wider deployment of the newest weapon against it — **vaccinations**.

That's setting back efforts to get social and economic life back to normal, particularly in schools and sectors like the hospitality industry that are built on public contact.
...
Malaysia unexpectedly imposed a one-month lockdown through June 7, spooked by a sharp rise in cases, more-infectious variants and weak public compliance with health measures.

It was the second nationwide lockdown in just over a year and came after the country's cases shot up fourfold since January; it's now more than 485,000 and 2,040 people have died, a sum also up by four times from January. Interstate travel and social activities are banned, schools are shut, and restaurants can provide only takeout service. The government has warned that hospitals have almost maxed out their capacity to take new coronavirus cases.

Singapore has imposed stringent social distancing measures until June 13, restricting public gatherings to two people and banning dine-in service at restaurants.

That came after the number of coronavirus infections of untraceable origin rose to 48 cases in the past week, from 10 cases the week before. Singapore had previously been held up as a role model after keeping the virus at bay for months.

Schools moved online after students in several institutions tested positive. Wedding receptions are no longer allowed, and funerals are capped at 20 people.
...
Hong Kong has responded to fresh outbreaks by increasing the quarantine requirement from 14 to 21 days for unvaccinated travelers arriving from "high-risk" countries, including Singapore, Malaysia and Japan, and, farther afield, Argentina, Italy, the Netherlands and Kenya.

China has set up checkpoints at toll booths, airports and railway stations in Liaoning province, where new cases were reported this week. Travelers must have proof of a recent negative virus test, and mass testing was ordered in part of Yingkou, a port city with shipping connections to more than 40 countries.
...
The resurgence has posed difficult choices for governments, particularly in poorer nations where lockdown restrictions can increase financial suffering for those already living on the edge of starvation.

In the **Philippines**, President Rodrigo Duterte has eased a lockdown in the bustling capital and adjacent provinces to fight economic recession and hunger but **has still barred public gatherings this month**, when many Roman Catholic festivals are held.

COVID-19 **infections started to spike in March** to some of the worst levels in Asia, surging beyond 10,000 a day and **prompting Duterte to impose the lockdown in and around Manila in April.** The Philippines has reported more than 1.1 million infections with ...

https://www.foxbusiness.com/lifestyle/university-pennsylvania-health-system-requires-employees-get-covid-vaccine

May 20

University of Pennsylvania Health System requires employees to get COVID vaccine or they're fired

The University of Pennsylvania Health System has given its employees an ultimatum: get the COVID vaccine before Sept. 1 or get fired.

All employees and clinical staff must be vaccinated against the vaccine no later than Sept. 1, 2021, a Penn Medicine spokesperson told FOX Business.

Effective July 1, 2021, all new hires will either have to provide proof of vaccinations or have had completed their vaccinations at least two weeks before beginning work.

Staff who choose not to get vaccinated for medical or religious reasons will have to apply for an exemption. Non-exempted workers who choose not to get vaccinated will be subject to disciplinary actions – including firing, according to the memo.

"As an institution grounded in the science and art of healthcare, we believe it is imperative for the University of Pennsylvania Health System to take the lead in requiring employee vaccinations to protect our patients and staff and to set an example to the broader community as we work together to end the COVID-19 pandemic," the Penn Medicine spokesperson said.

All UPHS employees and clinical staff have been offered the vaccine and nearly 70% – more than 33,000 people – are fully vaccinated, the spokesperson said.

"Evidence is clear that COVID-19 vaccines have proven to be very safe and highly effective at preventing transmission, hospitalizations, and death from the virus," the spokesperson said. **"The transformational mRNA technology discoveries at Penn which laid a foundation for the first COVID-19 vaccines are a tremendous point of pride which further buoys our confidence in the science that is now being deployed to save lives across the globe."**

The legality of UPHS's policy remains unclear. No other local health systems have implemented mandatory COVID-19 vaccine policies, according to the Philadelphia Business Journal.

https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/19/world/europe/eu-vaccinated-visitors-travel.html

May 20

E.U. agrees to reopen to vaccinated visitors and those from Covid-safe countries

... Ambassadors from the 27 member states of the European Union endorsed a **plan** that **would allow visits from tourists and other nonessential travelers, who have been mostly barred from entering the bloc for more than a year.**

The move has been seen as an economic imperative for tourism-dependent countries such as Greece and Spain, and it has been months in the works. Other E.U. nations that are less reliant on tourists for jobs and income, particularly in northern Europe, had been eager to maintain higher barriers for nonessential visitors to keep the coronavirus at bay. But they relented as vaccinations advanced and after they were promised the ability to reverse course if cases surge again.

The **new rules are set to become formal policy next week** after clearing some bureaucratic hurdles, and, depending on how well each country has prepared to welcome tourists, could be implemented immediately. Some countries, like **Greece**, have already said that they **will remove testing and quarantine requirements for vaccinated visitors.** But most countries are likely to implement such changes more slowly and conservatively.

Some experts recently cautioned that restarting international tourism could be premature.

Dr. Sarah Fortune, the chair of the Department of Immunology and Infectious Diseases at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, said that reopening areas to vaccinated tourists was a calculated risk.

“My doomsday scenario,” she said, “is a mixing of vaccinated and unvaccinated populations in a setting where there is high viral load and high viral transmission.”

Countries like Greece, Iceland and Croatia had opened to tourists from the United States and other countries before the bloc’s announcement.

Greece, where hospitality and tourism make up a large portion of the economy, was especially intent on reopening. Incoming tourists have to be vaccinated or present a negative PCR test taken up to 72 hours before their arrival, but they do not have to quarantine.

“Unfortunately, after more than 10 years of economic hardship, tourism and food is our only industry,” said Kostas Tzilialis, a co-owner and co-worker at a cafe and bookshop in Athens. “We don’t produce cars or machines. So we have to open our industry right now. Let’s hope that people will be careful and the vaccines will protect us.”

European Union member states will retain the freedom to tweak these measures if they want to take a more conservative approach, meaning that some European countries could retain demands for negative PCR tests or quarantines for certain visitors.

The bloc will also maintain an emergency-brake option, a legal tool that will allow it to quickly snap back to more restrictive travel conditions if a threatening new variant or other Covid emergency emerges.

Return to Timeline

https://www.cnn.com/2021/05/20/us/covid-vaccine-lottery-new-york-maryland-ohio/index.html?utm_content=2021-05-21T11%3A15%3A07&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twCNN&utm_term=link

May 21

New York and Maryland follow Ohio in creating Covid vaccine lottery

New York and Maryland both announced lotteries on Thursday for people who get vaccinated against Covid-19, joining Ohio, which last week announced drawings to give away millions of dollars in a bid to boost flagging vaccination rates in the state.

New Yorkers who get vaccinated next week from Monday to Friday will be given a lottery ticket with a chance to win as much as $5 million, Gov. Andrew Cuomo said at a news briefing Thursday.
And starting on Tuesday, the **Maryland Lottery will randomly select a vaccinated Marylander for a $40,000 prize every single day**, Gov. Larry Hogan announced Thursday.

The Maryland drawings will be held for 40 days through July 3, and on July 4, a winner will get a grand prize of $400,000, Hogan said.

"So it's a total of $2 million in prize money for a vaccinated Marylander," Hogan said. "Entry is very simple -- all you have to do is get vaccinated for Covid-19 here in Maryland, be a Maryland resident and be 18 or older. Anyone 18 and older who has already been vaccinated for Covid-19 in the state of Maryland, at any time, is also eligible for these prizes and will automatically be entered to win."
"So remember Maryland -- get your shot for a shot to win," Hogan said.

Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine last week was the first state leader to announce lottery drawings in a bid to get more people inoculated, and vaccination rates have since picked up, the Ohio Department of Health said on Thursday.

Ohio will hold five drawings with a prize of $1 million each for people 18 and older, and will hold five drawings for full college scholarships for people under the age of 18 who are vaccinated.

The state is already seeing results, according to Ohio officials.

"The Vax-a-Million campaign has helped drive an **increase in vaccination rates among Ohioans 16 and older by more than 28%" since it was announced on May 13**, the department said in a release.
...
"Troubling news" is how Cuomo described declining vaccination rates when he announced the New York lottery.

"The number of vaccinations are slowing, and they are slowing dramatically."
...
In **Maryland**, Hogan said more than **67% of state residents 18 and older have been vaccinated, and the lottery is meant to "push us over the edge."**

President Joe Biden has set a goal of having 70% ...

https://www.rfi.fr/en/france/20210522-bordeaux-expands-vaccination-drive-as-rare-covid-variant-detected

May 22

Bordeaux, France expands vaccination drive as rare Covid variant detected

The French city of Bordeaux is to fast-track vaccinations for residents in one neighbourhood, opening access the jab for all adults after nearly 50 people tested positive for a "very rare" variant of Covid-19

All adult residents of Bordeaux's northern Bacalan neighbourhood will be granted "unconditional" access to jabs, "this weekend or at worst early next week".

Patrick Dehail, medical adviser to the regional health authority, said: "We are working with the health ministry to obtain the extra doses required," adding that the boosted local effort will then be expanded to the wider Bordeaux area.

Covid variant similar to UK strain

The variant has already been identified on a national level in France but it has reportedly been very rare until now.

At least 46 people have been infected with the variant in Bordeaux, with mass testing launched on Friday to track down further cases.

None of those infected so far have been hospitalised.

Labelled VOC 20I/484Q, the strain is related to the British variant of Covid-19, but with an additional mutation.

The mutation is also carried by the South African and Brazilian variants and is suspected of reducing the immunity acquired by either a past infection or by some vaccines.

However, the regional health authority says **there is no reason as yet to suggest the variant is resistant to mRNA vaccines such as those made by Pfizer or Moderna.**

The mutation has also been detected in the northern Paris region.

Vaccinations in France have so far been limited to the over-50s, although people outside this age group can book unused slots advertised at short notice.

From 31 May, all adults will be eligible for vaccinations across the country.

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/health-coronavirus-pandemic-olympic-games-sports-dfd91e85b3af2d97404fde45d6fab341

May 23

Tokyo Olympics are on

... An International Olympic Committee vice president, Coates was asked a few days ago by a Japanese reporter at an online news conference if the Tokyo Olympics would go ahead, even if a state of emergency were in force in Japan.

Coates replied: “Absolutely, yes.”

Coates said what the IOC and local organizers have been trying to persuade the Japanese public about for months: **The postponed Olympics with 11,000 athletes from 200 nations and territories will open on July 23** and will be “safe and secure.”

...

Just over 12,000 deaths in Japan — good by global standards, but poor in Asia — have been attributed to COVID-19. But Tokyo and Osaka and several other areas are under a state of emergency until May 31. And it’s likely to be extended.

There is fear of new variants spreading with only a tiny percentage of Japanese vaccinated. Estimates range between 2% and 4%.

“Right now, **more than 80% of the nation’s people want the Olympics postponed or canceled,**” Japanese billionaire businessman Masayoshi Son said over the weekend. He is the founder and CEO of SoftBank Group Corp. He also owns the SoftBank Hawks baseball team.

“Who is forcing this to go ahead, and under what rights?” Son added.

Technically, the games belong to the International Olympic Committee and only it has the power to cancel. Of course, any move would have to be negotiated with Japanese organizers.

...

The IOC relies on selling television rights for 75% of its income, and Japan has officially spent $15.4 billion to prepare the games. Government audits suggest the figure is much higher. All but $6.7 billion is public money.

...

Many of Japan’s newspapers are among more than 60 local Olympic sponsors that have contributed more than $3 billion to local organizers. They have been restrained in their criticism, although one of them — the Hokkaido Shimbun — did call for unspecified action from Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga. Suga has said it’s the IOC that must determine the fate of the Olympics.

“That inaction itself is forfeiting the responsibility over people’s lives and health. Those in charge should take that to heart.”

The Shinano Mainichi Shimbun, which is not a sponsor, called for a cancellation in an editorial on Sunday.

“We are in no mood to celebrate an event filled with fear and anxiety,” the newspaper said. “The Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics should be canceled ... The government must make the decision to protect the lives and livelihood of the people.”

Organizers and the IOC say that the games will be safe because of extensive testing and building a bubble around the athletes. It says more than 80% of the residents in the Olympics Village, located on Tokyo Bay, will be vaccinated. ...

Return to Timeline

https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/worldwide-graphs/#total-deaths

Select live link for current number

May 24

Death toll from coronavirus tops 3,600,000

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/japan-coronavirus-pandemic-coronavirus-vaccine-olympic-games-sports-64115230b1805f18e5521bd0c29d1c28

May 24

Japan opens mass vaccine centers 2 months before Olympics

...**Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga** is determined to hold the Olympics in Tokyo after a one-year delay and has **made an ambitious pledge to finish vaccinating the country's 36 million elderly people by the end of July**, despite skepticism it's possible. Worries about public safety while many Japanese remain unvaccinated have prompted growing protests and calls for canceling the games, set to start on July 23.

Suga's government has repeatedly expanded the area and duration of a largely voluntary request-based virus state of emergency since late April and has made its virus-fighting measures stricter. **Currently, Tokyo and nine other areas that are home to 40% of the country's population are under the emergency** and a further extension is deemed unavoidable.

With COVID-19 cases still high, Suga now says vaccines are key to getting infections under control. He has not made vaccinations conditional for holding the Olympics and has arranged for **Pfizer to donate its vaccine for athletes** through the International Olympic Committee, while trying to speed up Japan's inoculation drive as anti-Olympic sentiment grows.
...
At the two centers, staffed by about 280 military medical staff and 200 civilian nurses, **the aim is to inoculate up to 10,000 people per day in Tokyo and 5,000 per day in Osaka for the next three months.**
...
People inoculated at the two centers were the first in Japan to receive doses from Moderna Inc., one of two foreign-developed vaccines Japan approved on Friday.

Previously, Japan had used only Pfizer Inc., and only about 2% of the population of 126 million has received the required two doses.

J**apan began vaccinating health care workers in mid-February** after delays resulting from its decision to require additional vaccine clinical testing inside Japan — a decision many experts said was medically meaningless and only slowed the inoculation process.

Vaccinations for the next group — **the elderly**, who are more likely to suffer serious COVID-19 effects — **started in mid-April but have been slowed by reservation procedures, unclear distribution plans and shortages of medical staff to give shots.**

The completion of Japanese-developed vaccines is still uncertain, but **government officials hope the approvals Friday of Moderna and AstraZeneca will accelerate inoculations.**

"Speeding up the rollout makes us feel safer because it affects our social life and the economy," said Munemitsu Watanabe, a 71-year-old office worker who got his first shot at the Tokyo center. "If 80-90% of the population gets vaccinated, I think we can hold the Olympics smoothly."

That goal seems impossible to meet. Those currently eligible are 65 years or older, and some officials say it may take until next March before younger people are fully vaccinated.

Japan also has a dire shortage of medical staff who can give shots since only doctors and nurses can legally do so — and they are already busy treating COVID-19 patients.

Under pressure, Suga's **government has allowed dentists and retired nurses to perform inoculations, and on Monday asked for pharmacists' help.** Suga said he is also **considering adding paramedics and clinical laboratory technicians** to create a pool of "several tens of thousands" of medical personnel. There are worries, however, that loosening the criteria may increase vaccine hesitancy in the public.

https://www.cnn.com/2021/05/24/health/us-coronavirus-monday/index.html

May 24

Half of US states have fully vaccinated at least 50% of adults

At least 25 states -- plus Washington, DC -- have now fully vaccinated at least half of their adults, data published Sunday by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention shows.

Those states are Alaska, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Iowa, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Vermont, Virginia, Washington state and Wisconsin.

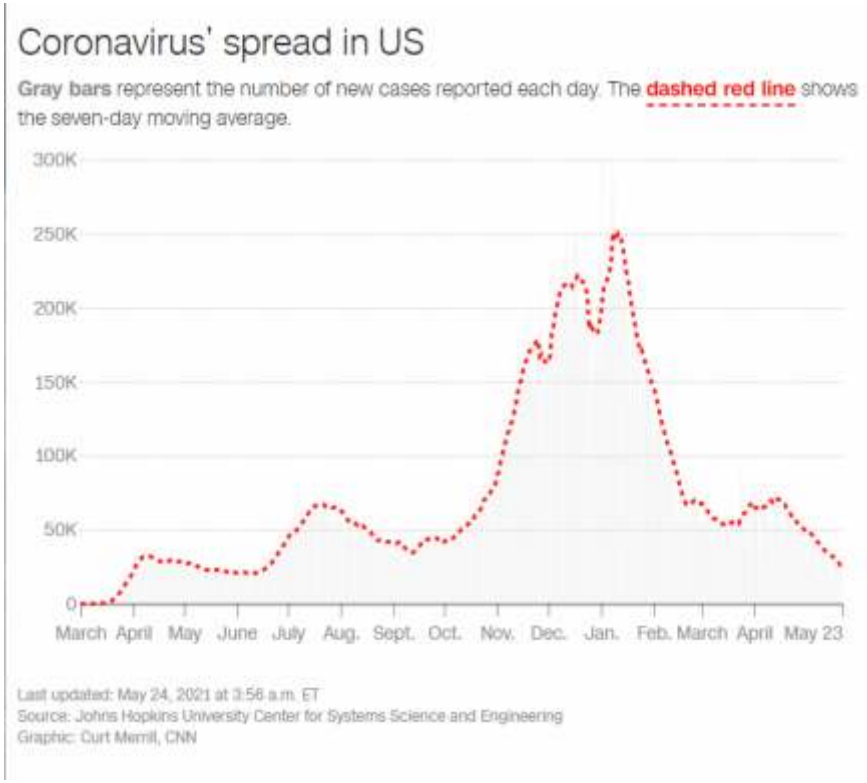
The state with the highest proportion of adults who have been fully vaccinated against Covid-19 is **Maine** -- with more than **62% of people 18 and over having completed their shots.**

Across the US, roughly **61.3% of American adults have received at least one Covid-19 vaccine dose and about 49.6% are fully vaccinated**, CDC data shows.

More than 49% of the country's total population has gotten at least one shot while more than 39% of the population is fully vaccinated, the data shows.

The impact of vaccines is now obvious: **the country is recording some of the lowest Covid-19 metrics in roughly a year** and officials say it could soon get even better than that.

"Across the country, cases of Covid-19, **serious illness and loss of life are all down dramatically**," White House senior Covid-19 adviser Andy Slavitt said during a briefing on Friday. "And they can be brought down even further and the risk of a future wave in your community significantly reduced if we keep up the pace of vaccinations."...



Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/japan-business-olympic-games-coronavirus-pandemic-sports-82792eb3ebd3e066400f6b16405bf864

May 25

US warns against all travel to Japan as Olympics loom

U.S. health officials and the State Department on Monday warned Americans against travel to Japan because of a surge in coronavirus cases in the country, which is preparing to host the Olympics in just two months.

The twin **alerts don't ban U.S. citizens from visiting the country, but they could have an impact on insurance rates for travelers and may factor into decisions by Olympic athletes and spectators on whether to compete in or attend the games**, which are due to start in July. There was no immediate indication as to what effect the warnings might have on would-be Olympic-goers.

"Travelers should avoid all travel to Japan," the Atlanta-based Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said in a new COVID-19 update. **"Because of the current situation in Japan even fully vaccinated travelers may be at risk for getting and spreading COVID-19 variants** and should avoid all travel to Japan."

The State Department's warning, which followed the CDC alert, was more blunt. "Do not travel to Japan due to COVID-19," it said in the announcement, which raised the department's travel alert from Level 3 — Reconsider travel — to Level 4 — Do not travel. The previous alert was issued on April 21.

The United States Olympic & Paralympic Committee said it still anticipates that American athletes will be able to safely compete at the Tokyo Games.

"We feel confident that the current mitigation practices in place for athletes and staff by both the USOPC and the Tokyo Organizing Committee, coupled with the testing before travel, on arrival in Japan, and during Games time, will allow for safe participation of Team USA athletes this summer," the committee said in a statement Monday.

Earlier Monday, Japan mobilized military doctors and nurses to give shots to older adults in two major cities, as the government tried desperately to accelerate its vaccination rollout and curb coronavirus infections before it hosts the Olympics. That move came amid growing calls for the games to be canceled.

Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga is determined to hold the Olympics in Tokyo beginning on July 23, after a one-year delay, and has made an ambitious pledge to finish vaccinating the country's 36 million older people by the end of July.

J**apan has recorded just over 12,000 COVID-19 deaths** — good by global standards, but poor in Asia — but **Tokyo and Osaka and several other areas are under a state of emergency until May 31 that is likely to be extended.**

There is fear of new variants spreading, with only a tiny **percentage of the Japanese — estimated at 2% to 4% — vaccinated.**

Return to Timeline

https://abcnews.go.com/Health/covid-19-infections-exceedingly-rare-full-vaccination-cdc/story?id=77898840

May 26

COVID-19 infections are exceedingly rare after full vaccination: CDC

... **A breakthrough infection is when a fully vaccinated person becomes infected with COVID-19**.

The new CDC report shows that such breakthrough infections **may occur in just 0.01% of all fully vaccinated people.**

Vaccines are highly effective at preventing infection, but none are 100% protective. **Even when these rare breakthroughs happen, the vaccines are still overwhelmingly effective at protecting people from being hospitalized or dying.**
...
The new report defines breakthrough infection as a positive test 14 days or more after full vaccination with any FDA-authorized COVID-19 vaccine, including Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna, and Johnson & Johnson.

By the end of April, over 101 million adults in the U.S. had been fully vaccinated and there had been just 10,262 breakthrough infections, the report says. These cases were generally well-tolerated by patients -- most reported mild symptoms or were entirely asymptomatic.

Only 10% of breakthrough cases required hospitalization and of the 2% of people who died, most were elderly in their eighties and around one in five died from a cause other than COVID-19.

The CDC report notes that this is **certainly an underestimate of breakthrough infections because all reporting was voluntary and many asymptomatic cases may never have been tested.** Also, it's not clear from the study if breakthrough infections were more likely with new, concerning variants.

"Since the study began in January 2021, there has been an overall improvement in sequencing capabilities," Brownstein told ABC News. "Moving forward, routine surveillance and sequencing could be helpful for public health planning, especially with anticipating variant-related surges. But they may not mean much on an individual level since most fully vaccinated people do well clinically after breakthrough infections."

Roughly two-thirds of these breakthrough infections happened in women, but specialists are not sure why. Thus far, more women than men have been vaccinated. According to the latest data, at least 64.2 million women are now fully vaccinated against COVID-19. And of the people who have been fully vaccinated in the U.S., 53.6% of those are women.

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/taiwan-coronavirus-pandemic-business-health-c12fc8276820e18751d85e52dcdba882

May 27

Taiwan struggles with testing backlog amid largest outbreak

... **Praised for its success at keeping the virus away for more than a year, Taiwan had until May recorded just 1,128 cases and 12 deaths. But the number of locally transmitted cases started growing this month** and it soon became clear that the central government was ill prepared not only to contain the virus, but to even detect it on a large scale due to a lack of investment in rapid testing.

That left officials like Ko scrambling to catch up as the number of new infections climbed to some 300 a day. Ko's search put him in contact with six local companies who make rapid tests and his government was soon able to set up four rapid testing sites in a district that had emerged as a virus hotspot.
...
With so few cases, Taiwan had been a bubble of normalcy for most of the pandemic. Schools stayed open, people went to bars and restaurants, and the island's economy was among the few globally that saw positive growth.

Its success was built largely on strict border controls that primarily allowed in only citizens and long-term residents, who then faced mandatory two-week quarantines.

From time to time it found small clusters of infections and stamped them out through contact tracing and quarantines. **Last month authorities found a cluster involving pilots from the state-owned China Airlines.**

Stopping the virus this time would prove difficult, in part because under government policy pilots were only required to quarantine for three-days and did not need a negative test to get out of quarantine. Soon employees at a quarantine hotel where China Airlines flight crew stayed started getting sick — and so did their family members.

The virus had escaped quarantine and was spreading locally, mostly in Taipei and surrounding areas.

The government in Taiwan — where only about **1% of the population have been vaccinated** — responded by ordering a lockdown, closing schools and switching offices to remote work or rotating shifts. Contact tracers identified 600,000 people that needed to quarantine themselves.

The biggest roadblock has been testing.

Government policy throughout the pandemic has been to rely on polymerase chain reaction, or PCR, tests, which are seen as the gold standard for diagnosis but must be processed using special machines in a lab. The government has not encouraged rapid tests, which are quicker and cheaper but potentially less accurate.
...
Throughout the pandemic the government has maintained there are few benefits to mass testing, with the health minister saying last year that public funds and medical resources could better be used elsewhere.

The government instead has emphasized a strategy of contact tracing and isolation and only testing those with symptoms and direct contact with someone infected.

"This is more efficient, effective and accurate," said Chen Chien-jen, the island's former vice president, who led the pandemic response last year before retiring.

Experts say such a strategy may have been appropriate when case numbers were low, but needed to change as infections spread.

"You should have a two-pronged approach. You do the quarantine, but you should do massive widespread testing," said K. Arnold Chan, an expert on drug and medical products regulation at National Taiwan University. "For whatever reason the government is completely unprepared." ...

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/south-africa-africa-coronavirus-vaccine-coronavirus-pandemic-business-3dbbdc32c5fef9ddfcfe4e6c3f960aa2

May 28

South Africa's new cases, hospitalizations and deaths are trending up

... After a plateau of the disease that lasted a few months, South Africa's new cases, hospitalizations and deaths are trending up. The seven-day rolling average of daily new cases has risen over the past two weeks from 3.33 per 100,000 people on May 12 to 3.97 per 100,000 on Wednesday, according to Johns Hopkins University. The seven-day rolling average of deaths is also on the rise: from 0.10 deaths per 100,000 people to 0.11 per 100,000 over the same period.

The increase may seem small, but **experts warn it may be the start of a resurgence as the country enters the colder winter months, which start in June.**

...

South Africa has by far the heaviest burden of the disease in Africa. With more than 1.6 million confirmed cases, including 55,976 deaths, the country has more than 30% of the cases and 40% of the deaths recorded by all of Africa's 54 countries, according to the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The continent of 1.3 billion people has reported 4.7 million cases, including 129,000 deaths, according to the Africa CDC.

...

South Africa's overall goal is to vaccinate 67% of its 60 million people by February. To achieve that **it has purchased 30 million Pfizer doses**, of which 1.3 million have been delivered so far and 4.5 million are expected by the end of June.

The country has also ordered 31 million doses of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, which have not yet arrived. An initial delivery of 500,000 doses was used to vaccinate health care workers.

Both the J&J and Pfizer vaccines are effective against the COVID-19 variant dominant in South Africa, according to studies. **Earlier this year South Africa received 1 million doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine from the United Nations-backed COVAX initiative but scrapped their use because a preliminary, small study showed it did not give effective protection against the variant.**

...

So far just 28 million doses of vaccines have been administered in Africa, representing less than 2% of the continent's population. Globally, 1.5 billion COVID-19 vaccine doses have been administered.

"Africa needs vaccines now. Any pause in our vaccination campaigns will lead to lost lives and lost hope," Dr Matshidiso Moeti, WHO Regional Director for Africa, said Thursday.

"It's too soon to tell if Africa is on the cusp of a third wave. However, we know that cases are rising, and the clock is ticking so we urgently appeal to countries that have vaccinated their high-risk groups to speed up the dose-sharing to fully protect the most vulnerable people." ...

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/asia-pacific-australia-lifestyle-travel-coronavirus-pandemic-a1d239e80be05c8cf393ec67d1b6cce2

June 1

Australian court upholds ban on most international travel

Most Australians have been stranded in their island nation since March 2020 under a government emergency order made under the powerful Biosecurity Act.

Libertarian group LibertyWorks argued before the full bench of the Federal Court in early May that Health Minister Greg Hunt did not have the power to legally enforce the travel ban that has prevented thousands of Australians from attending weddings and funerals, caring for dying relatives and meeting newborn babies.

LibertyWorks lawyer Jason Potts argued that Australians had a right to leave their country under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights that Australia had ratified.

But the three judges ruled that submission was based on the "erroneous premise that the right is absolute."

LibertyWorks' lawyers also argued that such a biosecurity control order could only be imposed on an individual rather than an entire population. The order could only be imposed if that individual had symptoms of a listed human disease, had been exposed to such a disease or had failed to comply with travel requirements.

The judges ruled that that interpretation of the law would frustrate Parliament's clear intentions when lawmakers created the emergency powers in the Biosecurity Act in 2015.

"It may be accepted that the travel restrictions are harsh. It may also be accepted that they intrude upon individual rights," the judges said in their ruling. "But Parliament was aware of that."

LibertyWorks President Andrew Cooper said he was considering an appeal to the High Court.

"We are very disappointed in the judgement today. We continue to believe that the outbound border closure is defective in law and, perhaps more importantly, unjust on human rights grounds. We must remind ourselves also that often things that are legal are not necessarily just," Cooper said in an email.

"While Europe and most of the world open up their borders, only North Korea and Australia stubbornly continue with strict controls over their citizen's ability to leave their country," Cooper added.

He had expected hundreds of thousands of Australians to fly within weeks if he had won.

Critics of the emergency order argue it is harshest for the 30% of Australians who were born overseas.

The government says tough border controls have played an important part in Australia's relative success in containing COVID-19 spread.

Surveys suggest most Australians applaud their government's drastic border controls.

The Australian newspaper published a survey last month that found 73% of respondents said the international border should remain closed until at least the middle of next year.

Australian Broadcasting Corp. last week reported its own survey had found 79% of respondents agree the international border should stay shut until the pandemic is under control globally.

Critics of the Australian travel restrictions argue that decisions on who can travel and why are inconsistent and lack transparency.

Esther and Charles Baker, an ultra-Orthodox Jewish couple from Australia's second-largest city, Melbourne, were twice refused ...

Return to Timeline

https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/worldwide-graphs/#total-deaths

Select live link for current number

June 2

Death toll from coronavirus tops 3,700,000

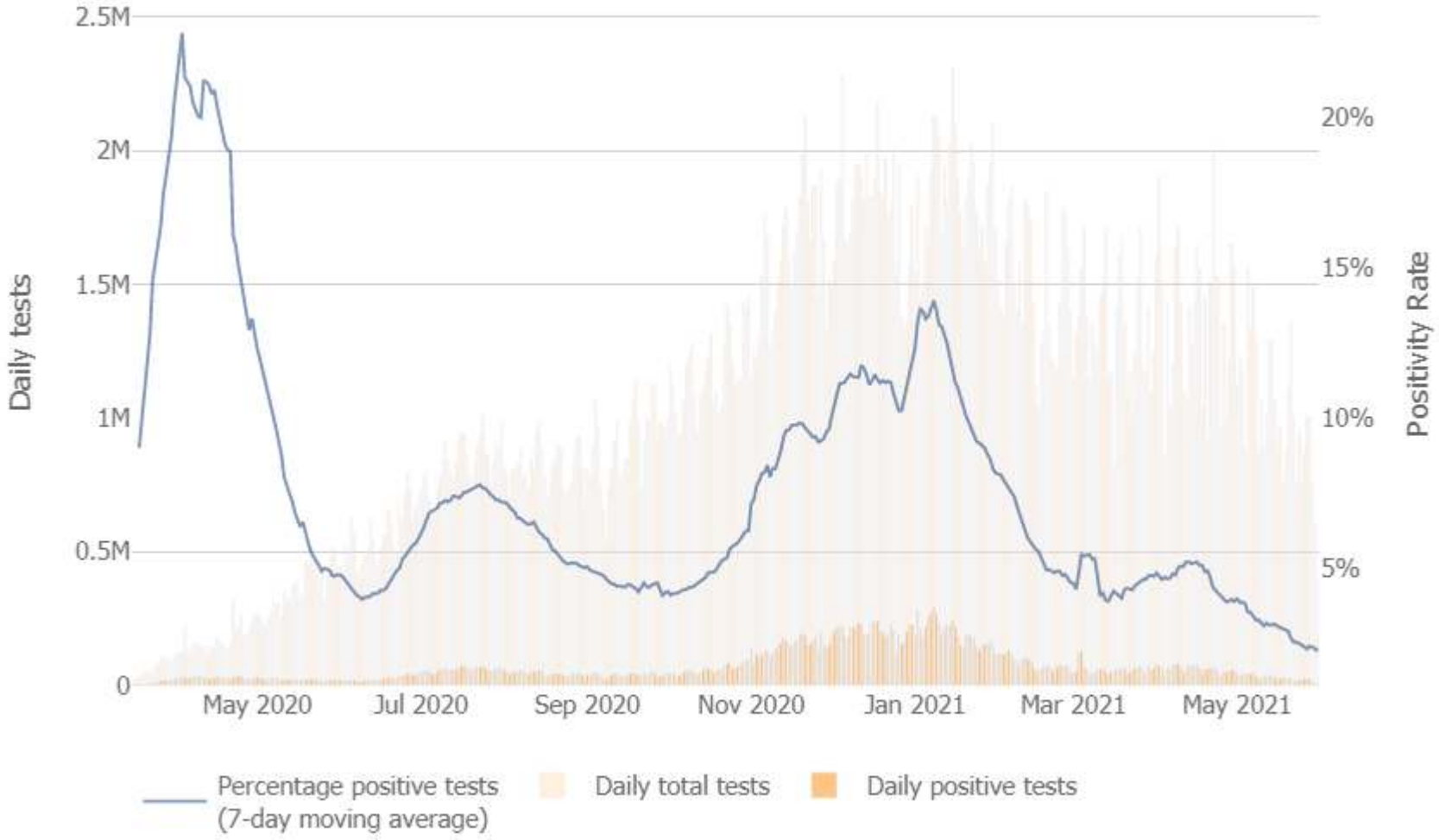
Return to Timeline

https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/testing/individual-states

Select live link for interactive chart

June 2

The US covid test positivity rate, 7-day average, is now 2.0%



Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/new-mexico-coronavirus-pandemic-government-and-politics-health-7bf8deb0e195f324b3e008b5ef7e3a39

June 2

New Mexico offers largest single vaccination prize in US

New Mexico bet big Tuesday that cash can persuade people to get vaccinated against the coronavirus, offering the largest single cash prize among the growing number of states staging lotteries to promote inoculations.

Vaccinated residents who register on New Mexico's "Vax 2 the Max" portal can win prizes from a pool totaling $10 million that includes a $5 million grand prize, Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham announced.

"Getting vaccinated is the right thing to do — for yourself, for your family and for your state," Lujan Grisham said. "I'm excited to add a little fun to our nation-leading vaccination push."

At least **55% of eligible residents in the state are fully vac**cinated, but the Department of Health wants to reach 70% and close in on possible herd immunity.

Ohio and California are also offering lotteries that have shown some success in boosting vaccination rates. California previously offered the largest single prize of $1.5 million from a total lottery pool of $116 million.

The prize money offered by New Mexico would go far in the state that's one of the poorest in the country, ranking 48th in per capita income of around $45,800, according to the U.S. Department of Commerce's Bureau of Economic Analysis.

Lujan Grisham said the lottery program is funded by federal pandemic relief money.

Starting next week, New Mexico officials will draw prizes of $250,000 in each of four different regions of the state, as well as smaller prizes ranging from lottery "scratcher" tickets to in-state vacation packages and museum tickets.

The $5 million prize drawing will be held in August. To be registered for the drawings, residents must sign up online at vax2themaxnm.org, which is separate from the state's vaccine scheduling site. Winners will have to produce their vaccination cards.

Return to Timeline

https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/covid-19-cases-rising-again-says-americas-health-agency-not-north-america-2021-06-02/

June 3

COVID-19 cases rising again, but not in North America

Lack of effective political leadership has hampered efforts to stop the COVID-19 pandemic in Latin America, where infections are dangerously on the rise again, the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) said on Wednesday.

While the United States, Canada and Mexico are reporting overall reductions in COVID-19 cases and deaths, **new infections are increasing in the rest of the Americas**, PAHO Director Carissa Etienne said.

Colombia is reporting the **highest rate of infections in South America**, where new cases have nearly tripled in some regions, and **Brazil is seeing a rise in new infections and hospitalizations**, she said.

But without effective leadership, Latin American countries are failing in their response to the illness.

"Sadly, across our region we've seen misinformation about COVID-19 sow doubt on proven health measures, often in the context of political disputes," Etienne said in a briefing.

"By stoking controversy where there is none, our leaders are sending mixed messages to the public and standing in the way of effective measures to control the virus," she said.

Of greatest concern now is Haiti, where despite sharp increases in cases, hospitalizations and deaths, public health measures required to stop transmission are being largely ignored by the population, Etienne said.

She said it was encouraging that Haiti's government has accepted the AstraZeneca (AZN.L) vaccine and doses will be arriving soon through the COVAX facility led by the World Health Organization.

Latin America and the Caribbean have the world's highest death toll from COVID-19 in proportion to its population, with at least 33,289,000 reported infections and 1,043,000 reported deaths, according to a Reuters tally.

Brazil leads the region with the most new cases and deaths, and a 7-day average of 1,881 fatalities per day. Argentina and Colombia follow in infections and deaths.

For Interactive graphic tracking global spread of coronavirus:

click here

https://apnews.com/article/europe-china-taiwan-business-japan-0c31ddf65eaa81ac101f592ec5697c37

June 4

Taiwan, feuding with China, gets vaccines from Japan

A flight carrying 1.24 million doses of AstraZeneca coronavirus vaccine from Japan touched down in Taiwan on Friday to help the vaccine-starved island fight its largest outbreak since the pandemic began.

The donation underscores how geopolitics has come to impact the global vaccine rollout, as countries scramble to secure enough doses for their populations. Taiwan, a self-governing island struggling to get enough doses, has blamed China for interfering in a potential deal for another vaccine.

Now it is more than doubling its vaccine supply thanks to Japan, which is trying to play a greater role in global vaccination distribution and accelerate its own slow rollout ahead of the Tokyo Olympics in July.

Japanese Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi told reporters on Friday that Japan was responding to a Taiwanese request, and that the donation reflects “Japan’s important partnership and friendship with Taiwan.”

Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen echoed those comments, saying after the Japan Airlines flight landed that “**we are witnessing once again the true friendship between Taiwan and Japan, built upon shared values and mutual help.”**

Neither side mentioned an ongoing feud between Taiwan and China over the island’s efforts to get the vaccine developed by Pfizer and BioNTech.

Taiwan has signed contracts for 10 million doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine, 5.05 million doses of the Moderna vaccine, and 4.76 million doses of vaccines through COVAX, a U,N, program to distribute vaccines to low and middle-income countries. It is also pursuing the development of its own vaccines, which are currently in mid-stage testing.

However, given global supply constraints and manufacturing delays, it had only about 700,000 doses to vaccinate its population with last month, all AstraZeneca’s shots. Japan reportedly considered sending vaccines to Taiwan through COVAX, but decided the process would take too long.

Tsai accused China last month of blocking Taiwan from getting the Pfizer vaccine through BioNTech, the German co-developer.

“We were almost finished with the contract with the German supplier, but owing to China’ s interference, it’s been delayed so that until now we have no way to complete it,” she told members of her Democratic Progressive Party.

Health Minister Chen Shih-chung later said that BioNTech had asked Taiwan to change the word “country” in the press release announcing the deal. Taiwan agreed, but the deal still remains unfinished.

China, which claims Taiwan as its territory, objects to calling the island a country. China is also a potentially major market for BioNTech, which has partnered with Shanghai-based Fosun Pharma to manufacture its vaccine in China and distribute it in the mainland and Hong Kong.

Fosun said in an interview with China’s official Xinhua News Agency that it has offered to sell the vaccines to Taiwan. However, Taiwanese law bans Chinese-made medical products, including vaccines.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin accused Taiwan’s governing party of preventing the mainland from sending vaccines to Taiwan and falsely claiming that China has hindered its procurement of vaccines.

“For their own political self-interest, the Democratic Progressive Party authorities continue to engage in political manipulation in anti-epidemic cooperation,” he said Friday. “It disregards the lives and ...

Return to Timeline

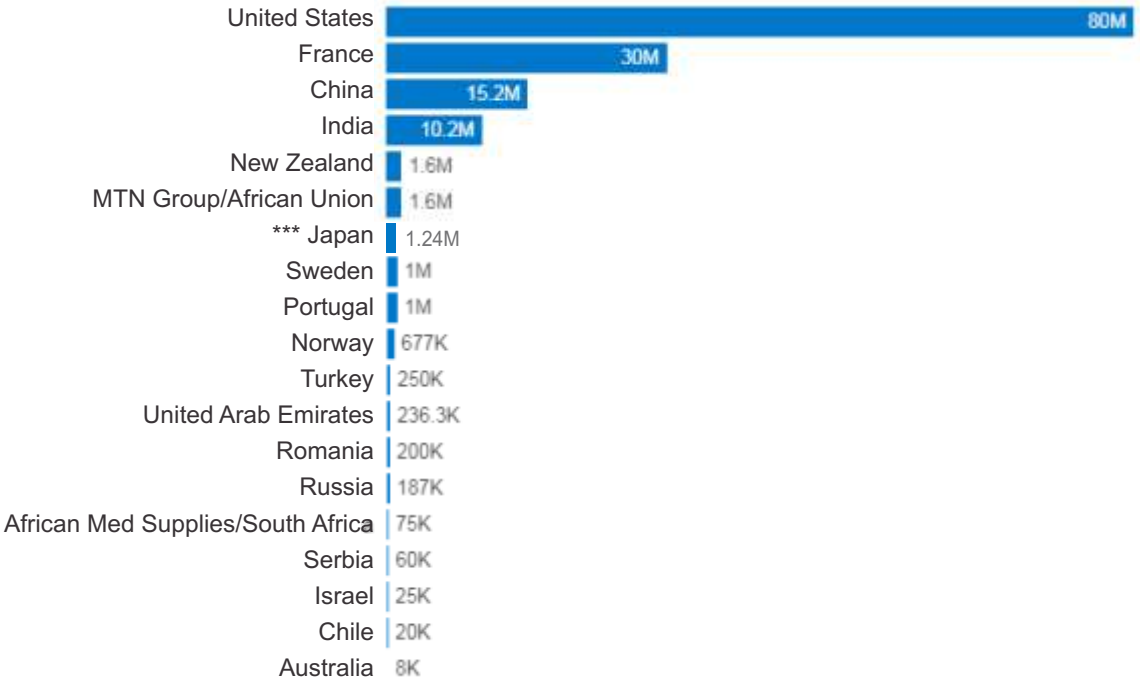
https://www.kff.org/policy-watch/putting-u-s-global-covid-19-vaccine-donations-in-context/

June 4

Putting U.S. Global COVID-19 vaccine donations in context

On May 17, 2021 President Biden announced that by the end of June, the U.S. would donate 80 million doses of COVID-19 vaccine for use internationally. **Sixty million of these doses are expected to be U.S.-owned doses of the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine (enough to vaccinate 30 million people)**, which has yet to be authorized in the U.S. but is authorized in multiple countries. **An additional 20 million U.S.-owned doses will be from a mix of Pfizer, Moderna, and Johnson and Johnson vaccines (while the exact combination of doses for each was not announced, this could amount to enough vaccines for an additional 10-20 million people)**.

Prior to this point, the U.S. had provided 4 million doses of AstraZeneca to Canada and Mexico (via a "loan"), so 80 million doses would represent a significant increase in U.S. vaccine donations and **make the U.S. the largest single country donor of in-kind vaccine doses worldwide** (see Figure). **In addition, the U.S. has also appropriated $4 billion to COVAX, the international partnership for COVID-19 vaccine procurement and distribution overseen by the Gavi Alliance, CEPI, and the World Health Organization, making the U.S. the largest donor to this effort as well.*** In addition, vaccine production and manufacturing continue to lag and a key supplier of global vaccines has announced it will not be exporting any additional doses until the end of this year, underscoring the importance of countries donating doses in the near term ...



NOTE: Donations includes both donations made bilaterally and through COVAX, a well as donations that have been confirmed as delivered and donation pledges. France recently announced it would donate at least 30 million doses, however, it is unclear whether this total will include or exclude France's previous donations.

SOURCE: UNICEF COVID-19 Vaccine Market Dashboard; Gavi; POLITICO; Development Today; Reuters

*** Japan donation added to chart by Legal-Graphics

https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/protecting-uk-is-vaccination-priority-hancock-says-2021-06-04/

June 5

UK to protect population before donating vaccines abroad, minister says

Britain's Health Secretary Matt Hancock said on Friday **vaccinating children in the United Kingdom against COVID-19 would take priority over donating vaccine doses to other countries around the world.**

Britain's medicine regulator on Friday approved Pfizer/BioNTech's (PFE.N), vaccine for use in 12-15 year olds, but global health bodies warn that if rich countries prioritise low-risk members of their own populations over broadening access globally, they risk disaster.

Asked he would prioritise vaccinating teenagers over more vulnerable people globally, Hancock said: **"My first duty as health secretary for the UK is to make sure that the UK is protected and safe."**

"Whilst thankfully children are very rarely badly affected by COVID themselves, they can still pass on the disease, and so that is my first duty," Hancock told Reuters after a meeting of G7 healthcare ministers in Oxford, central England.

"Alongside that I'm working with my international colleagues to make sure that people can get access to the vaccine around the world."

Hancock had hosted health ministers from the Group of Seven (G7) rich countries met at the University of Oxford, where AstraZeneca's (AZN.L) COVID-19 vaccine was invented, ahead of a G7 leaders' meeting next week.

The ministers agreed a new set of standards to improve clinical trials, as well as support for vaccine donations when domestic circumstances allowed.

U.S. President Joe Biden outlined plans to share 25 million surplus vaccines globally on Thursday, while France also said it would donate doses to Senegal.

But although Britain has given a first COVID-19 vaccine to three-quarters of adults, and fully vaccinated half the adult population, Hancock said the country was not yet in a position to donate doses.

Britain has ordered over 500 million doses of COVID-19 vaccine for its population of 67 million, most of which are two-shot vaccines.

"As and when the UK has excess doses of vaccine, then, if we don't need them, we'll make sure they're available to others," Hancock said.

"But at the moment we don't have any excess doses, because as soon as the doses are available for the UK, we get them injected into British arms."

Biden has also voiced support for a vaccine patent waiver to boost vaccine production and allow more equitable distribution of shots, but Britain and some European countries have expressed reservations.

Hancock said Britain had already taken a huge step by making the Oxford/AstraZeneca shot available at cost, citing how half a billion doses of the vaccine had already been delivered globally.

"The truth is you don't need an IP waiver in order to deliver vaccines, without any charge for the intellectual property rights, you can just get on and do it," Hancock said.

"It doesn't need us to change the intellectual property rules because they are important rules for future investment in future vaccines."

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/afghanistan-coronavirus-pandemic-religion-health-39b6f608467e534a89fadb2a83cf83b2

June 6

Amid brutal case surge, Afghanistan hit by a vaccine delay

Afghanistan is battling a brutal surge in COVID-19 infections as health officials plead for vaccines, only to be told by the World Health Organization that the **3 million doses the country expected to receive by April won't be delivered until August.**

...

Over the past month, the escalating pace of new cases has threatened to overwhelm Afghanistan's health system, already struggling under the weight of relentless conflict. In part, the increase has been blamed on uninterrupted travel with India, bringing the highly contagious Delta variant, first identified in India.

Also, most Afghans still question the reality of the virus or believe their faith will protect them and rarely wear masks or social distance, often mocking those who do. Until just a week ago, the government was allowing unrestricted mass gatherings.

The Delta variant has helped send Afghanistan's infection rate soaring, hitting 16 provinces and the capital Kabul the hardest. This week, the rate of registered new cases reached as high as 1,500 a day, compared to 178 a day on May 1.

Hospital beds are full, and it is feared rapidly dwindling oxygen supplies will run out. Afghan ambassadors have been ordered to seek out emergency oxygen supplies in nearby countries, Foreign Minister Haneef Atmar said in a tweet Friday.

By official figures, Afghanistan has seen a total 78,000 cases and 3,007 deaths from the pandemic. But those figures are likely a massive undercount, registering only deaths in hospitals, not the far greater numbers who die at home.

Testing is woefully inadequate. In only the past month, the percentage of positive COVID tests has jumped from about 8% to 60% in some parts of the country. By WHO recommendations, anything higher than 5% shows officials aren't testing widely enough, allowing the virus to spread unchecked.

...

Only recently, the government tried to take steps to clamp down to contain the surge. It closed schools, universities and colleges for two weeks. It also shut down wedding halls, which had been operating unhindered throughout the pandemic.

But it is rare to see anyone wearing a mask in the streets, and even where masks are mandatory, like in government offices, it's rarely enforced. As many as 10 flights arrive daily from India, packed with Afghans, particularly students and people who had gone to India for medical treatment.

Nazari said banning flights was not an option since many Afghans cannot afford to be stranded in India and the government cannot prevent citizens from re-entering their own country.

For vaccines, Afghanistan so far has relied on a donation of AstraZeneca doses from India and then purchases of Sinopharm from China. About 600,000 people have had at least one dose, about 1.6% of the population of 36 million. But the number who have gotten a second dose is minute — "so few I couldn't even say any percentage," Nazari said.

...

Poor countries around the world have been pleading for vaccines even as developed nations have been able to inoculate significant portions of their populations. COVAX, set up with U.N. help to try to prevent vaccine inequities, has struggled to fill the gap. It faced a major setback when its biggest supplier, the Serum Institute of India, announced last month that it would not export any vaccines until the end of the year because of the surge in that country.

"Honestly speaking, I lost my faith in COVAX," Nazari said. ...

https://www.reuters.com/world/india/india-reports-100636-new-covid-19-infections-2427-deaths-2021-06-07/

June 7

India re-opens major cities as new COVID-19 infections hit two month low

Key Indian cities re-opened for business on Monday, with long queues for buses in the financial hub of Mumbai while traffic returned to the roads of New Delhi after a devastating second wave of coronavirus that killed hundreds of thousands.

The 100,636 new infections of the past 24 hours were the lowest in the world's second most populous nation since April 6, and well off last month's peaks of more than 400,000, allowing authorities to re-open parts of the economy.

"We have to save ourselves from infection but also bring the economy back on track," Delhi's Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said on Twitter.

He ordered half the **capital's shops to open on odd and even numbered days of the month respectively, in a bid to limit crowds, but allowed offices and the Delhi underground rail network to run at 50% of capacity.**

But **some curbs were retained**, such as the **ban on dining in restaurants and the use of theatres and gyms** in a city still slowly recovering from a surge in the months of April and May that overwhelmed hospitals.

They ran short of beds and medical oxygen, and people died in hospital parking lots and homes, while crematoriums and morgues struggled to cope with an incessant flow of corpses.

India added 2,427 deaths overnight for a toll of 349,186, the health ministry said, down from more than 4,000 each day at the height of the crisis, while its tally of infections now stands at 28.9 million.

But experts believe that both figures have been severely undercounted and could be a few times higher than the official number.

Authorities in the western state of Maharashtra, home to Mumbai, allowed businesses to run until late afternoon, staffed with half their employees, and opened gyms, salons and spas though cinemas and malls are to stay shut.

The re-opening efforts come as authorities struggle to vaccinate the population of nearly 1.4 billion in a strategy officials say is the only way to limiting any third wave of infections.

But tight supplies have meant that **fewer than 5% of 950 million adult Indians have received the mandatory two vaccine doses.**

The pressure to resume some economic activity has grown as millions depend on daily wages to pay for food and rent.

"I have opened my shop after 40 days," a tea vendor, Monu Yadav, told Reuters partner ANI in the northern city of Varanasi, adding that only a fraction of his customers had returned.

Last week, the central bank cut its forecast for economic growth to 9.5% from 10.5% for the fiscal year 2021/22.

The second wave had “impaired the nascent recovery that was underway,” but “not snuffed it out”, said Shaktikanta Das, the governor of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).

Return to Timeline

https://twitter.com/EricTopol/status/1401595968550674435/photo/1

June 8

We have vaccines that can protect from all variants that have emerged to date

"The good news is that **we have vaccines that can protect from all the variants that have emerged to date.**

The bad news Is **delta, the worst we've seen so far**."

Previous Variant Names

https://www.who.int/en/activities/tracking-SARS-CoV-2-variants/

	New WHO Name	Transmissibility	Immune Evasiveness	Vaccine Effectiveness^
Ancestral		—	—	✓
D614G		+	—	✓
UK B.1.1.7	Alpha	+++	—	✓
South Africa B.1.351	Beta	+	++++	✓
Brazil P.1	Gamma	++	++	✓
(US) B.1.429	Epsilon	+	+	✓
(US) B.1.526	Iota	+	+	✓
India B.1.617.2	Delta	++++	++++#	✓

@erictopol

*Relative transmissibility to B.1.1.7 appears to be 40-50% higher than alpha
^Effectiveness from real world evidence vs. severe illness, not all vaccines are effective vs all variants, and importance of 2-doses, especially for B.1.617.2 for which 1 dose of mRNA or AZ is only ~30% effective #That this variant requires 2-doses of vaccines to preserve their effectiveness, along with lab studies, suggest it is as immune evasive (and possibly more than) as B.1.351 (beta)

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/donald-trump-science-coronavirus-pandemic-health-government-and-politics-850b7a6ee1005596bb0f8b2bc6b79dd5

June 9

EXPLAINER: The US investigation into COVID-19 origins

Once dismissed by most public health experts and government officials, the hypothesis that COVID-19 leaked accidentally from a Chinese lab is now receiving scrutiny under a new U.S. investigation.

Experts say the 90-day review ordered on May 26 by President Joe Biden will push American intelligence agencies to collect more information and review what they already have. ...

Virologists also say it is unlikely that any definitive answer about virus origins will be possible in 90 days. The work to fully confirm origins and pathways of past viruses — such as the first SARS or HIV/AIDS — has taken years or decades.

A look at what is known about the U.S. investigation of the virus.

WHAT ARE INTELLIGENCE AGENCIES REVIEWING?

Biden ordered a review of what the White House said was an initial finding leading to **"two likely scenarios," an animal-to-human transmission or a lab leak.** The White House statement says two agencies in the 18-member intelligence community lean toward the hypothesis of a transmission in nature; another agency leans toward a lab leak.

One document drawing new attention is a State Department fact sheet published in the last days of Trump's administration. The memo **notes that the U.S. believes three researchers at a Wuhan, China, lab sought medical treatment for a respiratory illness in November 2019.** However, the report is not conclusive: The origin and severity of the staffers' illness is not known — and most people in China regularly go to hospitals, not primary-care physicians, for routine care.

The memo also pointed to **"gain of function" studies** — which in theory could enhance the lethality or transmissibility of a virus — **allegedly done at the Wuhan lab with U.S. backing**. However, National Institutes of Health Director Francis Collins has since adamantly denied that the U.S. supported any "gain-of-function" research on coronaviruses in Wuhan.

...

WHAT DO SCIENTISTS BELIEVE ABOUT VIRUS ORIGINS?

The most compelling argument for investigating the possibility of a lab leak is not any new hard evidence, but rather the fact that another pathway for virus spread has not been 100% confirmed.

"The great probability is still that this virus came from a wildlife reservoir," said Arinjay Banerjee, a virologist at the Vaccine and Infectious Disease Organization in Saskatchewan, Canada. He pointed to the fact that **spillover events – when viruses jump from animals to humans – are common in nature**, and that scientists already know of two similar beta coronaviruses that evolved in bats and caused epidemics when humans were infected, SARS1 and MERS.

However, the case is not completely closed. "There are probabilities, and there are possibilities," said Banerjee. "Because nobody has identified a virus that's 100% identical to SARS-CoV-2 in any animal, there is still room for researchers to ask about other possibilities."

HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE TO CONFIRM THE ORIGIN OF A VIRUS?

Confirming with 100% certainty the origin of a virus is often not fast, easy, or always even possible.

For example, scientists never confirmed the origin of smallpox before the disease was eradicated through a global vaccination program. ...

https://www.reuters.com/world/india/india-records-6148-deaths-covid-19-past-24-hours-2021-06-10/

June 10

Indian state sharply raises COVID-19 death toll prompting call for wide review

An Indian state has raised its COVID-19 death toll sharply higher after the discovery of thousands of unreported cases, lending weight to suspicion that India's overall death tally is significantly more than the official figure.

Indian hospitals ran out of beds and life-saving oxygen during a devastating second wave of coronavirus in April and May and people died in parking lots outside hospitals and at their homes.

Many of those deaths were not recorded in COVID-19 tallies, doctors and health experts say.

India has the second-highest tally of COVID-19 infections in the world after the United States, with 29.2 million cases and 359,676 deaths, according to health ministry data.

But the discovery of several thousand unreported deaths in the state of Bihar has raised suspicion that many more coronavirus victims have not been included in official figures.

The health department in **Bihar, one of India's poorest states, revised its total COVID-19 related death toll to more than 9,429 from about 5,424 on Wednesday.**

The newly reported deaths had occurred last month and state officials were investigating the lapse, a district health official said, blaming the oversight on private hospitals.

"These deaths occurred 15 days ago and were only uploaded now in the government portal. Action will be taken against some of the private hospitals," said the official, who declined to be identified as he is not authorised to speak to the media.

Health experts say they believe both coronavirus infections and deaths are being significantly undercounted across the country partly because test facilities are rare in rural areas, where two-thirds of Indians live, and hospitals are few and far between.

Many people have fallen ill and died at home without being tested for the coronavirus.

'WIDESPREAD PROBLEM'

As crematoriums struggled to handle the wave of deaths over the past two months, many families placed bodies in the holy Ganges river or buried them in shallow graves on its sandbanks.

Those people would likely not have been registered as COVID victims.

"Under-reporting is a widespread problem, not necessarily deliberate, often because of inadequacies," Rajib Dasgupta, head of the Centre of Social Medicine and Community Health at New Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru University, told Reuters.

"In the rural context, whatever states may say or claim, testing is not simple, easy or accessible," Dasgupta said.

Overall, India's cases and deaths have fallen steadily in the past weeks after a surge from mid-March.

The official total of cases stood at 29.2 million on Thursday after rising by 94,052 in the previous 24 hours, while total fatalities were at 359,676, according to data from the health ministry.

The New York Times estimated deaths based on death counts over time and infection fatality rates and put India's toll at 600,000 to 1.6 million.

The government dismissed those estimates as exaggerated. But the main opposition Congress party said that other states must follow ...

Return to Timeline

https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/worldwide-graphs/#total-deaths

Select live link for current number

June 11

Death toll from coronavirus tops 3,800,000

https://www.sciencenews.org/article/coronavirus-covid-vaccine-booster-shot-variant-immunity

June 11

Here's what you should know about COVID-19 vaccine booster shots

... Studies are uncovering evidence that most people develop immune memory to the coronavirus. Ellebedy has found signs of antibody memory, for instance, in people who recovered from an infection. **People who had mild COVID-19 had long-lived antibody-producing immune cells in the bone marrow 11 months after infection**, he and colleagues reported May 24 in Nature. These cells continue to make antibodies against the virus long after it has left the body, providing protection if a person is exposed again.

Evidence is building that the vaccines offer similar, if not better, protection. In that case, boosters might not be needed for some time. In the last update from vaccine developers, "things looked pretty good," Lyke says. People who received Moderna's shot still have high levels of antibodies six months after getting the second dose, researchers reported in April. And Pfizer's jab has an efficacy of 91.3 percent against COVID-19 symptoms after six months, the pharmaceutical company announced April 1 in a news release.

Still, "we don't know how any of these COVID-19 vaccines perform past the one-year mark," Lyke says. The earliest trials that tested whether the vaccines prompt an immune response are just now reaching that point, and researchers are following up with participants (SN: 7/21/20).

Coronavirus variants could make booster shots more likely.

Even if the protection provided by the immune system is long-lasting, **viruses like the coronavirus are adept at evading those responses.** Case in point: the emergence of viral variants that can make COVID-19 vaccines less effective than they are against the original version of the virus (SN: 5/11/21).

"I don't think we would be talking about potentially boosting" if it weren't for the variants, Ellebedy says. "What we are seeing so far is that the vaccine is really robust, so why would we even need a booster if the virus doesn't change?"

Available vaccines still protect people from the worst of COVID-19, even if they're infected by one of the circulating variants. But that might not always be the case. "There may be a future variant that we're unaware of that may come down and surprise us," Lyke says. Still, **multiple COVID-19 vaccines are flexible in design and can easily be adapted to tackle new variants** (SN: 1/27/21). Then, it becomes a matter of manufacturing the doses.

Some companies, including **Pfizer and Moderna, are already testing booster shots to fight emerging variants, in particular, the beta variant that first emerged in South Africa**. Early results from Moderna hint that people who received a booster shot that uses the version of a viral protein from the beta variant had antibodies that were better at stopping the variant from infecting cells compared with people who got a third dose of the original vaccine.

Still, one question is what the best variant booster might look like, says Jerome Kim, a vaccinologist and director-general of the International Vaccine Institute in Seoul, South Korea. Researchers around the globe meticulously monitor circulating influenza strains, for example, to figure out which strain or strains should be included in flu vaccines. In the future, experts may need to keep an eye on the coronavirus in a similar way.

Low vaccination rates worldwide may also make booster shots more likely.

As countries like the United States begin to emerge from the worst of the pandemic, there are many others lagging behind in vaccinations (SN: 2/26/21). That's in part because wealthy countries have bought ...

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/europe-russia-coronavirus-pandemic-health-73f9ea558bd9e5fe276ee33e28691067

June 12

Moscow orders new restrictions as COVID-19 infections soar

MOSCOW (AP) — **Moscow**'s mayor on Saturday ordered a week off for some workplaces and imposed restrictions on many businesses to fight coronavirus **infections** that **have more than doubled in the past week.**

The national coronavirus taskforce reported 6,701 new cases of infection in Moscow, compared with 2,936 on June 6. **Nationally, the daily infection tally has spiked by nearly half** over the past week, to 13,510.

After several weeks of lockdown as the pandemic spread in the spring of 2020, Moscow eased restrictions and did not reimpose any during subsequent case increases. But because of the recent sharp rise, "it is impossible not to react to such a situation," Mayor Sergei Sobyanin said.

He ordered that **enterprises that do not normally work on weekends remain closed for the next week while continuing to pay employees. In addition, food courts and children's play areas in shopping centers are to close for a week beginning Sunday, and restaurants and bars must limit their service to takeout from 11 p.m. to 6 a.m.**

Earlier in the week, city authorities said **enforcement of mask- and glove-wearing on mass transit, in stores and in other public places would be strengthened and that violators could face fines** of up to 5,000 rubles ($70).

Although Russia was the first country to deploy a coronavirus vaccine, its use has been relatively low; many Russians are reluctant to get vaccinated.

President Vladimir Putin on Saturday said 18 million Russians have **received the vaccine — about 12% of the population**.

For the entire pandemic period, the task force has reported nearly 5.2 million infections in the country of about 146 million people, and 126,000 deaths. However, a report from the state statistics agency Rosstat on Friday found more than 144,000 virus-related deaths last year alone.

The statistics agency, unlike the taskforce, counts fatalities in which coronavirus infection was present or suspected but is not the main cause of death.

The agency's report found **about 340,000 more people died in 2020 than in 2019**; it did not give details of the causes of the higher year-on-year death toll. The higher death toll and a lower number of births combined to make an overall population decline of 702,000, about twice the decline in 2019, Rosstat said.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russia

Russia is the largest country in the world, covering over 17 million square kilometres (6.6×106 sq mi), and encompassing more than **one-eighth of Earth's inhabited land area.**

It extends across eleven time zones, and has borders with sixteen sovereign nations. It has a population of 146.2 million; and is the **most populous country in Europe**, and the **ninth-most populous country in the world.**

Return to Timeline

https://www.cbsnews.com/news/covid-vaccine-houston-texas-hospital-lawsuit-dismissed/?ftag=CNM-00-10aac3a

June 13

Federal judge dismisses lawsuit from Texas hospital employees over COVID vaccine requirement

... Nearly 200 employees at Houston Methodist were suspended without pay last week for their failure to get fully vaccinated, per the hospital system's requirements.

Of the 178 suspended employees, 117 signed onto the lawsuit, which argued that requiring workers to receive the COVID-19 vaccines "requires the employee to subject themselves to medical experimentation as a prerequisite to feeding their families," likening them to "guinea pigs."

U.S. district judge Lynn N. Hughes said in his ruling that claims that the vaccines are dangerous are "false, and it is also irrelevant." Hughes noted that **Texas law "only protects employees from being terminated for refusing to commit an act carrying criminal penalties to the worker," and that receiving a COVID-19 vaccine "is not an illegal act."**

Hughes also wrote in his ruling that the hospital's requirement does not violate federal law or public policy, and took issue with the lawsuit comparing the requirement to get vaccinated with Nazi medical experiments during the Holocaust.

"Equating the injection requirement to medical experimentation in concentration camps is reprehensible," Hughes wrote. "Nazi doctors conducted medical experiments on victims that caused pain, mutilation, permanent disability, and in many cases, death."
In response to the ruling, attorney and conservative activist Jared Woodfill said, "We took the position that it shouldn't be dismissed for a whole host of reasons and we believe that forcing an individual to participate in a vaccine trial is illegal."

"This is the first battle in a long fight," Woodfill added. "There are going to be many battles fought. Not just in this courtroom, but in courtrooms all across the state. There are battles that are going to be fought in the higher courts, the 5th Circuit, the Texas Supreme Court, even the United States Supreme Court. So this is just one battle in a larger war. It's the first round, if you will."

Houston Methodist, which is comprised of one medical center and six community hospitals, had initially offered vaccinated employees an extra $500 back in March. At the same time, the health system was clear that, eventually, the shots would no longer be voluntary. Houston Methodist then set a June 7 deadline for all employees to get fully vaccinated. The health system said all unvaccinated workers will be terminated on June 21.

As of Monday, nearly 25,000 employees had been fully inoculated against COVID-19. Two employees who worked in management chose to leave rather than receive the vaccine. Jennifer Bridges, a registered nurse, started a petition against the the policy and is leading the lawsuit against Houston Methodist.

https://apnews.com/article/england-europe-g-7-summit-coronavirus-pandemic-health-c11a3d9dcbcd3655d7578ea20e7efc1d

June 14

As infections rise, England braces for delay in reopenings

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson is expected to disappoint many people across England later Monday by saying that **restrictions on social contact will remain for a few more weeks because of rising infections due to the delta variant.**

The coronavirus variant **first found in India is estimated by some to be at least 60% more contagious than the previous dominant strain**. British scientists have urged the prime minister to err on the side of caution and postpone plans to lift most coronavirus restrictions in England on June 21. There is **growing speculation that the rules will stay in effect until July 19.**

For businesses, particularly those in hospitality and entertainment, any delays to what has been dubbed by the British media as “Freedom Day” will be a massive disappointment. **A delay will be a particularly bitter pill for nightclubs, as they have not been allowed to reopen since March 2020.**

The expected delay will also likely impact how many fans are allowed into the Wimbledon tennis tournament as well as European Championship soccer matches at Wembley Stadium, which will host the tournament’s semi-finals and final.

Many businesses, including many pubs and theaters, have remained closed despite the recent easing in restrictions as the reduced capacities allowed have meant it has not been financially viable.
...
The speed at which new coronavirus infections cases have been rising has piled the pressure on Johnson to delay the reopening so more people can get vaccinated. Argar said 10 million second jabs would go into arms of people over the month, providing them with high protection against the delta variant.

Professor Andrew Hayward, an epidemiologist from University College London who is a member of a group advising the government, said removing remaining restrictions could “fan the flames” of rising infections. He compared the process to driving a car around a bend without knowing what was around the corner.

“I think it’s clear we will have a substantial third wave of infections, the really big question is how much that wave of infections is going to translate into hospitalizations,” Hayward told the BBC.

On Sunday, the British government reported 7,490 new confirmed cases, one of the highest daily numbers since the end of February. Daily infections have increased threefold over the past few weeks but are still way down from the nearly 70,000 daily cases recorded in January.

Many blame the Conservative government for the spike in infections, saying it acted too slowly to impose the strictest quarantine requirements on everyone arriving from India, which has endured a catastrophic resurgence of the virus.

Across Europe, many countries, including France, have tightened restrictions for British travelers to prevent the delta variant from spreading.

The U.K.’s vaccine rollout has won plaudits as one of the world’s speediest and most coherent. As of Sunday, **around 62% of the British population had received one shot, while about 44% had gotten two jabs.**

The government aims to offer every adult in the U.K. one vaccine dose by the end of July. The devolved administration in Wales said it will have offered one jab to every adult by Monday, six weeks ahead of schedule.

The rapid rollout of vaccines and a strict months-long lockdown helped drive down the number of virus-related deaths in the U.K. in recent ...

Return to Timeline

https://www.bloomberg.com/news/newsletters/2021-06-15/novavax-covid-19-vaccine-could-become-a-booster-shot-vs-coronavirus

June 15

Novavax vaccine 93% effective against variants of concern

The success of a large trial of Novavax's Covid-19 vaccine candidate not only suggested that it will likely add to the supply of coronavirus vaccines, but positioned it as a potential promising technology to use for booster shots.

The shot was 90% effective at preventing symptomatic Covid and 100% effective at preventing moderate and severe symptoms, U.S.-based Novavax said Monday. **It was also 93% effective against variants of concern**, according to results from a secondary analysis that mostly included cases of the alpha variant predominant in the U.S.

The data **"clearly position Novavax as a viable alternative to mRNA vaccines,"** Kelechi Chikere, an analyst at Jefferies, wrote in a note. Over time, Novavax's vaccine **could become a "universal booster" due to its high efficacy and low rate of side effects**, according to the note.

The vaccine is based on a recombinant protein technology, also used in the candidate developed by Sanofi and GlaxoSmithKline. At over 90%, the overall efficacy of the vaccine is similar to reported rates for messenger RNA shots developed by partners Pfizer and BioNTech as well as Moderna's.

In the U.S., the vaccine may be primarily used as a booster, Novavax executives said, citing the low rate of side effects and **ability to ship at refrigerator temperatures.** That could be a valuable addition to the vaccine arsenal.

Novavax's Covid vaccine
Photographer: Alastair Grant/AP

https://www.cnn.com/2021/06/16/health/us-coronavirus-wednesday/index.html

June 16

The Delta variant accounts for nearly 10% of COVID-19 cases in the US

As US states lift more coronavirus restrictions, experts are worried people who aren't fully vaccinated could contribute to further spread of the virus.

The Delta variant, first reported in India, currently accounts for nearly 10% of coronavirus cases in the US, according to the CDC.

With concerns it could become the dominant strain soon, medical experts are underscoring the importance of full vaccination.

“I'm worried about those who are unvaccinated," US Surgeon General Vivek Murthy told CNN Tuesday, noting the Delta variant "is rapidly increasing here in the United States.”

The CDC has determined the Delta variant is a "variant of concern," a designation given to strains of the virus that scientists believe are more transmissible or can cause more severe disease.

The Delta variant "appears to be significantly more transmissible than even the Alpha variant or the UK variant, which is now dominant in the United States," Murthy told CNN.

"The second reason it's concerning is that **there is some data to indicate that it may in fact also be more dangerous, may cause more severe illness. That still needs to be understood more clearly, but these are two important concerns and they explain in part ... why this is become the dominant variant in the U.K., where over 90% of cases are the Delta variant,"** Murthy said.

The good news is that vaccines appear to be effective against the Delta variant.

A new study by Public Health England found that **two doses of a coronavirus vaccine is "highly effective against hospitalization" caused by the Delta variant. The study found the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine is 96% effective against hospitalization after two doses.**

Murthy said there isn't enough data to indicate the effectiveness of Johnson & Johnson's one-dose vaccine in regards to the Delta variant, but the vaccine has shown it can help prevent hospitalizations and deaths when people are infected with other strains.

"The key is get vaccinated, get both doses," Murthy said. As of Tuesday, 43.9% of the total US population was fully vaccinated while 52.6% has received at least one dose of a vaccine, according to the CDC.

This comes on the heels of the US surpassing 600,000 deaths since the coronavirus pandemic began, according to data compiled by Johns Hopkins University. That means about one in every 550 people in the US has died from the virus.

https://apnews.com/article/europe-lifestyle-travel-coronavirus-pandemic-health-efe1f93a7e0c5605dbabb95ac915327a

June 16

EU members agree to lift travel restrictions on US tourists

BRUSSELS (AP) — The European Union is recommending that its 27 member countries start lifting restrictions on tourists from the United States.

EU members agreed Wednesday to add the U.S. to the list of countries for which they should gradually remove restrictions on non-essential travel. The move was adopted during a meeting in Brussels of permanent representatives to the bloc.

The recommendation is non-binding, and national **governments have authority to require test results or vaccination records and to set other entry conditions.**

The EU has no unified COVID-19 tourism or border policy, but has been working for months on a joint digital travel certificate for those vaccinated, freshly tested, or recently recovered from the virus. EU lawmakers endorsed the plan last week.

The free certificates, which will contain a QR code with advanced security features, will allow people to move between European countries without having to quarantine or undergo extra coronavirus tests upon arrival.

Several EU countries have already begun using the system, including Belgium, Spain, Germany, Greece, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Denmark and Poland. The rest are expected to start using it July 1.

It's mainly meant for EU citizens, but Americans and others can obtain the certificate too — if they can convince authorities in an EU country they're entering that they qualify for one. And the lack of an official U.S. vaccination certification system may complicate matters.

Some EU countries have already started allowing in American visitors, though. On the other hand, Belgium's Prime Minister Alexander De Croo said this week a careful and phased-in approach should remain the rule.

"Let's look at science and let's look at the progress. Let's look at the numbers and when it's safe, we will do it," De Croo said. "The moment that we see that a big part of the population is double-vaccinated and can prove that they are safe, travel will pick up again. And I would expect that over the course of this summer."

In addition to the U.S., the representatives of EU nations added five other countries — North Macedonia, Albania, Serbia, Lebanon and Taiwan — to the tourist travel list. The European Council updates the list based on epidemiological data. It gets reviewed every two weeks.

The representatives also decided to remove a reciprocity clause for the special administrative regions of China, Macau and Hong Kong.

The recommendations are expected to be formalized on Friday.

Return to Timeline

https://www.fiercepharma.com/pharma/large-u-k-trial-regeneron-s-antibody-cocktail-reduced-mortality-some-hospitalized-patients?mkt_tok=Mjk0LU1RRi0wNTYAAAF9tZOcDhHLUwgnjcERbZHqMuUQUC4TguBznsHuZ8gG47dN1NlroWOTPdrCxkFSOQdKGi6st2DzMKgwmlrcpVPnrz2xNYEJ9MC8YD841t28igJFgeE&mrkid=936491

June 17

Regeneron's COVID-19 antibodies cut deaths in some hospitalized patients

Antibody treatments have shown little success in helping COVID-19 patients with severe disease. But a large study of hospitalized patients reveals that **Regeneron's antibody cocktail can reduce the chance of death in patients who haven't produced their own antibody responses to the disease.**

The 9,785-patient study, conducted in the U.K., showed that **among those who produced no natural antibody response, REGEN-COV reduced the risk of death by 20%.** The data could open up a new group of patients for the antibody cocktail, giving some new oomph to sales that have recently surged.

For patients who had developed antibodies, the treatment didn't work at all, suggesting that antibody testing would be useful for all hospitalized COVID-19 patients, trial investigator and Oxford professor Martin Landray told reporters in a conference call on Tuesday.

"People have been very, very skeptical that any treatment against this particular virus would work by the time people get to the hospital," Landray said. "If you haven't cleared the virus, if you haven't raised antibodies of your own, you really would benefit from getting some in an infusion."

Additionally, among the same group of patients—known as seronegative for their lack of antibodies—**REGEN-COV reduced the average hospital stay by four days and decreased the chance of a patient requiring a ventilator.**

"There are ways of testing the antibody levels," Landray said. "The tests are relatively straightforward, but they're not widely done because there hasn't been much purpose to it. Now we've got a very definite purpose."

The FDA granted REGEN-COV—a combination of monoclonal antibody treatments casirivimab and imdevimab—emergency authorization for patients with mild to moderate COVID-19 in November of last year. It was slow to gain acceptance because of its hefty price tag and the difficulty of getting patients with mild symptoms to leave home for infusion treatments.

But with REGEN-COV performing well in other trials and recently receiving an expansion of its FDA green light to include a lower dose and the option of delivering it by subcutaneous injection, the drug has been gaining users. Regeneron plans to take the new data to the FDA for yet another expansion, R&D chief George Yancopoulos said in a statement.

...

In the recent study, dubbed the Recovery Trial, half of the patients were given REGEN-COV and half received standard care. Roughly two-thirds of the patients were ... seropositive, the other third seronegative. The risk of death in those who were seropositive was 15% compared to 30% for those who were seronegative. But **Regenron's cocktail reduced that 30% figure by a fifth, to 24%.**

https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2021.06.15.21258542v1

Return to Timeline

https://www.pnas.org/content/118/26/e2108044118

June 18

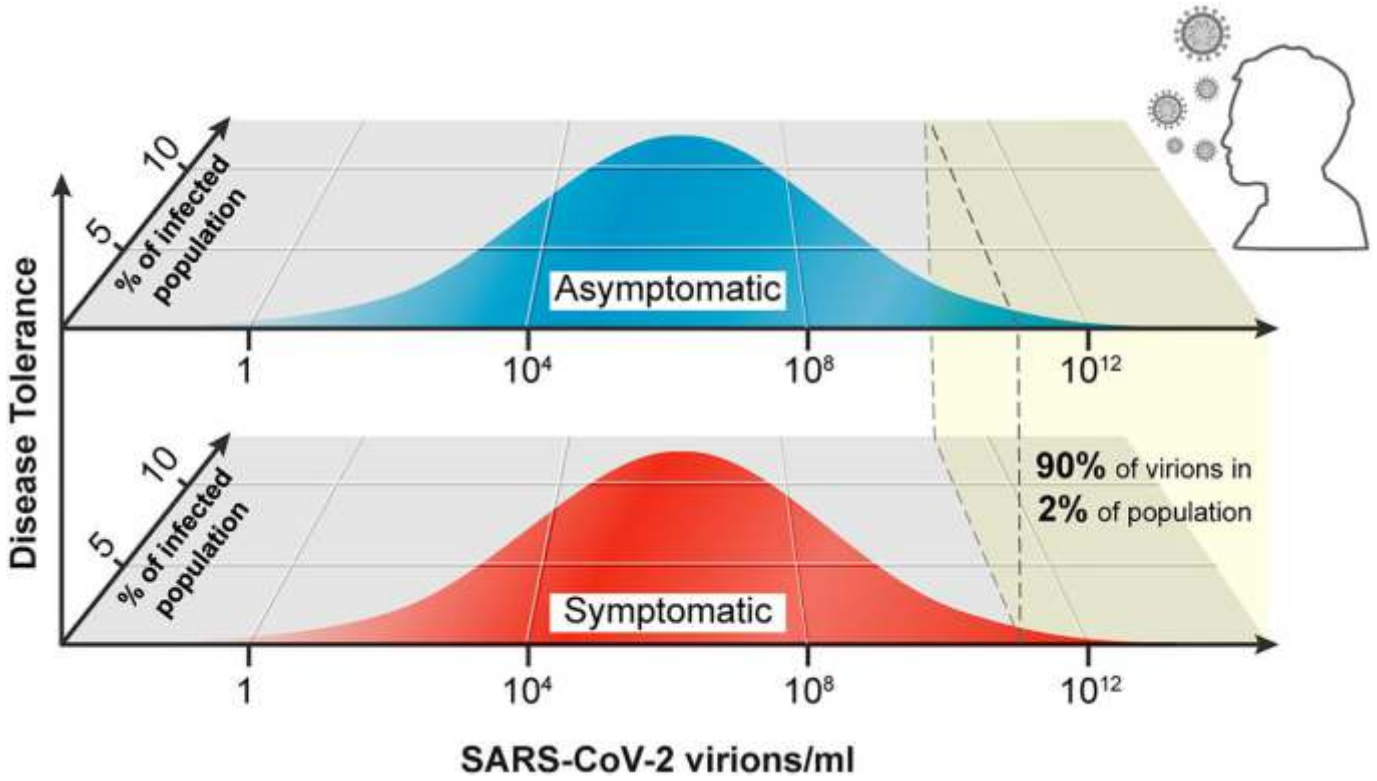
Lessons from the US Boulder, Colorado effort to screen for SARS-CoV-2

... SARS-CoV-2 viral load (x axis) among RT-PCR–positive individuals who were either asymptomatic (blue) or hospitalized with COVID-19 (red). The z axis indicates the percent of each cohort with a given viral load. Yellow shading indicates the top 2% of each cohort with the highest viral load; these individuals account for 90% of all virions in the cohorts. Lack of difference between asymptomatic and symptomatic viral load distributions indicates that these two groups differ in the ability to maintain health in the face of the same burden of SARS-CoV-2. This ability, or defense mechanism, has been called disease tolerance, and is shown along the y axis. ...

"2% of individuals harbored 90% of the virus"

"A single individual harbored more than 5% of the virions"

No viral load difference between symptomatic and asymptomatic



Return to Timeline

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/994839/Variants_of_Concern_VOC_Technical_Briefing_16.pdf

June 18

SARS-CoV-2 variants of concern and variants under investigation in England

... This report has been published to continue to share detailed surveillance of Delta (VOC21APR-02, B.1.617.2). A separate report is published covering our routine data on all other variants of concern and variants under investigation. These additional specialist technical briefings represent early data and analysis on an emerging variant and findings have a high level of uncertainty.

Principal changes and findings this week are:

- by combining genotyping and sequencing, more than 80% of cases in England now have a variant test undertaken
- the most recent data show that the **Delta variant comprises 91% of sequenced cases**
- deaths are now presented for those cases which have completed the 28-day follow-up period – the crude case fatality rate remains lower for Delta than other variants at present; however, mortality is a lagged indicator, which means that the number of cases who have completed 28 days of follow up is very low – therefore, it is too early to provide a formal assessment of the case fatality of Delta, stratified by age, compared to other variants
- **secondary attack rates remain higher for Delta** than Alpha – a small reduction in secondary attack rates is observed for Delta in recent weeks
- current evidence suggests vaccine effectiveness against hospitalisation is maintained for Delta
- the most common settings for reported exposures were education settings, for both Alpha and Delta variants – in the latest week presented, hospitalitysettings were a larger proportion of all common exposures reported by cases with both Alpha and Delta variants, and the proportion of common exposures related to travel also increasedThe risk assessment for Delta is published separately and has been updated this week. As Delta is now the dominant variant in the UK, epidemiological data in the weekly surveillance report is also relevant and is available. ...

https://apnews.com/article/india-coronavirus-pandemic-lifestyle-education-health-8aa16f1956d3ee218f9bc0dd701ab200

June 19

Virus surge claims brightest minds at Indian universities

SRINAGAR, India (AP) — Sajad Hassan sat at his professor's hospital bedside for three nights, doing most of the talking as his friend and mentor breathed through an oxygen mask and struggled with a suspected COVID-19 infection.

Both were confident the 48-year-old academic would be heading home soon, until a coronavirus test came back positive and physicians ordered him moved to the isolation ward — known by many at the university hospital as the "dark room" because so few who entered came out alive.

"I could visibly see fear in his eyes," Hassan recalled.

Two days later Dr. Jibraeil was dead, one of nearly 50 professors and non-teaching staff at AMU, one of India's top universities, who fell victim to the coronavirus as it ripped through through the country in April and May. AMU's tragedy was repeated across India as schools suffered similar blows to their faculty, and the loss of their knowledge — and in many cases friendship and guidance — has been devastating to the academic community.

"The virus took away our brightest minds," said Shafey Kidwai, spokesman for AMU, or Aligarh Muslim University.

One of the oldest universities in India, AMU has produced generations of politicians, jurists and scholars. The university has been the seat of modern education for many Muslims in the Indian subcontinent and an intellectual cradle for the community. It was primarily founded to educate India's Muslims, who now make up about 14% of the country's population.

Over the last two months, local newspapers and the university's Facebook page were filled with the obituaries of its professors — all lost to the pandemic.

The zoologist "touched the lives of a generation of his students." The physician was "an exceptional clinician, teacher and human being, who mentored many generations." The psychologist was a "vibrant presence " and was "known for conducting high-quality research."

And Jibraeil, an assistant professor of history who went by only one name, was a "dedicated teacher, who loved his work and cared deeply about students."

At the height of the surge, Kidwai recalled seeing colleagues carried off in ambulances to the hospital; some returning later to be buried in the over century-old campus graveyard, which ran out of space and fresh graves had to be dug over old ones.

"It was deeply harrowing," he said.

There is no official count of how many professors have died during the pandemic, but many top Indian universities have reported situations similar to that at AMU. Delhi University, in India's capital, and affiliated colleges lost 35 teachers. In Jamia Millia Islamia, another university in the capital, four professors and 15 staff members fell to the virus.

The pandemic has been equally devastating for government schoolteachers in some areas. More than 1,600 died in Uttar Pradesh, one of India's 28 states, where many are thought to have become infected after being forced to staff polling stations, over their objections, for an election held during the surge.

The academics were just a small part of the ghastly scenes that played out across India in April and May as its health system collapsed under a sudden, severe spike in cases that caught the government unprepared.

Some died in ambulances. Those who made it to hospitals were often left gasping for breath amid dramatic shortages of oxygen and ...

https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2021/06/covid-b-1-617-2-delta-variant-what-we-know.html

June 20

What is known about the Delta (B.1.617.2 aka India) Variant

The B.1.617.2 coronavirus variant originally discovered in India last December has now become one the most — if not the most — worrisome strain of the coronavirus circulating globally. **Recent research suggests it may be the most transmissible** variant yet and has fueled numerous waves of the pandemic around the world. B.1.617.2 has already s**pread to at least 62 countries**. The strain undoubtedly contributed to the massive wave of cases that has i**nundated India in recent months, and makes up more than 90 percent of new cases in the U.K. and about 10 percent of new infections in the U.S.** It's driven a resurgence of infections, with the U.K. racking up more than 11,000 daily cases for the first time in nearly four months on June 17. On top of that, it may be more likely to infect people who are only partially vaccinated than other strains; low-income and minority communities have a deficit in vaccinations, making them all the more vulnerable. Below is what we know about B.1.617.2 — also known as the Delta variant.

...

The Delta variant may soon be the dominant strain in the U.S.

The Delta variant is quickly on its way to becoming the dominant strain in the U.S., overtaking the Alpha variant, which has been the most prevalent in the States for the past two months. As of June 13, the Delta variant accounted for about ten percent of new infections in the country. According to Scott Gottlieb, former commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration, that share is **doubling every two weeks**. "That doesn't mean that we're going to see a sharp uptick in infections, but it does mean that this is going to take over," Gottlieb told CBS's Face the Nation. "I think the risk is really to the fall – that this could spike a new epidemic heading into the fall."

...

The Delta strain has already become dominant in the U.K. — and delayed the end of the country's lockdown

As of June 11, the Delta variant accounted for more than 90 percent — and as much as 96 percent — of all new COVID-19 cases in the U.K. Adds the Guardian, a recent Public Health England report "further revealed that **cases of the virus are doubling between every 4.5 and 11.5 days**, depending on the region of England, and that it has about a 60 percent increased risk of household transmission compared with the Alpha variant."

The rise of the variant has also delayed the country's full reopening. Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced on June 14 that the easing of coronavirus restrictions originally scheduled for June 21 was being pushed back to July 19 (at the earliest).

The rapid spread of B.1.617.2 has led the U.K. to attempt to speed up its vaccination campaign, particularly the second doses that many adults in Britain still have not received.

...

This is why allowing the coronavirus to spread and evolve unchecked is so dangerous

B.1.617.2 is yet more proof of both how SARS-CoV-2 continues to evolve and how that evolution is continuing to produce variants that are more dangerous than those that came before them. From the available evidence, **B.1.617.2 may be the most transmissible variant to yet spread in the world**, and thus poses the biggest risk to unvaccinated populations, and possibly also populations where most vaccine recipients have only received one dose. Scientists have good reasons to sound the alarm over it.

And the threat of any more dangerous COVID variant also raises the threat of more dangerous COVID variants which may evolve from it. **Vietnam's health ministry has announced that it has detected a variant which appears to be a hybrid of both B.1.1.7 and B.1.617.2 variants.** The country has only been able to give at least one dose ...

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/tokyo-2020-tokyo-olympics-olympic-games-health-coronavirus-pandemic-79196dd729929f217321900ad1a1931a

June 21

Tokyo Olympics to allow limit of 10,000 local fans in venues

... Organizers set a limit of 50% of capacity up to a maximum of 10,000 fans for all Olympic venues.
...
The decision contradicts the country's top medical adviser, Dr. Shigeru Omi, who recommended last week that the safest way to hold the Olympics would be without fans. He had previously called it "abnormal" to hold the Olympics during the pandemic.

The Tokyo Games are set to open on July 23.

Local organizing committee president Seiko Hashimoto said it was important to acknowledge the uncertainty around the pandemic during the games.

"We need to be very flexible. If there is any abrupt change in the situation, we will hold five-party meetings again to make other decisions," Hashimoto said. **"If there is an announcement of a state of emergency during the games, all the options like no-spectator games will be examined."**

Fans from abroad were banned several months ago. Officials say **local fans will be under strict rules. They will not be allowed to cheer, must wear masks, and are being told to go straight home afterward.**

Organizers say between 3.6-3.7 million tickets are in the hands of Japanese residents.

...
In recent polls, support seems to be increasing for holding the Olympics, though opposition is strong, depending how the question is worded. An Asahi newspaper poll of June 19-20 of almost 1,500 people showed 62% supported another postponement or cancellation of the games. But about one-third supported holding the Olympics, up from 14% in May in the same poll.

In the same survey, 83% said they "feel uneasy" that the Olympics might spread the virus. The poll said 53% wanted no fans and 42% said attendance should be limited.

The seven-day average for new infections in Tokyo is about 400 daily. The curve has flattened but health officials fear the Olympics and new variants will drive it up.

About 6.5% of Japanese are fully vaccinated, and 16.5% have had at least one shot, according to figures from the prime minister's office. More than 14,000 deaths in Japan have been attributed to COVID-19.

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-health-21c3695fa27b59d65f05f3ac71fdcf55

June 22

US hits encouraging milestones on virus deaths and shots

COVID-19 deaths in the **U.S. have dipped below 300 a day for the first time since the early days of the disaster in March 2020**, while the drive to put shots in arms hit another encouraging milestone Monday: **150 million Americans fully vaccinated.**

The coronavirus was the third leading cause of death in the U.S. in 2020, behind heart disease and cancer, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. But now, as the outbreak loosens its grip, **it has fallen down the list** of the biggest killers.

CDC data suggests that more Americans are dying every day from accidents, chronic lower respiratory diseases, strokes or Alzheimer's disease than from COVID-19.

The U.S. death toll stands at more than 600,000, while the worldwide count is close to 3.9 million, though the real figures in both cases are believed to be markedly higher.

About 45% of the U.S. population has been fully vaccinated, according to the CDC. Over 53% of Americans have received at least one dose of vaccine. But U.S. demand for shots has slumped, to the disappointment of public health experts.

Dr. Ana Diez Roux, dean of Drexel University's school of public health, said the dropping rates of infections and deaths are cause for celebration. But she cautioned that t**he virus still has a chance to spread and mutate given the low vaccination rates in some states, including Mississippi, Louisiana, Alabama, Wyoming and Idaho.**

"So far it looks like the vaccines we have are effective against the variants that are circulating," Diez Roux said. "But the more time the virus is jumping from person to person, the more time there is for variants to develop, and some of those could be more dangerous."

New cases are running at about 11,400 a day on average, down from over a quarter-million per day in early January. Average deaths per day are down to about 293, according to Johns Hopkins University, after topping out at over 3,400 in mid-January.

In New York, which suffered mightily in the spring of 2020, Gov. Andrew Cuomo tweeted on Monday that the state had 10 new deaths. At the height of the outbreak in the state, nearly 800 people a day were dying from the coronavirus.

Some states are faring worse than others. Missouri leads the nation in per-capita COVID-19 cases and is fourth behind California, Florida and Texas in the number of new cases per day over the past week despite its significantly smaller population.

The surge is being driven by new cases in a farming region in the northern part of the state and in the southwest corner, which includes the towns of Branson and Springfield. COVID-19 hospitalizations in southwest Missouri have risen 72% since the beginning of the month as of Friday.

The fall will bring new waves of infection, but they will be less severe and concentrated more in places with low vaccination rates, said Amber D'Souza, a professor of epidemiology at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

"So much depends on what happens over the summer and what happens with children," D'Souza said. "Anyone who is not vaccinated can become infected and transmit the virus."

Meanwhile, because of regulatory hurdles and other factors, President Joe Biden is expected to fall short of his commitment to share 80 million vaccine doses with the rest of the world by the end of June, officials said Monday.

Return to Timeline

https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/worldwide-graphs/#total-deaths

Select live link for current number

June 23

Death toll from coronavirus tops 3,900,000

Return to Timeline

https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/22/business/economy/china-vaccines-covid-outbreak.html

June 23

They Relied on Chinese Vaccines. Now They're Battling Outbreaks.

More than 90 countries are using Covid shots from China. Experts say recent infections in those places should serve as a cautionary tale in the global effort to fight the disease.

Mongolia promised its people a "Covid-free summer." **Bahrain** said there would be a "return to normal life." The tiny island nation of the **Seychelles** aimed to jump-start its economy.

All three put their faith, at least in part, in easily accessible Chinese-made vaccines, which would allow them to roll out ambitious inoculation programs when much of the world was going without.

But instead of freedom from the coronavirus, **all three countries are now battling a surge in infections.**

China kicked off its vaccine diplomacy campaign last year by pledging to provide a shot that would be safe and effective at preventing severe cases of Covid-19. Less certain at the time was how successful it and other vaccines would be at curbing transmission.

Now, **examples from several countries suggest that the Chinese vaccines may not be very effective at preventing the spread of the virus, particularly the new variants.** The experiences of those countries lay bare a harsh reality facing a postpandemic world: The degree of recovery may depend on which vaccines governments give to their people.

In the Seychelles, Chile, Bahrain and Mongolia, 50 to 68 percent of the populations have been fully inoculated, outpacing the United States, according to Our World in Data, a data tracking project. **All four ranked among the top 10 countries with the worst Covid outbreaks as recently as last week**, according to data from The New York Times. And **all four are mostly using shots made by two Chinese vaccine makers, Sinopharm and Sinovac Biotech.**

"If the vaccines are sufficiently good, we should not see this pattern," said Jin Dongyan, a virologist at the University of Hong Kong. "The Chinese have a responsibility to remedy this."

Scientists don't know for certain why some countries with relatively high inoculation rates are suffering new outbreaks. Variants, social controls that are eased too quickly and careless behavior after only the first of a two-shot regimen are possibilities. But the breakthrough infections could have lasting consequences.

In the United States, about 45 percent of the population is fully vaccinated, mostly with doses made by Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna. Cases have dropped 94 percent over six months.

Israel provided shots from Pfizer and has the second-highest vaccination rate in the world, after the Seychelles. The number of new daily confirmed Covid-19 cases per million in Israel is now around 4.95.

In the Seychelles, which relied mostly on Sinopharm, that number is more than 716 cases per million.

Disparities such as these could create a world in which three types of countries emerge from the pandemic — the wealthy nations that used their resources to secure Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna shots, the poorer countries that are far away from immunizing a majority of citizens, and then those that are fully inoculated but only partly protected.

China, as well as the more than 90 nations that have received the Chinese shots, may end up in the third group, contending with rolling lockdowns, testing and limits on day-to-day life for months or years to come. Economies could remain held back. And as more citizens question the efficacy of Chinese doses, persuading unvaccinated people to line up for shots may also become more difficult. ...

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/middle-east-russia-europe-lifestyle-coronavirus-pandemic-acd7478922c094cb2244692d7eed1385

June 24

Infections, deaths continue to soar in Russia

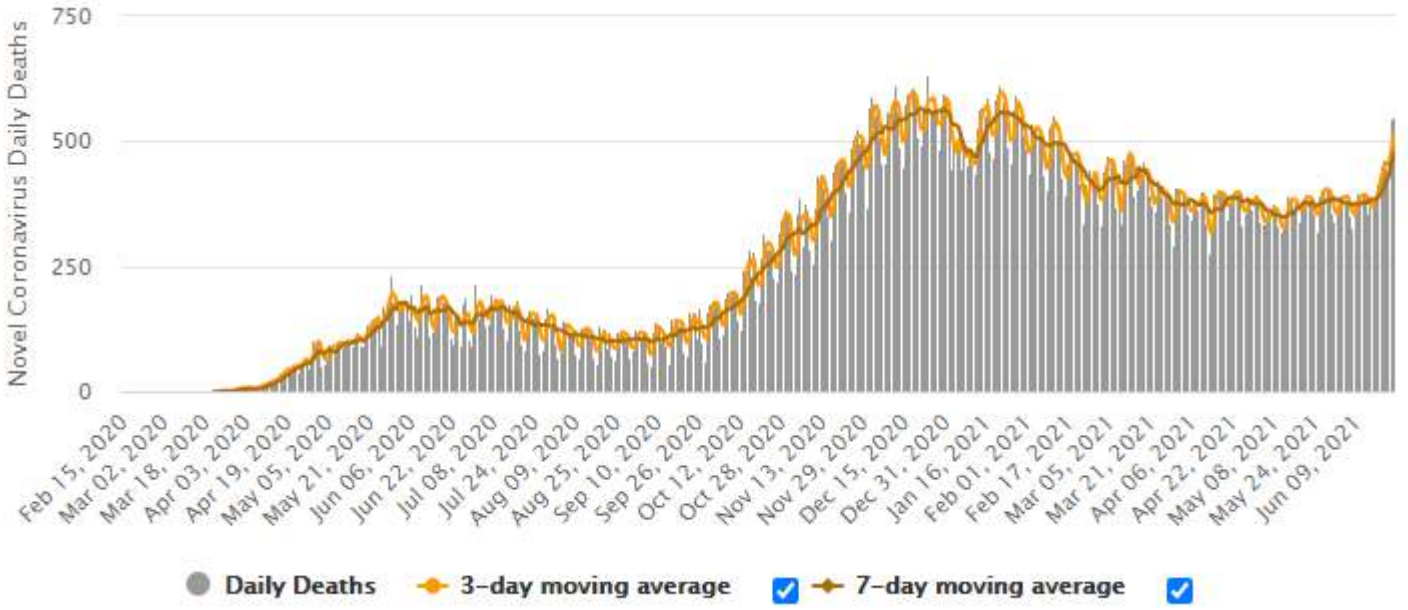
MOSCOW — Coronavirus infections continue to soar in Russia, with the authorities reporting **20,182 new cases on Thursday and 568 further deaths. Both tallies are the highest since late January.**

A surge in infections that hit Russia earlier this month comes as the authorities struggle to overcome widespread vaccine hesitancy and immunize its 146 million people. As of Wednesday, only 20.7 million — or **just 14% of the the population — have received at least one shot of the vaccine, while 16.7 million — 11% — have been fully immunized.**

In response to the soaring contagions, **authorities in 14 Russian regions have made vaccinations mandatory for certain groups of people, such as state officials, those employed in retail, healthcare, education, restaurants and other service-providing businesses**. In most of those regions, eligible companies are required to ensure vaccination of at least 60% of their staff in the coming months.

Daily Deaths

https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/country/russia/#graph-deaths-daily



Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-health-941fcf43d9731c76c16e7354f5d5e187

June 25

Nearly all COVID deaths in US are now among unvaccinated

... **“breakthrough” infections** in fully vaccinated people accounted for fewer than 1,200 of more than 853,000 COVID-19 hospitalizations. That’s **about 0.1%**.

And only **about 150 of the more than 18,000 COVID-19 deaths in May were in fully vaccinated people. That translates to about 0.8%**, or five deaths per day on average.

...

Deaths in the U.S. have plummeted from a peak of more than 3,400 day on average in mid-January, one month into the vaccination drive.

...

In Arkansas, which has one of the lowest vaccination rates in the nation, with only about 33% of the population fully protected, cases, hospitalizations and deaths are rising.

“It is sad to see someone go to the hospital or die when it can be prevented,” Gov. Asa Hutchinson tweeted as he urged people to get their shots.

In **Seattle’s King County**, the public health department found only three deaths during a recent 60-day period in people who were fully vaccinated. The rest, some **95% of 62 deaths, had had no vaccine or just one shot.**

...

In the **St. Louis** area, more than **90% of patients hospitalized with COVID-19 have not been vaccinated**, said Dr. Alex Garza, a hospital administrator who directs a metropolitan-area task force on the outbreak.

“The majority of them express some regret for not being vaccinated,” Garza said. “That’s a pretty common refrain that we’re hearing from patients with COVID.”

The stories of unvaccinated people dying may convince some people they should get the shots, but young adults — the group least likely to be vaccinated — may be motivated more by a desire to protect their loved ones, said David Michaels, an epidemiologist at George Washington University’s school of public health in the nation’s capital.

Others need paid time off to get the shots and deal with any side effects, Michaels said.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration this month began requiring health care employers, including hospitals and nursing homes, to provide such time off. But Michaels, who headed OSHA under President Barack Obama, said the agency should have gone further and applied the rule to meat and poultry plants and other food operations as well as other places with workers at risk.

...

https://www.cnn.com/2021/06/24/us/missouri-covid-19-delta-variant-vaccine/index.html

June 26

Missouri becomes hot spot for Delta variant fueling hospitalizations

... Missouri is seeing a concerning uptick in hospitalizations due to Covid-19's Delta variant, which originated in India. **In Springfield alone, there has been a 225% increase in hospital admissions since June 1**, according to the Springfield-Greene County Health Department

The Delta variant -- which has been found to be more transmissible than others -- now **accounts for about 29% of cases in Missouri**, more than any other state, according to data from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

And vaccination rates in Missouri remain below average, CDC data shows. **About 38% of the state's population is fully vaccinated, compared to nearly 46% of the US population overall.**

Vaccine outreach

With Springfield having less than 38% of people fully vaccinated, health officials are resorting to creative approaches to gain the trust of the community.

Health clinics along with the Springfield-Greene County Health Department have hosted vaccination clinics at fire stations, LGBTQ+ community centers and a local Juneteenth celebration. Local breweries have also hosted recurring events in which attendees can get a shot and a beer for free, motivation for some.
...
Those hospitalized now are younger in age than those affected during the winter surge.

"People in their late teens and even early 20s are being hospitalized and needing the use of ventilators," said Katie Towns, acting director of Springfield-Greene County Health Department.

The inversion in the spread of the variants is clearly reflected in the data, according to county health officials, as explained earlier in the week during a news conference.

"If you go back to mid-May, what we were seeing was 70% Delta variant, and about 24% Alpha variant. In June, the last three weeks, that has shifted greatly to 93% Delta variant and only 7% Alpha variant. That shift has likely been the cause of surge within our hospital systems," said Kendra Findley, administrator of community health and epidemiology at Springfield-Greene County Health Department.

More than half of those admitted to the two major hospitals in the Springfield area are from surrounding counties with limited health clinics. Those counties each have fully vaccinated rates below 20%. The national average is more than twice that figure, at 46%.

Dr. Robin Trotman, an infectious diseases expert at CoxHealth, is witnessing that hospital surge firsthand.

"It's nearly 100% of the people hospitalized with Covid pneumonia are unvaccinated. Now we do have vaccinated people who test positive, but they don't get severely ill," Trotman said.

For nurses, doctors and respiratory therapists on the front lines of the pandemic, it's an unnerving picture.

"When the staff's putting themselves at risk in these situations, and they feel like other people aren't willing to take the vaccine, despite their risk, that's, that's a hard one for some people to swallow," said Trotman.

https://apnews.com/article/bangkok-business-coronavirus-pandemic-health-f8ade99d1a516b44f11e82e0c9f6e14a

June 27

Bangkok, 9 provinces restrict movements to curb rising cases

BANGKOK (AP) — Faced with a sharp rise in coronavirus cases, the Thai capital on Sunday announced a **ban on indoor dining and gatherings of more than 20 people**, **in addition to the closure of construction sites** and the sealing off of workers' quarters in Bangkok and nine other provinces.

The measures will remain for 30 days.

Thailand reported 3,995 confirmed cases and 42 dead in the last 24 hours. The **numbers have doubled recently**, and health officials blame a lack of cooperation from migrant workers employed in construction and in factories.

"Camps were closed but workers sneaked out to markets and communities, and spread the disease," Apisamai Srirangson, spokesperson for the Center for COVID-19 Situation Administration, said Friday. She said that "bubble and seal" disease control measures had proved successful within 28 days in handling clusters in Samut Sakhon province, south of Bangkok, but not in the capital.

The situation has become critical as the number of **hospital beds in Bangkok for seriously ill COVID-19 patients is running short** despite the creation of several field hospitals. Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha said Friday that a proposal for a seven-day curfew for all of Bangkok has been rejected for the time being.

Under the new restrictions, **construction workers will be isolated in camps** in Bangkok and five neighboring provinces, and in the country's four southernmost provinces, all virus hotspots.

Department stores and malls in Bangkok can stay open until 9 p.m., but **food and drinks in restaurants are allowed only for takeaway. Seminars, meetings and parties are canceled.** If more clusters are discovered, the governor can seal off those communities.

Travelers from the 10 provinces, including Bangkok, will be isolated and quarantined.

Authorities, meanwhile, are planning to go ahead with a plan to allow fully vaccinated foreign tourists to visit the southern resort island of Phuket without undergoing a 14-day quarantine that is otherwise mandatory. Thailand is anxious to begin the recovery of its lucrative tourism industry, which has been devastated by the pandemic and consequent travel restrictions.

Thailand has administered around 8.66 million vaccine doses, with **around 9% of its 69 million people receiving at least one shot**. Critics charge that Prayuth's government failed to secure timely and adequate vaccine supplies. He says Thailand now has agreements that will ensure enough vaccine for about 70% of its population by the end of the year.

https://threadreaderapp.com/thread/1409186052334440452.html

June 28

Nevada has joined Missouri in becoming the epicenter of the Delta variant hit

Return to Timeline

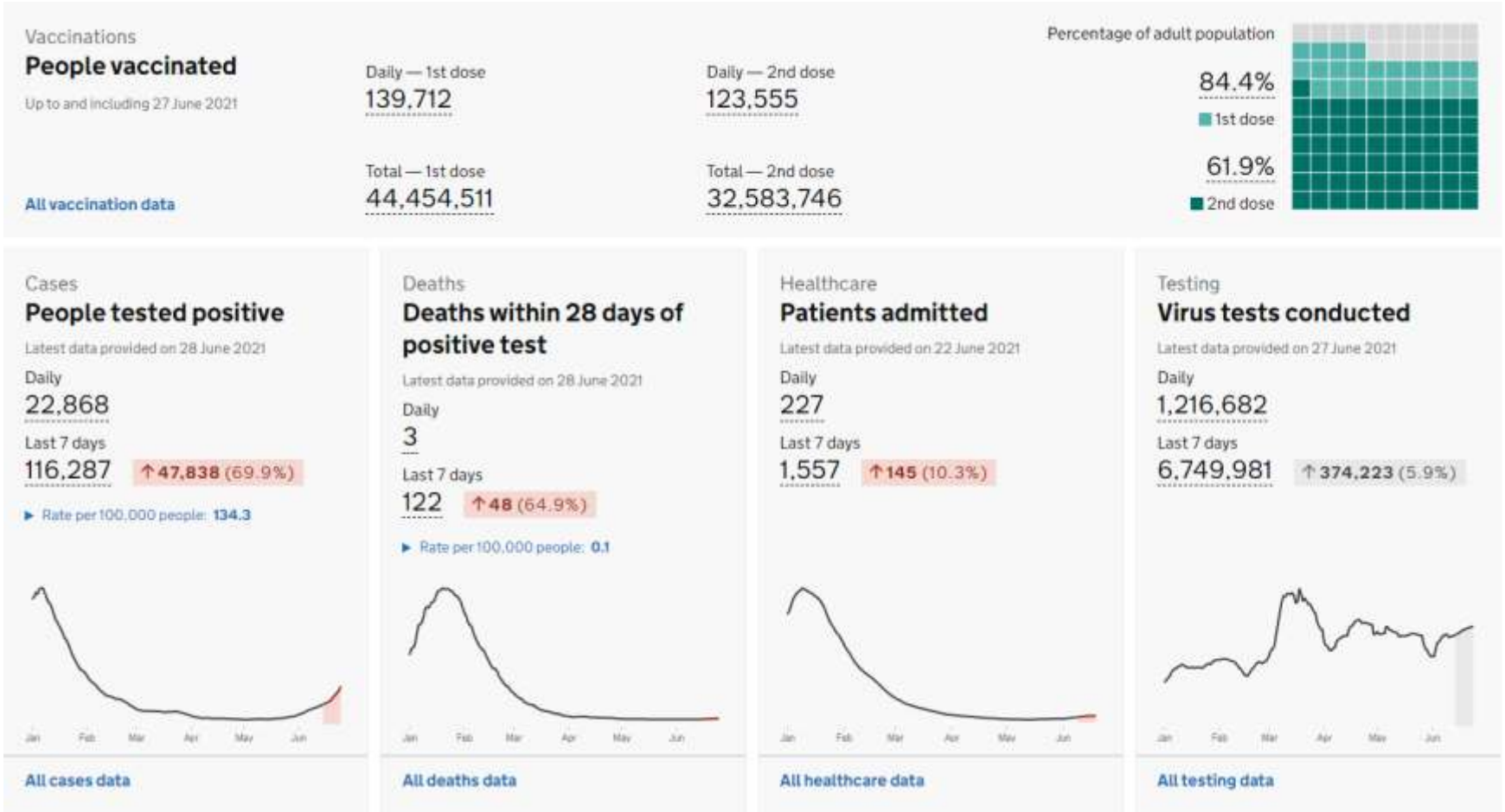
https://coronavirus.data.gov.uk/

June 29

UK cases rose 70%, but but only saw a 10% increase in hospitalizations

In the UK, the cases are rising (70% in past week) but only a small increase (10%) in hospitalizations.

Vaccinations Progress: 84% of adults have received 1st dose and 62% are fully vaccinated.



Return to Timeline

https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/health/2021/06/29/covid-variant-vaccines-pandemic-mask-wearing/7791412002/

June 30

WHO recommends masks even for fully vaccinated

The World Health Organization has urged fully vaccinated people to continue wearing masks indoors and practice social distancing as the delta variant surges in many parts of the world.

“People cannot feel safe just because they had the two doses. They still need to protect themselves,” said Dr. Mariangela Simao, WHO assistant director-general, during a news briefing Friday.

The Centers for Disease Control, however, told vaccinated Americans in May that they no longer needed to wear masks indoors. CDC officials pointed to the guidance Monday and gave no indication it would change, according to the New York Times.

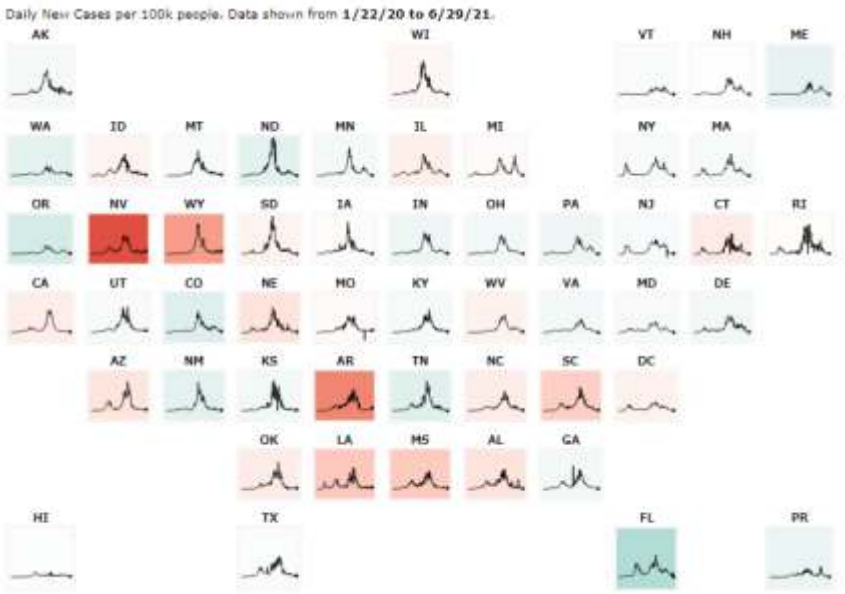
But some areas around the country are still urging vaccinated residents to wear masks indoors.

"Until we better understand how and to who the delta variant is spreading, everyone should focus on maximum protection," the Los Angeles County of Department Public Health said Monday. **The delta variant now accounts for 50% of active cases in Los Angeles, said officials Thursday, while it accounts for 1 in 5 of cases around the country.**

23 states had more cases in the latest week than in the week before, an analysis of Johns Hopkins University data* shows. 26 states had more deaths than a week earlier.

Select live link for current info

* https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/data/new-cases-50-states



https://apnews.com/article/middle-east-israel-coronavirus-pandemic-health-02cb24a60d6aa5d3fe0ebf713219e37f

July 1

Israel scrambles to curb jump in COVID infections

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — Israel, a world leader in coronavirus vaccinations, **reported its highest daily infection rate in three months** as it scrambles to contain the spread of the new delta variant.

Authorities are racing to vaccinate children and are considering tighter travel restrictions at the country's main airport.

The Health Ministry on Thursday reported 307 new cases on Wednesday, the highest in nearly three months and a rise from 293 newly-diagnosed cases a day earlier. **The health ministry reportedly expects those numbers to jump in coming days**, raising concerns that Israel is plunging back toward a crisis.

In recent months, Israel has reopened businesses, schools and event venues, lifting nearly all restrictions after it inoculated some 85% of the adult population. It's now seen as an early-warning system of sorts for other nations.

Prime Minister Naftali Bennett on Tuesday announced a drive to inoculate thousands of children by mid-month.

Though worrying, the trend still shows little uptick when it comes to deaths from the virus. In the past two weeks, the ministry recorded only one. In Israel, 5.1 million people, among its population of 9.3 million, have received the required double dose of vaccinations. Another 400,000 have received at least one dose.

Israel recorded its highest number of vaccinations of children **this week and has re-imposed a rule requiring people to wear masks indoors.** Bennett for the first time appointed a coronavirus commissioner to manage arrivals at the main gateway into Israel, Ben Gurion International Airport, which he called "a huge national vulnerability."

Interior Minister Ayelet Shaked on Wednesday said **officials are prepared to close the airport if the trend worsens.**

Israel's Haaretz newspaper reported that officials are considering bringing back the "Green Pass" system that differentiates between vaccinated and non-vaccinated citizens in access to certain venues and activities.

Israel's government **last week postponed the planned reopening of the country to vaccinated tourists** over concerns about the spread of the delta variant.

Israel was initially set to reopen its borders to vaccinated visitors on Thursday, after having largely closed the country during the pandemic. It had already started allowing groups of vaccinated tourists to enter in May.

But after a rise in infections over the past 10 days, the government pushed that date to Aug. 1.

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/middle-east-israel-coronavirus-pandemic-health-02cb24a60d6aa5d3fe0ebf713219e37f

July 3

Las Vegas is bouncing back, but the virus is on the rise too

... Tourists are streaming in again, **gambling revenue has hit an all-time high**, the Las Vegas Strip has its first new casino in a decade, and big concerts are starting at a gleaming new stadium. Plexiglass panels installed to separate gamblers at the poker and blackjack tables have largely been removed, the world-famous buffets are reopening, and nightclub dance floors are packed.

Vice President Kamala Harris was set to visit Saturday for what the White House is calling the “America’s Back Together” tour celebrating progress against the virus.

But that progress is threatened: Nevada this week saw the highest rate of new COVID-19 cases in the country, **hospitalizations are on the rise again, and the highly contagious delta variant has become the most prevalent form of the virus in the state**, adding urgency to the campaign to get more people vaccinated.

Still, in a place where the economy runs on crowds and uninhibited behavior, a return to pandemic-related restrictions and mask requirements seems to be off the table.

Inside the casinos, guests are not required to wear masks if they are fully vaccinated, but employees do not appear to be asking anyone for proof.

“It seems like everything is opening back up, getting back to normal,” Teresa Lee, a 47-year-old tourist from Nashville, Tennessee, said Thursday as she stood on the Strip, looking out over the fountains in front of the Bellagio casino.

Lee said she is vaccinated and felt safe in Las Vegas because she read about the casinos’ efforts to get their workers and their families vaccinated.

Tyler Williams, a 22-year-old from Eugene, Oregon, said it didn’t feel as if there was a pandemic anymore because “people are everywhere.” He said he had seen hardly anyone with a mask apart from a few foreign tourists and felt no need to wear one himself, because he is vaccinated.

Las Vegas fully reopened and lifted restrictions on most businesses June 1, though many casino-resorts had already returned to 100% capacity before that with approval from state regulators. **Visitor numbers, while not at their pre-pandemic highs, have grown by double digits four months in a row.**

Shows and fireworks are scheduled for the July 4 weekend, and the new 65,000-seat Allegiant Stadium where the NFL’s relocated Raiders will kick off their season this fall was set to host its first major concert Saturday, by electronic dance music star Illenium. It will be followed by a full-capacity show from Garth Brooks next weekend.

Over the past two weeks, Nevada’s diagnosis rate of 190 new cases per 100,000 people was higher than that of Missouri, Arkansas and Wyoming -- all states with lower vaccination levels — and the state public health lab found the delta variant in almost half the COVID-19 cases it analyzed.

Also, the number of patients hospitalized with the virus has grown 33% over the past week, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, though the levels are far below what they were in December, when hospitals were near capacity.

State biostatistician Kyra Morgan said Friday that the spike in cases might be attributable to the full reopening of the state and city in June and that the return of crowds and big events on the Strip could cause the increase to continue ...

Return to Timeline

https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/worldwide-graphs/#total-deaths

Select live link for current number

July 5

Death toll from coronavirus tops 4,000,000

https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uks-johnson-set-out-plan-final-lockdown-easing-monday-2021-07-04/

July 5

PM Johnson to set out lockdown easing, though pandemic 'not over'

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson will set out plans on Monday for the final step in easing England's COVID-19 lockdown, including guidance on social distancing, face coverings and working from home.

After imposing the most onerous restrictions in Britain's peacetime history to battle the novel coronavirus, **Johnson is preparing to lift most restrictions in England on July 19, with a final decision due on July 12.**

Data suggests that cases will continue to rise as restrictions are eased, the government said, but the link to hospital admissions and deaths has been weakened by a rapid vaccination programme.

Johnson is expected to say that people will learn to live with COVID as they do already with flu, meaning that hospitalisations, serious illness and deaths will continue but at a much lower level than before widespread vaccination.

"As we begin to learn to live with this virus, we must all continue to carefully manage the risks from COVID and exercise judgement when going about our lives," Johnson said in a statement released by his office.

"But I must stress that the pandemic is not over."

Britain has suffered the seventh highest global death toll from COVID-19, and Johnson has been criticised for his decisions over the timing of each of England's three lockdowns.

But the take-up of **vaccines in Britain has been strong, with 86% of adults receiving a first dose and 64% receiving two doses** as of Sunday, according to government data.

Meanwhile countries such as Australia, where case numbers are lower but vaccination has been much slower, are tightening restrictions.

Cases of **COVID-19 have also risen sharply in Britain in recent weeks, driven by the now-dominant Delta variant, and the final step of lockdown easing was delayed by four weeks to enable more people to be vaccinated.**

However, Public Health England figures indicate that the vaccines are highly effective in preventing the Delta variant leading to severe illness or hospital admission.

Housing minister Robert Jenrick said on Sunday face masks would no longer be mandatory after the final step in lockdown easing, but many doctors and scientists urged the government to be more cautious. read more

"It makes no sense to stop wearing face masks amongst the public in closed public settings such as public transport," Chaand Nagpaul, Chair of the Council of the British Medical Association trade union, told BBC radio, noting that their primary role was in preventing transmission.

"As for 'personal choice' - remember that the public face masks do not protect the wearer predominantly; they protect people around you."

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/africa-japan-tokyo-2020-tokyo-olympics-olympic-games-9fbd360e4524dca0b25140e60ebda389

July 6

As Tokyo Olympics approach, virus worries rise in Japan

...The games begin July 23, with organizers determined they will go on, even with a reduced number of spectators or possibly none at all. While Japan has made remarkable **progress to vaccinate** its population against COVID-19, the drive is l**osing steam because of supply shortages**.

With tens of thousands of visitors coming to a **country** that is only **13.8% fully vaccinated**, gaps in border controls have emerged, highlighted by the discovery of infections among the newly arrived team from Uganda, with positive tests for the highly contagious delta variant.
...
On Monday, **Tokyo** confirmed 342 new cases, the 16th straight day of an increase. On Saturday, the capital **reported 716 cases, highest in five weeks.**

At a meeting of government advisers, experts warned of the possibility of infections exploding during the games, projecting daily caseloads exceeding 1,000. They said that would severely strain health care systems. In a worst-case scenario, there could be thousands of infections a day, causing hospitals to overflow, they said.
...
In a case that has shocked many in Japan, **a member of the Ugandan team tested positive upon arrival June 19** at Narita International Airport and was quarantined there. The rest of the nine-member team was allowed to travel more than 500 kilometers (300 miles) on a chartered bus to their pre-Olympics camp in the western prefecture of Osaka.

Days later, **a second member of the team** from East Africa **tested positive for the virus, forcing seven town officials and drivers who had close contact with them to self-isolate.** The team itself is isolating at a hotel. Health officials said **both infected Ugandans had the delta variant.**

On Saturday, **an athlete from Serbia also tested positive, causing the cancelation of his team's training in the central city of Nanto. The government also has acknowledged that four other people arriving for the Olympics tested positive after entering the country earlier this year.**

Experts say the cases show that Japan's border health controls can be easily breached.
...
Under revised guidelines on health measures sent to 530 municipalities hosting Olympic training, airport officials will isolate an entire group if any member tests positive, and they will stay at designated facilities until the athletes' village opens July 12. Hosting towns can request guests to stop training and isolate themselves until they clear contact tracing and virus tests.

Dozens of municipalities in Japan have canceled their hosting arrangements because of virus worries, and many of them decided to use those facilities as vaccination sites.

In Tokyo, infections are spreading among the young and middle-aged who are largely unvaccinated. The more serious cases requiring hospitalization are gradually replacing the elderly, 26% of whom are now fully vaccinated, according to experts.
...
Japan began vaccinating medical workers in mid-February and the elderly in mid-April. Despite initial delays due to bungled reservations and shortages, the pace picked up in mid-May when vaccine imports stabilized and staff was secured to meet a primary target of fully vaccinating all 36 million elderly by the end of July.
...
On June 21, Japan eased its third state of emergency to less-stringent measures that focused on shorter operating hours at bars and restaurants in Tokyo and other metro areas until July 11. ...

Return to Timeline

https://www.npr.org/sections/coronavirus-live-updates/2021/07/06/1013582342/delta-is-now-the-dominant-coronavirus-variant-in-the-u-s

July 7

Delta Is Now The Dominant Coronavirus Variant In The U.S.

The highly contagious delta variant **now accounts for more than 51% of COVID-19 cases in the U.S.**, according to new estimates released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The variant, **also known as B.1.617.2, was first detected in India and is spreading quickly across the globe.**

And i**n parts of the U.S., the delta strain accounts for more than 80% of new infections, including some Midwestern states like Missouri, Kansas and Iowa.**

The delta variant is already causing **74.3% of infections in** Western states, including **Utah and Colorado**, and **58.8% of infections in** Southern states like **Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas and Oklahoma**, according to CDC estimates.

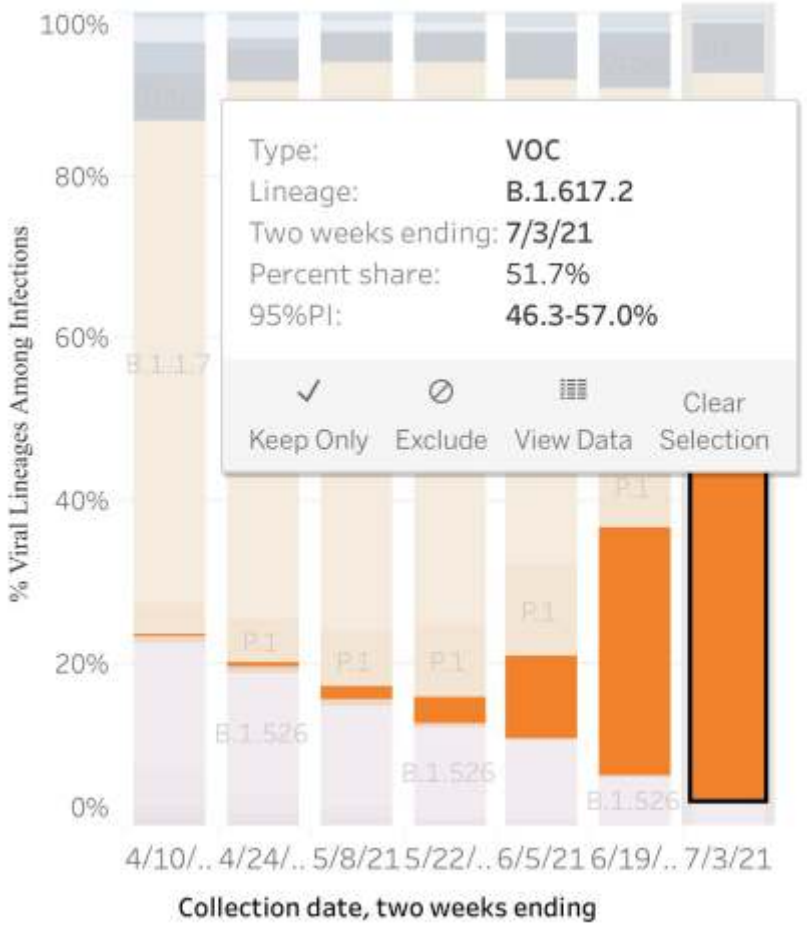
The **good news is the vaccines being used in the U.S. all appear to be highly effective at protecting against serious disease, hospitalization and death.** And public health officials are urging the roughly 140 to 150 million people who remain unvaccinated to get vaccinated.

...

"We're feeling pretty good right now because it's the summer. But come winter, if we still have a significant percentage of the population that is unvaccinated, we're going to see this virus surge again," Offit says.

And it's crucial to increase vaccinations in other countries, says Saad Omer, a vaccine researcher at Yale. "The world has to get its act together," Omer says. "Otherwise yet another, potentially more dangerous, variant could emerge."

https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#variant-proportions



Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/japan-coronavirus-pandemic-olympic-games-2020-tokyo-olympics-sports-f757eef4c7b7a606232145444a52e57f

July 8

Japan to declare virus emergency lasting through Olympics

... At a meeting with experts Thursday morning, government officials proposed a plan to issue a state of emergency in Tokyo from next Monday to Aug. 22. The Summer Olympics, already delayed a year by the pandemic, begin July 23 and close Aug. 8.

The Games already will take place without foreign spectators, but the **planned six-week state of emergency likely ends chances of a local audience**. A decision about fans is expected later Thursday when local organizers meet with the International Olympic Committee and other representatives.

Tokyo is currently under less-stringent measures that focus on shortened hours for bars and restaurants but have proven less effective at slowing the spread of the coronavirus.
...
The upcoming emergency will be the fourth for Tokyo since the pandemic began and is a last-minute change of plan made late Wednesday after a meeting with experts who warned strongly against the government's soft approach.

A main focus of the emergency is a request for bars, restaurants and karaoke parlors serving alcohol to close. A ban on serving alcohol is a key step to tone down Olympic-related festivities and keep people from drinking and partying. Tokyo residents are expected to face stay-home requests and watch the Games on TV from home.

"How to stop people enjoying the Olympics from going out for drinks is a main issue," Health Minister Norihisa Tamura said.

Tokyo reported 920 new cases on Wednesday, up from 714 last week and its highest since 1,010 on May 13. The figure is in line with experts' earlier estimate that daily cases in Tokyo could hit 1,000 before the Games and could spike into thousands in August.

Kazuhiro Tateta, a Toho University infectious diseases expert, noted an earlier state of emergency in the spring came too late to prevent hospitals in Osaka from overflowing with patients and said another delay should not be allowed.

Ryuji Wakita, director-general of the National Institute of Infectious Diseases, noted that **two-thirds of Japan's cases are from the Tokyo region** and "our concern is the spread of the infections to neighboring areas."

Experts also noted **cases among younger, unvaccinated people are rising as Japan's inoculation drive loses steam due to supply uncertainty.**

Just **15% of Japanese are fully vaccinated**, low compared to 47.4% in the United States and almost 50% in Britain. Nationwide, Japan has had about 810,000 infections and nearly 14,900 deaths.

"The infections are in their expansion phase and everyone in this country must firmly understand the seriousness of it," Dr. Shigeru Omi, a top government medical adviser, told reporters.

He urged authorities to quickly take tough measures ahead of the Olympics with summer vacations approaching. "The period from July to September is the most critical time for Japan's COVID-19 measures," Omi said.

https://www.voanews.com/covid-19-pandemic/us-covid-cases-hospitalizations-rise-again

July 9

US COVID cases, hospitalizations rise again

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said Thursday **new cases of COVID-19 were up in the United States by nearly 11 percent** in the past week, **driven by the prevalence of the delta variant in areas with the nation's lowest vaccination rates.**

During the regular weekly White House COVID Response Team briefing, CDC Director Rochelle Walensky said **hospitalizations were also up in the past week by about seven percent**, while deaths from COVID-19 continued to fall.

Walensky said the statistics show "two truths" that exist in the U.S., with the nation's vaccination effort significantly driving down cases, hospitalizations and deaths from COVID-19 from the peaks they reached in January. She said more than 160 million people in the United States are now fully vaccinated.

On the other hand, the CDC director said "new and concerning trends" are being seen indicating the **areas with the lowest vaccination rates have the highest rates of new cases and highest percentage of the more contagious delta variant** of the virus that causes COVID-19.

She said the delta variant is now the most prevalent variant in the country, accounting for more than 50 percent of all new cases across the country, up from 26 percent in just over two weeks. She said **the variant accounts for much as 80 percent of new cases in some areas of the Midwest and mountain states.**

The CDC director said 93 percent of the 173 counties in the U.S. with infection rates higher than 100 per 100,000 people also have vaccination rates below 40 percent.

Walensky, along with White House Senior Health Advisor Anthony Fauci, stressed the effectiveness of all the available COVID-19 vaccines against the delta variant, in terms of preventing severe disease, hospitalizations and deaths. Both stressed the need for widespread vaccinations to truly turn the corner on the pandemic.

Fauci and Walensky also clarified that fully vaccinated people have a high degree of protection from the virus and do not need to wear masks indoors.

Fauci said that if you were a fully vaccinated person with conditions that make you susceptible to serious illness and you were in a location with low vaccination rates and or a high rate of infection, you might consider wearing a mask. But he stressed that was not a recommendation.

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/europe-business-lifestyle-health-travel-79cac2e505903e6056685bb922a8eaab

July 10

New virus surge sends younger patients to Spain's hospitals

... After a brief respite that brought medical activity back to pre-pandemic routines, managers at the Hospital del Mar in this northeastern city are facing a sharp surge in infections by, once again, rearranging staff shifts and moving patients around in their sprawling facilities.

The increase comes amid the advance of the delta variant of the coronavirus that spreads more easily. And it's being **driven mostly by younger, unvaccinated patients** who require less ICU care but are turning in droves to health centers and emergency wards. If they reach the point of needing hospitalization, they typically spend longer in regular wards until they recover.

...

Although the vast majority of those infected don't show symptoms, the speed of the surge can only be compared to that of the first surge in March 2020, Horcajada said. Most hospitalized patients don't need much breathing support and get well enough with corticosteroids. But **doctors are seeing people in their 20s and early 30s developing serious pneumonia.**

In Spain, the young are largely socializing while unvaccinated because authorities have strictly prioritized the elderly and most vulnerable groups. As a result, 21 million — or **half of the country's adult population — are fully vaccinated, but fewer than 600,000 of those are younger than 30**, according to the latest Health Ministry data.

...

As a tourism powerhouse, Spain dropped curfews and outdoors mask requirements, among other restrictions, just in time for the summer season. The first major outbreaks were reported soon after, even before many tourists could make it into the country.

Many have been tied to the first holiday trips, unofficial celebrations of traditional summer festivals that are getting labeled colloquially as "the no-parties," and nightlife that reopened just as schools closed.

For Horcajada, the timings were a recipe for disaster: "We are dealing with a variant that is capable of infecting within seconds following minimum contact with a positive person," he said.

On Friday, the closely watched 14-day rate of contagion per 100,000 residents rose in Spain to 316 cases, from a 2021 low of 92 on June 22. But, in a departure from previous surges, before vaccines were available, new deaths are receding and hospital occupation rates growing at a fraction of the pace of new infections.

Spain's Health Ministry, for example, reported Friday 6 confirmed fatalities nationwide, the lowest figure since last summer, compared to 352 on Jan. 5 this year and 217 on Oct. 19 last year, two dates when the contagion rate was at similar levels and increasing. More than one-tenth of regular hospital beds and one-fifth of intensive care wards were treating COVID-19 patients on then, but the current occupation rate stands at 2.4% in regular beds and 6.6% in ICUs.

There's a similar pattern in other countries with the fastest-spreading outbreaks in Europe. In Portugal and Cyprus, hospitals are far from previous near-collapse scenarios, although they steadily accumulate patients.

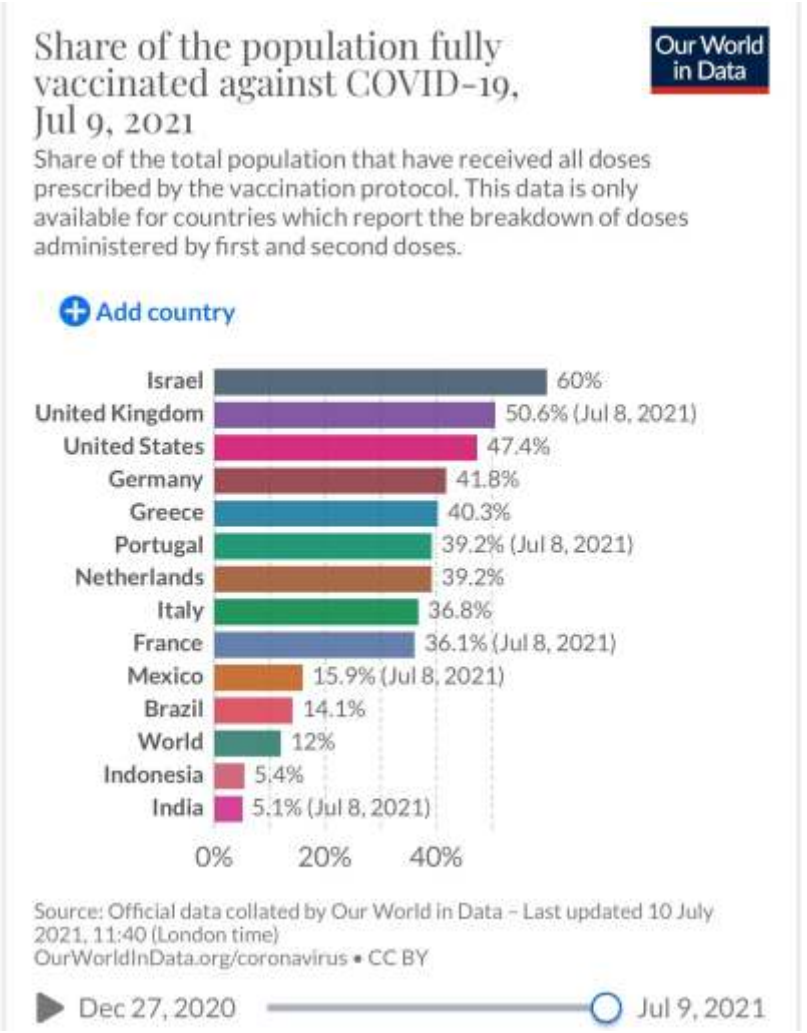
The UK averaged almost 30,000 new reported infections a day in the past week, compared to a peak of roughly 70,000 at the height of the winter surge in January driven by the alpha variant — more contagious than the original virus but significantly less so than delta. But daily deaths at the time surpassed 1,000 for days, while 29 were recorded on Friday.

Spain's central and regional governments are trying to accelerate vaccination of younger groups, but are wary of sweeping measures such as nighttime curfews or travel bans that would affect tourism. France and Germany are already discouraging travel to Spain and neighboring Portugal, a move that has thwarted the tourism ...

https://twitter.com/DrEricDing/status/1413931514954489860

July 11

Netherlands reports a near vertical >800% increase in new #COVID19 cases in 1 week; Greece and Spain nearly matching that surge (mostly Delta variant)



https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/07/12/coronavirus-latest-updates/

July 12

Hundreds of Thais inoculated with Sinovac are infected as cases spike in Southeast Asia

...
The 618 cases were among the 677,348 medical staff who had received two doses of the Chinese-developed vaccine between April to July, government data show. Among those infected are a nurse who died and a health care worker in critical condition.

A Thai health official said Sunday that **an expert panel has recommended administering a third dose to at-risk medical workers, adding that the booster shot would be either one from Oxford-AstraZeneca or a messenger RNA vaccine made by either Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna. The country is set to receive 1.5 million doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine from the United States this month.**

The number of coronavirus cases in Southeast Asia has been relatively low until this year. But many countries in the region are now facing the highly contagious delta variant with low vaccination rates: **only about 5 percent of people in Thailand and Indonesia respectively are fully vaccinated.**

The region's vaccination shortage has been plugged in part by Chinese-made shots, but health experts, including some in China, have raised **concerns about Sinovac's efficacy against the delta variant.**

In Indonesia, at least 131 health care workers, many of whom were inoculated with Sinovac, have died since June.

Thailand has recorded more than 345,000 coronavirus cases and 2,791 deaths. Last week, the Southeast Asian kingdom **announced new curbs in Bangkok, the capital, and nine provinces in an attempt to slow transmission of the virus. The tightened rules include travel restrictions, a curfew and limits on the size of gatherings.**

Vietnam also has also moved to restrict gatherings. In major metropolises like Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi, people are allowed to leave their homes only for certain purposes, including purchasing food and medicine. On Monday, the government began restricting movement in the city of Can Tho for 14 days, Reuters reported.

The country had been a model of virus containment until May, when a spike in infections began. **A third of 30,000-plus cases Vietnam has logged since the start of the pandemic came over the past week.**

Malaysia, too, has reported more than 57,000 new cases from July 4 to July 11. Indonesia, which has logged more than 243,000 new cases over the same time period, is struggling with a shortage of oxygen supplies amid a surge in the country.

https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/france-rushes-vaccinated-presidents-warning-78812773

July 13

France rushes to get vaccinated after president's warning

PARIS -- **Nearly 1 million people in France made vaccine appointments in a single day**, after the president cranked up pressure on everyone to get vaccinated to save summer vacation and the French economy.

An app that centralizes France's vaccine and other medical appointments, Doctolib, announced Tuesday morning that 926,000 people had made appointments Monday, a daily record since the country rolled out coronavirus vaccines in December. **People under age 35 made up 65% of the new appointments.**

President Emmanuel Macron announced Monday that vaccination would be obligatory for all health care workers by Sept. 15, and held out the possibility of extending the requirement to other parts of the population.

With infections on the rise again around France, expectations had mounted in recent days that Macron would announce some kind of vaccination requirement, driving new demand for appointments.

Around 41% of the French population has been fully vaccinated, though the pace of vaccination waned as summer vacations approached.

Health Minister Olivier Veran welcomed the renewed vaccine interest, saying on BFM television Tuesday: "That's thousands of lives saved."

More than 111,000 people with the virus have died in France.

Return to Timeline

https://www.fiercepharma.com/pharma/another-hit-for-johnson-johnson-s-covid-19-shot-as-feds-tag-guillain-barre-warning-label?mkt_tok=Mjk0LU1RRi0wNTYAAAF-O4TS1k4q9TC94zgLyoFgk1UQRlr-

July 13

Johnson & Johnson's COVID-19 shot hit again as feds plan to tag Guillain-Barré warning on label: reports

Johnson & Johnson's COVID-19 vaccine has encountered numerous setbacks ranging from manufacturing issues to an emergency safety review. Use of the vaccine hasn't met initial expectations as a result, and, now, authorities are reportedly set to highlight an additional concern.

The FDA plans to add a warning to the shot's label about the rare risk of Guillain-Barré syndrome (GBS) after vaccination, The Washington Post reports. The news comes after **officials recorded about 100 preliminary GBS cases out of more than 12 million vaccine recipients**, the newspaper reports.

GBS is a rare but potentially life-threatening disorder in which the body's immune system attacks nerve cells.

The condition has been associated with the use of other widely used vaccines such as GlaxoSmithKline's Shingrix. **So far, officials think GBS is about three to five times more likely to appear among J&J COVID-19 vaccine recipients than among the general public**, The New York Times reports.

Despite the risk, the shot's benefits still outweigh the risks, authorities said.

It's the latest in a string of hits for the shot since its emergency authorization in late February. Originally hailed as a simple, one-dose alternative to the mRNA powerhouses from Moderna and Pfizer, J&J's shot ran into production issues early on.

In late March, The New York Times reported that J&J's production partner Emergent BioSolutions had to throw out millions of doses' worth of ingredient because of a manufacturing mishap. Emergent's snafu led to intense scrutiny of its Baltimore plant, where manufacturing still hasn't resumed.

Things took a turn for the worse for J&J's shot in April when U.S. authorities paused the rollout to review rare blood clots that were occurring in some recipients alongside bleeding. Authorities later tagged the shot with a warning over the rare clots, but they maintain that the vaccine's benefits outweigh risks.

When J&J's shot made it back into distribution 10 days later, its momentum had been derailed. Before the pause, about 7 million people had received J&J's one-dose vaccine. In the months that have followed, the total has reached 12.8 million. That compares with more than 320 million doses administered of Pfizer's and Moderna's mRNA offerings, each of which are two-dose regimens.

While Monday's news represents a setback for J&J's program, it also comes at a sensitive time during the U.S.' battle with the pandemic. About 59% of the adult population is fully vaccinated, and officials are urging remaining holdouts to consider vaccination as a way to halt the troubling delta variant.

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-us-cases-rising-03150d6404004711b80e9bd6ff0d410d

July 14

US COVID-19 cases rising again, doubling over three weeks

... **driven by the fast-spreading delta variant, lagging vaccination rates and Fourth of July gatherings.**

Confirmed infections climbed to an average of about 23,600 a day on Monday, up from 11,300 on June 23, according to Johns Hopkins University data. And **all but two states — Maine and South Dakota — reported that case numbers have gone up over the past two weeks.**

...

The five states with the biggest two-week jump in cases per capita all had lower vaccination rates: Missouri, 45.9%; Arkansas, 43%; Nevada, 50.9%; Louisiana, 39.2%; and Utah, 49.5%.

Even with the latest surge, cases in the U.S. are nowhere near their peak of a quarter-million per day in January. And **deaths are running at under 260 per day on average after topping out at more than 3,400 over the winter — a testament to how effectively the vaccine can prevent serious illness and death** in those who happen to become infected.

Still, amid the rise, health authorities in places such as **Los Angeles County and St. Louis are begging even immunized people to resume wearing masks in public**. And **Chicago officials announced Tuesday that unvaccinated travelers from Missouri and Arkansas must either quarantine for 10 days or have a negative COVID-19 test.**

Meanwhile, the Health Department in Mississippi, which ranks dead last nationally for vaccinations, began blocking posts about COVID-19 on its Facebook page because of a “rise of misinformation” about the virus and the vaccine.

Mississippi officials are also recommending that people 65 and older and those with chronic underlying conditions stay away from large indoor gatherings because of a 150% rise in hospitalizations over the past three weeks.

In Louisiana, which also has one of the nation’s lowest vaccination rates, officials in the city of **New Orleans** said Tuesday that they are **likely to extend until fall virus-mitigation efforts currently in place at large sporting and entertainment gatherings, including mask mandates or requirements that attendees be vaccinated or have a negative COVID-19 test**. State health officials said cases of the coronavirus are surging, largely among nonvaccinated people.

But the political will may not be there in many states fatigued by months of restrictions.

In Michigan, Democratic Gov. Gretchen Whitmer is facing a drive to repeal a law that she used to set major restrictions during the early stages of the pandemic.

And Republican Gov. Kay Ivey of Alabama pushed back against the idea that the state might need to reimpose preventive measures as vaccinations lag and hospitalizations rise.

“Alabama is OPEN for business. Vaccines are readily available, and I encourage folks to get one. The state of emergency and health orders have expired. We are moving forward,” she said on social media.

Dr. James Lawler, a leader of the Global Center for Health Security at the University of Nebraska Medical Center in Omaha, said bringing back masks and limiting gatherings would help. But he acknowledged that most of the places seeing higher rates of the virus “are exactly the areas of the country that don’t want to do any of these things.”

Lawler warned that **what is happening in Britain is a preview of what’s to come in the U.S.** ...

Return to Timeline

https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/jul/14/us-delta-variant-coronavirus-covid-vaccine-divide?CMP=oth_b-aplnews_d-1

July 15

Delta variant gains ground in US as outbreaks highlight vaccine divide

... **Rates of Covid-19 cases in Kansas, Oklahoma, Missouri, Arkansas, Louisiana and Mississippi are among the highest in the country, and their vaccination rates among the lowest.** Covid also appears to be gaining ground in the American west.

Even so, overall numbers of new Covid-19 cases are low. New infections are less than one-10th the average daily rate at the height of the pandemic in January, even as they have doubled in the last two weeks.
...
Dilaha said many Arkansans, particularly the young, underestimate the severity of disease caused by Covid-19, and overestimate risks associated with vaccines, which have proven very safe.

“They’re not familiar with the long-term consequences” of Covid-19, “because we’re still learning about them,” Dilaha said. “People do not realize that people with Covid-19 can have permanent lung damage, heart damage, kidney damage, brain damage.”

In recent weeks, **more than 98% of people hospitalized with Covid-19 in Arkansas and Oklahoma have been unvaccinated. And in Arkansas, officials are seeing many more people in their 20s, 30s and 40s hospitalized.**

While vaccine hesitancy remains complex, conservative lawmakers’ constant attacks on pandemic mitigation measures, intentionally or not, underscore the false idea that Covid-19 is not as severe as public health officials warn.

In **Oklahoma**, lawmakers have introduced legislation to make school mask mandates far more difficult to implement even as children under 12 remain ineligible for the vaccine, and to ban vaccine mandates. As it stands, most schools are in summer recess, most do not have mask mandates, and none mandate vaccines.

Lawmakers in **Tennessee** attacked the top vaccine official in the state, eventually leading to her dismissal. After politicians criticized health officials, all vaccine-related messaging for minors was abandoned, even for unrelated vaccine-preventable diseases such as measles and human papilloma virus (HPV). More than 30,000 families missed measles vaccines during the pandemic.

“When the people elected and appointed to lead this state put their political gains ahead of the public good, they have betrayed the people who have trusted them with their lives,” wrote Dr Michelle Fiscus in an editorial in the Tennessean newspaper.
...
The speed with which the Delta variant can spread among unvaccinated populations was demonstrated in a recently released investigation into an outbreak in a gymnastics gym in Oklahoma.

In an outbreak investigated by the CDC, 47 people were sickened with Covid-19 in April. Among the 21 people whose test samples could be sequenced, all were found to have the Delta variant.

Among those infected, 85% did not have a Covid-19 vaccine, many of them adolescents who were ineligible to receive the vaccine at the time. The CDC recommends unvaccinated people wear masks, but the gym had poor mask adherence and ventilation. Indoor, high-intensity sports are among the most high-risk activities for unvaccinated people.

“I’m very concerned that we are already seeing a surge in cases,” said Wendelboe, who created his own model to track transmission in the state. He expects Delta to result in five times as many Covid-19 cases in August, and 10 times as many by December.

Even a small increase in vaccine rates could help mitigate this outcome, he said. Otherwise, Oklahoma may, “continue to see just an uptick in cases all the way through the winter”.

Return to Timeline

https://www.cbsnews.com/news/canada-us-border-likely-reopen-covid-vaccinated-americans-august/?ftag=CNM-00-10aac3a

July 16

Canada likely to reopen border to vaccinated Americans in August

Toronto — Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said on Thursday Canada **could start allowing Americans fully vaccinated against the coronavirus into Canada as of mid-August for non-essential travel. He said the country should be in a position to welcome fully vaccinated travelers from all countries by early September.**

...

Trudeau noted **Canada continues to lead G20 countries in vaccination rates with approximately 80% of eligible Canadians vaccinated with their first dose and over 50% of eligible Canadians fully vaccinated.** He said case numbers and severe illness continue to decline across the country as vaccination rates continue to increase.

In the early days of the pandemic, the U.S. and Canadian governments closed the more than 5,500-mile border to nonessential traffic. With increasing vaccination rates and dropping infection rates, some were annoyed the two governments hadn't laid out detailed plans to fully reopen the border.

Canada began easing its restrictions earlier this month, allowing fully vaccinated Canadians or permanent legal residents to return to Canada without quarantining. People still must prove a negative COVID-19 test before returning, and another once they get back.

Pressure has been mounting on Canada to continue to ease the restrictions at the border, which have been in effect since March of last year.

Providing exemptions for travel into Canada amid the pandemic is politically sensitive and Trudeau is expected to call a federal election next month.

Trudeau said his ministers would share more details on the border early next week.

Commercial traffic has gone back and forth normally between the two countries since the start of the pandemic. Canadians are able to fly into the United States with a negative COVID-19 test.

The U.S. Travel Association estimates that each month the border is closed costs $1.5 billion. Canadian officials say Canada had about 22 million foreign visitors in 2019 — about 15 million of them from the United States.

Tom Webb, a 63-year-old retired U.S. navy pilot from Orchard Park, New York, said he's seriously thinking of selling his cottage in Georgian Bay, Ontario after not being able to access it for almost two years. He is vaccinated. "I am beyond frustrated," he said.

Canadian officials have said they would like 75% of eligible Canadian residents to be fully vaccinated before loosening border restrictions for tourists and business travelers. The Canadian government expects to have enough vaccine delivered for 80% of eligible Canadians to be fully vaccinated by the end of July. The U.S. only allowed for exports of vaccines into Canada in early May.

Return to Timeline

https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/worldwide-graphs/#total-deaths

Select live link for current number

July 18

Death toll from coronavirus tops 4,100,000

Return to Timeline

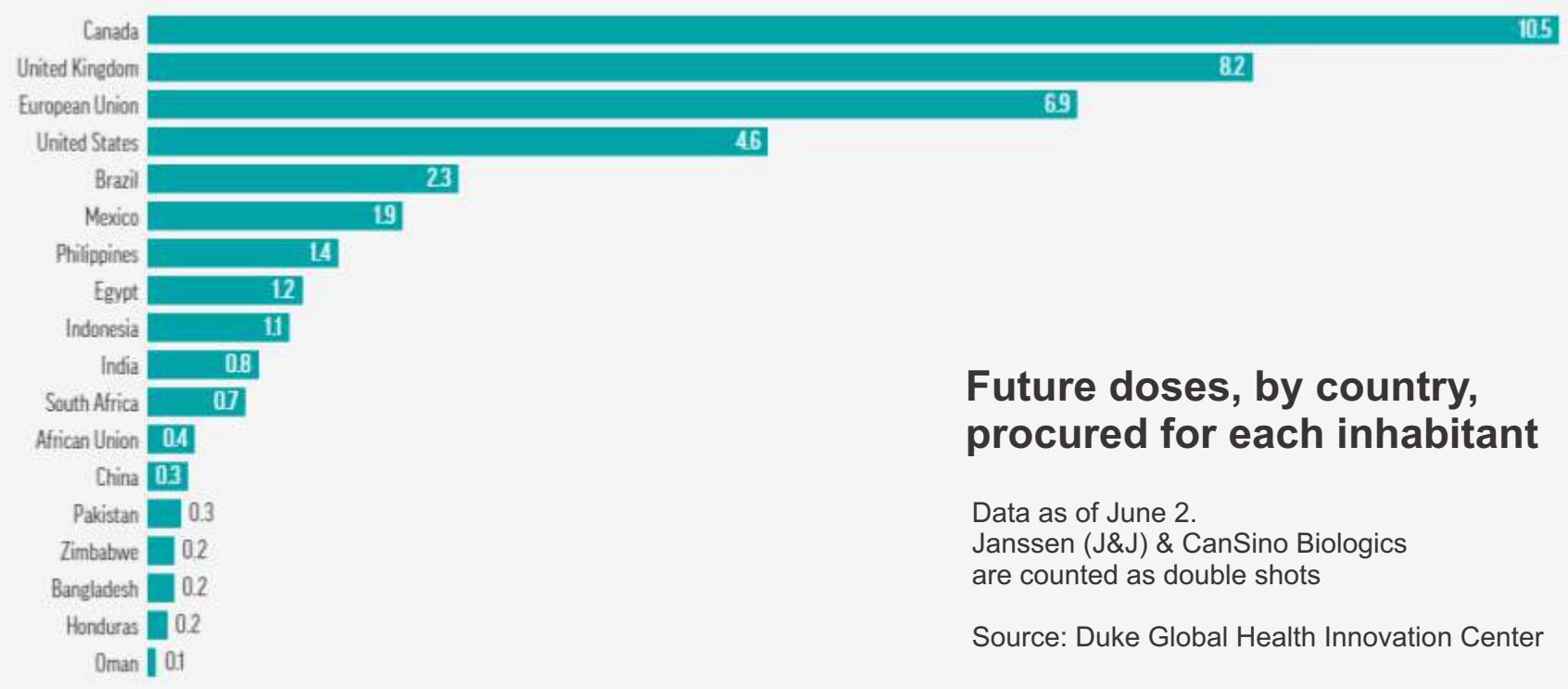
https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-vaccine-inequality-dac9c07b324e29d3597037b8dc1d908a

July 18

COVID-19 vaccine procurement vastly different around the world

... COVID-19 unexpectedly devastated wealthy countries first — and some of them were among the few places that make the vaccines. Export restrictions kept the doses within their borders.

There was a global purchase plan to provide vaccines for poorer countries, but it was so flawed and underfunded that it couldn't compete in the cutthroat competition to buy. Intellectual property rights vied with global public health for priority. ...



Return to Timeline

https://www.france24.com/en/europe/20210719-england-lifts-covid-19-restrictions-even-as-variant-cases-spike

July 19

England lifts Covid-19 restrictions on daily life even as variant cases spike

The British government on Monday lifted pandemic restrictions on daily life in England, scrapping all social distancing in a step slammed by scientists and opposition parties as a dangerous leap into the unknown.

From midnight (2300 GMT Sunday), **nightclubs were able to reopen and other indoor venues allowed to run at full capacity, while legal mandates covering the wearing of masks and working from home were scrapped.**

Prime Minister Boris Johnson—who is self-isolating after his health minister was infected—urged the public to remain prudent and for any laggards to join the two-thirds of UK adults who are now fully vaccinated.

He defended the reopening—**dubbed "freedom day" by some media**—despite scientists' grave misgivings after daily infection rates in Britain topped 50,000, behind only Indonesia and Brazil.
...

After the success of the vaccination programme—which has now offered at least one dose to every adult in Britain—the government says any risks to hospital care are manageable.
..
Senior Conservative MP Jeremy Hunt, a former health secretary, said the government should learn from Israel and the Netherlands, which have been forced to reverse recent relaxations.

"The warning light on the NHS dashboard is not flashing amber, it is flashing red," he told BBC radio.

Scotland and Wales, whose devolved governments set their own health policy, said they would maintain the mandate on face coverings among other restrictions.

But in England, **all restrictions on social mixing were lifted. Sports stadia, cinemas and theatres can now return to full houses.**

Fully vaccinated residents returning from "amber list" destinations in Europe no longer have to quarantine—although in a last-minute policy shift, **the government has kept the requirement in place for France.**

Also staying in place are requirements to self-isolate after a close contact, which have forced millions off work or school in recent weeks, leading to industry warnings of severe economic disruption.
...
The government's stated approach of lifting controls now before any winter surge of respiratory disease is marked by "moral emptiness and epidemiological stupidity", said University of Bristol public health expert Gabriel Scally.

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/europe-health-government-and-politics-coronavirus-pandemic-70ffb3d70df838f6736ed14bd3cc12a5

July 20

UK opts not to vaccinate most under-18s against COVID-19

LONDON (AP) — The British government has decided not to inoculate most children and teenagers against COVID-19 until more safety data on the vaccines become available.

Children as young as 12 with **severe neuro-disabilities, Down syndrome, immunosuppression and multiple or severe learning disabilities, as well as those who are household contacts of individuals who are immunosuppressed, will be eligible for vaccination**, the government said Monday.

The decision to hold off giving shots to most people under age 18 was based on the recommendation of an expert advisory panel. The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunization said the health benefits of universal vaccination don't outweigh the risks for most young people, who typically suffer only mild symptoms of the virus.

"Until more safety data is available and has been evaluated, a precautionary approach is preferred," the JCVI said in a statement.

Health Secretary Sajid Javid said in a statement that "today's advice does not recommend vaccinating under-18s without underlying health conditions at this point in time.

"But the JCVI will continue to review new data, and consider whether to recommend vaccinating under-18s without underlying health conditions at a future date."

The decision not to vaccinate most young people puts the U.K. at odds with France and several other European countries, which have decided to vaccinate adolescents as young as 12.

Among hundreds of people at a Paris vaccination center Friday, scores were teenagers with their parents. The French government announced last week that it plans to set up vaccine drives at middle schools, high schools and universities in the fall.

In the U.K., children and teenagers who are eligible for inoculation will receive the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine, the only one British regulators have authorized for use in those under 18. The University of Oxford is still conducting trials of the safety and effectiveness in children of the vaccine it developed with AstraZeneca.

Aside from medical and scientific questions surrounding the use of COVID-19 vaccines by adolescents, many public health experts have raised questions about the morality of inoculating low-risk children at a time when many of the world's most vulnerable people still lack access to vaccines.

https://www.aol.com/news/judge-upholds-covid-19-vaccine-214904358-120945696.html?error=login_required&error_description=login_required

July 21

Judge upholds COVID-19 vaccine mandate in victory for Indiana University

(Reuters) - Indiana University students must comply with the school's COVID-19 vaccine mandate for the fall semester after **a federal judge refused** on Monday **to block the school's inoculation requirement, one of the first rulings of its kind during the pandemic.**

U.S. District Court Judge Damon Leichty in South Bend, Indiana, rejected the argument by eight students that the school violated their bodily autonomy and constitutional right to due process.

"This university policy isn't forced vaccination," wrote the judge. "**The students have options — taking the vaccine, applying for a religious exemption, applying for a medical exemption, applying for a medical deferral, taking a semester off, or attending another university."**

The students sued last month and asked Leichty to block the school's requirement that students, faculty and staff be vaccinated or receive an exemption. Exempted students must follow separate COVID-19 mitigation strategies.

“Today’s ruling does not end the students’ fight — we plan to immediately appeal the judge's decision,” states James Bopp, a conservative activist attorney who represented the students.

COVID-19 vaccines have become a U.S. political flashpoint and the country has fallen short of President Joe Biden's vaccine goals, raising concerns that life may not return to normal as the number of infections are beginning to rise.

Leichty, appointed by former President Donald Trump, said had the students shown a likelihood that the university was infringing unreasonably on constitutional rights, blocking the policy would have been in the public interest. But he said the students "have a low likelihood of success" of proving that.

More than 500 colleges and universities have mandated the COVID-19 vaccine and Leichty's ruling appears to be the first in a case challenging such a policy.

A federal judge in Texas in June dismissed a case brought by 117 workers at Houston Methodist Hospital who challenged the facility's employee vaccine requirement.

Return to Timeline

https://www.aol.com/news/covid-19-cases-us-triple-183315521-090400958.html?error=login_required&error_description=login_required

July 22

U.S. virus cases triple in two weeks

Across the U.S., the seven-day rolling average for daily new cases rose over the past two weeks **to more than 37,000 on Tuesday, up from less than 13,700** on July 6, according to data from Johns Hopkins University. Health officials blame the delta variant and slowing vaccination rates. Just 56.2% of Americans have gotten at least one dose of the vaccine, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

In **Louisiana**, health officials reported 5,388 new COVID-19 cases Wednesday — **the third-highest daily count since the beginning of the pandemic in early 2020.** Hospitalizations for the disease rose to 844 statewide, up more than 600 since mid-June. **New Orleans leaders urged people to resume wearing masks indoors.**

Utah reported having 295 people hospitalized due to the virus, the **highest number since February.** The state has averaged about 622 confirmed cases per day over the last week, about triple the infection rate at its lowest point in early June. Health data shows the **surge is almost entirely connected to unvaccinated people.**

...

[Missouri] Opposition to vaccination is especially strong among white evangelical Protestants, who make up more than one-third of Missouri's residents, according to a 2019 report by the Pew Research Center.

"We found that the faith community is very influential, very trusted, and to me that is one of the answers as to how you get your vaccination rates up," said Ken McClure, mayor of **Springfield**.

The **two hospitals in his city are teeming with patients, reaching record and near-record pandemic highs.** Steve Edwards, who is the CEO of CoxHealth in Springfield, tweeted that the **hospital has brought in 175 traveling nurses and has 46 more scheduled to arrive by Monday.**

"Grateful for the help," wrote Edwards, who previously tweeted that anyone spreading misinformation about the vaccine should "shut up."

Jacob Burmood, a 40-year-old **Kansas City, Missouri**, **artist, said his mother has been promoting vaccine conspiracy theories even though her husband —** Burmood's stepfather **— is hospitalized on a ventilator** in Springfield. ...

https://theweek.com/coronavirus/1002888/covid-19-surges-in-florida-and-texas-show-the-risk-to-vaccinated-residents-is

... **Texas** is also seeing an steep uptick in coronavirus cases, and the Texas Department of State Health Services said Wednesday that **of the 8,787 Texans who have died of COVID-19 since early February, at least 43 were fully vaccinated.** "That means **99.5 percent of people who died due to COVID-19 in Texas from Feb. 8 to July 14 were unvaccinated**, while 0.5 percent were the result of 'breakthrough infections,'" ...

Return to Timeline

https://www.nbcnews.com/news/olympics/tokyo-olympics-opening-ceremony-kick-games-hit-covid-scandals-low-n1274688

July 23

Kick off of the 2020 Olympics

...**The Games opened while still in the shadow of Covid-19, with the Japanese capital under a state of emergency, and many of the country's residents adamantly opposed to holding the world sporting event at all.**

Outside the stadium, hundreds of protesters carried placards that read “Lives over Olympics” and chanted “Stop the Olympics” as they marched.
...
With the time difference — Tokyo is 13 hours ahead of the Eastern United States, 16 hours ahead of the West — Americans had to get out of bed early to watch it all live.

NBC’s live coverage in the U.S. got underway at 6:55 a.m. ET. And the ceremony will be rebroadcast in prime time at 7:30 p.m. ET and once more overnight.

Those who did tune in saw dozens of dancers building an Olympic village and raising Olympic rings, all made from the wood of trees that grew from seeds brought to the Japanese capital by athletes when it last hosted the Summer Games in 1964.

Instead of a 68,000-capacity crowd cheering the athletes, **fewer than a thousand foreign dignitaries and diplomats, Olympic sponsors and members of the International Olympic Committee were present as the Games officially began.**

The Games are the first major global gathering since Covid began its march, infecting nearly 200 million people and killing more than 4 million around the world.

Japan has staked its international reputation on making these Olympics a success, in spite of the coronavirus and the various scandals that have dominated the preceding weeks and months.

"Over 4 billion people across the world will be watching these Olympic Games,” Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga told NBC News before the ceremony. “In that context, overcoming the hardship of the coronavirus and to be able to hold the Games, I think there is real value in that.”

"... in recent weeks, Japanese leaders and Olympic organizers have watched with alarm as Covid cases continued to rise and polls showed a stubborn resistance in much of the country to holding the Games in Tokyo.

That helped prompt Toyota, the biggest carmaker in Japan and a key Olympic sponsor, to yank Japanese TV ads related to the Games for fear of alienating its local market. But the company remains the supplier of the official vehicles being used in Tokyo.

Despite repeated assurances from Japanese officials and Olympic organizers that the Games would be “safe and secure,” dozens of people linked to the competition — including more than a dozen athletes — have already tested positive for Covid.

https://www.aol.com/news/court-unblocks-order-lifting-cdc-231045166-171127456.html?error=login_required&error_description=login_required

July 24

Federal court lifts CDC rules for Florida-based cruise ships

MIAMI (AP) — Pandemic restrictions on Florida-based cruise ships are no longer in place under a ruling Friday by a federal appeals court, while the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention seek to fight a Florida lawsuit challenging the regulations.

A three-judge panel of the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals had temporarily blocked a previous ruling last Saturday that sided with Florida officials, but the court reversed that decision on Friday, explaining that the CDC failed to demonstrate an entitlement to a stay pending appeal.

Last weekend's temporary stay had kept the CDC regulations regarding Florida-based cruise ships in place while the CDC appeals the June decision by U.S. District Judge Steven Merryday. Those regulations can no longer be enforced but can still be used as guidelines.

The lawsuit, championed by **Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis, claims that the CDC's multiple-step process to allow cruising from Florida is overly burdensome, harming both a multibillion-dollar industry that provides some 159,000 jobs and revenue collected by the state.**

In court filings, attorneys for Florida had urged the 11th Circuit to reject the CDC request to keep its rules intact.

"The equities overwhelmingly favor allowing the cruise industry to enjoy its first summer season in two years while this Court sorts out the CDC's contentions on appeal," Florida's lawyers argued.

The CDC, however, said keeping the rules in place would prevent future COVID-19 outbreaks on ships that are vulnerable to the spread of the virus because of their close quarters and frequent stops at foreign ports.

"The undisputed evidence shows that unregulated cruise ship operations would exacerbate the spread of COVID-19, and that the harm to the public that would result from such operations cannot be undone," the CDC said in a court filing.

The CDC first flatly halted cruise ships from sailing in March 2020 in response to the coronavirus pandemic, which had affected passengers and crew on numerous ships.

Then the CDC on Oct. 30 of last year imposed a four-phase conditional framework it said would allow the industry to gradually resume operations if certain thresholds were met. Those included virus mitigation procedures and a simulated cruise to test them before embarking regular passengers.

Merryday's decision concluded that the CDC can't enforce those rules for Florida-based ships and that they should merely be considered nonbinding recommendations or guidelines. Several cruise lines have begun preliminary cruises under those guidelines, which the Tampa judge agreed with Florida are too onerous.

"Florida persuasively claims that the conditional sailing order will shut down most cruises through the summer and perhaps much longer," the judge wrote in June, adding that Florida "faces an increasingly threatening and imminent prospect that the cruise industry will depart the state."

Disney Cruise Lines held its first simulated sailing under CDC rules last Saturday when the Disney Dream departed from Port Canaveral, Florida. The passengers were volunteer Disney employees.

https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-uk-cases-fall-for-fifth-day-in-a-row-as-country-records-29-173-new-infections-12363868

July 25

UK cases fall for fifth day in a row

The country has recorded 29,173 new cases, compared to 31,795 infections recorded on Saturday, and 48,161 recorded this time last week.

A total of 28 deaths within 28 days of a positive test were reported on Sunday. On Saturday, 86 deaths were reported and 58 were recorded at the same time last week.

The number of people to have received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine has risen by 43,454, taking the total to 46,563,452.

And 37,160,659 people have now been double jabbed after 206,968 adults had their second vaccination yesterday.

Meanwhile, analysis by Labour has shown nearly six million Britons could have their travel plans ruined if Spain and Greece get added to a new "amber plus" list, requiring isolation on return to the UK.

It comes after the government introduced an exemption for the requirement to isolate at home for 10 days for fully vaccinated holidaymakers returning from countries on the amber list.

But ministers removed the exemption for France amid concerns over the Beta variant, creating what critics call an "amber plus" designation on the traffic light system for foreign travel.

There has been speculation that Greece and Spain could face the same measures as France, though this has not been confirmed.

Earlier, Sajid Javid apologised for a tweet he posted on Saturday that said people should no longer "cower from" coronavirus.

The health secretary, who has deleted the original tweet, said: "I was expressing gratitude that the vaccines help us fight back as a society, but it was a poor choice of word and I sincerely apologise."

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/europe-business-health-government-and-politics-coronavirus-pandemic-0303b155902cf1e22a22bf5e2f08235b

July 26

Spaniards put faith in COVID-19 vaccines even as cases surge

... Spain, like its fellow European Union members, **got off to a slow start in administering shots compared to Britain and the United States** after regulators approved the first vaccines. **But once deliveries by drugmakers started flowing to meet demand, the country quickly made up ground.**

After only fully vaccinating 10% of its adults from January until the end of April, now **nearly 54% of its adults, around 25 million people, have received two vaccine jabs, making Spain one of the inoculation leaders in the 27-nation European Union.**

The program is built on Spain's efficient public health care system, a well-ordered vaccination plan that stuck strictly to age groups, and a populace confident in the safety of childhood immunizations and therefore largely resistant to skepticism about COVID-19 jabs.

"Vaccination forms part of our genome," Amós García, president of the Spanish Association of Vaccinology, told The Associated Press. **"Our professionals have always believed strongly in the benefits of vaccines. We have always strongly encouraged children from a very young age to get their vaccines."**

He said general **vaccination rates for children in Spain were over 95%**.

Spain's public health care system, which has suffered budget cuts in the past decade, buckled last year under the first wave of the virus, which has claimed at least 81,000 lives in the country.

But fears that the health system wouldn't be up to the job of managing a massive vaccine rollout proved unfounded. Eligibility information was widely disseminated, and people didn't hesitate to sign up when it was their age group's turn. Vaccination lines generally moved swiftly, and unlike France, there was no paperwork to get in the way when people went to their local clinics or mass vaccination points.

It also helped that no politician, not even on the fringes of the right or left, sowed doubts about the vaccines. The only political issue regarding the vaccines was when they weren't arriving fast enough, and regional health authorities in charge of administering them demanded more quicker.

"This is not a question of progressives or of conservatives. It is a public health question," Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez told MSNBC while on a visit last week to the United States.

Unlike Germany or France, Spain doesn't have a big anti-vaccine movement. More than 90% of Spain's public health workers have been vaccinated, compared with 42% of public health workers in France.

So while France and Greece have had to pressure skeptics and procrastinators into getting their shots by making vaccines mandatory for people working certain jobs, such as paramedics and nursing home workers, Spaniards have so far needed very little prodding.

In methodically working its way from the most elderly downward, Spain achieved its first goal: stopping the most vulnerable from dying. But the emphasis on vaccines as the salvation could also have contributed to Spain's young letting down their guards as curfews and face mask requirements were lifted, just as the delta variant arrived.

The result is that, **despite its smooth vaccine rollout, Spain is currently one of Europe's hot spots for new infections**. Spain is reporting more than 25,000 new cases a day now compared with 3,400 a day a month ago, according to Our World in Data.

"A month ago, when we let go of the most of the restrictions, we didn't call it 'Freedom Day' like England, but basically it was a ...

https://apnews.com/article/government-and-politics-business-health-coronavirus-pandemic-92751d50b5919525e4033c63c1b4695f

July 27

VA requires COVID-19 vaccination for health care workers

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Department of Veterans Affairs on Monday became **the first major federal agency to require health care workers to get COVID-19 vaccines**, as the aggressive delta variant spreads across the nation and some communities report troubling increases in hospitalizations among unvaccinated people.

The VA's move came on a day when **nearly 60 leading medical and health care organizations issued a call for health care facilities to require their workers to get vaccinated. No federal law stands in the way of employers requiring vaccinations**, but like mask mandates, the issue has been politicized in a society that's divided on matters of public health.

"With more than 300 million doses administered in the United States and nearly 4 billion doses administered worldwide, we know the vaccines are safe and highly effective at preventing severe illness and death from COVID-19," Dr. Susan Bailey, immediate past president of the American Medical Association, said in a statement. "Increased vaccinations among health care personnel will not only reduce the spread of COVID-19 but also reduce the harmful toll this virus is taking within the health care workforce and those we are striving to serve."

Although **vaccination among physicians is nearly universal — 96% according to an AMA survey — that's not the case for many other people working at health care facilities. In nursing homes, only about 60% of staffers are vaccinated**, compared with about 80% of residents, according to recent numbers from Medicare. And COVID-19 cases are rising.

At the VA, vaccines will now be mandatory for certain medical personnel — including **physicians, dentists, podiatrists, optometrists, registered nurses, physician assistants and others who work in departmental facilities or provide direct care to veterans**, said VA Secretary Veterans Affairs Secretary Denis McDonough.

Employees will have eight weeks to be fully vaccinated.
...
It was unclear what would happen to VA employees who refuse to be vaccinated. The agency said **vaccination will be required "absent a medical or religious exemption."** The longstanding policy in the health care industry is for staff to stay up-to-date with vaccinations, such as annual flu shots. Exceptions for medical reasons include known allergies.

In addition to the AMA, the medical and health care groups calling for mandatory vaccines for health workers included the American Academy of Nursing, the American Public Health Association, the American Pharmacists Association and, for the first time, a nursing home industry group. LeadingAge, which represents nonprofit nursing homes and elder care facilities, had previously advocated educating nursing home employees about the benefits of getting their shots. Also joining the call was the National Medical Association, the leading professional group representing Black physicians.

"Unfortunately, many health care and long-term care personnel remain unvaccinated," the groups said in a statement. "We stand with the growing number of experts and institutions that support the requirement for universal vaccination of health workers."

Earlier this year, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission said current federal laws do not prevent an employer from requiring employees physically entering the workplace to be vaccinated against COVID-19.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has heavily promoted vaccinations as a way to slow the pandemic and save lives. However, the agency has not recommended that state or local officials, or employers, mandate vaccinations for their employees.

"The politics is really tricky because President Biden hasn't ...

Return to Timeline

https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/worldwide-graphs/#total-deaths

Select live link for current number

July 28

Death toll from coronavirus tops 4,200,000

Return to Timeline

https://dentonrc.com/business/baylor-scott-white-health-will-require-its-40-000-workers-to-get-covid-vaccines/article_0b6b6e64-6a87-55a3-9333-d0cf043d2600.html

July 28

Baylor Scott & White Health will require its 40,000 workers to get COVID vaccines

DALLAS — Baylor Scott & White Health, **the largest nonprofit hospital system in Texas**, will require all employees to be vaccinated against COVID-19 as surges in the delta variant raise health risks statewide, the company said Wednesday.

Baylor has 40,386 full-time employees in North and Central Texas, and **workers must be fully vaccinated by Oct. 1**. The company said about 71% of employees have been vaccinated.

Baylor's policy also extends to all providers on the medical staff, volunteers, students, vendors and contractors — "tens of thousands" of additional people, a spokeswoman said.

...

With the move, **Baylor becomes the latest of over 70 health care providers to adopt such a policy since Houston Methodist announced a mandate four months ago**, according to Becker's Hospital Review. They include the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota; Mass General Brigham in Boston; University of California Health; and the Department of Veterans Affairs.

The more easily transmitted delta variant has been driving up COVID cases and hospitalizations, especially in parts of the country with low vaccination rates.

...

On July 19, Baylor suspended elective surgery at its flagship hospital in Temple because of a big increase in COVID patients requiring hospitalization. The facility continues to provide emergency and urgent care, along with outpatient services completed the same day. But Baylor said it's still rescheduling elective procedures that require an overnight stay.

The company has not taken similar action at over 50 other hospitals in Texas — at least not yet, Arroliga said.

"I'm afraid that if you follow the trajectory of the increasing number of cases, it may be necessary" to do the same in other locales, including Dallas-Fort Worth, he said. "We have a staff that's already stretched and tired, and if we get too many cases in a short time, it's like having a traffic jam."

The solution is plain to see: Increase the uptake of vaccinations. That not only applies to certain workplaces, such as hospitals and other health care providers, but to the general population as well.

"Most of the counties in Texas right now have either a substantial or high transmission rate," Arroliga said. "So we better be concerned because we will have a surge [in cases]. And the reason? Because a substantial portion of the population is not vaccinated."

In Bell County, which includes Baylor Scott & White's hospital in Temple, just 33% of those 12 and over were fully vaccinated through July 27, according to data from Texas Health and Human Services.

That's far lower than the U.S. vaccination rate of 57.6% for the same population and 52.2% for those 12 and older statewide.

Meanwhile, UT Southwestern Medical Center said the number of people hospitalized for COVID-19 in North Texas is expected to increase sharply over the next several weeks. In a report updated July 21, UT Southwestern said hospital volumes had risen 89% in the previous two weeks.

At the current pace of vaccinations, its model projects that by October, COVID-19 hospitalizations will approach the levels seen in the first months of the year. That would be substantially higher than hospitalizations during the surge last summer — a threat that helped push Baylor to act now.

"With rapidly rising COVID-19 case counts due to the highly contagious delta variant and the start of the flu season fast ...

https://apnews.com/article/government-and-politics-health-coronavirus-pandemic-coronavirus-vaccine-bhutan-596528eca3535b5c2ee79e275ec5e7e0

July 29

Bhutan fully vaccinates 90% of eligible adults within a week

The Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan has fully vaccinated 90% of its eligible adult population within just seven days, its health ministry said Tuesday.

The tiny country, wedged between India and China and home to nearly 800,000 people, began giving out second doses on July 20 in a mass drive that has been hailed by UNICEF as **"arguably the fastest vaccination campaign to be executed during a pandemic."**

In April, Bhutan grabbed headlines when its government said it had inoculated around the same percentage of eligible adults with the first dose in under two weeks after India donated 550,000 shots of AstraZeneca vaccine.

But the country faced a shortage for months after India, a major supplier of the AstraZeneca shot, halted exports as it scrambled to meet a rising demand at home as infections surged.

Bhutan was able to restart its drive last week after half a million doses of Moderna vaccine arrived from the United States as a donation under the U.N.-backed COVAX program, an initiative devised to give countries access to coronavirus vaccines regardless of their wealth.

Some **5,000 shots of Pfizer were also facilitated through COVAX**, which is co-led by Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, the World Health Organization and the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovation.

It also received more than **400,000 AstraZeneca shots from Denmark, Croatia and Bulgaria** in the last two weeks.

"Our aim is to achieve herd immunity among our population in the shortest possible time to avert a major public health crisis," Dechen Wangmo, Bhutan's health minister, told The Associated Press.

Many Western countries with far more resources are yet to vaccinate such a high rate of eligible adults.

Health experts say Bhutan's small population helped, but the country also benefited from strong and effective messaging from top officials and an established cold chain storage system.

More than 3,000 health workers participated and 1,200 vaccination centers across the country helped ensure that shots reached every eligible adult. In some cases, health workers trekked for days through landslides and pouring rain to reach extremely remote villages atop steep mountains to administer doses to those unable to get to a center, said Dr. Sonam Wangchuk, a member of Bhutan's vaccination task force.

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/2020-tokyo-olympics-japan-tokyo-coronavirus-f38106df2354d25d0eb056f578a31d29

July 30

Japan expands virus emergency after record spikes amid Games

TOKYO (AP) — Japan expanded a coronavirus state of emergency to four more areas in addition to Tokyo on Friday following record spikes in infections as the capital hosts the Olympics.

Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga declared an **emergency in Saitama, Kanagawa and Chiba, near Tokyo, as well as in the western city of Osaka, effective Monday until Aug. 31. Emergency measures already in place in Tokyo and the southern island of Okinawa will be extended until the end of August, after the Olympics and well into the Paralympics which start Aug. 24.**

The upsurge in cases in Tokyo despite more than two weeks of emergency measures is raising doubts that they can effectively slow infections.

Five other areas, including Hokkaido, Kyoto, Hyogo and Fukuoka, will be placed under less-stringent emergency restrictions.

Tokyo has reported a record increase in cases for three days in a row, including 3,865 on Thursday, before logging another 3,300 on Friday. The cases have doubled since last week, although officials say the surge is unrelated to the Olympics.

“Infections are expanding in the Tokyo and western metropolitan areas at an enormous speed that we have never experienced before,” Suga said as he declared the expansion of the state of emergency. **If the spike continues at the current pace with the spread of the more contagious delta variant, Japan’s medical system could collapse, he said.**

Japan has kept its cases and deaths lower than many other countries, but its **seven-day rolling average is growing and now stands at 28 per 100,000 people nationwide and 88 per 100,000 in Tokyo**, according to the Health Ministry. **This compares to 18.5 in the United States, 48 in Britain and 2.8 in India**, according to data from Johns Hopkins University.

Officials said 2,995 are hospitalized in Tokyo, about half the current capacity of 6,000 beds, with some hospitals already full. More than 10,000 others are isolating at home or in designated hotels, with nearly 5,600 waiting at home while health centers decide where they will be treated. Tokyo is also setting up a facility for those requiring oxygen while waiting for hospital beds.

Nationwide, Japan reported 10,687 cases Thursday, exceeding 10,000 for the first time. It has recorded 15,166 fatalities from COVID-19, including 2,288 in Tokyo, since the pandemic began.

The emergency measures focus on an alcohol ban at eateries and karaoke bars and their shortened hours ...

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/science-health-coronavirus-pandemic-d9504519a8ae081f785ca012b5ef84d1

July 31

Study: Vaccinated people can carry as much virus as others

... scientists who studied a big COVID-19 outbreak in Massachusetts concluded that vaccinated people who got so-called breakthrough infections carried about the same amount of the coronavirus as those who did not get the shots.

Health officials on Friday released details of that **research**, which **was key in this week's decision by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to recommend that vaccinated people return to wearing masks indoors in parts of the U.S.** where the delta variant is fueling infection surges. The authors said the findings suggest that the CDC's mask guidance should be expanded to include the entire country, even outside of hot spots.

The findings have the potential to upend past thinking about how the disease is spread. Previously, vaccinated people who got infected were thought to have low levels of virus and to be unlikely to pass it to others. But the new data shows that is not the case with the delta variant.

The outbreak in Provincetown — a seaside tourist spot on Cape Cod in the county with Massachusetts' highest vaccination rate — has so far included more than 900 cases. About three-quarters of them were people who were fully vaccinated.
...
Like many states, Massachusetts lifted all COVID-19 restrictions in late May, ahead of the traditional Memorial Day start of the summer season. Provincetown this week reinstated an indoor mask requirement for everyone.

Leaked internal documents on breakthrough infections and the delta variant suggest the CDC may be considering other changes in advice on how the nation fights the coronavirus, such as **recommending masks for everyone and requiring vaccines for doctors and other health workers.**

The **delta variant**, first detected in India, causes infections that are **more contagious than the common cold, flu, smallpox and the Ebola virus, and it is as infectious as chickenpox**, according to the documents, which mentioned the Provincetown cases.

The documents were obtained by The Washington Post. As they note, COVID-19 vaccines are still highly effective against the delta variant at preventing serious illness and death.
...
People with breakthrough infections make up an increasing portion of hospitalizations and in-hospital deaths among COVID-19 patients, coinciding with the spread of the delta variant, according to the leaked documents.
...
The CDC report is based on about 470 COVID-19 cases linked to the Provincetown festivities, which included densely packed indoor and outdoor holiday events at bars, restaurants, guest houses and rental homes.

Researchers ran tests on a portion of them and found roughly the same level of virus in those who were fully vaccinated and those who were not.

Three-quarters of the infections were in fully vaccinated individuals. Among those fully vaccinated, about 80% experienced symptoms with the most common being cough, headache, sore throat, muscle aches and fever. ...

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/business-health-florida-coronavirus-pandemic-7ca97f0d685ab25559cf9b51cfc077eb

Aug 1

Florida breaks record for COVID-19 hospitalizations

ORLANDO, Fla. (AP) — **A day after it recorded the most new daily cases since the start of the pandemic, Florida on Sunday broke a previous record for current hospitalizations set more than a year ago before vaccines were available.**

The Sunshine State had 10,207 people hospitalized with confirmed COVID-19 cases, according to data reported to the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services.

The previous record was from July 23, 2020, more than a half-year before vaccinations started becoming widespread, when Florida had 10,170 hospitalizations, according to the Florida Hospital Association.

Florida is now leading the nation in per capita hospitalizations for COVID-19, as hospitals around the state report having to put emergency room visitors in beds in hallways and others document a noticeable drop in the age of patients.

In the past week, **Florida has averaged 1,525 adult hospitalizations a day, and 35 daily pediatric hospitalizations. Both are the highest per capita rate in the nation**, according to Jason Salemi, an associate professor of epidemiology at the University of South Florida.

The hospitalizations and increasing cases have come as the new, more transmittable delta variant has spread throughout Florida, and residents have returned to pre-pandemic activities.

...

There has been a startling rise in the number of children with the virus at hospitals in Miami, many of them requiring intensive care.

Memorial Health's **Joe DiMaggio Children's Hospital in Hollywood had seven patients with COVID-19. At Nicklaus Children's Hospital in Miami, there were 17 patients with COVID-19 on Friday, including six in the ICU and one who needed a ventilator**, ... **About half of the patients were under 12**, Mestre said, and the rest were older and eligible for the vaccine. But **none of the patients with COVID-19 at Nicklaus Children's on Friday were vaccinated.** Most children who get COVID-19 do not need hospitalization, Mestre said.

In the state capital, COVID-19 hospitalizations reached 70 patients on Sunday at Tallahassee Memorial HealthCare, a jump of 11 people in two days.

"This is the most we've ever had," Stephanie Derzypolski, a hospital spokeswoman, told the Tallahassee Democrat.

The Mayo Clinic hospital in Jacksonville said it had exceeded its capacity of 304 licensed beds due to COVID-19 cases and asked the Agency for Health Care Administration for permission to operate overcapacity until the current surge ends, First Coast News in Jacksonville reported Sunday.

At the UF Health North hospital emergency room in Jacksonville, COVID-19 patients once again were being put in beds in hallways due to a surge in visits.

For many hospital workers, up until a month ago, it looked like there was light at the end of the tunnel, as people got vaccinated and hospitalizations decreased. But then the summer surge, powered by the new delta variant, hit Florida in July.

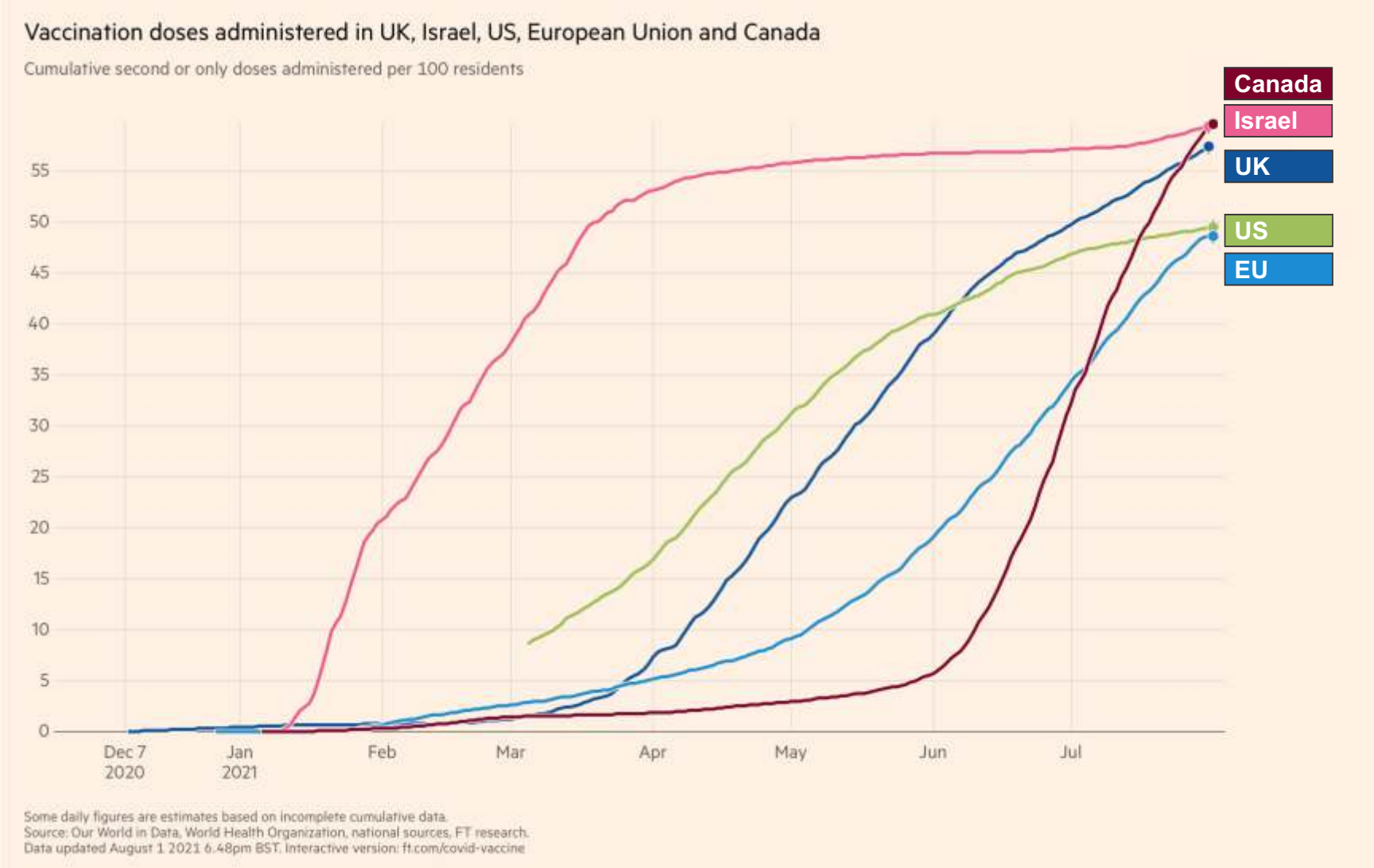
"That light did turn out to be a train in this case," Marsha Tittle, a nursing manager at UF Health North, told The Florida Times Union. "We're taking more patients than we normally would take. ... My staff is wonderful. You walk out there, they're going to have smiles on their faces and they're doing a great job. But there's a sense of defeat, like they're just defeated."

Return to Timeline

https://twitter.com/EricTopol/status/1421906652601544708

Aug 2

Canada surpasses Israel for fully vaccinated



Return to Timeline

https://gov.louisiana.gov/index.cfm/newsroom/detail/3301

Aug 2

Louisiana's statewide mask mandate is reinstated during 4th surge of COVID

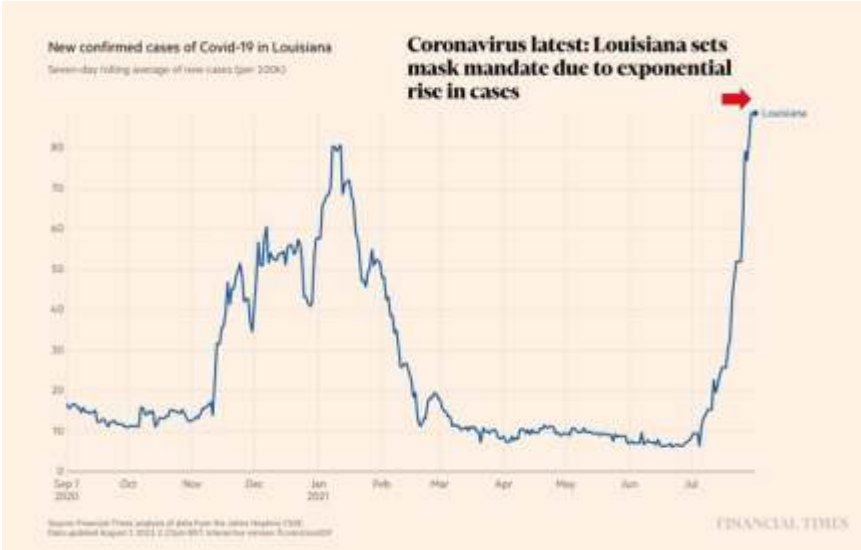
Today, Gov. John Bel Edwards has temporarily reinstated Louisiana's statewide mask mandate **indoors for all people age five and older** as COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations continue to rise across Louisiana, threatening the ability of Louisiana's hospitals to deliver care during this fourth surge of COVID. Louisiana is currently in the worst surge of the COVID-19 pandemic so far in terms of case growth rate, percent positivity and hospitalizations.

...(CDC) on Friday released data that shows that while vaccination reduces one's chance of becoming infected with COVID-19, **those who do become infected with the Delta variant despite being fully vaccinated are likely at risk of transmitting it to others.**

Louisiana's temporary indoor statewide mask mandate **will stay in place until at least September 1, but may be extended if necessary.**

Driven largely by Louisiana's insufficient vaccination rate and the spread of the highly transmissible Delta variant, COVID-19 cases in the state have grown exponentially. **Louisiana remains No. 1 nationwide for number of new COVID-19 cases per capita.** The temporary indoor statewide mask mandate will help slow the spread of COVID-19 and limit suffering and death in Louisiana until we are through this fourth surge. The indoor mask mandate also applies to K-12 schools, universities, and other higher education institutions, which return to on-campus learning in August. In accordance with new guidance from the CDC, all people on campuses should be masked indoors, regardless of their vaccination status.

"It has never been more clear that we are in an unchecked **COVID surge** that, in addition to threatening the health and wellbeing of many Louisianans, also **threatens the capacity of our hospitals and medical facilities to deliver care to their patients.** That is simply unacceptable, and after reviewing new data from the CDC, speaking with public health advisors, and hearing from hospital leadership and the business community, I am reinstating Louisiana's statewide mask mandate indoors, including in schools to protect our children who are too young to be vaccinated and our teachers and staff," Gov. Edwards said. "This decision is not one I take lightly, but as the fourth surge of COVID-19 is upon us, we know that mask wearing when you are in public is one way to greatly lower your risk of spreading or catching COVID. Being vaccinated against COVID-19 is another. We have the tools we need to slow the spread of COVID-19 in our communities and save lives, and I am pleading with unvaccinated Louisianans to get their shot as soon as they can to protect themselves. We can end this nightmare, but it is going to take all of us working together to do it."...



Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/health-china-coronavirus-pandemic-wuhan-8fa8edb073629c692ac51772e5e9d775

Aug 3

China orders mass testing in Wuhan as COVID outbreak spreads

BEIJING (AP) — China **suspended flights and trains, canceled professional basketball league games and announced mass coronavirus testing** in Wuhan on Tuesday as widening outbreaks of the delta variant reached the city where the disease was first detected in late 2019.

While the **total number of cases is still in the hundreds, they are far more widespread than anything China has dealt with since the initial outbreak** that devastated Wuhan in early 2020 and over time spread to the rest of the country and the world.

China has not eliminated but largely curbed COVID-19 at home with quick lockdowns and mass testing to isolate infected people whenever new cases pop up. Most previous outbreaks didn't spread far beyond a city or province. This time, **cases have been confirmed in more than 35 cities in 17 of China's 33 provinces and regions.**

The cities of Nanjing and Yangzhou have canceled all domestic flights, and Beijing has halted long-distance trains from 23 stations. The Chinese Basketball Association said that matches of its men's professional league would be suspended because of the pandemic.

Wuhan, a provincial capital of 11 million people in central China, is the latest city to undergo city-wide testing. Three cases were confirmed there on Monday, its first non-imported cases in more than a year.

They were among 90 new cases confirmed nationwide the previous day, the National Health Commission said Tuesday. Of those, 61 were locally spread ones and 29 among people who had recently arrived from abroad.

Most of the local cases are still in Jiangsu province, where an outbreak started at the airport in Nanjing, the provincial capital, and has spread to other parts of he province and beyond. Authorities reported 45 new cases, five in Nanjing and 40 in the city of Yangzhou, 105 kilometers (65 miles) away, where a second round of mass testing was underway.

Five other provinces and the cities of Beijing and Shanghai reported new local cases in the single digits. In Shanghai, the nation's largest city, a driver working at one of its two main airports tested positive. Beijing has reported a total of five cases in recent days.

The Nanjing outbreak, which has been traced to the delta variant, is the source of the cases in most other places. Separately, delta variant outbreaks in two other places have been linked to neighboring Myanmar, which has seen a sharp rise in infections.

An outbreak in Zhengzhou, a city hit by flooding that killed about 300 people last month, started with people who arrived from Myanmar by air. A third outbreak, the one that started the earliest, spilled into Yunnan province from its border with Myanmar.

Government-affiliated scientists have said that Chinese vaccines are less effective against the new strains of the coronavirus but still offer some protection. Only Chinese vaccines are currently being given in China, where authorities say more than 1.6 billion doses have been administered.

https://www.cnn.com/2021/08/03/us/covid-19-children-teens/index.html

Aug 4

Covid-19 cases among US children and teens jumped 84% in a week

Almost 72,000 children and teens caught Covid-19 last week -- a "substantial" increase from a week earlier, the American Academy of Pediatrics reported Tuesday.

The group counted 71,726 new cases from July 22 - 29. That is a "substantial" increase from the nearly 39,000 cases reported a week before, and five times as many kids who were sick at the end of June. The definition of a child varies by state but generally includes those up to age 17 or 18.

After decreases in reported cases over the past couple of months, the July numbers started trending upward again as the highly transmissible Delta variant of the virus became dominant in the country.

"That's high and considering the fact that we are vaccinated now, what that's telling us is that **unvaccinated people are getting infected in higher numbers because the virus is more infectious with the Delta variant**," said Dr. Yvonne Maldonado, chief of the division of infectious diseases in the Department of Pediatrics at Stanford Medicine and chair of the AAP committee on infectious diseases.

The report comes as schools have just started or will soon start, with some requiring no masks or social distancing, and as cases in many parts of the country are surging and hospitalizations at levels not seen in months.

At one Georgia school, more than 100 students were in quarantine after nine students and five staff members tested positive for Covid-19 just days after the first day back.

Children under 12 years old are not eligible for any of the three vaccines currently used in the United States, and the fast-spreading Delta variant has put them especially at risk, health experts say.

Vaccines are being tested now in children as young as 6 months, but they probably won't be available for children younger than 12 for several more months.

More than 4.2 million kids have tested positive for Covid-19 since the start of the pandemic. **Children and teens represented 19% of reported cases in the latest weekly data.**

"Our sense is because kids can't get vaccinated, parents should clearly be vaccinated themselves, and if their kids are 12 and older they should be vaccinated as well," Maldonado said.

Leaders around the country are taking various approaches to keep children safe, from Utah Gov. Spencer Cox saying the state will give away KN-95 masks to children, to Arkansas Gov. Asa Hutchinson calling on the state's legislature to amend a law in order to give school districts the flexibility to require masks.

The academy, which represents pediatricians, pointed out that **severe illness still appears to be rare among children. The number of hospitalizations has remained steady through much of the pandemic. Children accounted for 1.3%-3.5% of the hospitalizations**, depending on the state.

Seven states have reported no child deaths from Covid-19 during the pandemic. As of Monday, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports 526 deaths among children ages 0-17.
Among the some 25 million US children between 12 and 17 years old, about 10.9 million have been vaccinated with at least one dose of vaccine, according to CDC data.

https://www.bbc.com/news/business-58079107

Aug 5

Covid travel: France moves to amber list and green list expands

Fully vaccinated passengers returning to England, Scotland and Northern Ireland from France will no longer need to quarantine after Sunday.

...

But thousands of Britons are in **Mexico**, which **is moving to the red list.**

It is one of four countries now considered to be among the highest risk destinations.

Despite prior speculation, **Spain will remain on the amber list, enabling travellers who are fully vaccinated to continue to enjoy a quarantine-free return.**

However, the Department for Transport has now said that **"arrivals from Spain and all its islands are advised to use a PCR test as their pre-departure test wherever possible"** instead of the cheaper lateral flow tests.

...

India, Bahrain, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates are being moved from the red list to the amber list as part of the changes, which come into effect from 04:00 BST on 8 August.

And **Germany, Austria and Norway are among seven nations being added to the green list.**

The total number of countries or territories on the green list - from which all travellers can return without having to quarantine - will rise from 29 to 36.

But other countries have their own rules about allowing visitors - so being on the UK's green list does not guarantee travellers can visit there.

There are no changes to the rules requiring travellers to take tests before and after their return.

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps said: "We are committed to opening up international travel safely, taking advantage of the gains we've made through our successful vaccination programme, helping connect families, friends and businesses around the world."

Asked about the advice on PCR tests for arrivals from Spain, he told BBC Radio 4's Today programme that ministers were "not asking people to do anything different from what's been happening in Spain".

He insisted the government was "not changing the rules", as in Spain's case, "virtually everyone is taking a PCR" to meet the government's performance standards for the pre-departure test - adding that PCR tests helped scientists monitor variants.

He said that between 5,000 and 6,000 British holidaymakers are in Mexico currently and would be "making arrangements to come home". They need to return by the 04:00 BST deadline on Sunday or pay for hotel quarantine.

https://apnews.com/article/business-health-coronavirus-pandemic-economy-5cada1408f7fc5481e3b891b3d51715c

Aug 6

US added 943,000 jobs in July; unemployment rate at 5.4%

WASHINGTON (AP) — Hiring surged in July as American employers added 943,000 jobs. The unemployment rate dropped to 5.4% as the U.S. economy continues to bounce back with surprising vigor from last year's coronavirus shutdown.

The July numbers exceeded economists' forecast for more than 860,000 new jobs. Hotels and restaurants, reopening and doing brisk business, added 327,000 jobs last month. Local public schools added 221,000.

The number of people who reported they had jobs surged by 1 million, pushing the jobless rate down from 5.9% in June.

... The economy lost more than 22 million jobs in March and April 2020. Since then, though, it has recovered nearly 16 million jobs, leaving a 6.8 million shortfall compared to February 2020.

The rollout of vaccines has encouraged businesses to reopen and consumers to return to shops, restaurants and bars that they had shunned for months after the pandemic struck. **Many Americans are also in surprisingly strong financial shape because the lockdowns allowed them to save money and bank relief checks from the federal government.**

As a result, **the economy has bounded back with unexpected speed. The International Monetary Fund expects U.S. gross domestic product — the broadest measure of economic output — to grow 7% this year, its fastest pace since 1984**.

Employers are advertising jobs — a record 9.2 million openings in May — faster than applicants can fill them.

Some businesses blame generous federal unemployment benefits — including an extra $300 a week tacked on to regular state jobless aid — for discouraging Americans from seeking work. In response, many states have dropped the federal unemployment assistance even before it is scheduled to expire nationwide Sept. 6.

Many Americans may be staying out of the job market because of lingering health fears and trouble obtaining childcare at a time when many schools are closed.

Another problem: Many of those thrown out of work by the coronavirus recession can't go back to their old jobs.

Rubeela Farooqi, chief U.S. economist at High Frequency Economics, notes, for instance, that about 80,000 restaurants have closed since March 2020. So those displaced workers must find new employers and often new careers.

"Matching the unemployed to job openings will likely be a more prolonged process, given that finding a new job, perhaps in a new industry, will be a challenge," Farooqi wrote in a research report.

Farooqi also said the labor market may face longer-term struggles once temporary labor shortages sort themselves out. This is because many businesses adjusted to working with fewer employees during the pandemic, often using technology that reduced the need for human labor.

Also **clouding the outlook for jobs is a resurgence of COVID-19 cases** caused by the spread of the highly contagious delta variant. The United States is reporting an average of more than 75,000 new cases a day, up from fewer than 12,000 a day in late June — although still well below the 250,000 levels of early January.

Oxford Economics' Boussour says the spread of the delta variant might have "have dampened workers' willingness and ability to ...

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/health-coronavirus-pandemic-b0811d7287ef240ae619ba1e385e0a63

Aug 7

US averaging 100,000 new COVID-19 infections a day

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. (AP) — The COVID-19 outbreak in the United States crossed 100,000 new confirmed daily infections Saturday, **a milestone last exceeded during the winter surge** and driven by the highly transmissible delta variant and low vaccination rates in the South.

Health officials fear that cases, hospitalizations and deaths will continue to soar if more Americans don't embrace the vaccine. Nationwide, 50% of residents are fully vaccinated and more than 70% of adults have received at least one dose.

"Our models show that if we don't (vaccinate people), we could be up to several hundred thousand cases a day, similar to our surge in early January," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention director Rochelle Walensky said on CNN this week.

It took the U.S. about nine months to cross 100,000 average daily cases in November before peaking at about 250,000 in early January. Cases bottomed out in June, averaging about 11,000 per day, but six weeks later the number is 107,143.

Hospitalizations and deaths are also increasing, though all are still below peaks seen early this year before vaccines became widely available. **More than 44,000 Americans are currently hospitalized with COVID-19, according to the CDC, up 30% in a week and nearly four times the number in June.** More than 120,000 were hospitalized in January.

The seven-day average for deaths rose from about 270 deaths per day two weeks ago to nearly 500 a day as of Friday, according to Johns Hopkins University. Deaths peaked at 3,500 per day in January. Deaths usually lag behind hospitalizations as the disease normally takes a few weeks to kill.

The situation is particularly dire in the South, which has some of the lowest vaccination rates in the U.S. and has seen smaller hospitals overrun with patients.

In the Southeast, the number of hospitalized COVID-19 patients jumped 50% to a daily average of 17,600 over the last week from 11,600 the previous week, the CDC says. Florida, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee and Kentucky represent 41% of the nation's new hospitalizations, the CDC says, twice their overall share of the population.

Alabama and Mississippi have the lowest vaccination rates in the country: less than 35% of residents are fully inoculated, according to the Mayo Clinic. Georgia, Tennessee and the Carolinas are all in the lowest 15 states.

Alabama saw more than 65,000 doses wasted because health providers couldn't find people to take them before they expired, according to State Health Officer Scott Harris. That represents less than 1.5% of the more than 5 million coronavirus vaccines doses that Alabama has received.

"Sixty-five thousand doses have been wasted. That's extremely unfortunate when we have such a low vaccination rate and of course, there are so many people in the world that still don't have access to vaccine," Harris said.

Florida has been especially hard hit. It makes up more than 20% of the nation's new cases and hospitalizations, triple its share of the population. Many rural counties have vaccination rates below 40%, with the state at 49%. The state again set a record Saturday, reporting 23,903 new cases.

Gov. Ron DeSantis, while encouraging vaccinations, has taken a ...

Return to Timeline

https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/worldwide-graphs/#total-deaths

Select live link for current number

Aug 8

Death toll from coronavirus tops 4,300,000

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/covid-19-vaccine-europe-surpasses-us-f58d8301dba700337d0998f16667e341

Aug 8

Europe catches up to the US in vaccinations

... In mid-February, less than 4% of people living in the 27-nation EU were at least partially vaccinated against the coronavirus, compared with nearly 12% in the U.S, according to Our World in Data, an online science publication connected to the University of Oxford.

Now the EU has surpassed the U.S. by that same measure, **with some 60% of the bloc's residents receiving at least one dose, versus less than 58% of Americans.**

In **Italy**, where roughly **63% of people 12 and older are fully protected**, Premier Mario Draghi took a victory lap this past week.

"I said that I don't want to celebrate successes, but it must be said that Italy has inoculated more doses per 100 inhabitants than France, Germany, the United States," he said as the country's vaccine verification program went into effect Friday.

People in Italy must now show proof they have had at least one vaccine dose, recovered from COVID-19 or recently tested negative for the virus if they want to dine indoors, use gyms or go to concerts, theaters, museums and tourist sites such as the Colosseum.

European authorities attribute success in Italy and elsewhere to nationalized health care and a history of public confidence in the safety of immunizations.

The EU's slow process for approving the vaccinations set the bloc back at the beginning, but that is now paying dividends because it is instilling more confidence in the rapidly developed formulas, said Dr. Peter Liese, a European Parliament member from Germany.

While the U.S. and Britain issued emergency authorizations of vaccines to get shots into arms quickly, the EU went through the longer process of granting full approvals, putting it weeks behind.

...

The turnaround in Spain has been pronounced. In mid-April, when nearly a quarter of all Americans were fully vaccinated, only 7% of Spaniards were similarly protected, according to Our World in Data. Now, **nearly 60% of Spain's roughly 47 million people are fully vaccinated**, while about half the U.S. is.

Portugal, with around 10 million people, had fully vaccinated around a third of its population by the end of June. Now officials say it is **on track to reach 70% by the end of the summer.**

...

The major factor holding back the EU initially was its decision to purchase vaccines as a bloc instead of as individual countries. The move ensured smaller member nations weren't left out, but it ended up taking more time to negotiate with pharmaceutical companies, said Giovanna De Maio, a visiting fellow in international relations at George Washington University.

The U.S. was also more efficient in distributing the vaccine, quickly setting up large-scale vaccination sites and also supplying shots to neighborhood pharmacies, groceries and other places, while the EU initially focused on hospitals and other medical facilities, she said.

EU nations were also overly confident manufacturers would deliver. As it turned out, Astra-Zeneca failed to produce its shots on time and delivered a paltry number of doses. Concerns over its safety and effectiveness also contributed to vaccine skepticism. But with the major rollout of the Pfizer shot, things turned around.

Meanwhile, the **U.S. vaccination effort peaked and then dropped off dramatically in the face of significant hesitancy** and outright hostility, fueled by misinformation and partisan politics. ...

https://apnews.com/article/lifestyle-canada-business-health-travel-f2a37189b8c7ac90dddec1514a7f3fa8

Aug 9

Canada begins allowing vaccinated US citizens to visit again

Canada on Monday is lifting its prohibition on Americans crossing the border to shop, vacation or visit, but the United States is keeping similar restrictions in place for Canadians, part of a bumpy return to normalcy from COVID-19 travel bans.

U.S. citizens and legal permanent residents must be both fully vaccinated and test negative for COVID-19 within three days to get across one of the world's longest and busiest land borders. Travelers also must fill out a detailed on application on the arriveCAN app before crossing.

Even though travelers have to register, the Canada Border Services Agency won't say how many people they are expecting to enter Canada for the reopening. But travelers should plan for the possibility of additional processing time at the border.

"CBSA will not compromise the health and safety of Canadians for the sake of border wait times," agency spokeswoman Rebecca Purdy said in a statement.

While the Canada Border Services Agency won't say how many people it's expecting, Garnet Health, an Essex, Vermont-based company that offers same-day COVID-19 testing, has seen the number of tests it performs more than triple in recent weeks. The increase coincides with Canada's decision last month to drop a two-week quarantine requirement for its citizens when they return home from the U.S.

"I imagine once that border opens, we are going to see lots of people," said Chelsea Sweeney, the company's director of business development.

The U.S.-Canada border has been closed to nonessential travel since March 2020 to try to slow the spread of the coronavirus.

The U.S. has said it will extend its closure to all Canadians making nonessential trips until at least Aug. 21, which also applies to the Mexican border. But the Biden administration is beginning to make plans for a phased reopening. The main requirement would be that nearly all foreign visitors to the U.S. will have to be vaccinated against the coronavirus.

But Canadians aren't waiting for reciprocal rules.

Joel Villanueva, owner of Primo's Mexican Grill in White Rock, British Columbia, about 2.5 miles (4 kilometers) north of the U.S. border, is more than ready for Americans to return.

"Let's get this thing going," he said. "A lot of our customers are from the United States, and we are literally minutes from across the border. We welcome our Americans, and we depend on their foot traffic."

Villanueva said he supports people coming who are fully vaccinated and doesn't think there will be a rush of Americans initially. But if his restaurant and dozens of others along the waterfront could fill some tables with U.S. visitors every day for the rest of the summer, it would be a big financial boost, he said.

Near the border in Washington state, Blaine Chamber of Commerce board member Carroll Solomon called the reopening a step in the right direction for businesses. But she also said it was somewhat concerning because of an increase in COVID-19 cases nationwide as the highly contagious delta variant spreads.

"For people who need to get up there (to Canada) for family reasons, it's wonderful," said Solomon, who also volunteers at the Blaine Visitor Information Center.

With all the hoops people need to jump through — being fully ...

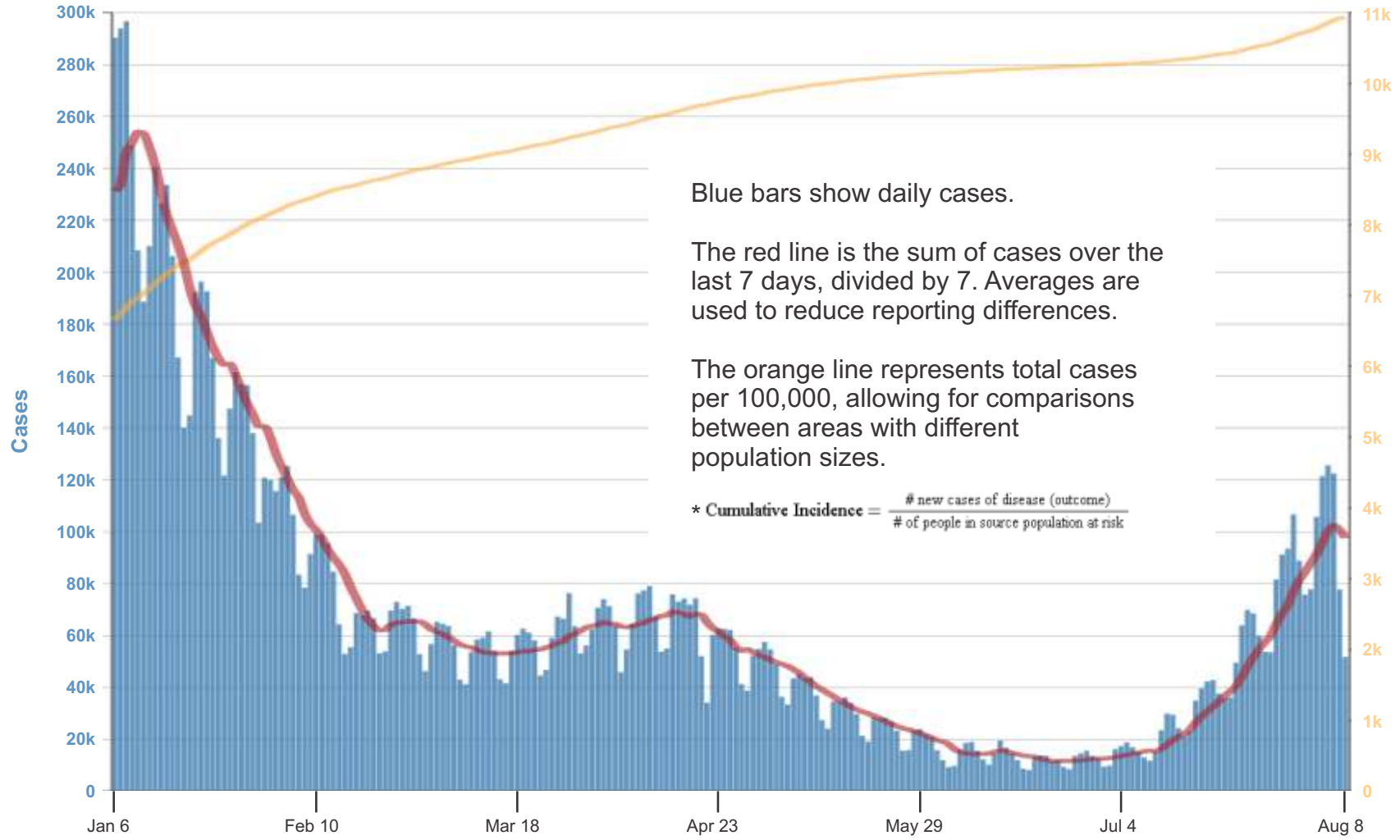
Return to Timeline

https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#trends_dailytrendscases

Select live link for current chart or to download chart data

Aug 10

Daily trends in number of cases in US reported to CDC and total and cumulative incidence* rate cases per 100,000 population



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https://twitter.com/EricTopol/status/1425089101926080514

Select live link for more discussion on this topic

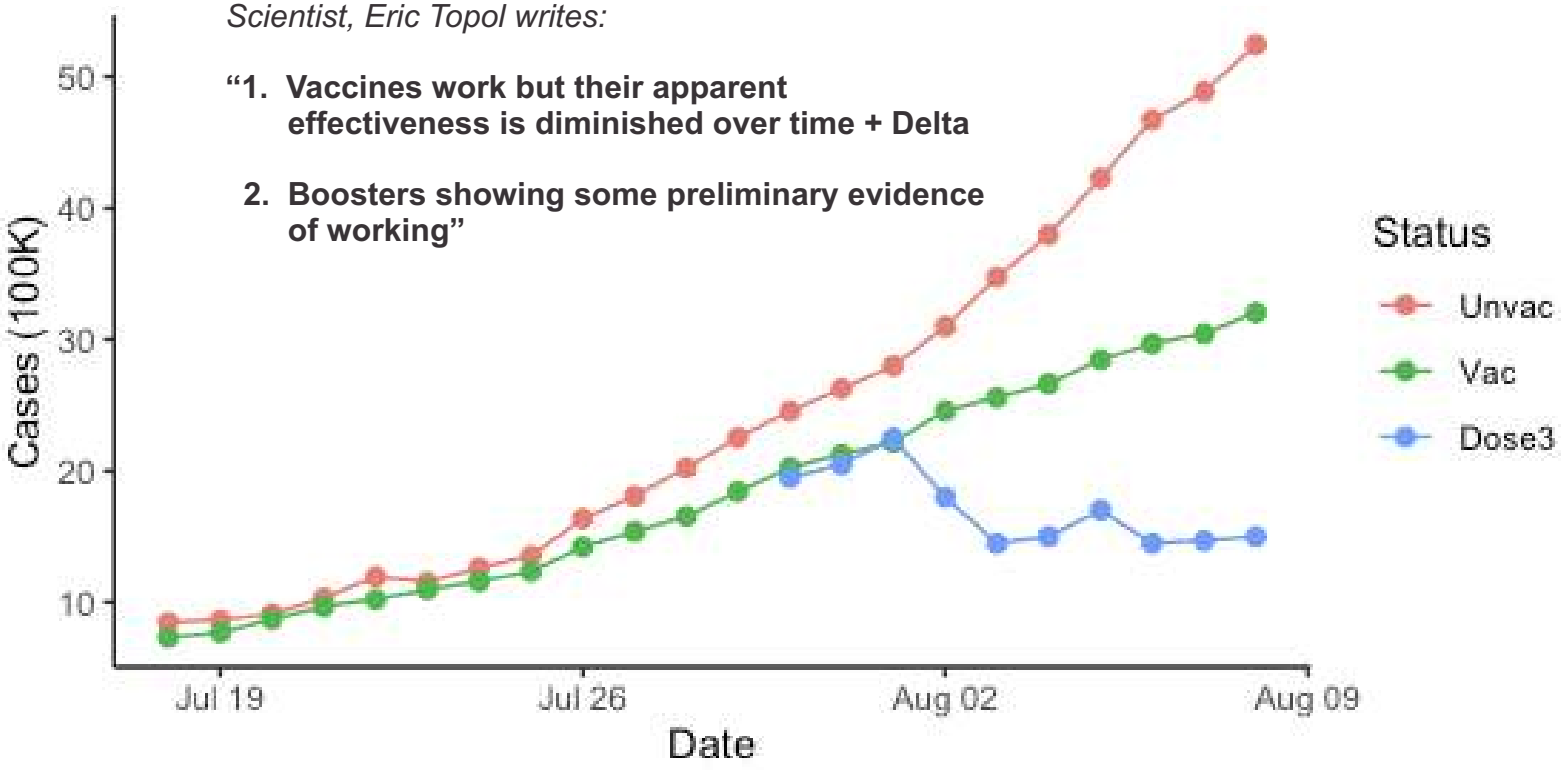
Aug 11

Current Israel data for mRNA vaccination in people age >60, 1st to get vaccines >6 months ago, now confronting Delta infections

Scientist, Eric Topol writes:

"1. Vaccines work but their apparent effectiveness is diminished over time + Delta

2. Boosters showing some preliminary evidence of working"



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https://twitter.com/EricTopol/status/1425492860619481098

Select live link for more discussion on this topic

Aug 12

Protection of mRNA vaccines against symptomatic Delta infections is much lower than the 95% pre-Delta estimates

Scientist, Eric Topol writes:

"50-60% is best estimate from all sources (not US, since we don't have the data)"

Study	N	Vaccines	Vaccine Effectiveness	Citation
Public Health England	4,272	AZ/mRNA	Pfizer 88% AZ 60%	Bernal JL, NEJM
Israel	NA	mRNA	Pfizer 39%	Ministry of Health report
UK REACT	46,525	AZ/mRNA	Combined 49-60%	Elliott P, Imperial College
Mayo Clinic*	51,738 matched	mRNA	Pfizer 42% Moderna 76%	Puranik A, MedRxiv
Qatar*	1,368,182	mRNA	Pfizer 53.5% Moderna 84.8%	Tang, P, MedRxiv

*These comparative mRNA studies did not control for time from vaccination

@erictopol

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https://apnews.com/article/science-health-coronavirus-pandemic-283298fb55b0556dbd9e45a62b782095

Aug 13

Extra COVID vaccine OK'd for those with weak immune systems

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. regulators say **transplant recipients and others with severely weakened immune systems** can get an extra dose of the Pfizer or Moderna COVID-19 vaccines to better protect them as the delta variant continues to surge.

The late-night announcement Thursday by the Food and Drug Administration **applies to several million Americans** who are especially vulnerable because of organ transplants, certain cancers or other disorders. **Several other countries, including France and Israel, have similar recommendations.**

It's harder for vaccines to rev up an immune system suppressed by certain medications and diseases, so those patients don't always get the same protection as otherwise healthy people — and small studies suggest for at least some, an extra dose may be the solution.
...
The FDA determined that transplant recipients and others with a similar level of compromised immunity can receive a third dose of the vaccines from Pfizer and Moderna at least 28 days after getting their second shot. The FDA made no mention of immune-compromised patients who received the single-dose Johnson & Johnson vaccine.
...
Importantly, the FDA's decision only applies to this high-risk group, estimated to be no more than 3% of U.S. adults. It's not an opening for booster doses for the general population.

Instead, health authorities consider the extra dose part of the initial prescription for the immune-compromised. For example, **France since April has encouraged that such patients get a third dose four weeks after their regular second shot. Israel and Germany also recently began recommending a third dose of two-dose vaccines.**

Separately, U.S. health officials are continuing to closely monitor if and when average people's immunity wanes enough to require boosters for everyone — but for now, the vaccines continue to offer robust protection for the general population.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is expected to formally recommend the extra shots for certain immune-compromised groups after a meeting Friday of its outside advisers.

Transplant recipients and others with suppressed immune systems know they're at more risk than the average American and some have been seeking out extra doses on their own, even if it means lying about their vaccination status. The change means now the high-risk groups can more easily get another shot — but experts caution it's not yet clear exactly who should.

"This is all going to be very personalized," cautioned Dr. Dorry Segev, a transplant surgeon at Johns Hopkins University who is running a major National Institutes of Health study of extra shots for organ recipients. For some people, a third dose "increases their immune response. Yet for some people it does not seem to. We don't quite know who's who yet."

One recent study of more than 650 transplant recipients found just over half harbored virus-fighting antibodies after two doses of the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines — although generally less than in otherwise healthy vaccinated people. Another study of people with rheumatoid arthritis and similar autoimmune diseases found only those who use particular medications have very poor vaccine responses.

There's little data on how well a third dose works, and if it causes any safety problems such as an increased risk of organ rejection. Wednesday, Canadian researchers reported that transplant recipients were more likely to have high levels of antibodies if they got a third dose than those given a dummy shot for comparison. Other small ...

https://www.reuters.com/world/us/children-hospitalized-with-covid-19-us-hits-record-number-2021-08-14/

Aug 14

Children hospitalized with COVID-19 in U.S. hits record number

The number of children hospitalized with COVID-19 in the United States hit a record high of just over 1,900 on Saturday, as hospitals across the South were stretched to capacity fighting outbreaks caused by the highly transmissible Delta variant.
...
"This is not last year's COVID. This one is worse and our children are the ones that are going to be affected by it the most," Sally Goza, former president of the American Academy of Pediatrics, told CNN on Saturday.

The **numbers of newly hospitalized COVID-19 patients aged 18-29, 30-39 and 40-49 also hit record highs this week**, according to data from the U.S. Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).
...
A fifth of the nation's COVID-19 hospitalizations are in Florida, where the number of hospitalized COVID-19 patients hit a record 16,100 on Saturday, according to a Reuters tally. More than 90% of the state's intensive care beds are filled, according to data from the Department of Health and Human Services.

INCREASED HOSPITALIZATIONS

The nation's largest teachers union, the National Education Association, **came out in support of mandatory vaccination for its members this week.** NEA President Becky Pringle said on Saturday that schools should employ every mitigation strategy, from vaccines to masks, to ensure that students can come back to their classrooms safely this school year.

"Our students under 12 can't get vaccinated. It's our responsibility to keep them safe. Keeping them safe means that everyone who can be vaccinated should be vaccinated," Pringle told CNN.

The U.S. now has an average of about 129,000 new COVID-19 cases per day, a rate that has doubled in a little over two weeks, according to a Reuters tally. **The number of hospitalized COVID-19 patients is at a six-month high, and an average of 600 people are dying each day of COVID-19, double the death rate seen in late July.**

Arkansas, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Oregon have reported record numbers of COVID-19 hospitalizations this month, according to a Reuters tally, pushing healthcare systems to operate beyond their capacity.

"Our hospitals are working to maximize their available staff and beds, including the use of conference rooms and cafeterias," Florida Hospital Association President Mary Mayhew said in a statement on Friday.

In Oregon, Governor Kate Brown said on Friday that she was sending 500 National Guard members to assist overwhelmed hospitals, with 1,500 members in total available to help.

In Jackson, Mississippi, federal medical workers are assisting understaffed local teams at a 20-bed triage center in the parking garage of the University of Mississippi Medical Center (UMMC) to accommodate the overflow of COVID-19 patients.

Fifteen children and 99 adults were hospitalized with COVID-19 at UMMC as of Saturday morning, the hospital said. More than 77% of those patients were unvaccinated.

Return to Timeline

https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russias-daily-covid-19-deaths-hit-new-record-2021-08-14/

Aug 15

Russia releases worst pandemic death numbers to date

Russia's daily COVID-19 deaths hit a new record of 819 on Saturday, a day after Moscow's health department reported **the highest number of monthly deaths in the city since the start of the pandemic.**

Russia's daily coronavirus deaths are on the rise after infections peaked in July. **Authorities blame the infectious Delta variant and a slow vaccination rate.**

Moscow said late on Friday that the mortality rate in the city in **July was 70% higher than before the pandemic in 2019 and 60% higher than in the same month last year.**

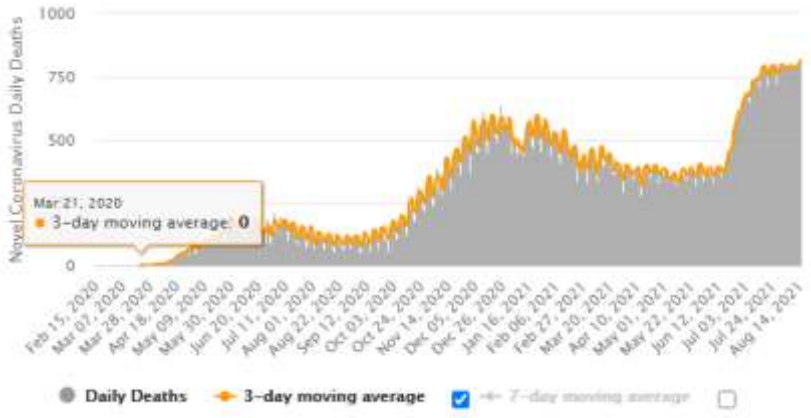
A total of 17,237 deaths in Moscow in July is the highest monthly death toll since the pandemic began. Most of the excess deaths were caused by the coronavirus outbreak, the Moscow health department said.

"The dynamics is linked to the sharp rise of infections due to the spread of a new strain of the coronavirus in June as well as abnormally hot weather in the city in recent months," said the department, adding that high temperatures made COVID-19 patients feel even worse.

Russia's official total coronavirus death toll stands at 169,683. Rosstat, the government statistics agency, keeps a separate count from the pandemic task force and says it recorded around 315,000 deaths related to COVID-19 between last April and June this year.

Russia reported around 463,000 excess deaths from April 2020 to June this year, according to Reuters calculations based on the latest Rosstat data. Some epidemiologists say excess deaths are the best way to measure the real death toll from COVID-19. read more

Russia reported 22,144 new coronavirus infections on Saturday. Daily cases have so far declined in August after the July peak.



https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/country/russia/#graph-cases-daily

Select live link for current chart

Return to Timeline

https://twitter.com/EricTopol/status/1426902842422353924

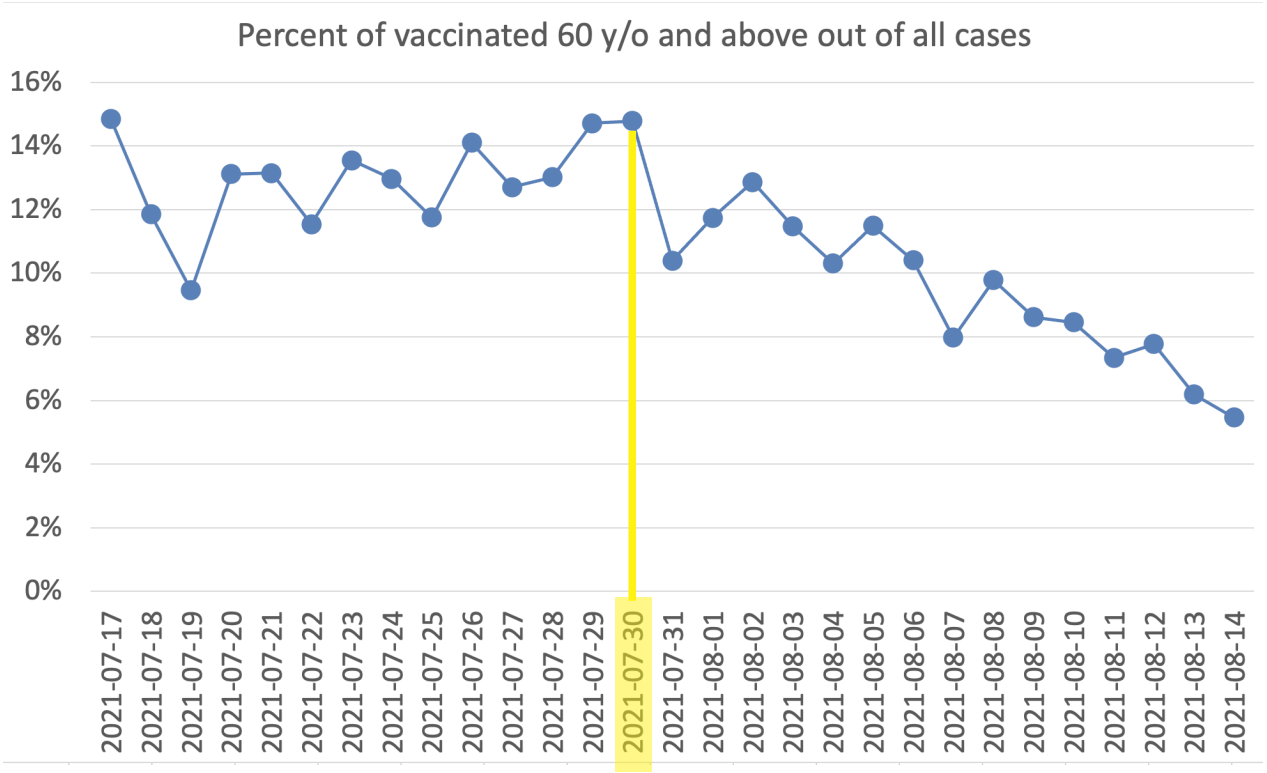
Aug 16

Data are accruing to support the impact of boosters for reducing Delta breakthrough infections

Israel started administering a third dose to 60 year olds and above on July 30

By now, over half of this age group received the 3rd dose

In the two weeks that passed, the relative fraction of cases of 60 y/o and above who are vaccinated out of all cases dropped from ~12-14% to ~6%



Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/business-health-coronavirus-pandemic-585e521c8ab97c64d55920788fe26e8f

Aug 17

In the US, mask disputes, outbreaks make for rocky start of school year

... Confusion reigned in several **Texas** school districts after the state **Supreme Court stopped mask mandates in two of the state's largest districts**, the day before the first day of school in Dallas. **An Arizona judge upheld**, at least temporarily, **a mask mandate in a Phoenix district** despite a new state law prohibiting such restrictions. One Colorado county posted sheriff's deputies in schools on the first day of classes as a precaution after parents protested a last-minute mask mandate.

...

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends masks in schools for students, staff and teachers.

...

In Los Angeles, like the rest of the state, students and teachers are required to wear masks in indoor settings, and teachers must show proof of vaccination or submit to weekly COVID-19 testing.

Los Angeles Unified School District, which serves about 600,000 K-12 students, is **also requiring students and staff to get tested weekly for COVID-19, regardless of vaccination status, and is conducting daily health checks.**

...

San Francisco schools also reopened Monday to more than 50,000 students — many for the first time in 17 months. San Francisco Unified is **recommending that students and staff get tested if they have symptoms, but is not requiring tests.**

...

In **South Carolina**, **one district has already moved to all-virtual classes after a rash of cases** led to hundreds of students quarantined within the first two weeks of the fall semester. That decision has led to protests among parents in Pickens County.

In **other South Carolina counties, officials considered joining Columbia, the capital, in requiring masks in schools despite a state budget requirement that bans districts from doing so without risking funding.**

In **Eagle County, Colorado**, sheriff's deputies were posted to elementary and middle schools on the first day of class Monday after parents objected to a last-minute decision Friday by the county school district to **require universal masking**. No problems were immediately reported, but the potential for trouble is real.

In Los Angeles, a man was released from a hospital after being stabbed when an anti-vaccine protest turned violent Saturday. Dozens of people have protested outside the home of Jenkins, the Dallas County judge, over his emergency order requiring masks. Protesters also showed up over the weekend outside the home of Hawaii's lieutenant governor, an emergency room doctor who has warned that increasing hospitalizations, particularly among the unvaccinated, could lead to another lockdown.

An unruly crowd objecting to masks and vaccines hearing heckled and criticized Louisiana's chief public health adviser as he described to lawmakers the state's coronavirus surge.

Louisiana's health department announced that the state **set another record for hospitalizations**, with 2,956 people with COVID-19 filling up hospital beds.

"I pray we're close to the peak, I really do. I haven't seen any evidence in our data that suggests we're close," said Dr. Joe Kanter, the state's chief public health officer.

The University of Mississippi Medical Center was setting up a second emergency field hospital in a parking garage to handle some of the sickest COVID-19 patients. **Mississippi's coronavirus numbers have doubled in the past two weeks and hospitalizations are ...**

Return to Timeline

https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/worldwide-graphs/#total-deaths

Select live link for current number

Aug 18

Death toll from coronavirus tops 4,400,000

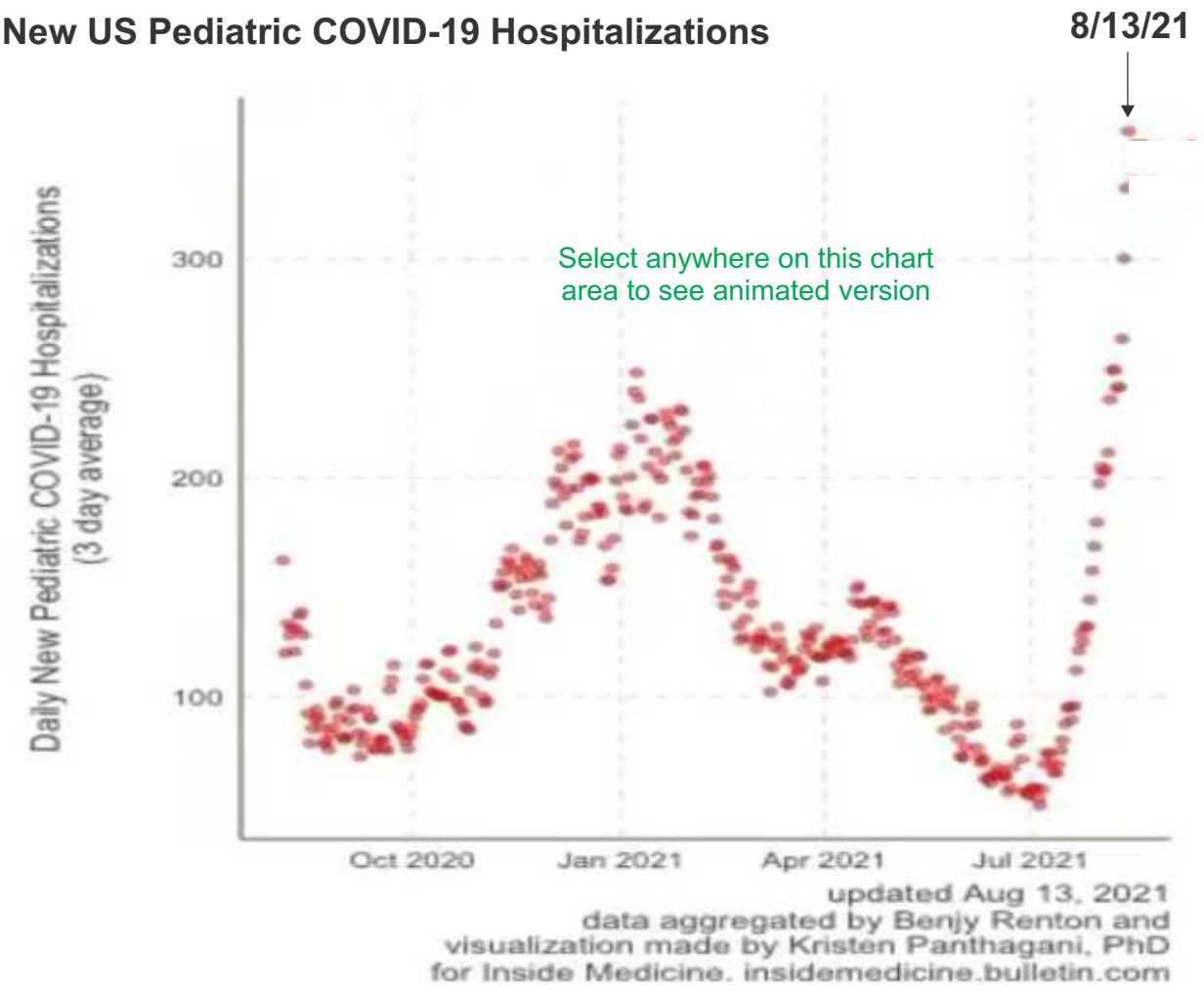
Aug 18

Pediatric COVID-19 hospitalizations just soared past January

Pediatric hospitalizations for Covid-19 have rapidly increased over the last month in the United States, **with the rate of daily new cases reaching an all-time high in the last few days**. It's already far worse than the previous record peak in January.

The data visualization [at right] for *Inside Medicine* [shows] where we are and where we've been.

Perhaps more alarming than the raw number of daily hospitalizations in children is the magnitude of the rise in recent weeks. Obviously we cannot predict whether this worrisome trend in pediatric hospitalizations will continue, level off, or drop. But we must not ignore it.



Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-vaccine-booster-shots-a10daad08f6d47aa5beca0b4da9da9d2

Aug 18

US health officials call for booster shots against COVID-19

... The plan ... calls for an extra dose eight months after people get their second shot of the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine. The **doses could begin the week of Sept. 20.**
...
People who received the **single-dose Johnson & Johnson vaccine will also probably need extra shots, health officials said. But they said they are waiting for more data.**
...
The announcement came the same day the Biden administration said it would require nursing homes to mandate vaccinations for staffers in order to continue receiving federal funds. Hundreds of thousands of nursing home workers remain unvaccinated, despite the heightened risk of fatal infections among elderly residents.

Officials said it is “very clear” that the vaccines’ protection against infections wanes over time, and they noted the worsening picture in Israel, which has seen a rise in severe cases, many of them in people already inoculated.
...
The **first boosters would go to people in high-priority groups that received the initial U.S. vaccinations: nursing home residents, health workers and those with underlying health conditions.** Health officials are likely to recommend that the booster be the same brand of vaccine that people received initially.

Top scientists at the World Health Organization bitterly objected to the U.S. plan, noting that poor countries are not getting enough vaccine for their initial rounds of shots.

The organization’s top scientist, Dr. Soumya Swaminathan, said the evidence does not show boosters are needed for everyone, and she warned that leaving billions of people in the developing world unvaccinated could foster the emergence of new variants and result in “even more dire situations.”

U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy rejected the notion that the U.S. must choose between “America and the world,” saying: “We clearly see our responsibility to both.”

White House officials noted that the U.S. has donated 115 million doses to 80 countries, more than all other nations combined. They said the U.S. has plenty of vaccine to dispense boosters to its own population.

Israel is already offering booster shots to people over 50. And European regulators are looking into the idea.

Last week, U.S. health officials recommended a third shot for some people with weakened immune systems, such as cancer patients and organ transplant recipients. Offering boosters to all Americans would be a major expansion of what is already the biggest vaccination campaign in U.S. history. Nearly 200 million Americans have received at least one shot.

Some experts have expressed concern that calling for boosters would undermine the public health message — and reinforce opposition to the vaccine — by raising more doubts in the minds of people already skeptical about the shots’ effectiveness.

As for why the vaccines appear to be less effective over time at stopping infections, there are indications that the body’s immune response to the shots fades, as it does with other inoculations. But also, the vaccines simply may not protect against the delta variant as well as they do against the original virus. Scientists are still trying to answer the question.

Officials said the eight-month timeframe was a judgment call about when vaccine protection against severe illness might fall, based on the direction of the current data. “There’s nothing magical about this ...

Return to Timeline

https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2021/08/18/alabama-doctor-unvaccinated-patients-valentine/

Aug 19

An Alabama doctor refuses to treat patients who have rejected the vaccine

In Alabama, where the nation's lowest vaccination rate has helped push the state closer to a record number of hospitalizations, a physician has sent a clear message to his patients: Don't come in for medical treatment if you are unvaccinated.

Jason Valentine, a physician at Diagnostic and Medical Clinic Infirmary Health in Mobile, Ala., posted a photo on Facebook this week of him pointing to a sign taped to a door informing patients of his new policy coming Oct. 1.

"Dr. Valentine will no longer see patients that are not vaccinated against covid-19," the sign reads.

Valentine wrote in the post, which has since been made private but was captured in online images, that there were "no conspiracy theories, no excuses" stopping anyone from being vaccinated, AL.com reported. **The doctor, who said at least three unvaccinated patients have asked him where they could get a vaccine** since he posted the photo, has remained resolute to those who have questioned his decision in recent days.

"If they asked why, I told them covid is a miserable way to die and I can't watch them die like that," wrote Valentine, who has specialized in family medicine with Diagnostic and Medical Clinic since 2008.

The Alabama doctor's stance highlights the state's challenges in getting residents inoculated at a time when another wave of the pandemic has been fueled by the highly transmissible delta variant and the millions of people who remain unvaccinated. **Alabama has the lowest vaccination rate in the United States, with less than 36 percent of the population fully vaccinated**, and Gov. Kay Ivey (R) recently said "it's time to start blaming the unvaccinated folks" for the state's surge in new cases and hospitalizations.

...

Alabama reported 4,465 new coronavirus cases Wednesday, increasing its seven-day average of daily infections to 3,728, according to data compiled by The Post. All but one county in the state have been deemed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention as areas of high community transmission. There are more than 2,900 people in Alabama hospitalized because of covid-19, the fifth-highest state total in the country. The number of hospitalizations is approaching the record set in the state on Jan. 11, according to the Alabama Department of Public Health, when the vaccine was not widely available.

The dire situation has strained the state's hospital system to the point that there are more patients in intensive care units than there are available ICU beds, according to the Alabama Hospital Association. Don Williamson, the association's president, told WSFA that there were 1,568 patients who needed ICU beds Tuesday but only 1,557 ICU beds for the entire state. About half of the people in ICU beds are covid patients, he told WBRC, adding that patients were still able to get ICU-level treatment in parts of the hospital not equipped for such care.

Williamson did, however, note how the ICU situation would look different if more people were vaccinated. ...

https://www.usnews.com/news/politics/articles/2021-08-19/federal-courts-impose-new-covid-19-restrictions-amid-surge

Aug 20

Federal courts impose new COVID-19 restrictions amid surge

... At the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in **Atlanta**, an order went into effect Monday requiring everyone who enters the court's buildings to verify their vaccination status. Fully vaccinated people must sign a statement “attesting to the truthfulness” of their responses, and everyone who enters must wear a mask. Visitors who aren’t fully vaccinated will have to show proof of a negative COVID-19 test taken within the last three days, while those who work there and aren’t fully vaccinated must be tested at least once a week.

...

In **Denver**, the 10th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals last week began limiting access to its courthouse to fully vaccinated people only. The court's order requires unvaccinated attorneys who are scheduled to present oral arguments to file a motion to appear via video. Unvaccinated people who want to file documents in person must use a drop box located just inside the front door of the courthouse.

...

In **Salt Lake City**, everyone who enters U.S. District Court must wear a mask again after the requirement had been dropped for about two months in line with CDC guidance. Court authorities reinstated the mask policy as the delta variant took hold, said Clerk of Court D. Mark Jones.

...

In **New Orleans**, the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals reinstated a mask mandate on July 30, requiring everyone — regardless of their vaccination status — to wear a mask in public areas of the courthouse. In **Richmond, Virginia**, the 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals had planned to resume in-person oral arguments next month, but reversed course and decided to continue holding remote arguments because of the surge.

...

The sudden increase in coronavirus cases has also had other ramifications in federal courts. In West Texas, concerns about the surge recently ground many court functions to a halt. On Aug. 9, the chief federal district judge in **San Antonio** suspended jury trials and grand jury proceedings until Oct. 3, although bench trials, sentencings and some other hearings will continue.

...

In **New York City**, the judge in the federal sex trafficking trial of R&B star R. Kelly has ruled that only the attorneys, jurors and defendant are allowed in the courtroom, while the public, including the press, must watch live video feeds of the proceedings from overflow courtrooms.

In **Florida**, frequent flyer Lucas Wall is suing the CDC and seven airlines over the federal mask mandate on flights, alleging the requirement left him stranded at his mother's home in that state during the pandemic. In his lawsuits, he argues that the mandate discriminates against people who cannot wear masks because of medical conditions, such as the anxiety disorder he contends with. Wall, who is representing himself in the lawsuits, said he plans to ask for an exemption from the mask requirement in U.S. ...

https://www.cnn.com/2021/08/20/health/us-coronavirus-friday/index.html

Aug 21

As Covid-19 hospitalizations increase, a greater number of Americans are deciding to get vaccinated

... **The average pace of those initiating vaccination is more than 70% higher than one month ago.**

Oklahoma and Louisiana -- two states that have lagged the rest of the nation in vaccinations -- **are now outpacing the national average**, White House Covid-19 Response Team Chief of Staff Asma Mirza said in calls with local faith leaders Thursday.
...
For now, health care systems are reporting an increasingly dire situation, with an influx of patients flooding waiting rooms due largely to the spread of the more infectious Delta variant.

And because it takes weeks to gain immunity following full vaccination, even those beginning their inoculations need to remain cautious against infection.
...
The rate of hospitalizations is still below pandemic highs seen in January, CDC data shows. **But at the current pace -- an average of more than 11,000 new hospital admissions for Covid-19 over the past week -- the US might reach a record high within a month**, the CDC said.

Mary Mayhew, CEO of the Florida Hospital Association (FHA), told CNN Friday the state's current surge is "fundamentally different" from earlier surges, with more than 17,000 Covid-19 patients hospitalized in about six weeks amid a "severe staffing shortage."

"These are healthy, young 20-year-olds, 30-year-olds who, because of the aggressive nature of the Delta variant, are now being hospitalized," Mayhew said.

Hospitals across the state are doing everything possible to respond to the demand by postponing elective services and bringing in staff from other states, Mayhew said. They're even converting auditoriums and cafeterias "to meet patient demand."

Preventative vaccinations are the most effective means to combat Covid-19 infections, and the US Food and Drug Administration will likely approve the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine around the end of August, former FDA Commissioner Dr. Mark McClellan said Thursday. Current vaccines have been granted emergency use authorization.

"I think that approval, at least for the Pfizer vaccine, is going to come very soon -- probably by the end of the month or right around there," McClellan told CNN's Chris Cuomo.

Booster shots for those inoculated are expected to be made widely available by September 20, and about 75% of the eligible population will have received at least one dose of Covid-19 vaccine at current vaccination rates, according to a CNN analysis of CDC data.

Around 51.1% of the total US population is fully vaccinated, according to the CDC.

https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/8/22/australian-pm-defends-lockdown-strategy-as-daily-cases-hit-record

Aug 22

Australian PM defends lockdown strategy as daily cases hit record

Scott Morrison, the prime minister of Australia, is defending his government's **lockdown strategy** for tackling the coronavirus, saying it **will stay in place until at least 70 percent of the population is fully vaccinated**, as daily infections break records.

Sunday's 914 cases of the highly infectious Delta variant surpassed the previous high of 894 a day earlier.

"You can't live with lockdowns forever and at some point, you need to make that gear change and that is done at 70 percent," Morrison said in a television interview on the Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

Lockdowns are a key element of the federal government's strategy to rein in outbreaks until the 70 percent level is reached, with borders being re-opened gradually when the figure climbs to 80 percent. But the stringent restrictions are taxing the patience of many.

Police arrested hundreds of people on Saturday during anti-lockdown demonstrations in Sydney and Melbourne, the capitals of the two most populous states, New South Wales and Victoria, which are under a strict lockdown.

Victoria, in its sixth lockdown since the start of the pandemic, recorded 65 locally acquired cases on Sunday, taking the tally in its current outbreak to 440 active cases.

"We are throwing everything at this," said Martin Foley, health minister of the southeastern state.

New South Wales saw 830 new infections on Sunday, despite stepped-up efforts, and the Australian Capital Territory, home to the capital, Canberra, had 19. Nationwide, the tally of active cases stands at nearly 12,000.

Just **about 30 percent of Australians older than 16 have been fully vaccinated**, health ministry data showed on Saturday. This is mainly because the Pfizer vaccine is in short supply and the AstraZeneca vaccine provokes public unease.

The pace has picked up recently, as supplies increase and Delta spreads. A News**poll this month** for The Australian newspaper showed that **11 percent of respondents would flatly refuse vaccination.**

In New South Wales, at least 57 percent of those eligible have received one dose, while 30 percent are fully vaccinated.

"If our community keeps getting their vaccines the way they are, New South Wales will look pretty good by October, November," said state Health Minister Brad Hazzard.

Despite a third wave of infections from the Delta variant, Australia's COVID-19 numbers are relatively low, with just under 44,000 cases and 981 deaths.

SOURCE: REUTERS

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-vaccine-pfizer-approval-1361ff61d06b815652a08a7cc0683a72

Aug 23

US regulators give full approval to Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine

The U.S. gave full approval to Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine Monday, potentially boosting public confidence in the shots and i**nstantly opening the way for more universities, companies and local governments to make vaccinations mandatory.**

The Pentagon promptly announced it will press ahead with plans to force members of the military to get vaccinated amid the battle against the extra-contagious delta variant. **The University of Minnesota** likewise said it **will require its students get the shot, as did Louisiana's major public universities, including LSU**, though state law there allows broad exemptions.

More than **200 million Pfizer doses have been administered in the U.S. under emergency provisions** — and **hundreds of millions more worldwide** — since December. In going a step further and granting full approval, the Food and Drug Administration cited months of real-world evidence that serious side effects are extremely rare.
...
Pfizer said the **U.S. is the first country to grant full approval** of its vaccine, in a process that required a 360,000-page application and rigorous inspections. Never before has the FDA has so much evidence to judge a shot's safety.
...

Moderna has also applied to the FDA for full approval of its vaccine. **Johnson & Johnson**, maker of the third option in the U.S., said it **hopes to do so later this year.**

Just over half of the U.S. population is fully vaccinated. **Vaccinations in this country bottomed out in July at an average of about a half-million shots per day, down from a peak of 3.4 million a day in mid-April.** As the delta variant fills hospital beds, **shots are on the rise again, with a million a day given Thursday, Friday and Saturday.**

Full approval of Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine means it meets the same "very high standards required of all the approved vaccines we rely on every day," said Dr. Jesse Goodman of Georgetown University, a former FDA vaccine chief. That should help "anyone who still has concerns gain confidence" in the shots.

Earlier this month, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said he would seek the president's OK to make the vaccine mandatory by mid-September or once the FDA grants final approval, whichever comes first. On Monday, after the FDA acted, the Pentagon said guidance on vaccinations will be worked out and a timeline will be provided in the coming days.

The approval also opened the way for swift action by colleges to require vaccines and solidified the legal ground for hundreds of universities that have already issued mandates for students and staff.

The public university systems in Louisiana and Minnesota had been waiting for FDA action before making vaccinations mandatory. Louisiana has become a COVID-19 hot spot, repeatedly breaking records for the number of people hospitalized with the virus. But certain **other states forbid universities to require shots, including Texas and Florida.**

"Mandating becomes much easier when you have full approval," said Dr. Carlos del Rio of Emory University. "I think a lot of businesses have been waiting for it."

On the same day the FDA decision came down, **New York City announced that all public school teachers and other staffers will have to get vaccinated.**

The delta variant has sent cases, deaths and hospitalizations soaring in recent weeks in the U.S., erasing months of progress. Deaths are running at about 1,000 a day on average for the first time since ...

https://apnews.com/article/middle-east-business-health-lebanon-coronavirus-pandemic-4efbac49a458d76cc2b13879c91d3511

Aug 23

Lebanese hospitals at breaking point as everything runs out

... The country's health sector is a casualty of the multiple crises that have plunged Lebanon into a downward spiral — a financial and economic meltdown, compounded by a complete failure of the government, runaway corruption and a pandemic that isn't going away.

The collapse is all the more dramatic since **only a few years ago, Lebanon was a leader in medical care in the Arab world.** The region's rich and famous came to this small Mideast nation of 6 million for everything, from major hospital procedures to plastic surgeries.

THE NEW NORMAL

Ghaidaa al-Saddik, a second-year resident, had just returned from a week off after an exhausting year. Back on duty for a week, she has already intubated two critical patients in the emergency room, both in their 30s.
...
The 28-year-old spends more nights in the staff dorms studying because at home, she has no electricity. She moved to an apartment closer to the hospital that she shares with two other people to save on rent and transportation. **With the collapse of Lebanon's currency amid the crisis, her salary has lost nearly 90% of its value.**

With fewer and fewer residents, she must now do the rounds for about 30 patients, instead of 10. **Her mentor, a senior virologist, has left Lebanon — one of many in a brain drain of medical professionals.**

"I want to help my people," she said. "But at the same time, what about me being a better doctor?"

RUNNING ON EMPTY

The Rafik Hariri University Hospital is **Lebanon's largest public hospital and the country's No. 1 for the treatment of coronavirus patients. Lebanon has so far registered nearly 590,000 infections and over 8,000 deaths.**

The hospital, which depended on the state power company, had to start relying on generators for at least 12 hours a day. **Since last Monday, the generators have been the only source of power**, running non-stop. Most of the hospital's diesel, sold at the black market at five times the official price, is either donated by political parties or international aid groups.

To save on fuel, some rooms run only electrical fans in the sweltering summer heat. Not all hospital elevators are working. Bed capacity has been downsized by about 15% and the ER admits only life-threatening cases.

It is a perpetual crisis that has left the hospital always on the brink, says its director, Firas Abiad. **There are "shortages of almost everything."**

Every day, he struggles to secure more fuel — the hospital has a maximum two-day supply at any time. Shelves are thin on medicines, including for cancer patients and dialysis. A new aid shipment of blood serum will last just a few days.

"We can hardly get by," said Jihad Bikai, head of the ER. He recently had to send a critical patient to another hospital because he no longer has a vascular surgeon on staff.

WHAT HAPPENED?

Lebanon's financial crisis, rooted in years of corruption and mismanagement, spilled out into the streets in late 2019, with antigovernment protests and demands for accountability. Political leaders have since failed to agree on a recovery program or even a new government — leaving the previous one in perpetual but stumped caretaker role. ...

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/lifestyle-europe-business-health-coronavirus-pandemic-594c590928088a91745a48fc69ef1cb9

Aug 24

Gig apps for a pandemic economy: Part time, no commitment

LONDON (AP) — For months, Gabrielle Walker had been looking for a part-time job. She applied to restaurant chains and retailers like Nando's and Primark, and she scoured the job search site Indeed.

Nothing.

Then one day, Walker, a 19-year-old student at University College London, was scrolling through TikTok and stumbled on a video about an app called Stint. A face on the screen explained that Stint could help students earn money by working brief temporary stints at places like restaurants and bars that require little training or experience.

Walker downloaded the app, took a 15-minute intro course and days later snagged a job polishing cutlery at a Michelin-star restaurant in London — for one day. Between May and June, she took on several other gigs, squeezing them into her class schedule where she could.

...

Stint, in use across the U.K., has grown in popularity, alongside **similar apps in the United States like Instaworks and Gigpro**, as one **response to the peculiar ways in which economies have been rebounding from the pandemic recession.** Uncertainty about the durability of the recoveries and the tentative re-openings of businesses still threatened by the coronavirus have made flexibility a top priority — for workers and employees alike.

As the hospitality industry, in particular, confronts worker shortages, these **apps are helping form an ultra-short-term worker-employee relationship**, something that hasn't widely existed in recent decades. Walker noted that even students with no relevant experience could sign up with one of these apps and likely find paid work — as brief as a couple of hours — that fits their schedule from week to week.

In contrast to Stint, Instaworks and **Gigpro are suited more for skilled or experienced workers who want or need short-term shifts.** ...

"The flexibility of the gig economy may be welcome when crises take out regular staff, but this comes at a potential cost to society," said Ann Light, a professor of design and creative technology at the University of Sussex.

Still, Greig acknowledged that the apps can lower barriers to entry for people who need cash quickly, a category that includes many young workers with limited work experience.

The role of gig workers, for employment purposes, can vary widely with these apps. Student users of **Stint are employed as workers, guaranteed a set wage and accrued holiday pay.** On the other hand, those who use **Instaworks are considered independent workers who can choose to be either contractors or employees. Gigpro users are independent contractors.** ...

Return to Timeline

https://www.pharmatimes.com/news/study_finds_protection_against_covid-19_waning_in_fully_vaccinated_people_1375814

Aug 25

Study finds protection against COVID-19 ‘waning’ in fully vaccinated people

The ZOE COVID Study app assessed data on positive COVID-19 PCR **test results between May and July 2021, with over a million people included having had two doses of either the Pfizer/BioNTech or AstraZeneca (AZ) vaccines.**

Researchers found that protection following two doses of the **Pfizer/BioNTech jab fell from 88% at one month to 74% at five to six months**. A similar decrease was observed for those vaccinated with the **AZ vaccine**, with **protection dropping from 77% to 67%** within the same timeframe.

"Waning protection is to be expected and is not a reason to not get vaccinated. Vaccines still provide high levels of protection for the majority of the population, especially against the Delta variant, so we still need as many people as possible to get fully vaccinated,” said professor Tim Spector, lead investigator on the ZOE COVID Study app.

Interim advice issued in June by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) outlined that any potential COVID-19 booster programme should be offered in two stages from September.

Under this proposal, the most at risk from serious disease would be the first to be offered the booster jabs, including care home residents, those over the age of 70 years old, frontline health and social care workers, the clinically extremely vulnerable and immunosuppressed adults.

Currently, the JCVI is reviewing ‘emerging scientific data’ before making its final recommendations for the booster COVID-19 vaccination programme.

https://www.cnn.com/2021/08/26/australia/australia-sydney-covid-19-pandemic-intl-hnk/index.html

Aug 26

Australia reports record Covid-19 ; Sydney hospitals set up emergency tents

Australia's new daily cases of Covid-19 **topped 1,000 on Thursday for the first time since the global pandemic began, as two major hospitals in Sydney set up emergency outdoor tents to help deal with a rise in patients.**

Sydney, the country's largest city and the epicenter of the current outbreak, is struggling to stamp out a surge in the fast-spreading Delta variant, with daily infections hitting record levels even after two months under lockdown.

The state of New South Wales (NSW), where Sydney is the capital, reported 1,029 new locally acquired cases, exceeding the previous record of 919 from a day earlier. Of the new cases, 969 were detected in greater Sydney, up from 838.

The rapid rise in Covid-19 patients has forced Sydney's Westmead and Blacktown hospitals, which service the city's sprawling western suburbs, to erect tents to screen and swab patients to help manage capacity.

The makeshift unit in the emergency department for Covid-19 patients will help "to offload delays", a Western Sydney Local Health District spokesperson told Reuters.

State Premier Gladys Berejiklian said authorities had quadrupled the number of the state's intensive care ventilators to 2,000 early last year. Although the system is "under pressure", it can withstand the current crisis once vaccination rates rise, she said.

"It might be different to the help you got before because of the situation, but please know the system is kicking in," Berejiklian said at a televised media conference.

Of 116 people in intensive care in NSW, 102 are not vaccinated.

Three new deaths were reported, including a man in his 30s who died at home, taking deaths from the latest outbreak to 79, although the death rate has slowed since last year.

In a video posted on Twitter Wednesday night, the Australian Paramedic Association said paramedics were given a choice to wait in their vehicles with infected people or "wait outside in the freezing rain" due to the rise in patients.

The fast-moving Delta strain has taken the gloss off Australia's early success against the virus that kept its coronavirus numbers relatively low, with some 47,700 cases and 989 deaths. About 32% of people above 16 have been fully vaccinated while just over 54% have had at least one dose.

Besides Sydney, the country's second-largest city, Melbourne, and the capital, Canberra, are also in hard lockdowns, putting more than half of the country's 25 million population under strict stay-at-home orders.

Cases in Victoria, home to Melbourne, surged to 80 on Thursday, up from 45 a day earlier.

The federal government is pushing ahead with the country's reopening plans once vaccination rates reach 70%-80%, but some states have hinted they may delay given the rapid growth of cases in Sydney.

Berejiklian said NSW may reach 70% fully vaccinated by mid-October, and airline Qantas said it was preparing for international travel to resume in December.

Also on Thursday, grocer Woolworths Group reported a surge in annual profit as lockdowns sparked demand for household essentials.

https://www.cbsnews.com/news/tyson-vaccinated-workers-poultry-factories-offered-10000-dollars/?ftag=CNM-00-10aac3a

Aug 27

Tyson poultry workers who get vaccinated offered chance to win $10,000

Already the biggest U.S. food company to require its workers to get vaccinated against COVID-19, Tyson Foods is now offering employees a weekly chance to win $10,000 for getting even one jab.

Rank-and-file workers at its nearly 50 poultry processing plants already face a November 1 deadline to be fully immunized against the coronavirus. But as the highly contagious Delta variant fuels a spike in cases, hospitalizations and deaths across the country, Tyson is ramping up its vaccination campaign.

"Team members at nearly 50 of our chicken facilities have an opportunity to win $10,000, once a week for the next five weeks, if they've received at least one dose of the vaccine," a Tyson spokesperson said Thursday in an email. **"This is in addition to incentives being offered in other areas of our business, as well as an enterprise wide $200 thank you for team members who are vaccinated."**

Starting this week, that $10,000 carrot will be awarded to one worker at each site every week, bringing to **roughly $2.5 million the amount Tyson is committed to spending on the incentive program.**

In announcing earlier this month that Tyson's 139,000 employees would have to be vaccinated, CEO Donnie King said the decision was not made lightly but came after lengthy efforts were met with limited success.

"We have spent months encouraging our team members to get vaccinated – **today, under half of our team members** are," King wrote in a blog post August 3. As of Thursday, "more than half of our U.S. workforce is vaccinated," the Tyson spokesperson told CBS MoneyWatch in an email.

Tyson opted to mandate the vaccine ahead of the Food and Drug Administration fully approving the shots, which previously were granted emergency status. **Since the FDA gave its final approval to the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine on Monday, the U.S. has seen a flood of new vaccine mandates.**

Springdale, Arkansas-based Tyson's efforts to immunize its workforce have included holding more than 100 vaccination clinics at its plants and offering to compensate workers up to four hours of pay if they got their shots elsewhere or off-hours.

Plagued by outbreaks, labor shortages and absenteeism due to COVID-19, Tyson and its competitors in the meat industry have struggled to get their hundreds of thousands of employees inoculated. Tyson has also dealt with workers dying of COVID-19 and faces lawsuits filed by some families alleging the company failed to take adequate measures to protect employees.

"Nearly all hospitalizations and deaths in the U.S. are among those who are unvaccinated," King said in his post, citing the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "It is abundantly clear that getting vaccinated is the single most effective thing we can do to protect ourselves, our families and our communities."

Return to Timeline

https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/worldwide-graphs/#total-deaths

Select live link for current number

Aug 28

Death toll from coronavirus tops 4,500,000

https://www.mdanderson.org/cancerwise/what-do-negative-positive-antibody-test-results-mean-after-a-covid-19-vaccine.h00-159459267.html

Aug 28

Can antibody tests tell you if a COVID-19 vaccine worked?

... Antibody testing identifies individuals who may have developed an immune response after infection with SARS-CoV-2, the coronavirus responsible for COVID-19 disease.

But can these antibody test results really tell you if the COVID-19 vaccine was effective? Here's why you shouldn't be surprised to get a negative result even if you've received a COVID-19 vaccine.

What your COVID-19 antibody test results mean

A positive result suggests that you had COVID-19 at some time in the recent past, even if you didn't show any symptoms. You'll need to continue to practice caution in the community and protect yourself and others from potential exposure to COVID-19 by following safety precautions, including masking, social distancing and handwashing.

A **negative result suggests that you haven't had a recent COVID-19 infection. However, it doesn't prove that there has been no prior or current infection.** Antibodies could be present at levels below the test's threshold for detection. It takes one to three weeks after an infection for antibodies to be detectable. In the months after an infection, antibody levels may decrease below the detectable level.

For either result, if you're experiencing cough, fever, difficulty breathing, sore throat, loss of taste/smell, chills/muscle pain and/or gastrointestinal symptoms, self-isolate and contact your doctor.

Antibody testing isn't conclusive for predicting COVID-19 immunity

... experts still have a lot of questions about what can be determined from the results.

... current evidence suggests antibody testing alone isn't conclusive for diagnosing a person with current or prior COVID-19 or for predicting a patient's sustained immunity. It remains particularly unclear how long antibodies exist in a person's body following a COVID-19 infection and how many antibodies are needed to neutralize SARS-CoV-2 following another exposure.

Can antibody tests determine if the COVID-19 vaccine was effective?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) discourages antibody testing for assessing immunity after getting the vaccine.

A vaccinated person is very likely to get a negative result from a serology test, even if the vaccine was successful and protective. That's because different serology tests detect antibodies to different parts of the virus.

Some tests detect antibodies to the spike protein of the virus, which are produced in response to viral infection or the vaccine. Others detect antibodies to a different part of the virus called the nucleocapsid protein, which are produced in response to infection, but not by the current vaccines.

...

"A vaccinated person should not be alarmed or worried if they receive a negative antibody test result because this test does not detect antibodies from the Pfizer, Moderna and Johnson & Johnson's Janssen COVID-19 vaccines, which were developed against the spike protein of the virus," says Fernando Martinez, M.D., medical director of Laboratory Medicine. **"This reinforces the guidance from the CDC that serology tests should not be used to test for immunity."**

https://nypost.com/2021/08/29/louisiana-hospitals-already-packed-with-covid-19-patients-brace-for-hurricane-ida/

Aug 29

Louisiana hospitals already packed with COVID-19 patients brace for Hurricane Ida

... The storm comes as **hospitals and their intensive care units are already filled with patients from the fourth surge of the COVID-19 pandemic**, this one sparked by the highly contagious delta variant and low vaccination rates statewide.

Daily tallies of new cases went from a few hundred a day through much of the spring and early summer to thousands a day by late July. **Statewide, hospitalizations had peaked at around 2,000 or less in three previous surges. But that number peaked at more than 3,000 in August.** The number reported Saturday was near 2,700, still high enough to stress hospitals.

Gov. John Bel Edwards said **evacuation of hospitals** in threatened areas is something that would normally be considered under other scenarios, but it's **impractical** as COVID-19 patients fill beds in Louisiana and elsewhere.
...
Officials at Ochsner Health, which runs the largest hospital network in the state, said Saturday that they considered evacuating some of their facilities closer to the coast but that wasn't possible considering how packed other hospitals are in their network. **Roughly 15 of their hospitals are in areas potentially affected by Ida.** But they did evacuate some individual patients with particular medical needs from smaller hospitals in more rural areas to their larger facilities.
...
But the hospital chain says in other ways it feels as prepared as it can be. Hulefeld said three days ago they ordered 10 days worth of supplies for facilities in areas that might be affected by Ida and everything has arrived. **Each facility has backup power that's been tested and a backup fuel truck on site. Many of their hospitals also have water wells should city water go out.**

"We're as ready as we can be," said Hulefeld.

Jeff Elder, a doctor who is also the medical director for emergency management at **LCMC Health, said that the system's six hospitals will go into lockdown mode Sunday** morning. The staff who were going to stay at the hospitals for the duration of the storm were coming in Saturday and Sunday morning and would sleep at the hospital.

Hurricane Ida will be a Category 4 hurricane with winds reaching 130 mph when it makes landfall on Sunday. Hurricane Ida barreling toward Louisiana as Category 4 storm Elder said one of the first things their hospitals do when storms come in is discharge any patients who are able to leave. However, their patient load is higher than usual because of the pandemic so they're not able to reduce by that much. But he said **the hospitals in the system are much more robust since 2005's Hurricane Katrina.**

"We've learned a lot since 2005," he said. Key pieces of infrastructure are now raised to keep them out of flooding. **For example, at University Medical Center in New Orleans, which was built after Katrina, the generator is raised, diesel supplies are protected and the first floor doesn't have essential services so even if flood waters get that high nothing essential is lost.** ...

https://apnews.com/article/lifestyle-business-europe-travel-coronavirus-pandemic-d008ced44d6c3f7d162d356e7981ef63

Aug 30

Croatia thrilled at summer season success despite COVID-19

DUBROVNIK, Croatia (AP) — Beaches along Croatia's Adriatic Sea coastline are swarming with people. Guided tours are fully booked, restaurants are packed and sailboats were chartered well in advance.

Summer tourism has exceeded even the most optimistic expectations in Croatia this year. Once fearful that the coronavirus pandemic would discourage people from traveling, Croatia's tourism industry was caught by surprise.

"It's much better — it's almost like 2020 never happened," said Josip Crncevic, a tour guide in Dubrovnik, a southern city known for its Old Town and nightlife that is Croatia's most popular destination.

The Balkan country experienced four years of war in the 1990s, but **before the pandemic had become a top vacation spot for European and American visitors** who appreciated its small towns and scores of islands offering natural beauty, local seafood and recreation in comparatively uncrowded settings.

The success of the summer season carries strong implications for Croatia's economy, which is among the weakest in the European Union. **Tourism accounts for up to 20% of gross domestic product**, and visitor spending is essential to the incomes of locals who rent lodging or run other tourism-linked businesses.

While people here prepared for this year to be better than last because of the advent of COVID-19 vaccines, the tourism minister described the July and August demand for getaways in Croatia as "remarkable." **As of Aug. 10, overnight stays were at 69% of the record number seen in the 2019 season**, tourism minister Nikolina Brnjac said.

The tourism revival is clearly visible in Dubrovnik, known as the "pearl" of the coastline, famous for its fortified, walled medieval city that is a UNESCO protected area and which served as a set for the popular "Game of Thrones" series. The main street in Old Town buzzes with people as tour groups mill along the outer walls.

As a reminder of the continuing risk of COVID-19, a huge sign on one of the stone walls warns people to keep their distance from others, to wash their hands and to wear masks. **Wearing a mask is required in enclosed spaces in Croatia, but not outdoors.**

Toni Dugandzic, a waiter at the restaurant Gusta Me, said the influx of tourists surprised many town residents and business people following last year's poor season. Restaurant owners didn't expect it and therefore didn't hire enough staff in time, he said.

"We work a little bit more because we were not prepared regarding human resources," Dugandzic said.

Health officials organized vaccination drives for people with jobs in tourism and kept some crowd limits in place. **About 40% of the adult population in the country of 4.2 million has been vaccinated** against the coronavirus.

Daily reported cases have increased in recent weeks, reaching nearly 600 late this week. Croatia has reported about 370,000 cases and more than 8,000 virus-related deaths since the start of the pandemic.

...

Kate Redder, a visitor from Germany, chartered a boat with her friends. Sailing around Croatia provides a feeling of independence, a better view of the country's stunning scenery and a way to self-isolate on the water, she explained.

"I think it is just safer than going to a hotel where you meet different people all the time," Redder said. "So you are safe. We are only here as a family and with our skipper."

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/lifestyle-europe-business-health-travel-9c0f10f0af7e4d7fab63d6d8d4ed844c

Aug 30

E.U. to propose travel restrictions on U.S. visitors

... **Starting [today], the officials said, the United States will be removed from a "safe list" of countries whose residents can travel to the 27-nation bloc without additional restrictions, such as quarantine and testing requirements.** The suggested **restrictions**, made by the European Council, will not be mandatory for member countries, and it **will remain up to those countries to decide whether or not to impose them.**

Most European countries reopened their borders to Americans in June, more than a year after imposing a travel ban, hoping that Americans would visit this summer and help an ailing tourism industry bounce back.

In essence, the European Union gave the United States a summertime pass to encourage tourism, despite the relatively high infection rates in parts of the country.

The threshold for being on the E.U. "safe travel" list is having fewer than 75 new Covid-19 cases daily per 100,000 people over the previous 14 days. The United States has an infection rate well above that threshold, and Covid hospitalizations in the country climbed above 100,000 last week for the first time since January.

Yet while American tourists were able to travel to Europe this summer, **the United States has remained closed to Europeans, drawing anger from Europeans and their leaders, who have expressed frustration at the lack of reciprocity.**

Travelers from countries on the safe list can usually visit E.U. countries without quarantining by showing a proof of vaccination or a negative test, while those from countries not on that list are barred from visiting for nonessential reasons and can be subject to further testing and quarantine requirements.

Most European countries reopened their economies this summer after vaccination campaigns picked up speed in recent months. Countries like France and Italy, among others, have required proof of vaccination or a negative coronavirus test result for people to dine in restaurants, visit museums or attend concerts, making Covid passes a fixture of daily life.

The decision to urge the reimposition of travel restrictions on U.S. travelers was first reported by Reuters. European officials who outlined the plan did so under condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the matter publicly ahead of an announcement planned for Monday.

Other countries expected to be removed from the "safe list" include Israel, Kosovo, Lebanon, Montenegro and North Macedonia.

The European Union overtook the United States in vaccinations last month, with 64 percent of the bloc's residents having received at least one dose of a coronavirus vaccine, compared with 60 percent in the United States, according to Our World in Data.

Return to Timeline

https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/aug/31/what-is-c12-the-new-covid-variant-in-south-africa-and-should-we-be-worried?CMP=oth_b-aplnews_d-1

Aug 31

What is C.1.2, the new Covid variant in South Africa, and should we be worried?

... C.1.2 “has since been detected across the majority of the provinces in South Africa and in seven other countries spanning Africa, Europe, Asia and Oceania”.

The **C.1.2 lineage** has drawn the attention of scientists because despite its low rate in the population, it **possesses mutations within the genome similar to** those seen in variants of interest and variants of concern, like **the Delta variant**, as well as some additional mutations.

...

Has the World Health Organization listed it as a variant of interest or concern?

Not yet. The National Institute for Communicable Diseases is continuing to monitor the frequency of C.1.2 and examine how it behaves. Tests to assess the impact of the mutations it possesses on infectiousness and vaccine resistance are still under way. **So far, the virus has not fulfilled the WHO criteria to qualify as a “variant of concern” or “variant of interest”.**

Variants of concern, such as Delta, are those that **show increased transmissibility, virulence or change in clinical disease, and a decreased effectiveness of public health and social measures.**

Variants of interest are those shown to **cause community transmission in multiple clusters**, and which **have been detected in multiple countries, but have not yet necessarily proven to be more virulent or transmissible.**

Then why was an alert issued?

A virologist and lecturer in immunology and infectious diseases with the University of Sydney’s Central Clinical School, Dr Megan Steain, said it’s because of the particular mutations that C.1.2 contains.

“It contains quite a few key mutations that we see in other variants that have gone on to become variants of interest or concern,” Steain said. “Any time we see those particular mutations come up, we’d like to keep an eye on the variant to see what it’s going to do. These mutations may affect things like whether it evades the immune response, or transmits faster.”

It will take some time for scientists to do the laboratory tests to see whether the virus is in fact fitter, she said.

“While we can say that it has a few key mutations that have led to other variants being more infectious, often what we find is the mutations work in synergy together which can overall lead to a fitter virus, potentially, or a weaker virus.

...

Is there a chance this variant might die out?

Yes. Covid-19 variants emerge all of the time and many of them disappear before they can become a real problem. Many virus variants are very fragile.

The key mutants are the ones that survive the changes and continue, and start to overgrow the variants of the past, which is what we saw with Delta.

“C.1.2 would have to be pretty good, pretty fit, and pretty fast to outcompete Delta at this stage,” Steain said. “I think we’re still very much at a point where this could die out, the prevalence is really low.

“We saw this with the Beta variant, and other variants of concern, where it looked like there could be a problem, they even had areas where they were transmitted and spread quite well. But then they haven’t really taken hold over time, and were overtaken by other variants of concern that are able to transmit faster. And so they ...

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/business-science-health-india-coronavirus-pandemic-cb4f593cfa0dd45a0bb4d9898daf8e25

Sep 1

Vaccinations in rural India increase amid supply concerns

India has dramatically increased COVID-19 vaccination rates in its vast rural hinterland, where around 65% of the country's nearly 1.4 billion people live. But supply constraints remain for the world's largest maker of vaccines and experts say it's unlikely India will reach its target of vaccinating all adults by the end of the year.

India opened shots for all adults in May. But the campaign faltered in villages due to vaccine hesitancy and misinformation. That started changing in mid-July and of the nearly 120 million shots administered in the past three weeks, around 70% were in India's villages — up from around half in the initial weeks of May.

Although the increased vaccine acceptance in rural areas is promising, the pandemic is far from done in India: After weeks of steady decline, the 46,000 new infections reported Saturday was its highest in almost two months.

Only about 11% of India's vast population is fully vaccinated. Half of all adults and **about 35% of the total population have received at least one shot.** This has left large swathes of people still susceptible to the virus.

... **India was expected to be a pivotal producer of shots to immunize the world but stopped exports after an explosion of infections. And while India had expected to get 1.35 billion shots in the final five months of 2021 to resolve its supply constraints, the question of whether Indian vaccine makers can scale up production to meet India's needs will have global implications.**

"Currently in India, there is more demand than available supply...the supply of vaccines currently in use is lower than the projections made a few months ago. So both of these situations are putting constraints on availability of vaccines in the country," said Dr. Chandrakant Lahariya, a vaccine policy expert.

...
So far, **nearly 90% of the vaccines administered were the AstraZeneca shots made by the Serum Institute of India.** The government hopes to solve the supply constraints that have hamstrung the vaccination effort with new production lines as well as the approval of a new homemade vaccine and another in the pipeline.

India hopes that Bharat Biotech will make around a third of the 1.3 billion shots it needs. The company has struggled so far in scaling up and while a new facility, capable of making 10 million shots monthly, began production last week, the company is looking for international manufacturing partners.

The Russian-made Sputnik V vaccine was given the nod by Indian regulators in April but accounts for less than 1% of total vaccinations. The company has arranged with several Indian vaccine makers to start making shots locally, hopefully by later this month.

India expects 100 million Sputnik V shots and 50 million shots of Indian drugmaker Zydus Cadila's recently greenlit COVID-19 vaccine later this year.

Apart from this, the regulator approved Moderna's COVID-19 vaccine in June and the single-dose Johnson & Johnson shot in August. But it is unclear when they will be administered.

Meanwhile, Moderna and Pfizer have been discussing the signing of indemnity waivers for their vaccines for weeks with India's federal government. Unlike some other countries and the U.N.- backed COVAX initiative, India doesn't have a mechanism in place for people who suffer rare side effects to seek compensation, said Lahariya. He said these discussions were an opportunity to reexamine accountability and create a system where people are protected. ...

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/health-mexico-caribbean-coronavirus-pandemic-6586259830fc0c3e61e6870cfbb3d0ae

Sep 2

Mexico sees easing in its third wave of COVID-19 cases

...Assistant Health Secretary Hugo López-Gatell, the Mexican government's pandemic point person, [stated] **"The epidemic curve of estimated cases began to decline a month ago and today we have clear signs that it is in a process of reduction and we anticipate that [the] reduction is going to continue over the coming weeks,"** he said during President Andrés Manuel López Obrador's daily news conference.

The health official said **30 of Mexico's 32 states had declining epidemic curves.**

Mexico has suffered more than 260,000 test-confirmed deaths from COVID-19. But because so little testing is done, official excess-death counts suggest the real toll is closer to 400,000.

A difference with this latest wave of infections was that Mexico's vaccination campaign was well underway. So far, nearly 34 million people have been fully vaccinated and more than 23.8 million have been partially vaccinated.

Another difference this time is that hospitals like Ajusco Medio are seeing more children than they have in the previous waves. That appears to be due to the more contagious **delta variant**, which Ortiz said **accounts for about 80% of the patients** they have sampled.

The staff had grown accustomed to seeing long lines of adults waiting beside their outdoor triage area, but suddenly there were adults holding children by the hand, Ortiz said.

"We weren't prepared for these children," Ortiz said, noting that those cases were harder on the staff. "Now we can see 50, 60 children coming to the hospital to be evaluated in a shift."

With Mexico's return to in-person classes this week, there is concern that those numbers could swell in the coming weeks.

Dr. Cynthia Karina Portillo González, the hospital's head of pediatrics, said they've seen children of all ages. Nearly all come after an adult in their home is infected, she said.

"We're preparing ourselves," Portillo said. "The number of patients will probably increase. We hope not."

Portillo and Dr. Daniela Fernández were closely watching a 16-year-old girl who had arrived from another hospital a day earlier. She lay face down and motionless on a bed receiving high-flow oxygen through tubes in her nose.

Her family had started treating her at home then took her to another hospital where her condition deteriorated, Fernández said. Then she was transferred to Ajusco ...

https://www.barrons.com/articles/stocks-new-today-51630662628?tesla=y

Sep 3

Stocks are mixed after weak jobs news

U.S. stocks were mixed on Friday, after the **August jobs report came in much weaker than expected.**

The U.S. added 235,000 jobs in August, compared with a revised increase of 1.053 million in July. Economists expected an increase of 720,000 jobs in August. The unemployment rate fell to 5.2%.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average closed 75 points, or 0.2%, lower while the S&P 500 finished down less than 0.1% and the Nasdaq Composite closed up 0.2%. All three indexes were up in the morning before the jobs report was released.

In the payrolls report, the leisure and hospitality industry—the most sensitive to Covid-19—added no jobs. Investors had wanted to see that the Delta variant was not restraining domestic economic growth.

Still, some employers may have had a difficult time hiring, as average hourly wages rose for the month. One of the market's biggest fears recently is that wage inflation, which could incentivize companies to raise prices, will create consumer price inflation, which could lower economic growth.

The main driver of the employment weakness may have been labor shortages. Wages in leisure and hospitality rose 1.4% month-over-month, according to Citigroup economists. This signifies that those business are trying to hire in order to meet strong demand. "We see the weak headline jobs number as representing more issues with worker-shortages than a lack of demand," writes Andrew Hollenhorst, Citigroup economist.

There were some positives to be found in the report, though. If some are not returning to work as they enjoy unemployment benefits, which soon expire, jobs could soon return at a faster pace. Plus, with rising Covid-19 cases responsible for some of the employment weakness, "it's a transitory report," says Brent Schutte, chief investment strategist at Northwestern Mutual Wealth. "As Delta hopefully rolls over, as booster shots come out, that alleviates that fear [Delta]."

Also, perhaps a weak jobs report—transitory or not—will delay the Federal Reserve's plan to reduce its monthly bond purchases. "Friday's weaker-than-expected jobs puts less pressure on the Fed to taper its stimulus," writes Jay Pestrichelli, CEO of ZEGA Financial.

Chinese equities felt a pinch after weak economic data from the August services purchasing managers' index (PMI) came in at 46.7, below the 52 expected and a decline from 54.9 in July. The Shanghai Composite slipped 0.4% and the Hong Kong Hang Seng Index dropped 0.7%.

Japanese stocks far outperformed their Asian peers after Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga—whose government has come under fire for its handling of the pandemic—said he would resign ahead of national elections this year. Tokyo's Nikkei 225 index rose 2.05%.

In **Europe**, London's FTSE 100 was 0.4% lower and the pan-European Stoxx 600 fell 0.6%. Paris' CAC 40 declined 1.1% and Frankfurt's DAX declined 0.4%.

European investors observed poorer-than-expected data, with the Markit composite and services PMIs for the Eurozone both falling slightly short of expectations and marking declines from July—potentially signaling that growth is slowing.

PagerDuty (ticker: PD) stock rose 7% after reporting a loss of 13 cents a share, better than the estimated 15 cents a share, on sales of $67.5 million, above expectations of $65.6 million.

DocuSign (DOCU) stock rose 5.3% after reporting a profit of 47 cents, beating estimates of 40 cents a share, on sales of $511 million, above expectations for $487 million. ...

Return to Timeline

https://www.cbsnews.com/news/500k-pfizer-covid-19-vaccine-doses-kosovo-kamala-harris/?ftag=CNM-00-10aac3a

Sep 4

U.S. to deliver over 500K Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine doses to Kosovo

The United States is set to deliver 503,100 doses of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine to the Republic of Kosovo this weekend. Vice President Kamala Harris delivered the news to Kosovo President Vjosa Osmani-Sadriu during a phone call Friday.

The doses, which are expected to arrive Saturday, will come through COVAX and are **a substantial addition to the 35,000 doses the U.S. had already delivered in August.**

In a readout of the call between Harris and Osmani-Sadriu, obtained exclusively by CBS News, the vice president also thanked Osmani-Sadriu for Kosovo's assistance in the evacuation efforts from Afghanistan and expressed her appreciation for the temporarily housing Kosovo has provided to vulnerable Afghans at Camp Bondsteel, in eastern Kosovo.

The donations come as the nation of roughly 1.7 million people has experienced a sharp rise in the number of COVID-19 cases. According to the World Health Organization, the country had 13,475 confirmed COVID-19 cases during the week of August 23 and has recorded 2,516 COVID-19 deaths between January 3, 2020 and September 2, 2021. Kosovo reportedly decided to destroy 133,000 expired AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccines. To date, 808,078 vaccine doses have been administered in the country.

Last week during a trip to **Vietnam**, Harris also announced plans for the **U.S. to send an additional 1 million Pfizer doses to the Southeast Asian country. In total, the U.S. has sent Vietnam 6 million doses.**

"I know the Vietnamese people are facing a difficult time right now with COVID-19. We also know that early in the pandemic, Vietnam was generous in supporting the United States when we were in a time of need, with over 250,000 PPEs and masks being delivered to our country when we needed them." Harris said during remarks given in Hanoi. "So we are proud to reciprocate in a time of need, most recently with these 1 million Pfizer vaccines."

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/covid-19-safety-net-ending-unemployment-evictions-bca43d873a61a9059c72fe15b88b9a9a

Sep 5

Two anchors of COVID safety net ending, affecting millions

...Two primary anchors of the government's COVID protection package are ending or have recently ended. Starting Monday, **an estimated 8.9 million people will lose all unemployment benefits. A federal eviction moratorium already has expired.**

While other aspects of pandemic assistance including rental aid and the expanded Child Tax Credit are still widely available, untold millions of Americans will face Labor Day with a suddenly shrunken social safety net.
...
President Joe Biden's administration believes the U.S. economy is strong enough not to be rattled by evictions or the drop in unemployment benefits. **Officials maintain that other elements of the safety net, like the Child Tax Credit and the SNAP program** (which Biden permanently boosted earlier this summer) **are enough to smooth things over.** On Friday, a White House spokesperson said there were no plans to reevaluate the end of the unemployment benefits.
...
Labor Secretary Marty Walsh said he believed the country's labor force was ready for the shift.

"**Overall the economy is moving forward and recovering**," Walsh said in an interview. "I think the American economy and the American worker are in a better position going into Labor Day 2021 than they were on Labor Day 2020."

Walsh and others point to encouraging job numbers; as of Friday **the unemployment rate was down to a fairly healthy 5.2%**. But Andrew Stettler, a senior fellow with the Century Foundation, a left-leaning think tank, says the end of the expanded unemployment benefits is still coming too early.

Rather than setting an arbitrary deadline, Stettler says the administration should have tied the end of the protections to specific economic recovery metrics. He suggests three consecutive months with nationwide unemployment below 5% as a reasonable benchmark to trigger the end of the unemployment benefits.
...
States with higher levels of unemployment can use the $350 billion worth of aid they received from the relief package to expand their own jobless payments, as noted by an Aug. 19 letter by Walsh and Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen.

Federal rental assistance funds remain available, though the money has been slow to get out the door, leaving the White House and lawmakers pushing state and local officials to disperse funds more quickly to both landlords and tenants.

The investment bank Morgan Stanley estimated Thursday that the economy will grow at an annual pace of 2.9% in the third quarter, down sharply from its prior forecast of 6.5%. That decline largely reflects a pullback in federal aid spending and supply chain bottlenecks.
...
The delta variant of the coronavirus also poses a challenge, threatening future school closures and the delay of plans to return workers to their offices.

Walsh called the delta variant "an asterisk on everything."

The sudden lapse of a crucial element of the pandemic safety net has fueled calls for a re-evaluation of the entire ...

https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/vietnams-capital-ramps-up-testing-after-extending-covid-19-curbs-2021-09-06/

Sep 6

Vietnam's capital ramps up testing after extending COVID-19 curbs

HANOI, Sept 6 (Reuters) - Vietnam's capital on Monday **extended COVID-19 restrictions for a further two weeks, as authorities launched a plan to test up to 1.5 million people** for the coronavirus in higher-risk areas of the capital to contain a climb in infections.

The Southeast Asian country dealt successfully with the virus for much of the pandemic, but the virulent Delta variant has proved more challenging in recent months.

Hanoi, which has **ordered people to stay at home and has halted all non-essential activities since July**, **has now divided the city into "red", "orange" and "green" zones based on infection risk.**

"Accordingly, **people in red areas must shelter in place and one person of every household there will be tested three times per week**," a statement from city authorities said, adding that **in other zones people would be tested every five to seven days**.

Barricades on Monday separated red zones from other areas, photographs posted on social media and media outlets showed.

Hanoi authorities expect up to 1.5 million test samples to be collected in the next week. The government is eager to keep the outbreak from reaching the intensity seen in Ho Chi Minh City.

In the southern business hub, people have been encouraged to test themselves using antigen COVID-19 kits after health services were overwhelmed.

Hanoi has been reporting on average 50 cases daily and has recorded over 4,000 cases since the pandemic began, official data showed.

Although the numbers are still low, authorities are wary after the Delta variant has helped drive up infections across the country to over 524,000 cases.

One third of Hanoi's 8 million residents have been given at least one dose of a vaccine and on Sunday the **health ministry called on the capital and Ho Chi Minh City to vaccinate all adult residents with at least one dose by Sept. 15.**

Vietnam has one of the lowest coronavirus vaccination rates in the region, with only 3.3% of its 98 million people fully vaccinated, and 15.4% with one shot.

https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-workplaces-look-college-fights-return-work-turning-point-looms-2021-09-07/

Sep 7

U.S. workplaces look to college fights as return to work 'turning point' looms

Sept 7 (Reuters) - A legal battle is brewing over remote work between administrators at U.S. colleges committed to in-person classes and some faculty with disabilities. Experts warn it is a precursor of what awaits employers that order staff back to the office amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

Employment lawyers said higher education provides a key test of who can work remotely because it is a profession traditionally associated with in-person work.

But COVID-19 lockdowns proved what disabled teachers have argued for years -- that online teaching can be a successful way to accommodate them.

Working from home during the pandemic allowed teachers with conditions ranging from epilepsy to genetic diseases to eliminate the need for specialized transport, add periods of rest to their day and ensure easy access to medicines.

As the new academic year begins, many are finding themselves fighting with administrators and having remote work requests denied, an early indication of tension awaiting big companies including Goldman Sachs (GS.N) and JPMorgan Chase & Co (JPM.N) that have said they want workers to return to offices.

Under the law, employers have to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which prevents discrimination against anyone with a disability, defined as an impairment that substantially limits a major life activity.

Employees with a disability can request an accommodation, but the employee must still perform what the business decides are the essential job functions, which can change from lockdown to reopening.

"The key question: Is presence in the workplace an essential function?" said Jeffrey Nolan, an employment lawyer Holland & Knight, which represents businesses.

...

Employment law specialists said fear of contracting COVID-19 is not likely to be considered a disability, although the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has encouraged remote work for those over 65.

"I have heard from dozens and dozens and dozens of disabled faculty members," said Lydia Brown, who advocates for disability rights nationally. "And every person, who requested remote work accommodations because of a very real and legitimate fear of an increased risk of transmission and severe illness of COVID, have been denied."

Brown and others said they hope the disputes in academia over remote work find their way to the courts and begin to reshape the law. Legal experts said it will take many months before courts hear the current remote work disputes.

Court rulings over the past 15 years on remote work often sided with employers without requiring much evidence that telecommuting was unreasonable, said Arlene Kanter, a professor at Syracuse University College of Law. She expects that to change, thanks to the pandemic.

"What I think we'll see now is courts will not just defer to the employer's judgment," she said. "Employees should have the right to explain how they can perform their job remotely, and how they just did it if they were working remotely during COVID. That's why I think we're at a turning point."

The Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates about 4% of the workforce is disabled while advocates said the actual number might be many times higher as people often do not disclose an impairment. ...

Return to Timeline

https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/worldwide-graphs/#total-deaths

Select live link for current number

Sep 8

Death toll from coronavirus tops 4,600,000

https://www.newsweek.com/mu-covid-variant-outbreak-florida-hundreds-detected-cases-1627068

Sep 8

Mu variant outbreak in Florida as hundreds of cases detected

Although Florida is finally starting to see a decrease in the number of new COVID-19 cases, there have been hundreds of cases detected of the **Mu variant, which is more transmissible and potentially more resistant to vaccines than other strains.**

Florida is getting over its worst wave of the pandemic, where as many as 27,779 new COVID-19 cases were recorded in the Sunshine State in one day. **On September 6 it recorded 10,162 new cases. Some 305 of its active cases are the Mu variant, according to data from the Outbreak.info website.**

However, the Delta variant remains by far the dominant strain and **Mu only accounts for 0.2 percent of the total cases in the U.S.**

Dr. Jason Salemi, an epidemiologist with the University of South Florida, told Newsweek: "I am absolutely concerned about Mu. It's **likely now in well over 40 countries, cases of this variants have appeared all over the U.S., and it possesses mutations that suggest it has the potential to effectively combat what our immune systems are throwing at it."**

"If, in fact, the variant is capable of substantially reducing the effectiveness of vaccines in lowering the risk of severe illness...well, it's one of those situations that we've been worried about."

He said if the world fails to achieve "meaningful vaccination coverage" it is more likely that variants such as Mu will emerge.

"This is the battle—we're doing everything we can to stamp out the deleterious effects of the virus, and it's fighting back, primarily with mutations that can make it spread more easily, cause more severe illness, and/or evade our defenses."

Salemi said that **there is still much to learn about Mu and its capabilities.**

"With Delta comprising 99 percent of all [U.S.] cases, we need to continue to focus on measures to combat the current wave, that despite showing declines (in cases, hospitalizations) in recent weeks, has been the most deadly wave of the pandemic in my home state of Florida."

He said that variants like Mu should underscore the importance of getting people vaccinated to minimize the likelihood of new, more resistant variants emerging and running amok.

Return to Timeline

https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/covid-in-israel-infection-rate-hit-three-month-low-1.10190887

Sep 8

COVID in Israel: Infection rate hits three-month low

Israel's COVID infection rate known as the R number – the average number of people each coronavirus carrier infects – hit on Wednesday a three-month low and currently stands at 0.95, according to Health Ministry data.

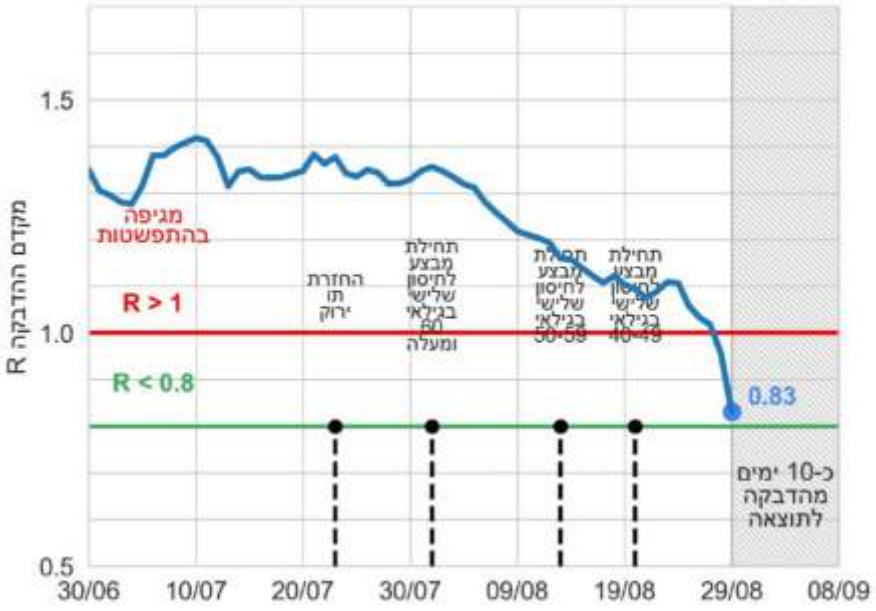
The last time the R number dropped below 1 was in early June, before the delta variant started spreading, leading to Israel's fourth wave of the coronavirus. It then stood at 0.89.

Furthermore, a decline in the rate of positive tests has also been recorded. Seven percent of the 97,000 COVID tests conducted Tuesday in Israel returned positive, while 8.4 percent of about 140,000 tests came back positive last week. Israel recorded 6,762 new cases on Tuesday, of whom 4,079 were unvaccinated.

Currently, 662 coronavirus patients are hospitalized in serious condition. **Out of the new 69 serious patients recorded on Tuesday, 49 have not been vaccinated against the virus and 29 are younger than 60.**

So far, over 2.6 million people have received a third COVID shot in Israel – a figure experts say could prevent another outbreak of the virus as Israel marks the High Holy Days, during which many social gatherings and prayers in synagogues are expected.

https://twitter.com/NTarnopolsky/status/1435880635478986752



Return to Timeline

https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-india-idUSKBN2G50KD

Sep 9

Mumbai gets ready to celebrate its biggest festival amid surging coronavirus cases

MUMBAI (Reuters) - As India's financial capital, Mumbai, gets ready for its biggest festival of the year, **daily coronavirus cases have surged, rising more than two-fold in less than a month, even as authorities imposed curbs to prevent a further spike.**

Markets were bustling and streets were crowded as people prepared for the 11-day festival of Ganesh Chaturthi, celebrating the elephant-headed Hindu god Ganesha, which begins on Friday.

Coronavirus cases in the city, which were at a low of 190 on Aug. 16, rose to 530 daily infections on Wednesday, according to government data. **Mumbai recorded a peak of 11,000 cases during India's devastating second wave this year, but won accolades for the way it recovered and curbed infections.**

Most coronavirus-related restrictions have been lifted in the city, including on its famed local trains, which are now open to fully vaccinated travellers. **But as the Ganesh festival approaches, authorities have imposed fresh curbs on public processions and restricted crowding at public pandals** - temporary structures built to protect a shrine.

Before the coronavirus outbreak hit the city, thousands of people thronged the streets to pray to towering idols of Ganesha, which are placed at almost every street corner by local organisations and politicians, and on the last day of the festival, to immerse those idols in the sea.

This year, citizens are forbidden from visiting such pandals and the city's civic body, the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation, suggested that only 10 people, preferably fully vaccinated, should accompany the idol for immersion.

"The third wave is not coming. It is already here," Mumbai mayor Kishori Pednekar told reporters this week, urging citizens to stay home and celebrate the festival.

As the festival season gets under way in India, several states are preparing for a possible third wave of the coronavirus.

On Thursday, the health ministry said 43,263 fresh cases were reported overnight, taking its cumulative caseload to 33.14 millon.

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/joe-biden-business-health-coronavirus-pandemic-executive-branch-18fb12993f05be13bf760946a6fb89be

Sep 9

US President orders sweeping new federal vaccine requirements

WASHINGTON (AP) — In his most forceful pandemic actions and words, **President Joe Biden ordered sweeping new federal vaccine requirements for as many as 100 million Americans — private-sector employees as well as health care workers and federal contractors** — in an all-out effort to curb the surging COVID-19 delta variant.

Speaking at the White House Thursday, Biden sharply criticized the tens of millions of Americans who are not yet vaccinated, despite months of availability and incentives.

“We’ve been patient. But our patience is wearing thin, and your refusal has cost all of us,” he said, all but biting off his words. The unvaccinated minority “can cause a lot of damage, and they are.”
...
The expansive rules mandate that all employers with more than 100 workers require them to be vaccinated or test for the virus weekly, affecting about 80 million Americans. And the roughly 17 million workers at health facilities that receive federal Medicare or Medicaid also will have to be fully vaccinated.

Biden is also requiring vaccination for employees of the executive branch and contractors who do business with the federal government — with no option to test out. That covers several million more workers.

Biden announced the new requirements in a Thursday afternoon address from the White House as part of a new “action plan” to address the latest rise in coronavirus cases and the stagnating pace of COVID-19 shots.

Just two months ago Biden prematurely declared the nation’s “independence” from the virus. Now, despite more than 208 million Americans having at least one dose of the vaccines, **the U.S. is seeing about 300% more new COVID-19 infections a day, about two-and-a-half times more hospitalizations, and nearly twice the number of deaths compared to the same time last year. Some 80 million people remain unvaccinated.**

“We are in the tough stretch and it could last for a while,” Biden said.
...
In addition to the vaccination requirements, **Biden moved to double federal fines for airline passengers who refuse to wear masks on flights or to maintain face covering requirements on federal property** in accordance with Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines.

He announced that the government will work to increase the supply of virus tests, and that the White House has secured concessions from retailers including **Walmart, Amazon and Kroger to sell at-home testing kits at cost beginning this week.**

The administration is also sending additional federal support to assist schools in safely operating, including additional funding for testing. And Biden called for large entertainment venues and arenas to require vaccinations or proof of a negative test for entry.

The requirement for large companies to mandate vaccinations or weekly testing for employees will be enacted through a forthcoming rule from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration that carries penalties of $14,000 per violation, an administration official said.

The rule will require that large companies provide paid time off for vaccination.

Meanwhile, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services will ...

https://www.cnn.com/travel/article/france-us-travelers-restriction-covid/index.html

Sep 10

France bans unvaccinated American travelers

France has become the latest European country -- and the most significant tourism destination -- to remove the United States from its safe travel list, following EU recommendations in the wake of a US Covid spike.

A French government decree issued on Thursday bumped the United States and Israel from the country's "green" list, down to "orange," effectively prohibiting nonessential travel to France for unvaccinated visitors.

Under France's rules, unvaccinated travelers from either country will still be allowed in provided they have an essential reason for travel, however they'll need a negative Covid-19 test before travel and must quarantine for seven days on arrival.

France's move follow restrictions imposed on US travelers from several other European destinations. Earlier this week, **Spain changed its entry policy for arrivals from the US, requiring them to have a certificate proving double vaccination.**

Covid-battered economies

Denmark and the Netherlands have also recently updated their restrictions, requiring proof of vaccination for US travelers. Sweden, meanwhile, has banned all US arrivals regardless of vaccination status.

Italy last week began requiring all visitors, including those from the United States, to show proof of a PCR or antigen Covid test taken within 72 hours of travel, regardless of whether they are vaccinated.

Many European travel destinations reopened their borders to Americans earlier in the summer in the hope of attracting much needed tourism dollars to boost Covid-battered economies.

With Covid's Delta variant spreading throughout the US, some countries, including **Germany, had already begun restricting access to Americans prior to the EU recommendation.** Others, such as Greece, insist they will remain open regardless of traveler vaccination status.

https://www.reuters.com/world/us/a-message-resilience-americans-reflect-20th-anniversary-sept-11-2021-09-11/

Sep 11

Americans reflect on 20th anniversary of Sept. 11

NEW YORK, Sept 11 (Reuters) - Twenty years after hijacked airliners smashed into New York City's World Trade Center and the Pentagon outside Washington, Americans came together on Saturday to honor the nearly 3,000 lives lost on Sept. 11, 2001, and reflect on how the attacks have shaped the country's view of the world and itself.

With President Joe Biden on hand, the ceremony at the Sept. 11 Memorial in lower Manhattan began with a moment of silence at 8:46 a.m. EDT (1246 GMT), the exact time the first of two planes flew into the World Trade Center's twin towers.
...
Relatives then began to read aloud the names of 2,977 victims to the thousands who had gathered on the cool, clear morning, among them former President Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton, New York's junior senator at the time of the attacks.

After ground zero, Biden will visit the Pentagon in Arlington, Virginia, where a third airliner crashed; and Shanksville, Pennsylvania, where Flight 93 was downed after passengers tried to regain control of the hijacked plane.

The remembrances have become an annual tradition but Saturday has special significance, coming 20 years after the morning that many view as a turning point in U.S. history, a day that gave Americans a sense of vulnerability that has deeply influenced the country's political life since then.

In a painful reminder of those changes, only weeks ago U.S. and allied forces completed a chaotic withdrawal from the war the United States started in Afghanistan in retaliation for the attacks - which became the longest war in U.S. history. And the COVID-19 pandemic, which so far has claimed more than 655,000 lives in the United States, continues.

Clifford Chanin, executive vice president at the National September 11 Memorial & Museum built at the site of the World Trade Center attack, said the two-decade milestone would serve as a "moment of high emotion" for the country, a time to consider "where we've been and where we are headed."

"Of course, we are in the middle of another unimaginable event right now with the COVID pandemic, but if 9/11 brings us anything in terms of what happened here and at the other attack sites, it is a message of resilience," Chanin told reporters this week.

At sunset, 88 powerful lightbulbs will project twin beams four miles (6.4 km) into the sky to mirror the fallen towers. This year, buildings throughout Manhattan, including the Empire State Building and the Metropolitan Opera, will join the commemoration by illuminating their facades in blue.

Also marking the anniversary, the New York Mets and New York Yankees baseball teams will play each other on Saturday evening as part of a special Subway Series, their first game on Sept. 11 since the attacks. The players will wear caps bearing logos for the New York City Fire Department and other first responders.

Return to Timeline

https://twitter.com/KeithMEWAS/status/1437017498596122624

Sep 12

The Chinese national hockey team arrives in Sweden

“This is not a joke. The Chinese national hockey team just arrived in Sweden ...

"Curious to know how they will dress for [the] match...”

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/business-health-japan-coronavirus-pandemic-4b409cf1a663759d6a434fe1faf0cc2d

Sep 13

Japan passes 50% vaccination rate, may ease limits in November

TOKYO (AP) — Japan's government says more than 50% of the population has been fully vaccinated.

Japan's vaccine rollouts began in mid-February, months behind many wealthy countries due to its lengthy clinical testing requirement and approval process. Inoculations for elderly patients, which started in April, were also slowed by supply shortages of imported vaccines, but the pace picked up in late May and has since achieved 1 million doses per day.

Economy Minister Yasutoshi Nishimura, who is in charge of COVID-19 measures, told NHK public television's weekly talk show Sunday that **about 60% of the population is expected to be fully vaccinated by the end of September, on par with current levels in Europe.**

The government is studying a roadmap for easing restrictions **around November** when a large majority of the population is expected to be fully vaccinated. That would allow **fully vaccinated people and those who test negative to travel, gather for parties or attend mass events.**

The progress of vaccinations has helped reduce serious cases and deaths among older people, but **infections from virus variants spread explosively in August among younger generations still largely unvaccinated, severely straining health care systems.**

Japan last Friday extended the ongoing state of emergency in Tokyo and 18 other areas until Sept. 30. It had been scheduled to end Sunday. **The measures focus on requests for eateries to close early and not serve alcohol.**

Japan has done much better than other developed countries in curbing illnesses and deaths without a lockdown. It has counted more than 1.65 million cases and 16,700 deaths.

https://www.reuters.com/world/china/china-reports-92-new-covid-19-cases-sept-13-vs-49-day-ago-2021-09-14/

Sep 14

COVID-19 cases in southeast China more than double as Delta spreads

... The National Health Commission said 59 new locally transmitted cases were reported for Sept. 13, up from 22 infections a day earlier. **All of them were in Fujian, a province bordered by Zhejiang to the north and Guangdong to the south.**

In just four days, a total of 102 community infections have been reported in three Fujian cities, including Xiamen, a tourist and transport hub with a population of 5 million.

The infections come ahead of the week-long National Day holiday starting on Oct. 1, a major tourist season. The last domestic outbreak in late July to August disrupted travel, hitting the tourism, hospitality and transportation sectors.

China's air passenger traffic plunged 51.5% in August from a year earlier, data released on Tuesday showed, highlighting the vulnerability of Chinese airlines to repeated outbreaks even though COVID-19 is largely under control in the country.

Fujian's outbreak began in Putian, a city of 3.2 million, with the first case reported on Sept. 10. Preliminary tests on samples from some Putian cases showed patients had contracted the highly transmissible Delta variant.

The outbreak has since spread south to Xiamen, which reported 32 new cases of community transmission for Sept. 13 compared with just one infection a day earlier.
...

LOCKDOWN

Like Putian, Xiamen has locked down some areas of higher virus risk, cut offline classes at kindergartens, primary schools and high schools, closed public venues such as cinemas, gyms and bars, and told residents not to leave the city for non-essential reasons.

The first patient in the Xiamen cluster was a close contact of a case in Putian, Xiamen authorities said late on Monday.

Known for its mild weather and a laid-back lifestyle, Xiamen is a popular tourist destination domestically.

The Xiamen Gaoqi International Airport is also a key transportation hub linking the Yangtze and Pearl River Delta. About 60% of flights to and from Xiamen were cancelled on Tuesday, according to aviation data provider Variflight.

Both Putian and Xiamen began city-wide testing for the coronavirus on Tuesday. The cities, however, are yet to announce tough city-wide lockdowns as seen in early 2020 in China.

Three new cases of community transmission were also reported in nearby Quanzhou city, versus six infections a day earlier. Variflight data showed 70% of Quanzhou's flights were cancelled.

"One wave after another," said a bank manager in Xiamen. **"It feels like the new normal now."**

Return to Timeline

https://www.ft.com/content/cf83b3a1-fe06-4c9f-999c-7500090aee7c

Sep 15

Why are Covid vaccine boosters needed and who will receive them?

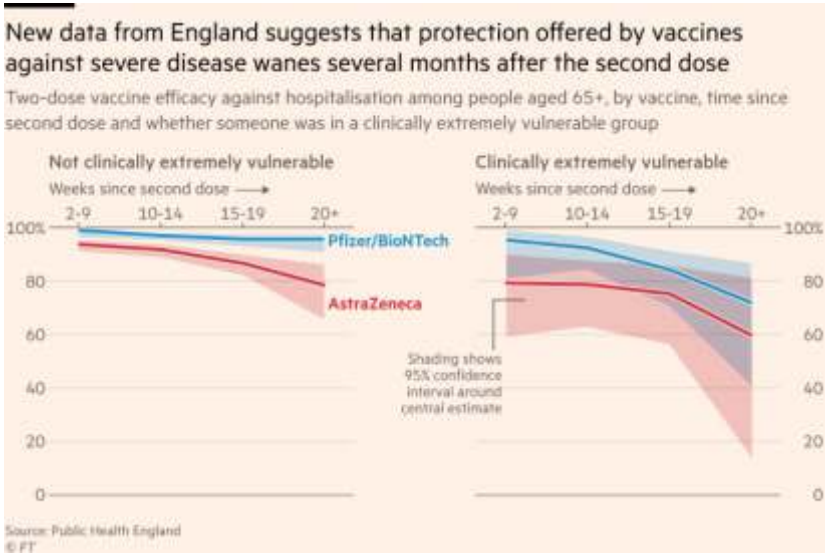
... The level of protection provided by vaccines against severe disease and death wanes in the period beyond three months after a second dose, according to data published on Tuesday by Public Health England.

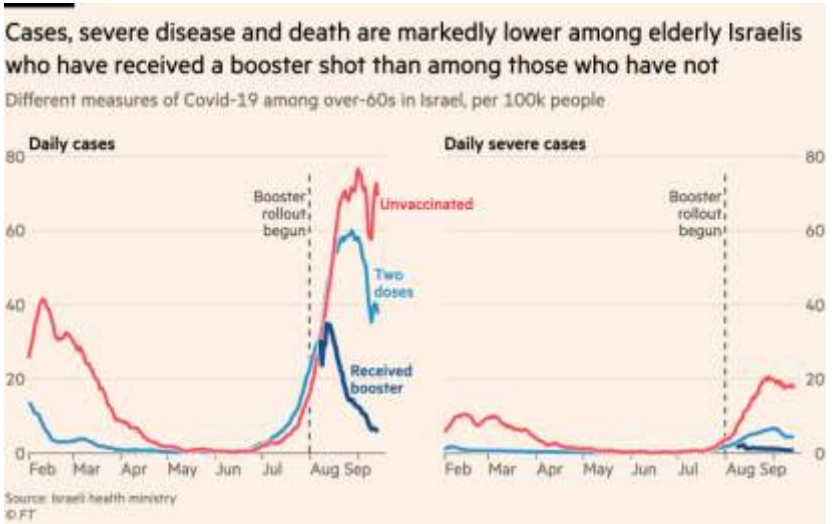
...

The rate of **waning was found to be steepest among the most elderly and those with serious underlying health conditions**."A booster programme for Covid-19 vaccines among the higher-risk adult population is a natural follow-on from the observed waning in vaccine effectiveness as time from the completion of primary two-shot vaccination course extends," said Penny Ward, visiting professor in pharmaceutical medicine at King's College London.**"Despite this being an apparently low fall-off [in immunity] — for example from 90 to 80 per cent protection — on a population basis that small difference is likely to translate into significant numbers of people needing hospital care for Covid."**

...

https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-booster/factbox-countries-weigh-need-for-booster-covid-19-shots-idUSKBN2GA190





Countries weigh need for boosters

UNITED STATES ...Sept. 20; ...**EUROPEAN UNION** ...not yet been recommended by the EU drugs regulator; ...**ARGENTINA** ..... might be evaluated in November; ...**AUSTRIA** .....Oct. 17; ...BELGIUM ...has authorised the use of boosters – specifically mRNA shots - for immunosuppressed people; ...**BRITAIN** ... all vulnerable people, frontline health staff and those aged over 50 ...; ...**CAMBODIA** ...Aug. 12 ...; **CANADA**...for moderately or severely immunocompromised ...; **CHILI** ...

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/lifestyle-business-canada-travel-coronavirus-pandemic-520bbc56c6f8045bf6888c1adf9d0744

Sep 16

Alaska seeing one of sharpest COVID-19 surges in US

JUNEAU, Alaska — Alaska's state epidemiologist says Alaska is experiencing "one of the sharpest surges" in COVID-19 in the country.

Dr. Joe McLaughlin added that it's not clear when the situation might stabilize. He says a lot will depend on vaccination rates and measures such as masking and distancing.

Health officials says hospitals are stressed, with staffing and capacity issues. **The state health department reports 20% of patients hospitalized in Alaska have COVID-19.**

Meanwhile, **Bartlett Regional Hospital in Juneau announced Thursday that as a condition of employment, staff must be vaccinated against COVID-19 by Dec. 15.**

HERE'S WHAT ELSE IS HAPPENING:

...

SEATTLE -- Seattle and King County officials have issued a health directive requiring proof of COVID-19 vaccination or a negative test to enter certain establishments and attend large outdoor events.

...

JACKSON, Miss. -- Mississippi has surpassed New Jersey as the state with the highest rate of COVID-19 deaths in the U.S., with roughly 1 of every 320 Mississippians having succumbed to the coronavirus.

HELENA, Mont. — A hospital in Helena was forced to implement crisis standards of care amid a surge in COVID-19 patients, hospital officials said Thursday.

...

HONOLULU -- Some Hawaii schools are participating in a state Department of Health program that provides COVID-19 testing for students, teachers and staff.

...

HOUSTON — Two dozen Republican attorneys general are warning the White House of impending legal action if a proposed coronavirus vaccine requirement for as many as 100 million Americans goes into effect.

...

WAILUKU, Hawaii — Proof of vaccination is now required for patrons wanting to sit inside Maui bars and restaurants.

...

HAVANA — Cuba on Thursday began a COVID-19 vaccination campaign for children between the ages of 2 and 10, saying it was necessary to curb the spread of the delta variant.

...

ROME — Italian workers in both the public and private sectors must provide a health pass to access the workplace starting on Oct. 15.

...

TOPEKA, Kan. — Kansas schools are experiencing a growing number of coronavirus outbreaks, and school-aged children are getting infected more frequently than any age group. ...

Return to Timeline

https://www.idahostatesman.com/news/coronavirus/article254293958.html

Sep 17

‘Net is gone’: All of Idaho put in crisis standards of care amid ‘unabated’ COVID spread

In a stark indication of the severity of Idaho’s COVID-19 crisis, **state health officials activated a last-resort measure on Thursday that allows hospitals across the state to ration care as needed because of an unmanageable influx of patients.**

The implications of the decision are bleak, **allowing medical professionals to prioritize patients most likely to recover and withhold what could be lifesaving treatments from patients deemed unlikely to survive** — all because the spread of the virus in a poorly vaccinated state means there are not enough resources to provide adequate care for all.

Although the Department of Health and Welfare on Thursday approved the change, called crisis standards of care, not all health care systems will implement the standards immediately, because those decisions are made on an individual basis.

St. Luke’s Health System, which requested Wednesday that the crisis standards be enacted, has begun activating the measures at its hospitals, while Saint Alphonsus is operating “at the most extreme contingency standards,” which is the level of care below the crisis level, according to Dr. Steven Nemerson, chief medical officer for Saint Al’s.
...
The standards were created in June 2020 as a plan to strategically ration health care should the need arise for hospitals that became overwhelmed. **The state’s guidelines for rationing care emphasize that hospitals must shift the priority from offering the best care to each individual patient to saving the most lives.**

“The situation is dire — we don’t have enough resources to adequately treat the patients in our hospitals, whether you are there for COVID-19 or a heart attack or because of a car accident,” Department of Health and Welfare Director Dave Jeppesen said in a news release Thursday.

On Sept. 6, crisis standards were activated in two North Idaho health districts. A day after the announcement, Dr. Robert Scoggins, a doctor at Kootenai Health in Coeur d’Alene, told reporters that patients were being triaged outside of the ER, and those coming to the hospital should expect longer waits in emergency rooms.

At a press conference on Thursday, hospital leaders in the Treasure Valley described their challenges and said conditions would only get worse in the coming weeks.

At St. Luke’s facilities, surgeries for certain types of severe conditions — like some tumors and cancers — have been stopped because of a lack of resources. “Primitive” ventilation devices are being used on some patients in non-monitored settings, and the hospital has had to reduce its supervision of patients’ vital signs, according to Dr. Jim Souza, chief physician executive of St. Luke’s Health System.

Under normal circumstances, he said that an abundance of resources and high-quality care are the net that allows doctors to perform “high-wire” procedures with high reliability.

“The reason we made this case for (crisis standards of care) is because the net is gone,” Souza said. “And people will fall from the wire.”

As of Wednesday, the hospital had 245 COVID-19 patients and 608 total patients, according to the hospital dashboard.

There were a record 678 patients hospitalized with COVID-19 in Idaho on Monday, including a record-tying 173 in intensive care, according to data from Health and Welfare. Those numbers are likely underreported, as only 45 facilities provided data on Monday. Health and Welfare shows data on other days from as many as 52 facilities.
...

Return to Timeline

https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/worldwide-graphs/#total-deaths

Select live link for current number

Sep 18

Death toll from coronavirus tops 4,700,000

Return to Timeline

https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-covid-19-booster-debate-moves-fda-vaccine-advisory-committee-2021-09-17/

Sep 18

FDA advisers recommend COVID boosters for 65 and older after rejecting broad approval

Advisers to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration voted on Friday to **recommend COVID-19 vaccine booster shots for Americans 65 and older and those at high risk of severe illness**, after overwhelmingly rejecting a call for broader approval.

The panel **also recommended** that the FDA **include healthcare workers and others at high risk of occupational exposure to the virus that causes COVID-19, such as teachers.**

Despite the narrowed scope of the proposed authorization, the panel's recommendation would cover most Americans who got their shots in the earliest stages of the U.S. vaccination campaign.
...
The FDA is expected to make its decision on the third round of shots soon. It is not bound by the panel's recommendation but will take it into consideration.
...
By a vote of 16 to 2, members of the FDA's Vaccines and Related Biological Products Advisory Committee declined to recommend a third dose of the Pfizer (PFE.N)/BioNTech vaccine to anyone age 16 and older who received their second shot at least six months earlier.

The panelists suggested the evidence supporting broad approval was inadequate, and they wanted to see more safety data, especially concerning the risk of heart inflammation in younger people after vaccination.
...
Advisers to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) are scheduled to meet on Sept. 22 and 23 to discuss further recommendations for who will be eligible for the shots.
...
Some countries, including Israel and the UK, have already begun COVID-19 booster campaigns. The United States authorized extra shots for people with compromised immune systems last month and some 2 million people had already received a third shot, according to the CDC.

President Joe Biden has pushed for the additional shots in the face of surging hospitalizations and deaths caused by the highly contagious Delta variant of the coronavirus, mostly among the unvaccinated, and rising cases of breakthrough infections among fully vaccinated Americans.

Recent polls have shown that most vaccinated Americans want a booster shot to enhance their immunity.

https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/health/2021/09/18/cdc-says-moderna-vaccine-staying-especially-effective-covid-updates/8380925002/

Sep 19

Moderna vaccine protection staying especially strong

New research released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on Friday shows that effectiveness of the Moderna vaccine is staying particularly strong.

Over the course of five months of research, from March to August, **the effectiveness of all the vaccines at keeping people out of the hospital due to COVID among people without compromising conditions was highest for Moderna recipients, at 93%. Pfizer's effectiveness was overall 88% and Johnson & Johnson's was 71%.**

Pfizer's effectiveness decreased after 120 days of the study period, from 91% to 77%, while Moderna's effectiveness did not see a similar decline. Initial effectiveness of 93% only declined to 92% with Moderna.

"Although these real-world data suggest some variation in levels of protection by vaccine, all FDA-approved or authorized COVID-19 vaccines provide substantial protection against COVID-19 hospitalization," researchers concluded.

The report was released hours before an FDA committee decided not to recommend booster shots for people vaccinated with Pfizer, except in the case of the elderly and those with compromised immune systems.

https://apnews.com/article/business-science-health-coronavirus-pandemic-coronavirus-vaccine-202cb6e44b90270ec4d1f19690ed94c5

Sep 20

Pfizer says COVID-19 vaccine works in kids ages 5 to 11

... For elementary school-aged kids, **Pfizer tested a much lower dose -- a third of the amount that's in each shot given now. Yet after their second dose, children ages 5 to 11 developed coronavirus-fighting antibody levels just as strong as teenagers and young adults**, Dr. Bill Gruber, a Pfizer senior vice president, told The Associated Press.

The kid dosage also proved safe, with similar or fewer temporary side effects -- such as sore arms, fever or achiness -- that teens experience, he said.
...
Earlier this month, FDA chief Dr. Peter Marks told the AP that once Pfizer turns over its study results, his agency would evaluate the data "hopefully in a matter of weeks" to decide if the shots are safe and effective enough for younger kids.

Many Western countries so far have vaccinated no younger than age 12, awaiting evidence of what's the right dose and that it works safely in smaller tots. But **Cuba last week began immunizing children as young as 2 with its homegrown vaccines and Chinese regulators have cleared two of its brands down to age 3.**

While kids are at lower risk of severe illness or death than older people, **more than 5 million children in the U.S. have tested positive for COVID-19 since the pandemic began and at least 460 have died**, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics. Cases in children have risen dramatically as the delta variant swept through the country.

"I feel a great sense of urgency" in making the vaccine available to children under 12, Gruber said. "There's pent-up demand for parents to be able to have their children returned to a normal life."

In New Jersey, 10-year-old Maya Huber asked why she couldn't get vaccinated like her parents and both teen brothers have. Her mother, Dr. Nisha Gandhi, a critical care physician at Englewood Hospital, enrolled Maya in the Pfizer study at Rutgers University. But the family hasn't eased up on their masking and other virus precautions until they learn if Maya received the real vaccine or a dummy shot.

Once she knows she's protected, Maya's first goal: "a huge sleepover with all my friends."

Maya said it was exciting to be part of the study even though she was "super scared" about getting jabbed. But "after you get it, at least you feel like happy that you did it and relieved that it didn't hurt," she told the AP.

Pfizer said it studied the lower dose in 2,268 kindergartners and elementary school-aged kids. The FDA required what is called an immune "bridging" study: evidence that the younger children developed antibody levels already proven to be protective in teens and adults. That's what Pfizer reported Monday in a press release, not a scientific publication. The study still is ongoing, and there haven't yet been enough COVID-19 cases to compare rates between the vaccinated and those given a placebo — something that might offer additional evidence.

The study isn't large enough to detect any extremely rare side effects, such as the heart inflammation that sometimes occurs after the second dose, mostly in young men. The FDA's Marks said the pediatric studies should be large enough to rule out any higher risk to young children. Pfizer's Gruber said once the vaccine is authorized for younger children, they'll be carefully monitored for rare risks just like everyone else.

A second U.S. vaccine maker, Moderna, also is studying its shots in elementary school-aged children. Pfizer and Moderna are studying even younger tots as well, down to 6-month-olds. Results are expected later in the year.

https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/eid/article/27/9/21-1042_article

Sep 21

Study: Not all people infected with COVID develop antibodies

... **Abstract:** Not all persons recovering from severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) infection develop SARS-CoV-2–specific antibodies. We show that nonseroconversion is associated with younger age and higher reverse transcription PCR cycle threshold values and identify SARS-CoV-2 viral loads in the nasopharynx as a major correlate of the systemic antibody response.
...
The Study: We studied 72 persons, all of whom had a previous positive RT-PCR test but were symptom-free for >3 weeks before blood was collected for testing ... Only 2 persons (3%) reported no symptoms, whereas 13 (18%) persons reported mild disease, 48 (67%) reported moderate disease, and 9 (12%) reported severe disease....

We tested plasma samples (n = 144) collected at enrollment and follow-up visits for antibodies to the spike protein by using a validated ELISA (Appendix). Only 46 of the 72 participants had detectable IgG responses, IgA responses, or both (Table); reciprocal endpoint titers ranged from 182 to >312,500 .... Analysis of the same samples for receptor-binding domain (RBD) and nucleocapsid (N) antibodies yielded very similar results (Appendix Figure 1). All persons with spike protein antibodies also had detectable RBD (IgG, IgM, or both) or N (IgG) protein responses, except for 1 participant whose spike protein endpoint titers were very low .... In contrast, 26 participants remained seronegative, despite the testing of up to 3 samples per person for IgA, IgM, and IgG against multiple antigens as well as neutralizing antibodies. Thus, **36% of our cohort represented serologic nonresponders.**

To investigate potential reasons for the lack of seroconversion, we examined available demographic, clinical, and laboratory data. Comparing race/ethnicity, sex, and symptom severity, we failed to find a significant association with serostatus..., although we did observe a trend for increasing antibody positivity with increasing symptom severity ... We also found no significant differences in seroconversion between patients reporting or not reporting various symptoms, including symptoms characteristic of COVID-19 .... However, seronegative persons were on average 10 (95% CI 3–17) years younger than seropositive persons ... and exhibited RT-PCR Ct values that were 11 (95% CI 8–14) cycles higher .... Moreover, logistic regression showed a precipitous decline in the probability of seroconversion at higher Ct values ... For example, a Ct of 35 predicted only a 15% (95% CI 5%–37%) probability of seroconversion, which decreased further with increasing Ct values. Thus, low nasopharyngeal viral loads seem insufficient to elicit a systemic antibody response.
...
Finally, we asked whether the relationship between seroconversion, age and Ct values was dependent on the diagnostic laboratory. We found that 2 sites with highly sensitive RT-PCR tests (University of Alabama at Birmingham Fungal Reference Laboratory and Children's of Alabama Diagnostic Virology Laboratory in Birmingham) were 6 (95% CI 2–30) times more likely to identify serologic nonresponders than a third site with a less sensitive test (Assurance Scientific Laboratories in Birmingham) (Appendix Methods). However, this difference did not change the relationship between Ct values and seroconversion because seronegative persons had higher Ct values than seropositive persons regardless of the test site (Figure 1, panels D, F). In contrast, we observed little association between age and seroconversion at the Assurance Scientific Laboratories site (Figure 1, panel C), and the difference observed at the other sites was largely driven by young persons who also had high Ct values (Figure 1, panel E). Thus, nasopharyngeal viral loads represent a major correlate of the systemic antibody response, whereas age seems to have only a minor effect.

Conclusions
In summary, we show that patients with low SARS-CoV-2 viral loads in their respiratory tract are less likely to mount a systemic antibody response. Although we cannot formally exclude false-positive ...

https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/white-house/u-s-donate-500-million-more-vaccine-doses-lower-income-n1279795

Sep 22

U.S. to donate 500 million more vaccine doses to lower-income countries

WASHINGTON — The U.S. is buying 500 million more doses of Pfizer's Covid vaccine that it plans to donate to lower-income countries as President Joe Biden responds to pleas from world leaders to do more to vaccinate the world's population.

The doses will bring the total number of shots the U.S. plans to donate to 1.1 billion, nearly 160 million of which have already been shipped and 200 million of which are expected to go out by the end of the year, an administration official said. The remaining 800 million will be sent out by next September.

...

So far, about 6 billion vaccine doses have been given, with rates varying widely among countries. Some, like **Portugal and Singapore, have had more than 80 percent of their populations vaccinated, while less than 1 percent of the population has received the shots in other countries, like Haiti and Tanzania. On average, just 20 percent of people in lower-income countries are vaccinated, compared to around 80 percent in the wealthiest countries**, according to the WHO.

World leaders criticized the U.S. and other wealthy countries Tuesday at the U.N. General Assembly meeting over their plans to start giving out booster shots before billions of people have yet to get their first doses. The head of the WHO came out in strong opposition to booster shots, and Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte accused the U.S. and other wealthy countries of hoarding vaccines.

"There is a man-made drought of vaccines ravaging poor countries," Duterte said Tuesday. "Rich countries hoard lifesaving vaccines, while poor nations wait for trickles. They now talk of booster sh

The WHO has said **it will take 11 billion doses to vaccinate at least 70 percent of the world's population**, and it has called for a "moratorium" on booster shots until more countries have access to the vaccines.

Biden administration officials have argued that the U.S. can do both — give booster shots to people at home and distribute vaccines globally.

The Food and Drug Administration is expected to give the green light soon to booster shots for people 65 years and older and those at high risk for severe disease. Administration officials have said they have enough supply to give a third dose to every person in the country 16 or older if and when the FDA gives its approval.

The 500 million new Pfizer doses will be made in the U.S. and sold to the federal government at a not-for-profit price, the official said. The contract for the doses hasn't been finalized with Pfizer yet, but the official said it will be completed "as quickly as possible."

Over the summer, the Biden administration announced that it would donate 500 million doses to 100 countries, the largest donation by a single country. The new effort doubles that commitment.

https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/romanian-hospitals-fill-up-with-covid-patients-amid-widespread-vaccine-refusal-2021-09-23/

Sep 23

Romanian hospitals fill up with COVID patients amid widespread vaccine refusal

BUCHAREST, Sept 23 (Reuters) - After living through three waves of the COVID-19 pandemic without getting sick, 55-year-old Roxana Pascu thought that she was healthy enough to withstand the virus and decided to turn down the vaccine.

Now Pascu, who runs a small business, is one of around 1,040 COVID-19 patients currently in intensive care across Romania where cases have more than doubled over the last week and ICU beds are becoming dangerously scarce.

With the second-lowest vaccination rate in the European Union, Romania is bracing for a fourth wave of the pandemic that looks set to overwhelm hospitals where medical staff are already stretched thin.

"I thought that if I made it through three waves without getting infected, I can make it through another one without a vaccine," Pascu said, her voice so weak that she could barely speak.

Whereas the European Union has fully vaccinated 72% of its adult population on the whole, Romania has only managed 34%, exposing entrenched distrust in state institutions, misinformation campaigns, poor rural infrastructure and weak vaccine education.

The government, which eased restrictions despite low vaccine intake, has missed a goal to vaccinate 10 million people by September, with little over 5 million inoculated. **About 40% of medical and school staff were not vaccinated and officials have so far stopped short of making it mandatory.**

On Wednesday, Romania had only 32 intensive care beds available, and was struggling to add more because of staff shortages. **Daily infection rates are nearing a record high of over 10,000 and public health officials this month estimated that Romania could see 15,000-20,000 new daily cases in October**.

In capital Bucharest, Beatrice Mahler, the manager of the Marius Nasta Pneumology Institute was trying to staff a mobile intensive care unit.

"At the moment I have great, great problems in opening these beds, because we can't work without staff."

The institute's morgue is also at capacity and is looking to rent mortuary freezers, she said.

"I am scared because I don't know how much we can help if there aren't enough of us," said Anita Timofte, the institute's chief ICU nurse. "I ... suspect there will not be enough room for how many people will be unlucky to get sick."

Restrictions including weekend curfews are being reintroduced in cities and villages with high case numbers. Schools are increasingly moving online.

Along with efforts to find more staff and provide more beds, officials plan to send mobile vaccination units to schools and introduced a lottery with vouchers and cash prizes to boost inoculations.

"What is essential is being able to give specialized medical attention to those who need it. The human resource is what limits us," deputy health minister Andrei Baciu said.

As for Pascu, she plans to get vaccinated after she recovers. So does Raul Adin, a 20-year-old patient gasping for breath through a respirator.

"I 100% plan to get vaccinated," he said.

Return to Timeline

https://www.statnews.com/2021/09/23/covid19-vaccine-boosters-cdc-acip/

Sep 24

Advisory committee recommends wide swath of Americans be offered Covid-19 vaccine boosters

A vaccine advisory panel voted Thursday to recommend that a wide swath of Americans should be offered Covid-19 vaccine booster shots, given at least six months after their second vaccination. **But a vote that would have ensured access to boosters for health care workers and others in high-risk occupations did not pass, leaving many of them for now out of the eligibility pool.**

The recommendations — which pertain at this time **only to people who were previously vaccinated with the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine** — now go to Rochelle Walensky, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. She is not bound to follow recommendations from the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices but it would be highly unusual for a CDC director to reject the ACIP's advice.

...

The ACIP voted on a series of questions, each of which cast a broader net in terms of who in this country would be eligible to get a booster shot at this point. **The committee agreed unanimously to recommend to boosters for people 65 and older as well as people living in nursing homes.**

With each successive vote, however, the committee's support for recommending boosters ebbed, with increasing numbers of members questioning the strength of the evidence supporting the need. A vote to recommend boosters for **people aged 50 to 64 with medical conditions that raise the risk of severe** Covid infection passed 13 to 2. A vote to recommend boosters for people aged 18 to 49 with medical problems passed with a 9 to 6 vote.

...

But the committee **drew the line at a recommendation that would have given access to boosters to people aged 18 to 64 who are at elevated risk because they live in a setting or work in an occupation where the risk of catching Covid-19 is significant. This would include health workers, prisoners and prison guards, and people who live in or work in homeless shelters.**

The recommendation was defeated by a 9 to 6 vote.

...

While most members of the committee supported the use of boosters, several raised concerns that this step won't fix the country's Covid problem. Talbot said hospitals are full of people with Covid-19 who aren't vaccinated. Boosting fully vaccinated people won't change that.

"I feel like we're putting lipstick on frogs," she said. "This is not going to solve the pandemic."

Thursday's ACIP vote caps a rocky five-week period in which the Biden administration found itself at odds with many in the scientific community — and those who value drug and vaccine approvals playing out according to regulatory pathways.

Rather than asking the FDA and the CDC to advise it on whether it was time to make booster shots available to Americans, the administration announced a booster shot campaign would begin the week of Sept. 20. The announcement was made before any booster shots had been authorized for use — and before two of the three manufacturers had even filed an application to the FDA for approval of a ...

https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-health-new-york-courts-education-c5dd62f249ff600cf034924be734d8f8

Sep 25

Federal judge delays vaccine mandate for NYC teachers

New York City schools have been temporarily blocked from enforcing a vaccine mandate for its teachers and other workers by a federal appeals judge just days before it was to take effect.

Workers in the nation's largest school system were to be required to show vaccination proof starting Monday. But late Friday, a judge for the 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals granted a temporary injunction sought by a group of teachers pending review by a three-judge panel, which will take up the motion Wednesday.

Department of Education spokesperson Danielle Filson said officials were seeking a speedy resolution in court.

"We're confident our vaccine mandate will continue to be upheld once all the facts have been presented, because that is the level of protection our students and staff deserve," Filson said in an email.

The New York Post reported that the department sent an email to principals Saturday morning saying they "should continue to prepare for the possibility that the vaccine mandate will go into effect later in the week."

Mayor Bill de Blasio announced in August that about 148,000 school employees would have to get at least a first dose of the COVID-19 vaccination by Sept. 27. The policy covers teachers, along with other staffers, such as custodians and cafeteria workers.

It's the first no-test-option vaccination mandate for a broad group of city workers in the nation's most populous city. And it mirrors a similar statewide mandate for hospital and nursing home workers set to go into effect Monday.

As of Friday, 82% of department employees have been vaccinated, including 88% of teachers.

Even though most school workers have been vaccinated, unions representing New York City principals and teachers warned that could still leave the 1 million-student school system short of as many as 10,000 teachers, along with other staffers.

De Blasio has resisted calls to delay the mandate, insisting the city was ready.

"We've been planning all along. We have a lot of substitutes ready," the Democrat said in a radio interview on Friday. "A lot is going to happen between now and Monday but beyond that, we are ready, even to the tune of, if we need thousands, we have thousands."

https://www.nbcnews.com/health/health-news/daily-pill-treat-covid-could-be-just-months-away-scientists-n1279938

Sep 26

A daily pill to treat Covid could be just months away, scientists say

..."**Oral antivirals have the potential to not only curtail the duration of one's Covid-19 syndrome, but also have the potential to limit transmission to people in your household if you are sick**," said Timothy Sheahan, a virologist at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill who has helped pioneer the therapies.

Antivirals are already essential treatments for other viral infections, including hepatitis C and HIV. One of the best known is Tamiflu, the widely prescribed pill that can shorten the duration of influenza and reduce the risk of hospitalization if it is given quickly.

The medications, developed to treat and prevent viral infections in people and animals, work differently depending on the type. But they can be engineered to boost the immune system to fight infection, block receptors so viruses can't enter healthy cells or lower the amount of active virus in the body.

At least three promising antivirals for Covid are being tested in clinical trials, with results expected as soon as late fall or winter, said Carl Dieffenbach, director of the Division of AIDS at the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, who is overseeing antiviral development.

"I think that we will have answers as to what these pills are capable of within the next several months," Dieffenbach said.

The top contender is a medication from Merck & Co. and Ridgeback Biotherapeutics called molnupiravir, Dieffenbach said. That is the product being tested in the Kellys' Seattle trial. **Two others are a candidate from Pfizer, known as PF-07321332, and AT-527, an antiviral produced by Roche and Atea Pharmaceuticals.**

They work by interfering with the virus's ability to replicate in human cells. In the case of molnupiravir, the enzyme that copies the viral genetic material is forced to make so many mistakes that the virus can't reproduce. That, in turn, reduces a patient's viral load, shortening infection time and preventing the kind of dangerous immune response that can cause serious illness or death.

So far, only one antiviral drug, remdesivir, has been approved to treat Covid. But it is given intravenously to patients ill enough to be hospitalized, and it isn't intended for early, widespread use. By contrast, the top contenders under study can be packaged as pills.

Sheahan, who also performed preclinical work on remdesivir, led an early study in mice that showed that molnupiravir could prevent early disease caused by SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes Covid. The formula was discovered at Emory University and later acquired by Ridgeback and Merck.

Clinical trials have followed, including an early trial of 202 participants last spring that showed that molnupiravir rapidly reduced the levels of infectious virus. Merck Chief Executive Robert Davis said this month that the company expects data from its larger phase 3 trials in the coming weeks, with the potential to seek emergency use authorization from the Food and Drug Administration "before year-end."

Pfizer launched a combined phase 2 and 3 trial of its product Sept. 1, and Atea officials said they expect results from phase 2 and phase 3 trials later this year.

If the results are positive and emergency use is granted for any product, Dieffenbach said, "distribution could begin quickly."

That would mean millions of people soon could have access to a daily orally administered medication, ideally a single pill, that could be taken for five to 10 days at the first confirmation of Covid infection.

"When we get there, that's the idea," said Dr. Daniel Griffin, an ...

https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-vaccine-boosters-children-demand-us-ca6d151522986900211f467740211994

Sep 27

US has enough COVID-19 vaccines for boosters, kids' shots

MADISON, Wis. (AP) — **With more than 40 million doses of coronavirus vaccines available, U.S. health authorities said they're confident there will be enough for both qualified older Americans seeking booster shots and the young children for whom initial vaccines are expected to be approved in the not-too-distant future.**

The spike in demand — expected following last week's federal recommendation on booster shots — would be the first significant jump in months. **More than 70 million Americans remain unvaccinated** despite the enticement of lottery prizes, free food or gifts and pleas from exhausted health care workers **as the average number of deaths per day climbed to more than 1,900 in recent weeks.**

Federal and state health authorities said current supply and steady production of more doses can easily accommodate those seeking boosters or initial vaccination, avoiding a repeat of the frustratingly slow rollout of COVID-19 vaccines across the country early this year.

...

Robust supply in the U.S enabled President Joe Biden this week to promise an additional 500 million of Pfizer's COVID-19 shots to share with the world, doubling the United States' global contribution. Aid groups and health organizations have pushed the U.S. and other countries to improve vaccine access in countries where even the most vulnerable people haven't had a shot.

...

State health officials said they have tried to request only what health care providers and pharmacies expect to need from the federal supply. Those numbers have dwindled since the vaccines became widely available in early spring.

But U.S. officials — holding out hope that some of the unvaccinated will change their minds — are trying to keep enough vaccines in stock so all Americans can get them.

That balancing act is tricky and can lead to consternation around the globe as the U.S. sits on unused vaccines while many countries in places such as Africa can't get enough vaccines.

"Somebody sitting in a country with few resources to access vaccines, seeing people in the U.S. able to walk into a pharmacy and get that vaccine and choosing not to, I'm sure that's causing heartache," said Jen Kates, senior vice president and director of global health and HIV policy for the Kaiser Family Foundation.

Dr. Marcus Plescia, chief medical officer of the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials, which represents the public health agencies of all 50 U.S. states, the District of Columbia and U.S. territories, said officials anticipate that on-hand doses of COVID-19 vaccines and manufacturers' ability to supply more will meet needs across the country.

"I think states have tried to plan as if everybody's going to be offered a booster," he said, suggesting they will be overprepared for the more narrow recommendations issued by the FDA and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

California, for example, estimated earlier this month that it would need to administer an extra 63 million doses by the end of 2022 — if initial shots for children under 12 were approved and boosters were open to everyone.

U.S. health officials late Thursday endorsed booster shots of the Pfizer vaccine for all Americans 65 and older — along with tens of millions of younger people who are at higher risk from the coronavirus because of health conditions or their jobs.

California, with nearly 40 million residents, has the lowest transmission rate of any state and nearly 70% of eligible residents ...

https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/united-airlines-says-more-than-99-us-employees-have-been-vaccinated-2021-09-28/

Sep 29

United Airlines ready to fire workers for defying vaccine mandate

CHICAGO, Sept 28 (Reuters) - United Airlines (UAL.O) said on Tuesday nearly 600 U.S.-based employees faced termination after failing to comply with the carrier's vaccination policy.

In early August, the company became the first U.S. carrier to require COVID-19 vaccinations for all domestic employees, requiring proof of vaccination by Monday.

The carrier said it would start on Tuesday the process of firing 593 employees who decided not to get vaccinated.

"This was an incredibly difficult decision but keeping our team safe has always been our first priority," Chief Executive Scott Kirby and President Brett Hart told employees in a memo.

The workers can save their jobs if they get vaccinated before their formal termination meetings, the company officials said.

United has received requests for vaccine exemptions from employees for religious and medical reasons. Those employees account for less than 3% of the airline's 67,000 U.S. workforce, United officials said.

The company had plans to put employees who received religious exemptions on temporary, unpaid personal leave from Oct. 2. Those plans, however, have been put on hold until Oct. 15 because of a lawsuit challenging the policy.

Excluding those who have sought an exemption, United said more than 99% of U.S.-based employees have been vaccinated against COVID-19.

A company spokesperson said the airline plans to hire about 25,000 people over the next few years, and vaccination will be a condition of employment for all new hires.

United will also require students at its pilot training school to get vaccinated, the spokesperson said.

The company dismissed the notion that the vaccine requirement was deterring applicants for jobs at the air carrier.

United received 700 applications for about 400 job postings last month at a Denver career fair. Similarly, it has received more than 20,000 applications for about 2,000 open positions for flight attendants, the spokesperson said.

https://www.nbcnews.com/health/health-news/cdc-issues-urgent-alert-pregnant-women-need-covid-19-vaccine-rcna2422

Sep 29

CDC issues urgent alert: Pregnant women need the Covid-19 vaccines

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on Wednesday issued its strongest guidance to date urging pregnant women to be vaccinated against Covid-19.

The guidance comes as more than a quarter million cases of Covid in pregnant women have been reported, 22,000 of whom were hospitalized, according to the CDC.

A total of 161 pregnant women have died of Covid, the CDC said, with 22 deaths in August alone.

Yet, **less than a third of pregnant women have been vaccinated**, the agency reported.

The new notice is meant to strengthen previous CDC guidance issued last month, when the agency first advised pregnant women to get the vaccine.

It's well established that people with underlying health conditions, such as high blood pressure and diabetes, are at increased risk for Covid complications.

Pregnancy is also considered an underlying health condition. (The guidance extends to women trying to become pregnant, as well as those who have recently given birth or who may be breastfeeding.)

Pregnant women are at risk for complications of Covid. Overwhelmingly, these complications have occurred in women who were unvaccinated.

One complication of Covid during pregnancy is preterm birth, which puts a newborn at risk, as well.

In general, **premature babies are more likely to have compromised respiratory function because of their underdeveloped lungs. But if a premature baby with underdeveloped lungs ends up with Covid, (likely from exposure to the mother after birth), that newborn is at risk for additional breathing issues.**

While it is rare, some of the youngest Covid patients have needed to be placed on ventilators.

“I strongly encourage those who are pregnant or considering pregnancy to talk with their health care provider about the protective benefits of the Covid-19 vaccine to keep their babies and themselves safe,” CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky said in a statement.

Communicating the risks of Covid to pregnant women is neither easy nor straightforward, doctors say. Many such women are loathe to get the shots, sometimes falling prey to misinformation about the vaccines' safety and effectiveness.

One recent study, however, showed no increased risk for miscarriage after at least one dose of the Moderna or the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccines. The miscarriage rate of the approximately 2,500 women in the study was about the same as would be expected in the general population.

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-europe-health-pandemics-connecticut-34a70ec8c61abe37abac05d985a8c76f

Sep 30

Woman who survived Spanish flu, world war succumbs to COVID

She lived a life of adventure that spanned two continents. She fell in love with a World War II fighter pilot, barely escaped Europe ahead of Benito Mussolini's fascists, ground steel for the U.S. war effort and advocated for her disabled daughter in a far less enlightened time. She was, her daughter said, someone who didn't make a habit of giving up.

And then this month, **at age 105, Primetta Giacopini's life ended the way it began — in a pandemic.**

"I think my mother would have been around quite a bit longer" if she hadn't contracted COVID," her 61-year-old daughter, Dorene Giacopini, said. "She was a fighter. She had a hard life and her attitude always was ... basically, all Americans who were not around for World War II were basically spoiled brats."

Primetta Giacopini's mother, Pasquina Fei, died in Connecticut of the Spanish flu in 1918 at age 25. That pandemic killed about 675,000 Americans — a death toll eclipsed this month by the 2020-21 coronavirus pandemic.

Primetta was 2 years old when her mother died.
...
This year, during a visit on Sept. 9, Dorene noticed her mother was coughing. She knew her mother's caretaker had been feeling sick after her husband returned from a wedding in Idaho. All three had been vaccinated. But as she drove away, Dorene guessed that her mother had contracted COVID-19.

"I made sure we said 'I love you.'" She did the 'See you later, alligator.' I think we both said 'After a while, crocodile,'" Dorene said. "That was the last time I saw her."

Two days later, Primetta was in the emergency room. Her oxygen levels dropped steadily over the next six days until nurses had to put an oxygen mask on her.

She became confused and fought them so hard she had to be sedated, Dorene said. Chest X-rays told the story: pneumonia. Faced with a decision of whether to put Primetta on a ventilator — "They said nobody over 80 makes it off a ventilator," Dorene said — she decided to remove her mother's oxygen.

Primetta died two days later, on Sept. 16. She was 105 years old.

"She had such a strong heart that she remained alive for more than 24 hours after they removed the oxygen," Dorene said. "I'm full of maybes, what I should have done with the ventilator . . . (but) it broke through three vaccinated people."

She added: "I'm reminding myself that she was 105. We always talk about ... my grandmother and mother, the only thing that could kill them was a worldwide pandemic."
"

Return to Timeline

https://www.popsci.com/health/covid-vaccine-faq/

Sep 30

If you're unsure about getting the COVID-19 vaccine, read this

... As of this week, more than 77 percent of adults in the United States have received at least one dose of these vaccines. However, some Americans are still unsure about being vaccinated. **We've asked vaccine experts to address some common questions about how the vaccines work and their safety. Here's what they have to say.**

Should I be worried about how quickly these vaccines were developed?

There are two types of COVID-19 vaccines used in the US. Those from Pfizer and Moderna are mRNA vaccines, which use snippets of genetic material from the novel coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2, to train the immune system. The Johnson & Johnson shot is what's known as a viral vector vaccine. It uses a different virus (the "vector") that's been engineered to deliver coronavirus genes. **Both of these technologies have been under development for decades.**

...

Was the vaccine tested as rigorously as other vaccines in the past?

When COVID-19 struck, researchers around the world put aside their other work to focus on developing a vaccine.

"No corners were cut; all of the normal stages of vaccine development were followed," Talaat says. "The only difference is that because there was a lot of money available, things happened at a much faster pace than they could have with more limited funding."

...

I've already had COVID-19. Shouldn't my body be immune now?

People who've already had COVID-19 do develop some immunity to the virus, but they're **generally not as well protected as people who are vaccinated**, Talaat says.

…

I've never had the flu, and I've never gotten a flu shot. Am I healthy enough to not need the vaccine?

Your chances of getting COVID-19 are much higher than your chances of getting the flu, Talaat says. "The way the pandemic is circulating, I think at some point we're all either going to have been infected or have been vaccinated, [and] sometimes both," she says.

Compared to the flu, COVID-19 is also more likely to cause severe illness and death and spreads more rapidly, Hopkins says. In both cases, though, vaccines reduce the risk of becoming seriously sick or dying.

"Our healthcare system is quite at its breaking point, and anything we can do to keep ourselves healthy and not have to go see the doctor and not have to end up in the hospital is a good thing," Talaat says.

They have medications to treat COVID-19 now, so is it really a big deal if I get sick?

A number of treatments are being used to combat COVID-19, including monoclonal antibodies and the antiviral drug remdesivir. But **these medicines aren't perfect**, Hopkins says. They're also most effective when given early in the disease and aren't available everywhere.

...

People are getting breakthrough infections, so does the vaccine even work?

No vaccine is 100 percent effective at preventing every infection, Hopkins says, and measures such as social distancing and masking up will still play an important role in thwarting the spread of COVID-19. But that doesn't mean that the shots aren't doing their job.

Breakthrough infections are still uncommon, even with the rise ...

Return to Timeline

https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/worldwide-graphs/#total-deaths

Select live link for current number

Oct 1

Death toll from coronavirus tops 4,800,000

Return to Timeline

https://www.nationalgeographic.com/culture/article/epic-covid-19-memorial-national-mall-one-stunning-photo

Oct 1

The epic COVID-19 memorial on the National Mall, in one stunning photo

For more than 30 hours, photographer and National Geographic Explorer Stephen Wilkes watched people move through the sea of white flags below him on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. He saw young children bend down curiously to examine the small flags, and cyclists lay down their bikes to take in the 20-acre expanse of them. He saw skateboarders roll through, selfie-takers frame shots—and passersby slowly realize that each flag represents a life lost to COVID-19.

On September 18 and 19, starting before sunrise and finishing after sunset, Wilkes took 4,882 photographs of the art installation In America: Remember, an exhibit that aims to convey the enormity of the country's pandemic losses. He and his team then blended the photographs into a single composite image, part of his Day to Night series.

"One of the things I tried to capture was the epic scale of this," says Wilkes. "It's almost impossible to take it all in." ...

Return to Timeline

https://www.statnews.com/2021/10/01/mercks-antiviral-pill-reduces-hospitalization-of-covid-patients-a-possible-game-changer-for-treatment/

Oct 2

Merck's antiviral pill reduces hospitalization of Covid patients

An investigational antiviral pill reduced the chances that patients newly diagnosed with Covid-19 would be hospitalized by about 50%, a finding that could give doctors a desperately needed new way to treat the sick, the drug maker Merck announced Friday.

A five-day course of molnupiravir, developed by Merck and Ridgeback Biotherapeutics, reduced both hospitalization and death compared to a placebo. In the placebo group, 53 patients, or 14.1%, were hospitalized or died. For those who received the drug, 28, or 7.3%, were hospitalized or died.

A simple oral medication to help treat Covid-19 has been an elusive goal since the start of the pandemic. **Other drugs, including Gilead's remdesivir, have also been shown to reduce hospitalizations if given early in the course of disease, but must be given intravenously.**
...
If approved, molnupiravir could have a dramatic impact on efforts to fight the pandemic. **Merck and Ridgeback said they would seek an emergency use authorization from the Food and Drug Administration "as soon as possible" and would submit it to regulatory agencies worldwide.**

The data from the study were made public in a press release and **have not yet been peer-reviewed**. But even top-line figures were encouraging. In the first 29 days of the study, **there were no deaths reported in the group treated with molnupiravir and eight deaths reported among patients who received placebo**.

Patients in the study had mild-to-moderate Covid-19, were within five days of symptom onset when dosed, and had at least one risk factor associated with poor disease outcomes.

The study was stopped early on the recommendation of an independent data monitoring committee and in consultation with the FDA, Merck said. Such committees are charged with making sure studies are in the best interest of patients, and recommend they be stopped if it is clear a drug is effective.

Only limited information on side effects was made public in the press release, but the companies said rates were similar between the placebo group and the treated group. An adverse event, or bad outcome, occurred in 35% of those who received molnupiravir and 40% of those who received placebo. **Only 1.3% of molnupiravir-treated subjects discontinued the drug because of an adverse event, compared to 3.4% who discontinued placebo.**

"When people talk about endemic Covid and the future of Covid, they don't spend as much time talking about the value of intervening early to reduce severity of disease and that's a very valuable tool," said Natalie Dean, an assistant professor of biostatistics at Emory University who studies infectious disease. "The more accessible that can be, the more effective it can be."

One challenge will be making sure the drug is available when people need it, and one challenge could be price. In June, Merck entered into an agreement to supply the U.S. government 1.7 million courses of the drug for $1.2 billion, or **$700 a course.** That price could be out of reach for some countries. But Merck also has said it will enter into licensing agreements with generic drug makers to accelerate the availability of the drug in more than 100 low- and middle-income countries. "We are committed to making sure that there is access to this drug," Daria Hazuda, a Merck vice president, told reporters on a conference call Friday morning.

In an interview, Dean Li, Merck's head of research and development, said that no particular side effect stood out as being more common with the drug, but more complete data will be available at a later date.

https://www.reuters.com/world/us/california-require-covid-19-vaccines-schoolchildren-governor-says-2021-10-01/

Oct 3

California first in U.S. to mandate COVID-19 vaccines for schoolkids

SACRAMENTO, Calif., Oct 1 (Reuters) - California will become the first U.S. state to mandate statewide COVID-19 vaccinations for schoolchildren, Governor Gavin Newsom said on Friday as a Reuters tally showed the United States topping 700,000 coronavirus deaths.

“The state already requires that students are vaccinated against viruses that cause measles, mumps, and rubella – there’s no reason why we wouldn’t do the same for COVID-19," the Democratic governor said at a news conference.

Newsom said **the schools mandate could be enacted as early as January**, once the U.S. Food and Drug Administration fully approves inoculations for their age groups. California is the most populous U.S. state.

The United States has reported an average of more than 2,000 deaths per day over the past week, representing about 60% of the peak in fatalities in January, a Reuters analysis of public health data showed.

The United States leads the world in COVID-19 cases and deaths, accounting for 19% and 14% of all reported infections and fatalities, according to the Reuters tally. Globally, the pandemic is set to surpass 5 million deaths.

While national hospitalization numbers have fallen in recent weeks, some states, especially in the south of the country, are bucking that trend to record big rises, putting pressure on healthcare systems.

Public health officials say the state's strict COVID-19 public health orders helped to slow the transmission of the virus in recent weeks.

On Friday, **the transmission map tracker of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention showed California with the lowest weekly case rate in the country.**

Amid a national surge in COVID-19 cases fueled by the highly transmissible Delta variant leading to serious illness and death mostly among unvaccinated people, **several large school districts in California already have mandated COVID-19 vaccines for some students.**

The **Los Angeles** Unified School District, **the country's second-largest, requires them for children over the age of 12**, for whom the FDA has authorized their emergency use.

Public schools in **San Diego will require vaccines for students over the age of 16 in December**, and in Hoboken, New Jersey, students must be vaccinated or undergo weekly testing for the virus.

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-health-new-york-education-new-york-city-bc516b3c5012bd31e8f9a83cb06de18f

Oct 4

COVID vaccine mandate takes effect for NYC teachers, staff

... Mayor Bill de Blasio gave a final warning to the city's roughly 148,000 public school staffers on Friday, saying **unvaccinated employees would be placed on unpaid leave and not be allowed to work this week.** The city planned to bring in substitutes where needed.

Implementing the mandate smoothly may be a challenge for de Blasio, a Democrat who has boasted of the city's record of keeping school buildings open during most of the last school year when other districts went to all-remote instruction. **New York City is not offering a remote option this year.**

De Blasio said **90% of Department of Education employees had received at least one vaccine dose, including 93% of teachers and 98% of principals**, as of Friday.

The vaccination **mandate** in the nation's largest school system **does not include a test-out option, but does allow for medical and religious exemptions**. It was supposed to go into effect last week but was delayed when a federal appeals court granted a temporary injunction. An appeals panel reversed that decision three days later.

A similar mandate is set to go into effect in Los Angeles on Oct. 15.

Mark Cannizzaro, president of the Council of Schools Supervisors and Administrators, said that despite a surge in vaccinations last week, some principals can't find enough staff to replace unvaccinated workers.

"While we're thankful that the percentage of vaccinated staff has increased systemwide since the deadline was extended, there are still too many school leaders that have been unable to find qualified substitutes for Monday," Cannizzaro said.
A spokesperson for the United Federation of Teachers said the city "needs to work hard to make sure enough vaccinated personnel are in place to safely open the schools Monday morning."

Teachers and other school employees who had sued over the school vaccine mandate asked the U.S. Supreme Court on Thursday for an emergency injunction blocking its implementation. The request was denied on Friday.
...
Some educators have reservations about the mandate but are complying.

Maurice Jones, 46, a support staff member at a Manhattan middle school, said he got vaccinated months ago but he sympathizes with co-workers who have not gotten the shots. "If they've got to get tested more they've got to get tested more," Jones said. "I don't think they should lose their job."

Roxanne Rizzi, who teaches technology at an elementary school in Queens, waited until Friday to get her first coronavirus vaccine shot.

"I had to do it for the finances of my family," she said.

Rizzi, 55, had resisted the vaccine because she contracted COVID-19 in November and believed natural immunity would protect her. She said she would continue to protest the

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, people should get vaccinated even if they have already been infected by the virus. The agency says COVID-19 vaccines offer ...

https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-lifestyle-business-scott-morrison-travel-0e0dea481cefe0952e19f6315b6955ee

Oct 5

Australia won't welcome foreign tourists until at least 2022

CANBERRA, Australia (AP) — Foreign tourists won't be welcomed back to Australia until at least next year, the prime minister said Tuesday as he outlined plans for lifting some of the toughest and longest COVID-19 travel restrictions imposed by any democracy.

The country will instead prioritize the return of skilled migrants and students after it hits Prime Minister Scott Morrison's benchmark for reopening its external borders: the **full vaccination of 80% of the population aged 16 and older. It is expected to reach that point Tuesday.**

The news comes just days after Morrison announced plans to allow vaccinated citizens and permanent residents to fly overseas from November for the first time since March 2020.

The **severe travel restrictions, which have trapped most Australians at home and kept most foreigners out, have led to the lowest level of immigration since World War II.** Australian universities, which rely heavily on fees paid by international students, have been particularly hard hit, and many fear students will go elsewhere if they are not allowed in soon.

While many countries imposed strict lockdowns that shut down large portions of the economies, Australia's travel restrictions have kept life fairly normal for much of the pandemic — though it is now experiencing shutdowns in the biggest cities, Sydney and Melbourne, as well as the capital Canberra.

The rules imposed a high emotional burden in a country where half the population was born overseas or has at least one immigrant parent. Families were separated, and some grandparents have been barred from meeting grandchildren in Australia who are now approaching 2 years old.

After lifting restrictions on Australians, Morrison said **the next priority would be skilled migrants and international students — before tourists.** He did not specify when those groups would be allowed in.

...

There are a few exceptions to Australia's travel ban — and tourism has never been accepted as a reason to cross the border. Those who have been able to enter must spend two weeks in hotel quarantine. That would represent a major obstacle if it remains even after tourists are allowed.

Morrison said last week that his **government would work toward "complete quarantine-free travel for certain countries, such as New Zealand, when it is safe to do so."** He did not elaborate on the timing.

Australia and New Zealand briefly shared a quarantine-free travel bubble when both countries were essentially free of COVID-19 transmission.

But New Zealand reintroduced quarantine after Australian authorities lost control of an outbreak of the highly-contagious delta variant, which was brought to Sydney in June by a U.S. air crew.

The delta variant has changed the game in many countries that previously were able to largely keep the virus at bay with very strict travel rules, including New Zealand. On Monday, that country's government acknowledged for the first time that it can no longer completely get rid of the coronavirus.

Australia is continuing to battle outbreaks, while also racing to inoculate its population. Its vaccination rollout was initially slow but has picked up.

Victoria state on Tuesday reported a national record 1,763 new local infections. Australia's second-most populous state also reported four COVID-19 deaths. ...

Return to Timeline

https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/health/2021/10/06/covid-vaccination-masks-mandates-biden-administration/6012639001/

Oct 6

Kids account for 27% of US cases

Children make up only 22% of the U.S. population but account for 27% of coronavirus cases nationwide, the American Academy of Pediatrics reported Monday.

The organization said the number of children receiving their first COVID-19 vaccine this week was the lowest recorded number since vaccines became available, and has been trending downward for almost two months.

Kids make up less than 1% of COVID-19 deaths, the Academy said, but there isn't much data about the long-term effects of the coronavirus on children. **Since the beginning of the pandemic, 5.9 million children have tested positive for COVID-19, and less than half of eligible children have been fully inoculated.**

Children ages 5 to 11 — making up 14.5% of the U.S. population — are not yet approved to receive the COVID-19 vaccine, but recent action by the Food and Drug Administration suggests that may change soon. The FDA scheduled a meeting of the independent committee, which advises the administration on vaccine and drug approvals, for the end of October.

Pfizer-BioNTech says data shows their vaccine is safe and effective in children ages 5 to 11, and recommended one-third the dose used for those aged 12 and over. The company submitted clinical trial data to the FDA last Wednesday.

If both the FDA and a second federal advisory committee authorize vaccines for young children, inoculations could begin before Halloween.

https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/unvaccinated-federal-workers-canada-will-be-put-unpaid-leave-globe-mail-2021-10-06/

Oct 6

Canada imposes COVID-19 vaccine mandate on federal workers, transportation

OTTAWA, Oct 6 (Reuters) - Canada will place unvaccinated federal employees on unpaid leave and require COVID-19 shots for air, train and ship passengers, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said on Wednesday, as he unveiled one of the world's strictest vaccine mandate policies.

Federal employees will be required to declare their full vaccination status through an online portal by Oct. 29. Workers and passengers age 12 and older on trains, planes and marine transport operating domestically - which are federally regulated - must show they have been inoculated by Oct. 30.

"These travel measures, along with mandatory vaccination for federal employees, are some of the strongest in the world," Trudeau told reporters. "If you've done the right thing and gotten vaccinated, you deserve the freedom to be safe from COVID."

There are almost 300,000 federal service workers, plus 955,000 federally regulated workers, representing about 8% of Canada's full-time workforce, according to the Treasury Board, which manages the public service.
...
Canada has fully vaccinated more that 80% of its eligible population ages 12 and over.

Canada's neighbor to the south, the **United States**, said last month **most federal employees must be fully vaccinated against COVID-19 no later than Nov. 22, while federal contractors must be vaccinated by Dec. 8.** The U.S. government also is drafting rules to require large employers to have their workers inoculated or tested weekly.

Some other countries also have pursued vaccine mandates for government employees. **Fiji in August forced public workers to go on leave if unvaccinated. If still not inoculated by November, they would lose their jobs.** Later this month, Italy will require proof of vaccination, a negative test or recent recovery from infection for all the country's workers.
...
Canada's vaccine mandate for federal workers, first promised on Aug. 13, will be reassessed every six months and stay in place until the policy is no longer required, one official said.

For travelers, a negative COVID-19 test will not be accepted as a replacement for proof of vaccination after Nov. 30, officials said. Children under 12 who are not eligible for vaccination will be exempted from the travel mandate.

The government also said it is working with industry to put a strict vaccine requirement in place for cruise ships before the resumption of the 2022 cruise season.

https://www.thedrive.com/the-war-zone/42612/satellite-images-show-massive-armada-of-idle-cargo-ships-waiting-to-dock-in-long-beach

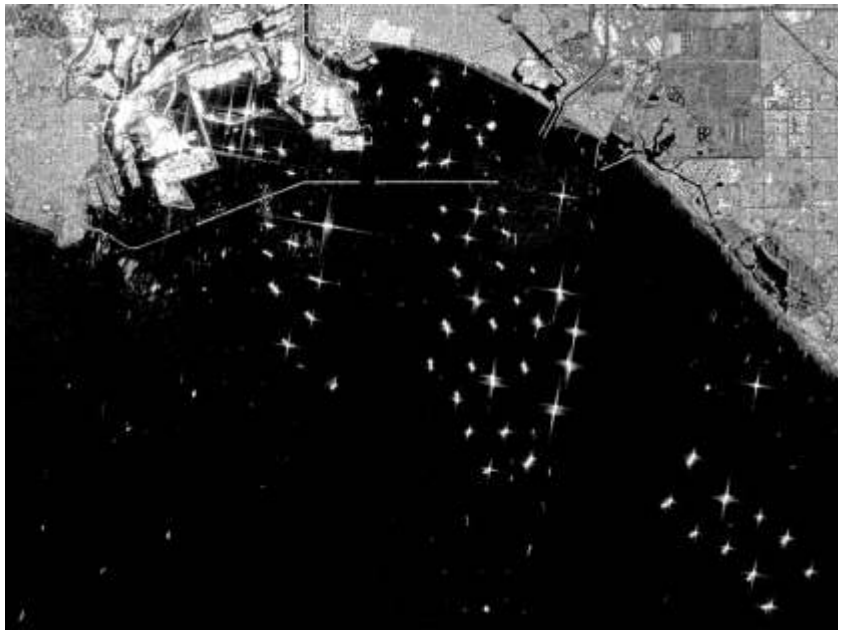
Oct 7

Satellite Images Show Massive Armada Of Idle Cargo Ships Waiting To Dock

The massive backlog of cargo ships stacking up off the port of Long Beach, California, is making headlines. It's a complicated situation, with **multiple factors contributing to the unprecedented situation, including labor shortages at the docks, growing ship sizes, and COVID-safety measures slowing down the processing of each ship's cargo, as well as a big uptick in incoming cargo**, among others. **Well over 60 ships are awaiting their turn to offload and the massive delay there, as well as at other U.S. ports, is impacting an already rickety supply chain that has been battered by the logistical fits and starts of the pandemic.**
...
With shipping at California's biggest port up nearly by a third compared to a year ago and ongoing complications due to COVID-19, delays in cargo transfers have been present throughout the year, but they have been elevated to a new high for the fall shipping season. Many of the goods that get shipped during this time of year are meant to stock retail outlets' shelves during the holiday season, for instance.

Delays in that numbered days or weeks have quickly turned into many weeks or even months as a result. Now major logistics companies are looking for any open port on the west coast to redirect their cargoes, even if it is extremely inconvenient and may shatter the established shipping price model. Of course, all **these impacts tend to snowball and lead to even more delays and ballooning shipping costs down the line.**

While some measures are being put into place that may help the situation, **there are no clear indications that this logjam of cargo ships will be alleviated anytime soon. In fact, it may grow further** before it eventually subsides. It's yet another maritime reminder of the sometimes **bizarre reality the post-COVID-19 world faces and of the real economic impacts that continue to reverberate from the global crisis.**



Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-business-finland-coronavirus-vaccine-public-health-34dbf44c3b115f385153adfc5b4cafee

Oct 8

Finland joins other Nordic nations in curbing Moderna shots

COPENHAGEN, Denmark (AP) — Finland has joined other Nordic countries in **suspending or discouraging the use of Moderna's COVID-19 vaccine in certain age groups** because of an increased risk of heart inflammation, a rare side effect associated with the shot.

The Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare said Thursday that authorities **won't give the shot to males under age 30. They will be offered the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine instead.** The government agency said it found that young men and boys were at a slightly higher risk of developing myocarditis.

The move by Finland followed similar decisions by three neighboring countries on Wednesday. **Sweden suspended the use of Moderna for people under 30, Denmark said those under 18 won't be offered the Swiss-made vaccine, and Norway urged those under 30 to get the Pfizer vaccine instead.**

All four countries based their decision on an unpublished study with Sweden's Public Health Agency saying that it signals **"an increased risk of side effects such as inflammation of the heart muscle or the pericardium"** — the double-walled sac containing the heart and the roots of the main vessels. It added: **"The risk of being affected is very small."**

The preliminary information from the Nordic study has been sent to the European Medicines Agency's adverse reaction committee to be assessed.

https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-virginia-colorado-missouri-coronavirus-vaccine-ef731a305d52a78a79e38e5279d94551

Oct 9

Boosters, employer mandates drive increase in US vaccines

The number of Americans getting COVID-19 vaccines has **steadily increased to a three-month high as seniors and people with medical conditions seek boosters, and government and employer mandates push more workers to take their first doses.**

Demand is expected to spike in a few weeks if regulators authorize the Pfizer vaccine for elementary school children, and some states are reopening mass vaccination clinics in anticipation.

In **Missouri**, a mass vaccination site at a former Toys R Us store is set to open Monday. Virginia plans to roll out nine large vaccination centers over the next few weeks, including one at the Richmond International Raceway.

Colorado opened four mass vaccination sites in mid-September, largely to deal with employer mandates, and officials saw a 38% increase in vaccinations statewide during the first week.

The total number of doses being administered in the U.S. is climbing toward an average of 1 million per day, almost double the level from mid-July — but still far below last spring. The increase is mainly due to boosters, with nearly 10% of the nation's over-65 population already getting third shots, but there are signs of increased demand from other groups as well.

On Thursday, 1.1 million doses were given, including just over 306,000 to newly vaccinated people, said Dr. Cyrus Shahpar, the White House COVID-19 data director.

Organizers of the effort to reach the roughly 67 million unvaccinated American adults say the rise in demand can be traced to approval of the Pfizer booster, mandates that have forced employees to choose between the shot and their jobs and sobering statistics that show nearly all COVID-19 deaths are among the unvaccinated.

"We're seeing people who need the shot to keep a job," said Dr. Ricardo Gonzalez-Fisher, who runs a mobile vaccine clinic mostly for Latinos in Colorado.

Last weekend, his clinic delivered 30 shots to people outside the Mexican Consulate in Denver. "On these days, 30 is a very good number," he said.

Virginia's state vaccine coordinator, Dr. Danny Avula, said opening the large vaccination centers, will allow local health departments to focus on reaching underserved communities. "This should really help relieve the burden for our local providers," he said.

Last week, the number of people getting shots at a mall in Charlottesville, Virginia, doubled over the previous week, said Ryan McKay, who oversees COVID-19 operations for the Blue Ridge Health District.
...
Health officials in Springfield, **Missouri**, an early epicenter of the delta surge, are opening the new vaccination site at the former toy store because they anticipate seeing an influx of people.
...
Vaccination sites that opened within the past week in **Memphis, Tennessee, and Tampa, Florida**, drew mostly people seeking booster shots and only a handful of people getting their first or second shots, said organizers who expect demand to rise.

A bump in vaccinations in **Louisiana** began in August, when so many were getting sick from the highly contagious delta variant, said Sheree Taillon, vaccine incentive coordinator for the state's health department.

But now there are few first-timers seeking shots, and most people coming for their boosters are older people and those who rushed to get vaccinated last winter, she said. And COVID-19 deaths ...

https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-science-nevada-pandemics-health-7d09b1f6da8f991be505deb12b16a837

Oct 10

Nevada among last states to add rapid tests to virus tally

CARSON CITY, Nev. (AP) — **Nevada this week became one of the last states to publicly report rapid antigen tests as part of its coronavirus tallies** — a move that experts said could provide a fuller picture of the pandemic but also upend metrics used to gauge how the virus is spreading.

The change **leaves Maryland as the lone U.S. state that doesn't incorporate rapid tests in its online dashboard or include them in virus statistics**, as the U.S. Centers for Disease Control recommends, according to an Associated Press review of dashboards and policies for all 50 states.

Nevada has been among the states hit hardest by the pandemic. The state's hospitals have been pushed to near capacity, its unemployment has broken national records, and 435,000 people have tested positive for COVID-19. Omitting rapid tests from its tally limited the public's understanding of the pandemic's spread in the state, Nevada health officials acknowledge.
...
The rapid antigen tests, which detect the presence of viral proteins rather than the coronavirus itself, return results in minutes, unlike traditional molecular tests sent to labs, which can take days to process but are shown to be more accurate. **Their quick turnaround times have led to their widespread use in prisons, schools and nursing homes.**
...
One criteria that triggers county mask mandates for indoor public spaces is an 8% positivity rate, which the CDC defines as "substantial" transmission.

"Changing now will probably cause some disruption to that system," Labus said.

While other states have embraced antigen tests, which are also called point-of-care tests, Nevada has been comparatively skeptical. A year ago, federal officials chided the state when it decided to halt their use due to accuracy concerns.

Nevada, which was the only state to stop using the tests, subsequently reversed the ban.
...
With a drop in new cases, Nevada now has the capacity to investigate positive antigen tests as probable coronavirus cases, Peek-Bullock said.

"The reporting of the antigen tests really give us a better picture of what's happening disease burden-wise across our state. With the schools using it, with correctional facilities doing mass use of antigen testing and a lot of employer-based testing — we've just reached a point in the pandemic where we absolutely have to take into account these positive results," she said.

An average of 17,700 antigen tests a week were reported to Nevada health officials in August and the first three weeks of September, state data show.

Nevada wasn't the only state struggling to process hundreds of thousands of different kinds of tests, said Janet Hamilton, the executive director of the Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists. Test results aren't transmitted electronically from providers to health departments, forcing them to process large volumes of paper. Those kinds of time-consuming undertakings stem from a long-term lack of funding for public health systems and infrastructure nationwide, she said.

"We should have electronic case reporting, but public health, until very recently, was never funded to support it. Providers were never incentivized to participate in the process or ensure that their electronic medical record systems were sending data to public health," Hamilton said. ...

https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-lifestyle-business-australia-pandemics-978c58c7002a4edc651d943ae0520500

Oct 11

Sydney opens to vaccinated after 100-plus days of lockdown

CANBERRA, Australia (AP) — Sydney hairdressers, gyms, cafés and bars reopened to fully vaccinated customers on Monday for the first time in more than 100 days after Australia's largest city achieved a vaccination benchmark.

Sydney planned to reopen on the Monday after 70% of the New South Wales state population aged 16 and older were fully vaccinated.

By Monday, 73.5% of the target population was fully vaccinated and more than 90% have received at least one dose.

Some businesses opened at midnight due to demand from people impatient to enjoy their freedom.

More pandemic restrictions will be removed at the 80% benchmark, and New South Wales residents will be free to travel overseas for the first time since March last year.

New South Wales reported 496 new infections in the latest 24-hour period and eight COVID-19 deaths.

The infection rate will rise as Sydney residents return to work and become more mobile.

New South Wales Premier Dominic Perrottet said the **infection rate and numbers of COVID-19 patients being admitted to hospitals were lower than modeling had predicted.**

"So that's positive and gives hope and confidence as we open up in a measured way we're in a very good position to keep people safe," Perrottet said.

"There's still restrictions in place. It's not a free for all. It is opening up in a measured way and if everyone can look after each other and respect each other, we can get people back into work, we can get businesses open, while at the same time keeping people safe," he added.

While Sydney infections have been trending down in recent weeks, they have yet to peak in Melbourne, Australia's second-most populous city.

Victoria state, which includes Melbourne, reported 1,612 new infections on Monday and eight deaths.

Sydney's lockdown began on June 26 and the outbreak of the delta variant spread from Sydney to Melbourne, which has been locked down since Aug. 5, and the national capital Canberra, which has been locked down since Aug. 12.

Most of the rest of Australia is largely free of COVID-19, although authorities warn that delta cannot be kept out of any state or territory.

The Australian Capital Territory, which includes Canberra and two villages, and New South Wales are the only parts of the country to achieve the 70% benchmark. **Canberra will reduce pandemic restrictions on Friday. More than 95% of the target population has had at least one dose and 72.8% are fully vaccinated.**

Victoria remains a week or two behind. In **Victoria, 85.5% has had a least one vaccine dose and 58.6% are fully vaccinated.**

https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-europe-russia-moscow-pandemics-9af74e65c48d40b8ddc6a346893a8563

Oct 12

Russia registers another record in daily COVID-19 deaths

MOSCOW (AP) — Russia registered a new record number of daily coronavirus deaths Tuesday as it faced a rapid surge of contagion amid laggard vaccination rates.

The government coronavirus task force reported 973 coronavirus deaths, **the highest daily toll since the start of the pandemic.**

The country has continuously registered new coronavirus mortality records this month, and daily infections also have been hovering near all-time highs, with 28,190 new confirmed cases Tuesday.

In total, Russia's coronavirus task force has registered over 7.8 million confirmed cases and 218,345 deaths — the highest death toll in Europe. The **state statistics agency Rosstat that also counts deaths where the virus wasn't considered the main cause has reported a much higher total — about 418,000** deaths of people with COVID-19.

The Russian government has blamed a sharp rise in infections and deaths that began last month on a slow vaccination rate. Only 47.8 million Russians, or almost 33% of its nearly 146 million people, had received at least one shot of a coronavirus vaccine, and 42.4 million, or about 29%, were fully vaccinated, the government said Friday.

Despite the rapidly mounting coronavirus caseload and mortality, **the Kremlin has ruled out a nationwide lockdown**, delegating the power to make decisions on toughening coronavirus restrictions to regional authorities.

Some Russian regions have restricted attendance at large public events and limited access to theaters, restaurants and other places to people who have been vaccinated, recently recovered from COVID-19 or tested negative in the previous 72 hours.

However, life remains largely normal in Moscow, St. Petersburg and many other Russian cities, with businesses operating as usual and mask mandates loosely enforced. In Moscow, the authorities expanded free coronavirus tests in shopping malls, hoping it would help stem contagion.

https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/astrazenecas-covid-19-drug-cocktail-meets-main-goal-late-stage-trial-2021-10-11/

Oct 13

AstraZeneca antibody cocktail study shows success treating COVID-19

AstraZeneca's (AZN.L) antibody cocktail against COVID-19, which has proven to work as a preventative shot in the non-infected, was also shown to save lives and prevent severe disease when given as treatment within a week of first symptoms.

The drug, a combination of two antibodies called AZD7442, **reduced the risk of severe COVID-19 or death by 50% in non-hospitalised patients who have had symptoms for seven days or less,** the Anglo-Swedish drugmaker said on Monday.

The **risk reduction was even better in patients who started therapy within just five days of initial symptoms**, but AstraZeneca joins an already crowded field of medicines that were shown to prevent deterioration in patients with mild disease when given soon after diagnosis.

AstraZeneca executive Mene Pangalos said in a media call that the treatment results would mainly underscore the potential future use as a non-vaccine prevention.

"If and when this is approved it will be used in the treatment setting as well. But the real differentiator for this antibody is going to be in the prophylactic setting," he said.
...
AstraZeneca, whose COVID-19 vaccine has been widely used across the globe, asked U.S. regulators last week to grant emergency use authorisation for AZD7442 as a preventative shot.

As such, it is **designed to protect people who do not have a strong enough immune response to vaccines, primarily those who have received organ transplants or who are in cancer care.**

If full market clearance is obtained after any emergency approval the market could widen, for instance, to include crew and passengers of a cruise ship, said Pangalos.

"You can say the same **for people who don't want to be vaccinated but want an antibody,**" he added.

AstraZeneca said it is submitting the new treatment data on AZD7442 to global health regulators.

The trial took place across 13 countries and involved more than 900 adult participants, 90% of whom suffered from conditions that made the particularly vulnerable to COVID-19, such as cancer and diabetes. One half receiving AZD7442 and the rest a placebo.

Full trial results will be submitted for publication in a peer-reviewed journal, AstraZeneca said.

AZD7442 contains laboratory-made antibodies designed to linger in the body for months to contain the virus in case of an infection. A vaccine, in contrast, relies on an intact immune system to develop targeted antibodies and infection-fighting cells.

While Monday's results cover the use of AZD7442 in non-hospitalised patients, a separate trial is also studying its use as a treatment for hospitalised COVID-19 patients.

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-business-lifestyle-java-indonesia-47a2c077023c5fa5fe0588847b8fcf1f

Oct 14

Bali reopens to foreign travelers as COVID-19 surge subsides

... for the **first time in more than a year** Thursday — if they're vaccinated, test negative, hail from certain countries, quarantine and heed restrictions in public.
...
all international flight passengers must have proof they've been vaccinated two times, test negative for the coronavirus upon arrival in Bali and undergo a 5-day quarantine at designated hotels at their own expense. They'll also have to follow stringent rules at hotels, in restaurants and on beaches.
...
President Joko Widodo credited Bali's high vaccination rate for the decision to reopen. The country's COVID-19 caseload has also declined considerably; Indonesia has had around 1,000 cases a day in the past week after peaking around 56,000 daily in July.

Tourism is the main source of income on the idyllic "island of the gods" that is home to more than 4 million people, who are mainly Hindu in the mostly Muslim archipelago nation. Bali's tourist areas were deserted two decades ago after visitors were scared off by deadly terror attacks that targeted foreigners, but the island has worked to overcome that image.

More than 6 million foreigners arrived in Bali each year prior to the pandemic.

Foreign tourist arrivals dropped six-fold from 6.2 million in 2019 to **only 1 million in 2020, while 92,000 people employed in tourism lost their jobs and the average room occupancy rate of classified hotels in Bali was below 20%.** Statistics Indonesia data showed the island's economy contracted 9.31% year-on-year last year.

After closing the island to all visitors early in the pandemic, **Bali reopened to Indonesians from other parts of the country in the middle of last year.** That helped the island's gross domestic product grow a modest 2.83% in the second quarter this year, ending five consecutive quarters of contraction.

The July surge, fueled by the delta variant, again totally emptied the island's normally bustling beaches and streets. Authorities restricted public activities, closed the airport and shuttered all shops, bars, sit-down restaurants, tourist attraction spots and many other places on the island. It reopened to domestic travelers in August.
...
Widodo said **deciding to reopen Bali was based on its high vaccination rate as well as wanting to revive its economy. He said more than 80% of the Bali population has been fully vaccinated.**

"Based on this situation, I am optimistic and we have decided to reopen international flights to Bali," Widodo wrote in his official Instagram on Saturday.

Overall, 59.4 million of Indonesia's 270 million people are fully vaccinated and another 43.2 million are partially vaccinated. Indonesia has confirmed more than 4.2 million cases and 142,811 deaths from COVID-19, the most in Southeast Asia.

Tourists from 19 countries are now able to visit the Bali and Riau islands provinces — Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, New Zealand, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, China, India, Japan, South Korea, Liechtenstein, Italy, France, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Poland, Hungary, and Norway....

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https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/worldwide-graphs/#total-deaths

Select live link for current number

Oct 15

Death toll from coronavirus tops 4,900,000

Return to Timeline

https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-vaccine-moderna-booster-shot-fda-2de19cdff021ad11b95c6b67fd5d8617

Oct 15

FDA panel endorses lower-dose Moderna COVID shot for booster

U.S. health advisers said Thursday that **some Americans who received Moderna's COVID-19 vaccine at least six months ago should get a half-dose booster** to rev up protection against the coronavirus.

The panel of outside advisers to the Food and Drug Administration voted unanimously to recommend a booster shot for **seniors, as well as younger adults with other health problems, jobs or living situations that put them at increased risk from COVID-19.**
...
As for the dose, initial **Moderna vaccination consists of two 100-microgram shots. But Moderna says a single 50-microgram shot should be enough for a booster.**
...
As the delta variant surged in July and August, **a Moderna study found people who were more recently vaccinated had a 36% lower rate of "breakthrough" infections compared with those vaccinated longer ago.**

Another study of 344 people found a six-month booster shot restored virus-fighting antibodies to levels thought to be protective — and that included large jumps in antibodies able to target the delta variant. But that was a small study, and only about half of those people got the exact series of doses that would be offered under a Moderna booster campaign.
...

Moderna said it chose the lower-dose booster because it triggered fewer uncomfortable shot reactions such as fever and achiness but also leaves more vaccine available for the global supply.

One very rare side effect of both the Moderna and Pfizer vaccines is heart inflammation, particularly among young men soon after the second dose — and one lingering question is whether another dose could spark more cases. Moderna's booster study wasn't large enough to spot such a rare risk.

But **Israel** began offering **Pfizer boosters** sooner than the U.S. and to more of its population. Thursday, Dr. Sharon Alroy-Preis of Israel's health ministry told the FDA panel that after 3.7 million booster doses administered, **there's no sign the extra shot is any riskier.**

Because the Moderna vaccine is similar, the FDA's advisers found that data reassuring.

While Pfizer's boosters are only for certain high-risk groups of Americans, **Israeli officials credit wider booster use in their country to stemming the delta surge.**

"There is no question in my mind that the break of the curve was due to the booster dose," Alroy-Preis said in response to FDA advisers who noted that other countries have seen a lowering of delta cases without widespread booster use.

But FDA's advisers also highlighted one confusing issue: **People with severely weakened immune systems already can get a third full dose of the Moderna vaccine soon after the initial vaccinations — so a lingering question is whether they should be eligible for a booster, too, which would be their fourth dose.**

https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-science-business-health-coronavirus-vaccine-53aaa9bfe4d05656aa52e251ba2b5401

Oct 16

FDA panel endorses booster shot for J&J COVID-19 vaccine

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. health advisers endorsed a booster f Johnson & Johnson's COVID-19 vaccine Friday, citing concern that Americans who got the single-dose shot aren't as protected as those given two-dose brands.

J&J told the Food and Drug Administration that an extra dose adds important protection as early as two months after initial vaccination — but that it might work better if people wait until six months later. Unable to settle the best timing, the FDA's advisory panel voted unanimously that the booster should be offered at least two months after people got their earlier shot.

"I think this frankly was always a two-dose vaccine," said FDA adviser Dr. Paul Offit of Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. "It would be hard to recommend this as a single-dose vaccine at this point."

The FDA isn't bound by the recommendation as it makes a final decision — and adding to the debate's complexity, **new research also suggests that J&J recipients might have a stronger immune response if their booster dose is from a competing brand.**

Preliminary results from an ongoing study of different ways to "mix and match" different shots showed that a booster of any sort revved up people's levels of virus-fighting antibodies — at least for a few weeks. And **the most dramatic jump came from giving a Pfizer or Moderna shot after the single-dose J&J vaccination.**

FDA's advisers didn't vote on whether that should be recommended but told the government to allow flexibility with boosters, saying there were no safety red flags even if it's not yet clear just how much difference, if any, mixing and matching may make in long-term protection.

"In the real world all these kind of combinations are already happening so I think it's a matter of some urgency for the FDA to help sort out what is admittedly a complicated and challenging scenario," said Dr. Ofer Levy of Boston Children's Hospital.

The government says all three U.S. vaccines continue to offer strong protection against hospitalization and death from COVID-19, and that the priority is getting first shots to the 66 million eligible but unvaccinated Americans who are most at risk. But with the spread of the extra-contagious delta variant and signs of waning immunity against milder infections, the nation is moving toward a broader booster campaign.

Last month Pfizer boosters started being offered to seniors and younger adults at high risk from COVID-19 because of poor health, jobs or living conditions — at least six months after their initial vaccination. Thursday, the FDA advisory panel recommended the same approach for half-dose Moderna boosters.

But **J&J's vaccine has consistently shown lower effectiveness levels across a series of studies — and the FDA panel ultimately settled on another shot for any recipient 18 or older at least two months after their first vaccination.**

"This is really -- with the second dose -- bringing it, I think, on par with those other vaccines in terms of effectiveness," said Dr. Archana Chatterjee of Rosalind Franklin University.

...

The vast majority of the 188 million Americans who are fully vaccinated against COVID-19 have received the Pfizer or Moderna options, while J&J recipients account for only about 15 million.

J&J's vaccine is made with a different technology and on Friday, the company pitched its booster as a way to strengthen a robust vaccine that they said has retained its protective power over eight months...

https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-58937582

Oct 17

Russia's figure of 222,000 Covid deaths is the highest in Europe

The figure had been rising all week, with **the Kremlin blaming the Russian people for not taking up vaccination.**

Only about a third of the population has had a jab, amid wide distrust of the vaccines.

Russia's figure of 222,000 Covid deaths is the highest in Europe, with another 33,000 infections reported on Saturday.

The government has avoided bringing in strict restrictions because it says it needs to keep the economy working.
...
The government insists the health system has not been overwhelmed and can cope with the rising number of patients.

However, Health Minister Mikhail Murashko urged doctors who had left practices because of Covid fears to get vaccinated and come back to work.

The number of active cases of infected people in Russia is around 750,000 - also the highest it has been since records started in February 2020.

Overall infections since the outbreak began are now closing in on 8 million.

The figures for the percentage of Russians who have had single and full vaccination are surprisingly close together - both just short of a third of the population.

This suggests a large number of people do not want to be vaccinated at all. Recent opinion polls suggested that figure could be more than 50%.

Russia has not been slow in developing vaccines. Its Sputnik V was rolled out quickly last year and it has approved three others.

But it appears to have failed to convince many at home they are either necessary or reliable.

It has had more success selling Sputnik V around the world. But although the vaccine was made available for other countries quickly, it also ran into delivery issues, with some nations unable to get their doses on time.

About 70 nations have authorised the use of Sputnik V but, like Russia's other vaccines, it has yet to be approved by the World Health Organization.

This, along with the lack of international vaccines inside Russia, has led some Russians to take advantage of vaccination tour packages.

Serbia - which Russians can enter without a visa - is...

https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-middle-east-africa-health-egypt-37eb2c0c83824f1fc85b5316f03b141a

Oct 18

Egypt to require virus vaccinations for civil servants

CAIRO (AP) — Egypt's government will soon require public servants to have a vaccination certificate or show a weekly negative COVID-19 test before entering their workplaces.

The government announced the new measures late Sunday. It said the **requirements will be applied starting November 15. The measures also require public to show proof of vaccination to enter government buildings starting December 1, according to a government statement.**

The idea is to encourage people to get vaccinations, as the country of over 100 million people suffers through a fourth wave of the pandemic.

Health Minister Hala Zayed said the government has secured more than 62 million shots of COVID-19 vaccine, with 7.8 million more shots expected to arrive this month.

She said around 31.7 million shots have been given to residents since the vaccination campaign was launched in January.

Prosecutors earlier this month ordered the detention of three workers at the Health Ministry after more than 13,400 vaccine doses were found dumped into a canal in the southern province of Minya.

The doses were part of 18,400 vaccine packages costing more than 5 million Egyptian pounds ($319,000) were found to be missing from the storage in the city of Beni Mazar.

The three workers, including a pharmacist, a driver and a warehouse director, face accusations of committing damage to public property and embezzlement.

The government has stepped up efforts in recent weeks to vaccinate students, teachers and university and school workers.

Earlier this year, Egypt mandated vaccinations for workers at tourist sites and resorts on the Red Sea and elsewhere in efforts to revive its battered tourism sector.

Egypt has seen a slight surge in confirmed cases in recent weeks, with an average of 800 cases reported every day this month.

The Health Ministry registered 871 cases and 44 fatalities on Sunday, bringing the tally to around 318,460 confirmed cases, including 17,970 deaths. However, the actual numbers of COVID-19 cases, like elsewhere in the world, are thought to be far higher in part due to limited testing.

Year 1 of COVID-19

Days since first sign of virus

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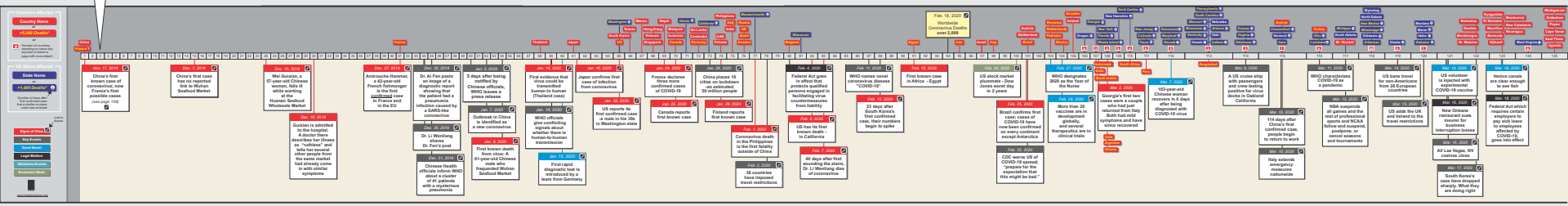

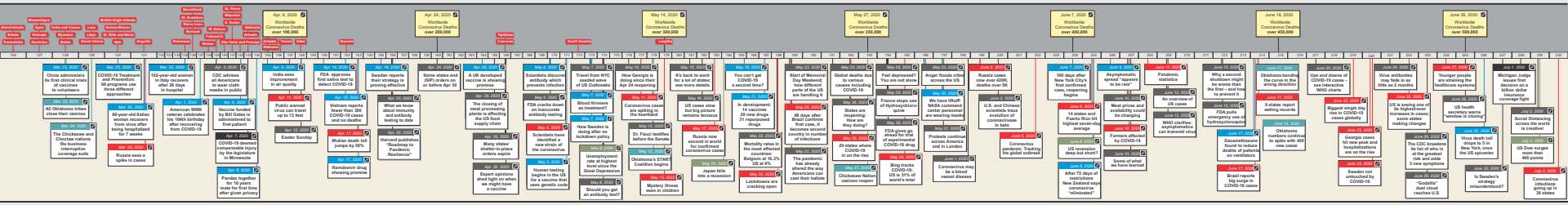

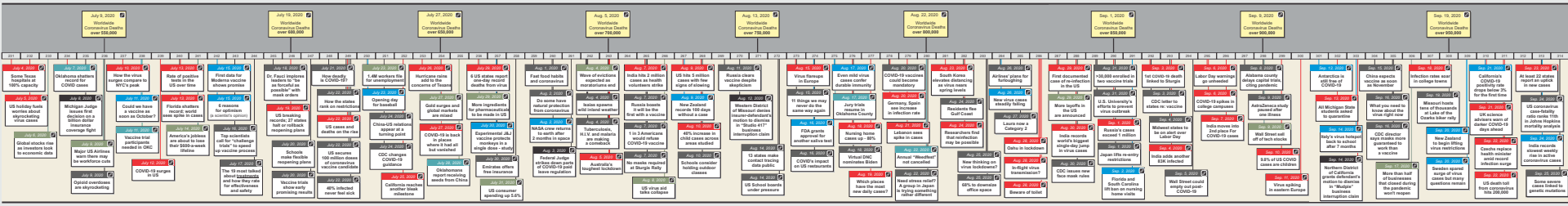

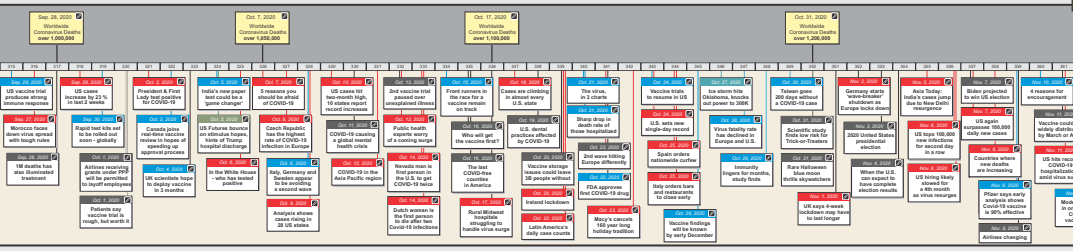

Nov. 15

1 Year

This page is an overview of the key events for Year 1 of COVID

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