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2 February 2021

COVID-19(21)11

**TO: LABOUR AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
ALL MEMBERS & ASSOCIATE MEMBERS
BIWEEKLY MEMBERS MEETING PARTICIPANTS
INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION GROUP PARTICIPANTS**

COVID-19 UPDATE AS OF 1 FEBRUARY 2021

Action Required: *Members are invited to note:*

- *Information below provided by WHO for 24 January 2021 and general epidemiological information on Covid 19 issued by WHO. Covid case numbers, hospital admissions and deaths continue to substantially increase across Europe and the Americas.*
- **102,083,344 Confirmed cases of COVID-19, 4,269,172 additional cases have been confirmed since last week's report. 4.38% last week. There were also increased fatalities 2209195 deaths recorded which is 97,960 additional deaths 4.63 % growth last week. Many countries still cannot report all cases, so numbers will considerably increase. Currently 223 Countries, areas or territories have cases.**

To get specific information for a country please visit the WHO-Covid-19 dashboard. [Link](#).

SITUATION IN NUMBERS BY WHO REGION

Region	Cases	Deaths
Global	102,083,344	2,209,195
Africa	2,570,474	62,504
Americas	45,345,051	1,047,171
Eastern Mediterranean	5,669,871	134,186
Europe	34,220,453	743,026
South-East Asia	12,856,723	197,707
Western Pacific	1,420,027	24,588

TOP 12 COUNTRIES WITH CASES AS AT YESTERDAY (Top first)

	THIS WEEK	LAST WEEK	
1	USA	USA	The Same
2	India	India	The Same
3	Brazil	Brazil	The Same

4	Russia	Russia	The Same
5	UK	UK	The same
6	France	France	The same
7	Spain	Spain	The same
8	Italy	Italy	The same
9	Turkey	Turkey	The same
10	Germany	Germany	The same
11	Columbia	Columbia	The same
12	Argentina	Argentina	The same

TOP 12 COUNTRIES

	INCREASED CASES YESTERDAY	HIGH FATALITIES YESTERDAY
1	USA	USA
2	India	Mexico
3	Brazil	Brazil
4	Russia	Russia
5	UK	Italy
6	France	Germany
7	Spain	Columbia
8	Italy	Lebanon
9	Turkey	South Africa
10	Germany	Portugal
11	Columbia	France
12	Argentina	Indonesia

Which countries have got the vaccines?

Total reported vaccine doses administered per 100 people



Note: Total vaccinations refers to the number of doses given, not necessarily the number of people vaccinated

Source: OWID, gov.uk dashboard, ONS, updated 1000 GMT on 1 Feb **BBC**

Vaccines

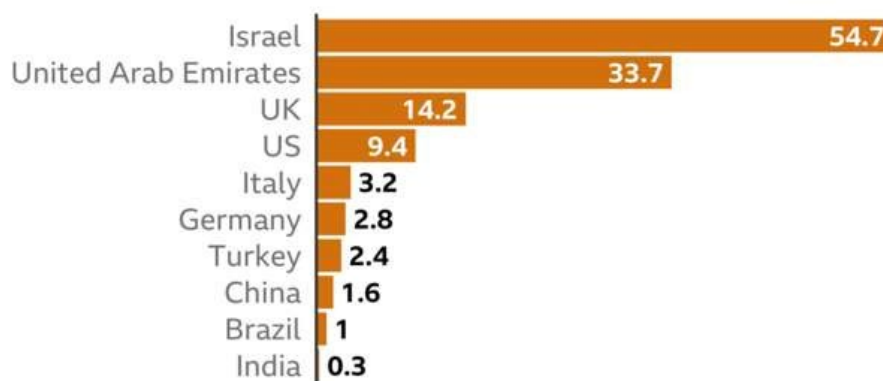
Vaccinations, experts say, are the best way to end the coronavirus pandemic. Fortunately, several coronavirus vaccines have now been approved for use, either by individual countries or international groups, such as the WHO. .Most vaccines are being administered in high-

income countries. Eg Israel (population estimated at just under 9m people) has inoculated more people per head of population than any other country, as the graphic below shows,

Some countries have secured more vaccine doses than their populations need, while other lower-income countries are relying on a global plan known as Covax, which is seeking to ensure everyone in the world has access to a vaccine.

Most countries in Africa haven't started vaccination programmes, which puts the recent political row over access to jobs in Europe into perspective. WHO has said the failure to distribute vaccines equally has put the world "on the brink of a catastrophic moral failure. Nobody wins the race until everyone wins.

Vaccine doses per 100 people in countries with highest total vaccinations



Note: Total vaccinations refers to the number of doses given, not necessarily the number of people vaccinated

Source: Our World In Data, 0900 GMT on 1 Feb with latest available data **BBC EU**

As the bid for mass-inoculation gathers pace pressure is ramping up in the race across Europe to roll out coronavirus vaccines amid the warning of a "shortage".

The EU is threatening to impose strict controls on export of jabs made in the bloc, potentially impacting supplies of the Pfizer one made in Belgium. It follows growing anger in Europe towards AstraZeneca, which is accused of failing to deliver the promised number of doses of the COVID-19 vaccine developed with Oxford University. Over 8.97 million UK citizens have had a dose of a coronavirus vaccine approved for use by the medicines regulator administered by health professionals and the UK leads in total doses relative to its population compared to other EU countries.

Sir Simon Stevens, chief executive of NHS England, said there is a global supply shortage of vaccines as manufacturers struggle to match demand. Referring to trouble brewing in Europe, including the German health ministry slapping down a local media report querying efficacy of the Oxford vaccine, he said there is a supply shortage. If there were unlimited vaccines then you wouldn't see what the European Commission were saying yesterday, you wouldn't see Italy attempting to sue a manufacturer, you wouldn't see Germany in uproar as today. Of course, there's a supply shortage, and we've done very well in this country to get the supply we have available, the question is how we use it to best effect.

Meanwhile, the UK Health Secretary urged countries to collaborate in the vaccine roll-out. He said he was sure that the UK could work with the EU to ensure that whilst transparency is welcome no blockers are installed. He said it was not expecting vaccine supply levels to change. AstraZeneca are committed to delivering two million doses a week to the UK and we are not expecting any changes. The Pfizer vaccine supplies will see stocks drop as it upgrades its factory, but the number of jobs should increase again in March.

The EU is furious about AstraZeneca's vaccine delays not least as there's no similar threat over UK supplies. Vaccines are key to end the crisis. But they have also become the catalyst for a huge swirl of acrimony. It has accused AstraZeneca of breaking its contract by not supplying enough vaccine doses. The company blames production delays. The EU is not satisfied, not least because there is currently no similar threat hanging over the supply of UK vaccines. Firstly, it maintains it provided money up-front to AstraZeneca to beef up its production capacity, precisely to avoid these sorts of problems.

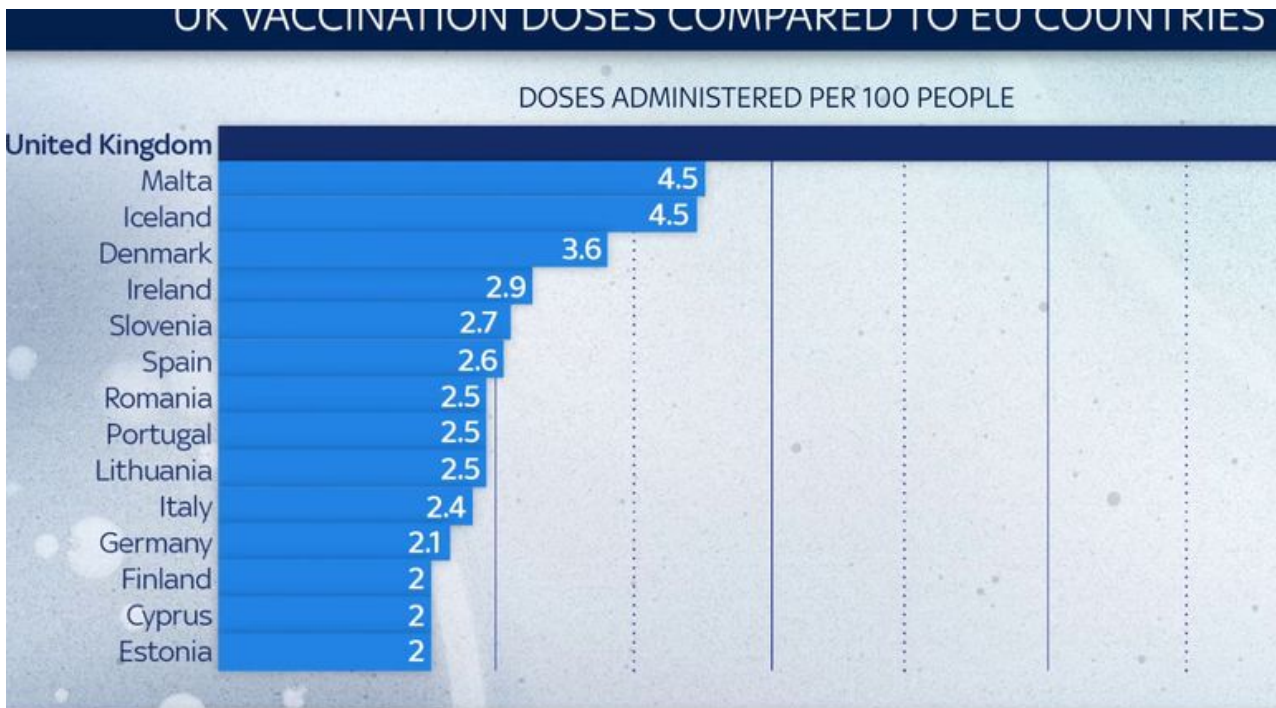
Secondly, it is furious that the UK receives preferential treatment. European Health Commissioner, Stella Kyriakides, rejected the UK being rewarded for signing a contract earlier. Vaccine developers have a moral, societal and contractual responsibility.

Thirdly, the EU is angry that this supports an idea that its approach to vaccination has been stuttering and sluggish compared to the UK. About 11% of the UK population has now been vaccinated. The best-performing country in the whole EU is Malta, with about 5% of its population vaccinated. Malta's health minister stated there is a race but it's not against one another but against the virus. Time is important, numbers vaccinated are important, but we need to do this together. I'm a strong advocate for vaccine solidarity. We are in this together, fighting the virus not each other. While a pandemic is somewhere there is a pandemic everywhere. Yet, just as Malta, and Europe invest in the vaccine to defeat the virus, the row emerges with AstraZeneca.

The answer is measured focus remains on the success of nations collaborating to procure medicine, a model expected to be replicated in future years. The question of transparency is a hot issue regarding pharmaceutical products. For the first time member states have procured a vaccine which is a breakthrough and something which will serve in the future for drugs to treat cancers, for therapies etc..."

Europe has chosen different models of vaccinating its population. The UK used all doses as first doses and will delay the second dose. The EU have chosen differently and kept second doses in reserve as recommended by the manufacturers. There is also pleasure that Sanofi, whose own vaccine project fell flat will now be produce vaccines on behalf of Pfizer. In Brussels currently the mood remains clouded by anger. As for the UK, the prime minister struck a conciliatory tone, saying vaccines resulted from international exchange, international partnerships and the distribution of vaccines around the world will be a great multinational, international effort and that he was very confident about both the contract for, and the supply of, vaccines. The same across the EU, perhaps, but the comparison with the UK seems stark.

The Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine was first approved in the UK, and only in the EU last Friday. The EU says UK-Swedish drug firm AstraZenec will now supply an additional nine million Covid vaccine doses by March, after days of criticism of the bloc's vaccination programme. 40m doses expected are still only about half of what had been hoped, but the move is a step forward according to EC President von der Leyen following the EU's much-criticised row with both the UK and AstraZeneca. The Commission was condemned over its threat to put checks on the Northern Ireland border to prevent vaccines produced in the EU reaching the UK. The EU continues to face vaccine supply problems.



Belgium

Since 27 January to 1st March 2021 non-essential trips in and out of Belgium are prohibited. This travel ban will be monitored for road, air, sea and rail traffic. Travel for professional reasons is still authorised. This means that seafarers can travel. Seafarers, having their main residence in an EU country or the Schengen Zone, or residing in a country of annex A of the council recommendation of 30 June 2020 must possess a completed sworn statement. Seafarers from third countries need their seaman book and a letter of guarantee to prove they are travelling for work. A blanco sworn statement is attached at Annex A.

Brazil

Families of COVID patients requested to fill oxygen canisters if they want their loved ones to survive, deep in Manaus where the Brazilian variant of COVID-19 is believed to have originated, are now so bad that people are suffocating in hospital beds without oxygen. It is being described as like a medieval plague and the fear is that it will continue to spread.

With over 211 million people, a resurgent COVID-19 outbreak, a president in denial about its danger, dwindling supplies of oxygen and a new variant of its very own, there was some short lived relief that the country's vaccination programme was now underway which ceased when it was revealed Brazil only had just six million doses with little more on the way.

Brazil's handling of the pandemic has been chaotic and ultimately cost an enormous loss of life - it is second only to the United States. Things are so bad that emergency supplies of oxygen were trucked in from Venezuela; a bankrupt country which has one of the most non-functioning health services in the world. Like so many countries, the Brazilian government has now bowed to the seemingly inevitable and reached out to its military for help.

In Manaus, soldiers are collecting the seriously ill and evacuating them to other parts of Brazil which are not much better but just not yet a complete disaster. Manaus was flooded in the first outbreak and never recovered, and it is through the floor now. Families of new admissions to utterly overwhelmed hospitals are handed huge green oxygen canisters and told to get them filled if they want their loved ones to stand a chance of survival. Others source oxygen where

they can. Huge queues form as they wait for supplies. Scarcity of oxygen is now so critical that medical volunteers must decide who lives and who dies.

The worldwide disaster is growing daily. Britain is overwhelmed, so is Brazil, the US, Europe, the Americas, Asia, we are all struggling. But consequences are horrendous for countries without a safety net. At hospitals and clinics, you can see rage, anxiety, and desperation with lack of support and medical care and no information about loved ones. At the cemetery, there is sorrow, resignation and angry outbursts. There is disinformation, people are angry, unclear exactly who they are angry with the mayor and governor the most common targets.

Aside from the deaths, are the lengths that individuals are going to try and save the lives of their family, with a government and health system that simply can't cope and efforts almost never sufficient." Drone pictures thousands of graves at the city cemetery. 22,000 new ones are currently being dug but many in Manaus fear these may not suffice.

Canada

Transport Canada has now issued a circular regarding the Maximum Period of Service on board and repatriating seafarers during Covid 19. This is attached at Annex B.

China

Security was tight around the Wuhan Center for Disease Control and Prevention. Almost a year into the pandemic, the origin of the coronavirus remains unknown. A team of WHO scientists is hoping to find answers in Wuhan, the central Chinese city where the virus was first detected in late 2019. Today, the team visited two disease control centres, including one with a lab near a seafood market that saw an early cluster of infections. Questions have been raised about the viruses studied at the facility, leading to suggestions - for which there is currently no evidence - that there may have been a leak.

Earlier, WHO scientists visited another disease control centre outside Wuhan. The group of experts spent about four-and-a-half hours at the facility its longest site visit since finishing two weeks of quarantine last Thursday.

The Chinese government has resisted international efforts to investigate the origins of Covid-19 in China.

Colombia

An 11-year-old Colombian boy says he has received death threats after calling for better access to education during the pandemic. Francisco Vera is a known campaigner on the environment and children's rights.

Europe

The EU has urged AstraZeneca to supply it with Covid-19 vaccines from UK plants as production issues at European plants have delayed supply of the first batch of at least 300 million requested doses. The issue has raised tensions between the firm and the EU bloc.

UK access to the Pfizer jab is threatened as EU imposes new controls on COVID vaccine exports. The move followed a row between the bloc and pharmaceutical companies over supply delays. The European Union has threatened to impose strict controls on exporting coronavirus vaccines made in the bloc. The move could impact the UK's supply of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine manufactured in Belgium. It comes amid growing European anger towards

AstraZeneca, which is accused of failing to deliver the promised number of doses of the vaccine it developed with Oxford University.

European health commissioner Kyriakides warned that the EU will take any action required to protect its citizens and rights adding that an export transparency mechanism will be installed as soon as possible. In future, all companies producing vaccines against COVID-19 in the EU will have to provide early notification whenever they want to export vaccines to third countries.

The UK government said it was confident that supply of the AstraZeneca UK made vaccine, , would allow it to meet its vaccination target for the most vulnerable by mid February.

The Vaccines minister said was confident supplies of the Pfizer vaccine would continue as Pfizer have ensured that they have always delivered for us and will continue to do so.

Ms Kyriakides criticised AstraZeneca's decision to slow supplies of its vaccine as "unacceptable". The pharmaceutical company, announced on Friday it could not meet agreed supply targets and, according to reports, that meant a cut of 60% to 31 million doses - just weeks after Pfizer also announced supply delays. AstraZeneca is believed to have received an upfront payment of £298m when the 27-nation bloc sealed a supply deal with the company in August for at least 300 million doses. Under advance purchase deals sealed during the pandemic, the EU makes down-payments to companies to secure doses, with the money expected to be mostly used to expand production capacity.

The vaccine was approved for use in the EU on 29 January, with first deliveries expected from 15 February. An AstraZeneca spokesman said the company was doing everything it could to bring its coronavirus vaccine to millions of Europeans as soon as possible. Meanwhile, it has been revealed that Astra Zeneca, which has headquarters in the UK, faces wider supply problems, with Australia and Thailand affected. The UK is particularly reliant on the Oxford-AstraZeneca jab and it has been key to the country's vaccine rollout so far, but the Health Secretary has warned that supply across the board is "tight".

Europe's political row over delayed vaccine deliveries has abated somewhat, but there is still frustration in the EU over the slow pace of vaccinations. They are lagging far behind the UK.

Pfizer-BioNTech has promised to deliver up to 75m more vaccine doses to the EU in the second quarter of this year. It is trying to address a supply shortage caused mainly, it says, by the need to expand production at its plant in Belgium.

Earlier AstraZeneca central to Friday's row involving its UK production pledged 9m extra doses by March for the EU bringing its first-quarter total to 40m, half the amount the EU expected. Aftershocks are continuing. Ireland's EU Commissioner Mairead McGuinness described as "a mistake with very serious consequences" the EU Commission's decision to trigger Article 16 of the Northern Ireland Protocol. The Commission did not warn Dublin before taking the emergency step, the Irish government says. It meant that the EU would impose checks to prevent vaccines produced in the EU from reaching the UK but, facing a UK outcry, the Commission reversed its decision.

France

Armateurs De France have advised that decree n ° 2021-31 of January 15, 2021, requires travelers wishing to enter France from outside the EU, Andorra, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Monaco, Norway, San Marino, Holy See and Switzerland) to present the result of a virological screening biological examination (RT-PCR) not concluding contamination by COVID-19, conducted less than 72 hours before arrival.

Travelers visiting France for compelling reasons, from countries where a PCR virological screening test cannot occur before departure, must apply to the consulate for an exemption from presenting the test on departure and will be tested on arrival in France. They must stay in solitary hotel confinement for seven days as agreed by French authorities.

All passengers must upon boarding present a sworn statement attesting no covid-19 symptoms, they are unaware of being in contact with a confirmed Covid-19 case for fourteen days before the trip, and agree to isolation for seven days upon arrival in France and to repeat a second virological screening test (RT- PCR) after seven days.

President Macron after an EC Meeting announced that coordination of health measures between States to present a negative PCR test of less than 72 hours would apply to non-European traveler essentials, starting on January 24th. Essential travel is not affected and border workers and land transport will be exempt. The French Administration advised seafarers were not affected by the health restrictions. A protocol mentioning exemption of seafarers is currently being validated, for publication soon.

French pharmaceutical firm Sanofi will start mass production later this year of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine in a bid to help the EU meet its vaccination targets.

Germany

According to VDR the German government has issued entry restrictions, which go beyond the European recommendations. According to these restrictions, entry into Germany from virus-variant areas will be prohibited. There will be a ban on travel from virus-variant areas (areas with a particularly high risk of infection due to the widespread occurrence of certain SARS-CoV-2 virus variants: currently UK, Ireland, Portugal, South Africa and Brazil).

The transport ban is directed at the carriers; public transport is also affected. It is not a ban on entry (e.g. private entry by car). The following in particular are excluded: empty, mail and freight transports. Transport of persons with residence / right of abode in DE is also exempt (visa not sufficient). Unfortunately, there will be no exception for transport personnel. The Ministry of Transport has lobbied hard for this, but the declared goal of stopping the entry of the virus variants obviously has priority for the moment. Since the ban in this regulation is not linked to residence, indirect entry should be still possible (e.g. PHL has a virus variant, RUS does not - PHL seafarer flies from Manila to Moscow and from there on to Hamburg). Once the new regulation is officially issued it will be shared.

Chancellor Angela Merkel will discuss the vaccine crisis shortly with Germany's regional leaders and vaccine manufacturers. Germany is also considering medical aid for Portugal, which has recorded the EU's highest death rate from Covid-19. The Portuguese health service is near breaking point, and Austria plans to accept some intensive care patients.

Hong Kong

According to our ICS representative in Hong Kong, The Hong Kong Marine Department has issued a bulletin that vessels which have visited certain countries in the past 21 days will not be allowed to enter Hong Kong waters. The relevant measure took effect from 23 January 2021: https://www.mardep.gov.hk/en/pub_services/ocean/pdf/doh_notice_20Jan.pdf

Hungary

Bars and restaurants say they intend to defy the Covid lockdown and reopen today. There will also be a protest march in Budapest.

Iceland

Iceland is now issuing digital vaccination certificates to residents who have had two doses. The certificates are designed make it easier for people to travel but not recognised in EU

Ireland

Ryanair says European beach holidays will return this summer. Michael O'Leary, its CEO is forecasting a strong return for European beach holidays this summer thanks to the Covid-19 vaccination programme. He expected travel restrictions to drop once high risk groups were inoculated, unleashing pent-up demand. It came as Ryanair warned it was the most challenging year in its 35-year history. It expects annual losses of up to €1bn (£870m) up to March 2021. Despite this he was heartened that the UK expected to vaccinate everyone over 50 by the end of March and that Europe would achieve the same by June.

Last month, EasyJet said it had seen summer bookings rise by 250%, but the cost of pre-departure coronavirus tests costing up to £150 per person was still a deterrent.

Israel

Data on the effect of the vaccines on covid transmission is preliminary. We still must be extremely cautious and wait until there is proper data. You shouldn't expect to see nobody getting ill when vaccinated, vaccines are not 100% effective. we will still see people getting the disease and people with severe disease, but it'll be much reduced with the vaccine."

Italy

The resignation of Italian Prime Minister Conte means that Italy's president will now consult other party leaders, with Mr Conte staying on in a caretaker capacity. Mr Conte survived two confidence votes in parliament, but then lost his absolute majority in the Senate after former PM Matteo Renzi defected. This makes it much more difficult for the premier to pass legislation or make decisions on the Covid 19 crisis, and devastation to Italy's economy.

What the next Italian government might comprise, could be down to the party of Silvio Berlusconi. Hours before Mr Conte's office announced his resignation, the ex-premier said he trusted the political wisdom of Mr Mattarella to indicate a way out of the crisis. Mr Berlusconi suggested a new government would represent substantial unity in Italy in the emergency or an election to give back the deciding word to the Italian voters. Mr Conte may still be asked to form a third coalition government, but opponents could push for an early election instead.

Japan

Japan's prime minister has apologised after several of his ministers visited nightclubs despite his government urging the public to avoid unnecessary outings

Christophe Dubi, IOC executive director, says officials are discussing measures for this year's Olympics and athletes should be ready for this summer. He said conditions have greatly changed since the Games were cancelled last year a reason to be optimistic. We have learnt a lot about how to organise and manage sports and better understand testing. There will be test events during the spring and testing to enter Japan and a daily testing regime. He said people have got used to no audience, but stressed the ideal scenario would be a full stadium".

The IOC has "no plan B", just "different scenarios for the games' safety". athletes are invited to be ready for the summer.

Netherlands

There have been protests initially against a curfew but which have become violent inspired by incitement on social media. At least 70 people were arrested after protests in the Netherlands. The demonstrators initially opposed a curfew imposed by the government to tackle the covid crisis. In some cities they sank into rioting and violence, with motivations becoming less clear. There were clashes in cities including Amsterdam and Rotterdam, with police using tear gas and water cannon to try to disperse rioters. People threw fireworks, looted shops and turned a car over onto its side. In Eindhoven, they torched a car, threw rocks and fireworks at officers, smashed windows and looted a supermarket. Hundreds of rioters were arrested including some suspected of using social media to call for rioting, after a temporary COVID-19 testing station was destroyed. Prime Minister Rutte said "It is unacceptable. This has nothing to do with protesting, it is criminal violence and that's how we'll treat it." More protests are expected.

The curfew in force between 9pm and 4.30am - is the first since World War Two and was introduced amid fears of the COVID-19 variant discovered in the UK. Over 5,700 fines have been issued to people breaking the curfew. But the number of new cases has now declined.

Norway

Norway's borders are closed to all but essential visitors, prime minister Solberg has stated. While exceptions will apply to a few groups, such as health workers. In practise, the border will be closed to anyone not living in Norway." The measures will be reviewed in two weeks. Norway announced a lockdown around Oslo after an outbreak of the more contagious variant of Covid-19 first identified in the UK.

Norwegian Cruise Line will return all crew members back home that joined recently which is not part of the skeleton crew. The difficult decision was taken and the crew on board received a letter with details regarding the latest repatriation process. In hopes that the company will return to service, NCL boarded thousands of crew members in November and December 2020, to prepare cruise ships for a possible restart and compliance with CDC regulations. However, with the latest announcement and further suspension of operations issued by Norwegian Cruise Line on January 19, to delay the start of cruising through April 30, 2021, the company realized they will not start anytime soon.

IN December 1000+ crew members boarded Norwegian Escape in Mumbai, India, while Norwegian Joy set sail from Manila, Philippines with 1216 returning crew. NCL also worked on a deployment plan for crews to join Norwegian Spirit in Europe to assign to the Encore and Bliss. The repatriation process will occur on two appointed ships. The Norwegian Joy, Aruba will gather non-essential crew from ships within the Caribbean and proceed to the Philippines.

The Norwegian Encore in Southampton will make a few different stops on her journey to Asia. The repatriation process will mirror the one last year with crew transfers to the appropriate vessel, before the crew finally sails to their homes in India, Indonesia and the Philippines, with anticipated arrival at the final destinations in late March or early April 2021.

This will be a long and sad journey for all crew onboard as their hopes and dreams to set sail with guests onboard will not currently materialize. They have made countless sacrifices, PCR tests, and quarantines to join the ships to serve guests and to provide for their family.

This decision was not easy and crew repatriation was not in the company plan. However, with further cruise cancellation, NCL believes that the crew will be better off at home with family before re-joining once again to return to cruising. NCL promised that repatriated crew will be prioritized for new assignments where possible.

Peru

A two-week lockdown covering a third of the country until mid-February following a spike in infections has been announced.

The Philippines

According to FSA, the government has removed the list of countries that were prohibited from entering the Philippines. Instead, and regard to crew change, arriving foreign crew will be quarantined at the cost of the owners and tested on the 5th day. If negative, they will need to complete the 14 days of quarantine prior to being allowed to go onboard the ship. For disembarking crew, the crew will be taken to a triage and quarantine facility. Crew will be tested on day 6 of entry in the facility. Further information is in Annexes C and D attached.

South Africa

The South Africa Maritime Safety Authority (SAMSA) has published a new Gazette. Section 6 relates to the Government's policy on crew change. See Annex E.

A leading scientist has called for "better and more efficient" ways of tracking new coronavirus variants after news the South Africa variant spread across England.

Prof Adam Finn, on the UK Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation, also says the UK needs to go through the process of ensuring we can reformulate the vaccines quickly and efficiently as and when required.

United Kingdom

The government will set out a "roadmap" for reopening schools, the economy and society on 22 February and 8 March is the earliest date schools could reopen. It will take weeks for case numbers to reduce to really low levels.

Travellers to the UK from countries where there are concerns about new virus variants will go into hotel quarantine, the government said earlier. Wales and Scotland say the quarantine plans don't go far enough.

The Labour party leader questioned why the UK has the most deaths in Europe.

The New Scientist requested more information on the vaccine's impact on transmission or if there are any cases of people vaccinated being hospitalised with coronavirus.

Outbreaks of COVID-19 in over half of UK prisons mean many operate with skeleton staff. The pandemic has forced prisons to adopt an exceptional delivery mode. One prisoner claimed they were kept in their cells for more than 23 hours a day with limited access to hygiene facilities, forcing them to dispose of human waste in plastic bags and bottles. There are signs that prisons could be epicentres for infection with small, enclosed areas and a lack of social distancing with staff potentially bringing the virus in and out.

The New Variant Assessment Platform will work directly on samples from abroad or provide advice and support remotely to others. The UK is to offer its genomics expertise to help other countries identify new COVID variants, the UK Health Secretary has announced. Launch of the New Variant Assessment Platform will see other countries offered UK laboratory capacity and advice to analyse new strains of coronavirus. It will be led by Public Health England working with NHS Test and Trace and a team from WHO.

Since the initial outbreak of the pandemic, new COVID variants have been discovered in the UK Denmark, South Africa and Brazil. Prime Minister Johnson has expressed concern about a possible new variant proving resistant to existing COVID vaccines. The New Variant Assessment Platform will work directly on samples from abroad or will provide expert advice and support remotely to other countries. This could include training, resources, personnel and equipment. The Platform will help to understand the virus and how it spreads and boost global capacity to understand covid, to better prepare for whatever lies ahead."

The UK has already conducted over half of all COVID genome sequences submitted to the global database. The prime minister hailed the UK for having the "best genomic sequencing ability in the world", enabling it to better identify" new COVID than any other country". It was the discovery of the UK variant found to spread more quickly than the original variant - in the southeast of England that prompted Mr Johnson to introduce more stringent COVID restrictions in many areas in December, before later putting the UK into a national lockdown.

Dr Isabel Oliver, Director of Public Health England's National Infection Service, said that the virus will evolve over time and certain mutations could potentially cause the virus to spread faster, make people sicker, or possibly affect how well vaccines work. Genomic testing is crucial to controlling the virus. It allows us to monitor how the virus is changing and to respond before it's too late. The new initiative will bring the advanced science to countries with little or no ability to sequence and analyse COVID-19 virus strains themselves and give crucial early warning of new variants emerging globally that might endanger the UK."

UK Coronavirus deaths have now surpassed 100,000, after release of figures from the Office for National Statistics (ONS). About four in 10 of deaths (40.2%) registered in the week of 15 January were attributed to COVID-19 - the highest proportion so far of the pandemic. ONS data released showed a total of 107,907 deaths occurred across the four nations. This measure is slightly different to the official government count, published daily on its dashboard which classifies a COVID death as one where someone tested positive for the virus within 28 days of their death. The ONS measure, however, is widely viewed as more comprehensive, if less timely as a measure of the direct toll of the disease. Registered deaths involving COVID-19 increased in 8 out of 9 English regions compared to last week, with the South East and East of England recording their highest weekly numbers of deaths. Figures also showed total deaths in Wales exceeded the first wave peak for two weeks running.

Some care home staff are refusing a coronavirus vaccine due to cultural issues, the National Care Association's executive chairman says some of it is to do with access as people are just not able to get it where they needed to go. "If they've entered care homes, GPs have not had enough vaccine for staff as well, with only enough for the residents, which is the priority and some of it is due to cultural issues as some people just don't want to have the vaccine. "We have to convince people that this vaccine is for them. That it's for the staff, to protect them and must protect the services they work in."

The Social Care Minister played down reports that some care home workers in England were unwilling to take the coronavirus vaccine, insisting there has been "good take-up" from care home workers. The NHS says coronavirus vaccines have been offered to residents at every eligible care home in England. The aim was to invite over 300,000 elderly care home residents

for their first jab by the start of this month. The Social Care minister said a vaccine has been offered to every care home in England where it was possible for teams to enter. "Any care home that has not been contacted, should let her know and she would follow up. She said they are continuing to work through the social care workforce, to offer a vaccine to all staff by 15 February. It comes after the expected confirmation that all elderly care home residents in England were offered the coronavirus vaccine was a "real milestone".

The UK's stockpile of vaccines is growing and growing. A new order of 40 million additional doses of the Valneva vaccine takes the total being provided to Britain by the French company to 100 million. The doses will be delivered between 2022 and 2025. because the vaccine is still in its early clinical trials but it's also a sign **United States of America**

Dr Tildesley, a UK government infectious disease expert, said lockdown measures could begin to ease in March if the pace of vaccinations stays high, and if jabs prevent transmission, not just severe infection. He stated that any easing would have to happen gradually. Research into whether vaccines prevent transmission is currently ongoing but it's believed they do have some effect. Vaccines would need to be pretty good at blocking transmission to avoid a resurgence of the virus when measures are eased. Hopefully by the summer we can get back to something like before the pandemic as normal. Since jabs are not 100% effective at preventing symptoms in people, eased restrictions will create more risk for those without a jab.

Captain Sir Tom Moore, 100, who raised £33m for the NHS is now in hospital with coronavirus

Pupils in the UK could potentially lose an average of £40,000 each in lifetime earnings from the effects of school closures, according to a new report

United States

The U.S. Committee on the Marine Transportation System (CMTS) COVID-19 Working Group (C-19 WG) encourages mariners from across the U.S. maritime industry to anonymously complete the "Mariner Mental Health Needs during Covid-19" survey at <https://redcap.link/mariners>

The confidential survey asks mariners a variety of questions about COVID-19, mental health, and their experiences and feelings when aboard a vessel during the worldwide pandemic. No mariner identification data will be collected. Survey participation from a significant portion of the mariners in each industry segment is critical to understanding how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected their mental health. The survey is available from January 22 through May 31, 2021. Survey Results will be shared with federal agencies, vessel owners/operators, mariner unions, maritime training institutions, seafarer welfare organizations and MTS stakeholders to help develop effective solutions to benefit mariner mental well-being.

President Biden hinted at 1.5m jabs a day but warned America's death toll could top 600,000. He is fighting for his \$1.9trn stimulus package in Congress to help fund a national vaccination programme. He suggested the US could soon vaccinate an average of 1.5 million Americans a day but warned the growing COVID death toll could still top 600,000. The US offered one million doses a day last week, but the new president insisted: he thought the US may be able to get that to 1.5 million a day. He added that he expects widespread availability of the vaccines for Americans by spring, with the US well on our way to herd immunity necessary to end the pandemic by summer.

Despite this, he warned the nation was going to be in this for a while, and could see between "600,000 and 660,000 deaths before turning the corner in a major way". Already, over 420,000 Americans have died with covids. Mr Biden's increasing confidence on the pace of COVID-19

vaccinations comes after signing an executive order to boost government purchases from US manufacturers like Moderna. Some Republicans are not convinced. Senator Collins said it seems premature to be considering a package of this size and scope and Senate minority leader McConnell said any further action should be smart and targeted, not just an imprecise deluge of borrowed money that would direct huge sums toward those who don't need it".

Besides suggesting a new vaccine target, Mr Biden reversed a Trump ban renewing a number of COVID-related travel bans including on arrivals from the UK.

WHO warns Covid-19 pandemic is 'not necessarily the big one'

WHO Experts have stated that the virus is likely to become endemic and the world will need to learn to live with it. They have warned that even though the pandemic has been very severe, it is not necessarily the big one. The destiny of the virus is to become endemic, even as vaccines begin to be rolled out, said Professor Heymann, chair of the WHO strategic and technical advisory group for infectious hazards said the concept of herd immunity was misunderstood. It appears the destiny of Covid-19 is to become endemic, as have four other human coronaviruses, and will continue to mutate as it reproduces in human cells, especially in areas of more intense admission. Fortunately, we have tools to save lives, and these together with good public health will permit us to learn to live with Covid-19."

Dr Ryan, head of the WHO emergencies program, said: the likely scenario is Covid will become another endemic virus that will remain somewhat of a threat, but a very low-level threat in the context of an effective global vaccination program. "It remains unclear how well vaccines are taken up, how close we get to coverage that might allow us to go for elimination," he said. "The existence of a vaccine, even at high efficacy, is no guarantee of eliminating or eradicating an infectious disease. It is a very high bar to achieve." This was why the first goal of the vaccine was to save lives and protect the vulnerable, Ryan said. "And then we will deal with the moonshot of potentially being able to eliminate or eradicate this virus." He warned that the next pandemic may be more severe. The pandemic has been very severe it has affected every area. But this is not necessarily the big one. This is a wake-up call. We are learning, now, how to do things better: science, logistics, training and governance, how to communicate better. But the planet is fragile. We live in an increasingly complex global society. These threats will continue. If there is one thing we should learn with all of the tragedy and loss is to get our act together and honour those we've lost by getting better at what we do daily."

WHO chief scientist Dr Soumya Swaminathan explained that vaccination against the virus did not mean public health measures such as social distancing would stop. The first role of the vaccine is to prevent symptomatic disease, severe disease and deaths, but whether vaccines would also reduce infections or prevent people from passing on the virus is unclear.

WHO director general, Ghebreyesus, said now was a time to reflect on the toll Covid has taken and progress made. He said the year ahead would see new setbacks and challenges. "New variants of Covid-19, and helping people who are tired of the pandemic continue to combat it.. New ground has been broken, not least with the extraordinary cooperation between the private and public sector. In recent weeks, safe and effective vaccine rollout has started in several countries, an incredible scientific achievement. This is fantastic, but WHO will not rest until those in need everywhere can access new vaccines and are protected.

WHO's new coronavirus treatment guidelines - what's changed and why

The regime suggests the use of anticoagulants to stop blood clots and better access to follow-up care for long COVID sufferers. New advice on how to treat coronavirus has been issued by

the World Health Organisation (WHO) - as it also begins a wide-reaching study into the effects of so-called "long COVID".

For Covid19 patients at home, WHO now suggests using a pulse oximetry machine to measure blood oxygen levels but warns this should only be done after full patient education and with medical follow-up support if necessary. For hospitalised patients, WHO recommends use of low-dose anticoagulants to prevent clots forming in blood vessels, known as thrombosis and for sufferers already using supplemental oxygen, it is officially endorsing positioning patients on their stomachs to increase oxygen flow. "awake prone positioning".

Experts are split on the effectiveness of this method, with some even claiming it is counter-productive, but the health organisation said its advice had come from its Guideline Development Group - an independent panel of scientists, clinicians, patients and ethicists - and was based on detailed review all available evidence". The new guidelines also include a recommendation that healthcare professionals favour clinical judgement over models" in making decisions for individual patients.

Long COVID is another area being considered. Evidence has been gathered on the post-COVID condition, where people who recover from COVID-19 continue to have longer-term issues like extreme fatigue, persistent cough and exercise intolerance. Next month WHO will organise a series of consultations with subject experts and patients, to reach a better understanding of the condition and its variations.

Updated advice and future steps are contained in the WHO COVID-19 Clinical Management, Living Guidance document which says WHO will continue to monitor the situation closely for any changes that may affect this interim guidance".

WHO says international travellers should not be prioritised for Covid-19 jabs

WHO is calling for health care workers and the most vulnerable 20% of people in every country to receive Covid-19 jabs before broadening immunisation programmes to other populations. The WHO panel of experts said that international travellers should not be prioritised for Covid-19 vaccines amid a shortage of the jabs. WHO is calling for health care workers and the most vulnerable 20% of people in every country to receive Covid-19 jabs before broadening immunization programmes to other groups.

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