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26 January 2021

**COVID-19(21)10**

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

**COVID-19 UPDATE AS OF 25 JANUARY 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.*
- **97,464,094** 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 with 2,112,689 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 **224** Countries, areas or territories have cases.
- *A database outlining availability of vaccines under the UN COVAX programme is being held on the UNICEF website and is constantly being updated and available from The online Vaccine Market Dashboard ([click here](#)) outlining vaccines currently available, who & which countries have agreements, quantities purchased, and a table updated as more agreements are made.*

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	97,464,094	2,112,689
Africa	2,462,083	57,902
Americas	43,456,972	999,894
Eastern Mediterranean	5,507,360	130,886
Europe	32,032,536	706,238
South-East Asia	12,656,504	194,449
Western Pacific	1,347,894	23,307

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

	<b>THIS WEEK</b>	<b>LAST WEEK</b>	<b>Status</b>
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	Turkey	Changed
8	Italy	Italy	Changed
9	Turkey	Spain	The same
10	Germany	Germany	The same
11	Columbia	Columbia	The same
12	Argentina	Argentina	The same

**TOP 12 COUNTRIES**

	<b>INCREASED CASES YESTERDAY</b>	<b>HIGH FATALITIES YESTERDAY</b>
1	USA	USA
2	UK	Mexico
3	Brazil	UK
4	Russia	Brazil
5	Mexico	Russia
6	France	Columbia
7	India	South Africa
8	Columbia	Italy
9	Indonesia	Portugal
10	Portugal	Germany
11	Italy	France
12	Germany	Indonesia

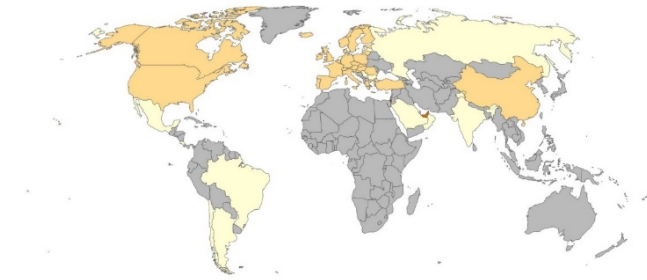
**Vaccines**

Africa must wait weeks if not months before receiving Covid-19 vaccines approved by the World Health Organization, according to various officials working towards getting doses for the continent. Close to 900 million doses have been secured so far through various initiatives, enough to inoculate about 30% of the continent's 1.3 billion people this year.

Hoarding by wealthy nations, funding shortfalls, regulations and cold chain requirements have slowed vaccine roll out "The world is on the brink of a catastrophic moral failure and the price will be paid with lives and livelihoods in the poorest countries," warned the WHO head. Calls for equity are growing. Nearly 40 million doses have been administered in at least 49 higher-income countries, compared to just 25 doses in just one low income countries. No Western vaccines have been used in Africa, almost two months after doses were given in Europe.

## 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: Our World In Data, 21 Jan 1000 GMT with latest available data



The People's Vaccine Alliance found rich nations representing 14% of the global population purchased 53% of the most promising vaccines including all Moderna vaccines for 2021 and 96% of Pfizer's expected production. Canada is thought to have enough doses to vaccinate Citizens five times. Demand must be met before lower income countries can have a turn.

In Africa, the situation reflects the 1990s, when HIV/Aids antiretroviral treatment was made in the United States. Even though Africa had a much bigger population infected with HIV, it took at least six years before life-saving treatment was available for Africans. Twelve million people died in Africa from Aids-related complications in a decade, whilst US mortality dropped drastically, according to the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. UNAids Executive Director is calling for fairness from Covid-19 vaccine manufacturers. "We're not asking them to make losses," With the ARVs, it was pressure from people living with HIV and right to life champions that got governments to allow for production of much more affordable generic treatments. "The price of antiretroviral treatment per person dropped from \$10,000 per year to just \$100 per year." She wants a similar approach for the Covid-19 vaccine and urged industry not to drive for a desire for super profits.

WHO is also calling for equity: "Even as they speak of equitable access, some countries and companies continue to prioritise bilateral deals, going around Covax, driving up prices and trying to jump to the start of the queue. Covax is a WHO initiative with the Vaccine Alliance to equitably distribute Covid-19 vaccines globally. "Most supply of the leading vaccines was pre-ordered by wealthy nations even before safety and efficacy data was available," WHO Africa said securing funding was the first task, \$6bn was raised as a target of \$8bn for 92 middle and low-income countries, according to Gavi. The facility has secured two billion doses for countries including all of Africa with 600 million. The African Union has arranged for member states to apply for \$7bn funding from lenders to produce 270 million vaccines. Not just purchase of vaccines need funding. Countries have also ramped up cold chains to prepare for their arrival especially important for the Pfizer vaccine, which must be kept at 70C. Unicef, which handles childhood vaccine distribution, will handle delivery of Covid-19 vaccines under Covax. It plans to transport at least twice its usual capacity.

## China

Provinces around China must prepare mass quarantine facilities. Millions of people in Beijing are being tested for COVID-19 after the capital recorded three new cases on Friday. Provinces around China also must prepare mass quarantine facilities. Mainland China currently has 1,960 officially confirmed cases, but the government wishes to stop limited

outbreaks turning into a second wave. China recorded over 100 cases each day last week. Another 103 cases were recorded on Friday.

Nearly exactly a year since the first lockdown in Wuhan, unprecedented at the time, tens of millions of people are once again living under similar restrictions. Lockdown rules are much stricter than in countries with much higher Covid rates.

Residents in some areas of Shijiazhuang, the Hebei province capital which borders Beijing, cannot leave their houses. Others in lower risk areas can go outdoors but must stay within their residential compounds, and shops and restaurants are shut. Chinese social media showed a man being restrained and tied to a tree by epidemic control workers after taking a walk. The workers shouted at the man: The village official in charge of the workers was suspended and is being investigated, authorities said. Despite severe restrictions many people support the measures. A resident tested for COVID-19 three times in recent days thought the strict policy is very necessary and conducted in time.

Chinese officials blamed the new cases as infections from abroad. They confirmed that the B.117 COVID variant first identified in the UK was in China. The deputy director of the Chinese Centre for Disease and Control and Prevention, said epidemiological investigations showed the outbreaks were not due to previous infections, but caused by newly imported virus sources. China has publicly boasted Communist Party success in Covid controlling Covid.

From the moment a new, pandemic coronavirus emerged in Wuhan as a laboratory dedicated to the study of new coronaviruses with pandemic potential, Prof Shi Zhengli has been a focal point of one of the biggest scientific controversies of our time. For much of the past year she has met the doubt that Sars-Cov-2 might have escaped from the Wuhan Institute of Virology with angry denial. She has now written on how the initial outbreak may have begun in Wuhan in January's edition of Science Magazine where she referred to various studies that she said, suggest the virus existed outside of China before Wuhan's first known case in December 2019. From a leading global expert on coronaviruses even discussion of such a possibility seems unusual. Could a spiralling outbreak of infection that almost destroyed Wuhan's health system, sparked the world's first Covid lockdown and spawned a global catastrophe really have arrived on imported food without any signs of similarly devastating outbreaks elsewhere? But with the virus vanquished, the idea that it is a foreign import is repeated with almost unanimity across this city of 11 million people.

On 23 January 2020, Chinese authorities severed transport links out of Wuhan confining residents to their homes. The tough lockdown coincided with the annual spring festival celebrations and too late to prevent global spread as five million people had already left the city before the holiday. Doctors' warnings went unheeded and in an outpouring of anger on the Chinese internet the authorities were accused of hiding the initial outbreak for political stability.

One year on, there's little sign of that anger in Wuhan today. In fact, it's the humdrum normality that is striking the traffic jams, the bustling markets and busy restaurants. Its success in eventually bringing the virus under control is now being celebrated in a giant exhibition hall, complete with models of medical workers in hazmat suits, installations of hospital beds and giant portraits of President Xi Jinping. The accompanying texts mention his all-out war against the pandemic, his resolute decision making and how he shared China's solutions globally.

There can be no doubting the success of China's mass testing programmes, its tracing apps and the widespread mask wearing. Strict enforcement of lockdowns, with little hand-wringing over the impact on individual rights, may be less easy for democratic countries to emulate.

Despite China's promise of international co-operation, the world is still no closer to an answer to the biggest question - where did the virus come from? Many prominent scientists believe that based on past outbreaks the most likely source is a natural one, a "zoonotic" leap from bats known to harbour such viruses to humans, possibly via an intermediate species.

China has produced little evidence of work done to research the source, in particular testing historic human samples stored by hospitals to determine where and when the virus commenced. Scientists arguing that the possibility of an accident at the Wuhan Institute of Virology should also be included within any investigation question the silence but instead of publishing evidence China has suggested Covid may have arrived in Wuhan on frozen food imports or through multiple origins". Interestingly, scientists who have disagreed strongly about the lab-leak theory, suddenly find themselves very much aligned on whether the virus came from abroad. Prof Shi Zhengli recently told the BBC that she'd welcome "any form of visit" by an inquiry team to the Wuhan Institute of Virology to rule out a lab leak. But in a follow-up email asking about aligning her discussion of possible foreign origins with the Chinese government's own narrative, she said. the question is not friendly.

After delays and wrangling with China over access, a WHO team has arrived in Wuhan to study the virus origins. The terms of reference hint of background politics with the document showing many Chinese talking points, including foreign origins and food-chain transmission.

The Wuhan crisis is now a world crisis with many lives and livelihoods lost, answers are needed. If Covid came from bats, understanding the pathway is important to protect humanity from repeated spillover events. If it leaked from a lab, an urgent review of safety protocols is needed not just in China but globally. Scientists wonder if the answers will ever be given.

## **Egypt**

Egypt has begun vaccinating its citizens having recorded nearly 9,000 deaths from Covid. The first vaccine recipients were a doctor and a nurse given a Chinese injection. Vaccines from Britain and Russia will be used in the unfolding inoculation programmes. The health minister said Egypt aimed to produce an injection locally to distribute across Africa which is in danger of falling behind, as richer Countries strike vaccine-supply deals and raise prices.

## **European Union**

The EU regulator will decide on approval of AstraZeneca's vaccine on 29 January, with a purchasing deal for at least 300m doses. AstraZeneca will cut deliveries of the Oxford COVID-19 vaccine to the EU by 60% in the first quarter. The company was due to deliver around 80 million doses to the 27 EU countries by the end of March. However, it now thinks it will reduce to 31 million doses due to production problems at a Belgian vaccine factory run by Novasep.

AstraZeneca stated: While there is no scheduled delay to vaccine shipments should we receive approval in Europe, initial volumes will be lower than originally anticipated due to reduced yields at a manufacturing site within our European supply chain. "We will supply tens of millions of doses in February and March to the EU, whilst ramping up production volumes."

The EU drug regulator will decide on approval of AstraZeneca's vaccine on 29 January, with a deal to purchase at least 300 million doses and an option for an additional 100 million already signed. Europe's immunisation campaign has been hampered by a temporary shortfall in the supply chain of Pfizer and BioNTech, who are retooling a site in Belgium to boost output.

Astra Zeneca has also warned of supply issues to the European Union, compounding frustration over ongoing delays to the vaccine rollout across Europe. AstraZeneca said a

production problem meant a lower number of initial doses would be available than expected, with some reports that availability will temporarily reduce by up to 60%. It comes after some European nations' inoculation programmes slowed due to a cut in deliveries of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine. The EU Health Commissioner expressed "deep dissatisfaction" at the AstraZeneca delay due to reduced yields at a manufacturing site in its European supply chain.

Speed of vaccination rollout in Europe is criticised with frustration at Israel, the UAE, the UK, and the US all ahead of EU nations in terms of doses given per capita. Italy and Poland have threatened to take legal action due to the reduction in vaccine supply. Vaccines are increasingly seen by experts as the only solution with many European nations currently struggling to cope with a deadly surge of Covid.

## **France**

Eurostar has struggled during the pandemic but has not had the same assistance as aviation competitors. French authorities are ready to give financial support. The country's junior transport minister told a parliamentary hearing in Paris he was talking with the UK government about ensuring the cross-Channel train operator survives the coronavirus pandemic. He said France would be at Eurostar's side to maintain the strategic link between the two countries.

Support will be given "based on our involvement in Eurostar, so that we can financially sustain its business model", he added. Eurostar is 55% owned by French state rail company SNCF and the UK government sold its 40% stake to private companies in 2015. Eurostar has suffered from Covid restrictions and reduced demand for travel like aviation but its plight has been less reported. Passenger numbers have fallen by 95% and it now runs just one daily train each way between London and Paris and between London and Amsterdam via Brussels.

Rémy Julienne, a well-known stuntman, has died of coronavirus, aged 90. Over a 50-year career, Julienne devised the crashes, crunches and collisions witnessed in over 1,400 films. He also starred in many of them anonymously. In 2002 Julienne created a motor stunt show at Disney theme parks in Paris and Florida. He was a body double for stars, including Roger Moore, Timothy Dalton, Charles Bronson and Jean-Paul Belmondo. Sophia Loren, Carole Bouquet and Gina Lollobrigida. His famous roles include The Italian Job and six Bond films.

French Doctors recommended people to avoid talking on busy public transport to reduce risk of spreading coronavirus. The National Academy of Medicine said: "The mandatory wearing of masks on public transport, where social distancing is not possible, should be accompanied by one very simple precaution: avoid talking and making phone calls." Academy member Patrick Berche told local media that if there was lots of space it was not a problem, but if you were very close to the person next to you it made sense not to talk. Masks have been compulsory on public transport in France since May.

## **Hong Kong**

Thousands of people in Jordan, Hong Kong must stay at home in the city's first Covid lockdown. Authorities said about 10,000 people living in buildings in a restricted area of Kowloon must stay at home until tested. They aim to finish testing within about 48 hours, so that people can return to work. Residents must stay at their premises to avoid cross-infection until they get test results. The move came amid a surge of cases in the area. In total, Hong Kong had recorded 168 deaths from Covid-19 as of Friday.

## Ireland

Ireland may have to slow its mass rollout of jabs due to supply issues with the AstraZeneca vaccine. The Taoiseach has warned AstraZeneca has told the EU that a production problem means the number of initial doses available would be lower than expected. In an interview with RTÉ, Micheál Martin said AstraZeneca was going to be the catalyst to be allowed to move from low level to mass vaccination". Delivery delays will cause a problem. The length of the delay will depend on ongoing discussions between the EU and Oxford University/ AstraZeneca, and that some robust meetings would take place in the coming days. Yesterday most long-term care residents and about half of front-line healthcare workers in Ireland would be vaccinated. He expected Covid-19 restrictions to be applied for the next six months.

A Catholic priest praised hospital staff holding a dying man's hand and prayed whilst dying with Covid-19. He gave last rites to a patient in Craigavon Area Hospital in County Armagh and upon arrival found four people around a bed. As they wore full PPE he assumed it was the man's family as one cried. The others held the patient's hand and wiped his brow, while one said a prayer. He saw they were doctors and nurses as their names were on protective equipment. These frontline staff; give everything in service for us and family members.

## Israel

Israel is banning all passenger flights to tackle the pandemic and prevent variants from getting a foothold. The ban came as police clashed with ultra-Orthodox communities in various cities across Israel. Authorities are struggling to enforce Covid requirements, including social distancing, in ultra-Orthodox communities throughout the country, contributing to one of the world's highest rates of infection. 20% of Israelis are now vaccinated. Infections among the community also threaten to undermine the Israeli government's successful vaccine campaign, with the country vaccinating over a quarter of its 9.2 million people. But infection rates remain high, with an average of over 8,000 new cases reported every day.

Last night the Israeli Cabinet approved measures to close nearly all incoming and outgoing air traffic, with exceptions for humanitarian travel such as for a funeral or for medical patients. The order still requires parliamentary legislation to be lawful and will last until the end of January, according to Prime Minister Netanyahu thereby ensuring damage from the mutation, and additional variants if they enter, will be much smaller, to enable opening the economy. Until now we have vaccinated approximately 2.5 million Israeli citizens with the first vaccine dose and around one million citizens have had the second dose.

Experts say that non compliance with safety regulations in ultra-Orthodox communities has severely spread Covid. Many major sects have flouted safety regulations opening schools, praying in synagogues and holding mass weddings and funerals. Despite being just over 10% of the country's population, they comprise 33% of Israel's Covid cases. The police are reluctant to confront the community with clashes in one city leading to an officer firing into the air to keep a crowd at bay. The worst unrest on Sunday occurred in Bnei Brak, where large crowds of young men clashed with police and threatened journalists, prompting a police officer to fire a pistol into the air. "I expect all Israelis to respect the safety guideline, that includes all sectors, including the ultra-Orthodox," said Mr Netanyahu, who relies on their support in the upcoming elections. Israel has had over 595,000 positive cases and over 4,361 deaths.

## Italy

Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte has called a delay in the supply of Pfizer and AstraZeneca vaccines to the EU is "unacceptable" and vowed to take legal action. The companies said they had experienced production issues. Mr Conte has accused them of

"contractual violations" that would cause "enormous damage". Officials have not confirmed publicly how big the shortfall will be but there has been criticism and frustration across Europe about speed of the rollouts as cases surge.

## **Lebanon**

Lebanon's cases have almost quadrupled, deaths tripled and ICU patients have risen by almost 100%. The head of Lebanon's main coronavirus hospital has said the country's health system is close to collapse with insufficient beds, drugs, oxygen, ventilators and staff. Dr Firas Abiad said the government decision to relax Covid restrictions over Christmas and New Year led to many cases and deaths over recent weeks. All hospitals reported full, or almost full, intensive care units and many have patients stuck in emergency wards, waiting for a bed. Daily new cases have almost quadrupled since almost a month ago whilst deaths have also tripled and patients in ICU increased by almost 100%. On 17 December, four days before a nationwide lockdown ended the government eased restrictions for the holiday period. Under intense pressure from businesses, they allowed nightclubs, bars and restaurants to open at 50% capacity while urging people to wear masks and maintain social distancing but videos over Christmas and New Year showed packed clubs and bars not tackling violations.

Lebanon was already in a critical economical state. Years of accumulative economic mismanagement has led to a slow collapse in every sector of society. This was exacerbated by the pandemic and the devastating port explosion last year.

## **New Zealand**

New Zealand reported its first case of COVID-19 outside of a quarantine facility in over two months. A traveller from Europe went into quarantine and tested negative twice before going home but then tested positive. There was no immediate evidence the virus spread in the community but it will concern health officials, as New Zealand has remained largely protected from Covid throughout the pandemic

Director-general of health Ashley Bloomfield said a woman returning from Europe recently tested positive. She spent 14 days in quarantine and twice tested negative before returning on 13 January but later developed symptoms. Tests are underway to establish the variant causing the infection which is thought to be a more transmissible form of the virus. Doctors are investigating if the disease was caught during quarantine. There were no cases of wider community Covid transmission since 18 November. The authorities will employ contact tracing and testing to make ensure there has been no community spread." A tough lockdown and geographical isolation have helped New Zealand virtually eliminate the novel coronavirus within its borders. Yesterday there were eight new infections, all in travellers quarantined after arrival at the border, with 79 people in quarantine.

## **Russia**

President Vladimir Putin has offered his condolences following the death of Larry King, from Covid the Kremlin's spokesman has said. King repeatedly interviewed Putin. The president appreciated his great professionalism and journalistic authority said RIA Novosti news agency.

Larry King conducted over 50,000 interviews during his career including sit-downs with every US president since Gerald Ford. Other high-profile guests included Dr Martin Luther King, Bill Gates, Margaret Thatcher and Lady Gaga. He hosted his own nightly programme on CNN from 1985 to 2010. At its peak, the programme had 1.5 million viewers a night and in the final episode in 2010, it was the longest-running same host show. In his final show, Barack Obama said King had "opened our eyes to the world beyond our living rooms". King continued



broadcasting hosting his own shows on Ora TV, a-demand digital network he founded, Hulu and RT, Russia's state-controlled international broadcaster.

## **Spain**

Pedro Sanchez, The Spanish prime minister has said foreign tourists would be welcome once 70% of Spain was vaccinated. Tourists wishing to visit Spain could have their holiday plans cancelled following reports that he said Spain would not welcome international tourists until the end of summer. It will be a blow for tourism, which closed its worst year since the 1970s in 2020 with revenues falling by over 75%. Speaking at a WTO meeting, he reportedly stated he did not expect holidaymakers to visit Spain until 70% nationals are vaccinated in the Autumn. Spain is not the only popular holiday destination closing its doors to tourists, as Portugal stated it will suspend all flights to and from Britain from Saturday. A Club Med study showed Spain was the fifth most popular destination, behind the Maldives, Mexico, Thailand and Turkey. Earlier, European Union leaders held an online summit to discuss potential Covid measures, including further border restrictions. While various EU leaders would not rule out border closures, Spain and Greece backed a common approach to vaccine passports to allow people to travel if vaccinated although EU diplomats said the measure was premature as it is unclear if vaccinated people could still transmit Covid to others.

Spain reported its highest daily number of Covid infections by recording 44,357 cases. A further 404 deaths were reported, taking the total to 55,041 deaths and 2.5 million cases.

## **The Netherlands**

A night-term curfew started on Saturday night, as part of Covid control measures. The order applies from 21:00 to 04:30 local time. Anyone outside during these hours needs a valid work reason and an employer letter. There will be exemptions for emergencies and allowances made for funerals, court proceedings, travelling in or out of the country or dog walking.

Flights from high-risk areas are also banned for at least a month, as the country tries to reduce the chance of more infectious variants spreading.

## **United Kingdom**

The deputy chief medical officer, stressed that people shouldn't act any differently once they've had a Covid vaccine as scientists do not yet know the impact of the vaccine on transmission and it could still be transmitted. 6,353,321 people received their first vaccine in the UK and 469,660 have had a second dose. The government plans to offer a vaccine to everyone in the four most vulnerable categories by 15 February.

Body camera footage showed two officers being injured breaking up about 200 people in London at a mass gathering. Attendees became hostile and pushed through to avoid fines, injuring two officers.

UK Companies made plans to cut 795,000 jobs in 2020 as large parts of the economy closed during lockdowns. Planned cuts slowed at the end of the year, though, and the numbers may well have increased without the government's furlough scheme.

The Black Country Living Museum, set of hit TV show Peaky Blinders, became a vaccination centre today. With millions of people in the UK now receiving vaccinations, space for the procedure is at a premium. Cathedrals, mosques, museums and vehicle showrooms have been pressed into service as some of the more unusual vaccination centres. It will join

Blackpool's Winter Gardens and t. On Friday, a The Al-Abbas Islamic Centre mosque in Birmingham became a vaccination hub to vaccinate up to 500 people daily. Blackburn and Salisbury cathedrals are among church buildings opened as vaccine stations.

Two leading doctors expressed scepticism about higher mortality linked to the new variant prevalent in the UK. The Prime Minister stated there was early evidence of the new variant first found in London and the south east may be more deadly. ". Public Health England medical director Dr Doyle says it is still not clear that the new variant caused more death. "There is some evidence, but it is very early evidence, it is a few cases and far too early to say it will happen, Dr Tildesley, of the Scientific Pandemic Influenza Group on Modelling (Spi-M), said it is still too early to draw conclusions based on a relatively small amount of data. Senior UK doctors asked for the gap to reduce between the first and second Pfizer-BioNTech Covid-19 vaccine doses. Dr Doyle defended delaying the second dose from 3 to 12 weeks arguing the strategy is to bear down on transmission to reduce deaths and more dangerous variants emerging. The more people protected, the less opportunity to get the upper hand. It is a reasonable scientific balance of both supply and protecting more people.

The UK government is considering tightening restrictions at UK borders, including hotel quarantines for travellers. Ministers will discuss further measures, with the Prime Minister refusing to rule anything out as he didn't want to allow a new virus variant into the country. Under current travel rules, almost all UK arrivals must test negative for Covid-19 to enter. All passengers must quarantine for up to 10 days. New variants causing concern were identified in South Africa and Brazil, leading to direct flights to the UK from all South American countries and several southern African countries being suspended.

Senior doctors called on the chief medical officer to halve the gap between the first and second doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech Covid-19 vaccine. Health officials extended it from three to 12 weeks, to allow the first jab to be given to as many people. The British Medical Association said the gap should be six weeks, saying the policy was difficult to justify. Pfizer has tested the vaccine's efficacy only when two doses were given up to 21 days apart. The BMA intervention shows senior doctors have widespread concerns, including worries about reliability of supplies if people wait longer for a second jab. The Department of Health and Social Care says the extension decision followed a thorough review of data in line with recommendations of the UK's four chief medical officers. Last week over two million people received their first dose of the vaccine, with the government saying all those in the four most vulnerable categories will be offered their initial jab by 15 February. NHS England data shows a 22% rise in the average number of healthcare staff off sick due to Covid-19 in the first week of January, compared to the last week in December. The spokesman said the safety of NHS and social care staff was top priority but the current guidance did not need changing. In response to new Covid-19 variants, the UK Infection Prevention Control Cell conducted a comprehensive review of available evidence and concluded current guidance and PPE recommendations remain appropriate. "New and emerging evidence is continually scrutinised and evaluated by the government.

The RCN warns inadequate PPE may put nurses at risk. It has written to the workplace safety watchdog detailing its concerns, after a similar appeal from doctors. England's Department of Health says there is no reason to change current guidance. It follows a comprehensive review of evidence around new variants and the impact on PPE. Currently, most nurses not in intensive care wear standard surgical masks which the RCN say may not protect against the new Covid variants and very small airborne viral particles spread in hospitals. It wants all NHS staff to receive FFP2 or FFP3 high-grade intensive care face masks. UK infection prevention and control guidance has been updated, but nurses say it allows individual trusts to determine

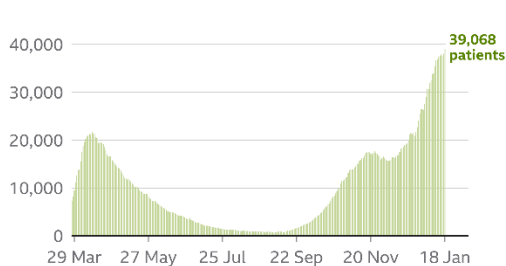
PPE f. Some hospitals offer staff high-grade PPE while many are not causing unequal levels of protection depending on work locations. The RCN is asking UK governments to:

- assure health and care staff that current PPE guidance on PPE is robust enough
- ensure that nursing staff are supported to use respiratory personal protective equipment (PPE) such as FFP2 or FFP3 masks
- look at the effectiveness of ventilation in all NHS buildings
- call for the Health and Safety Executive to review guidance on appropriate use of PPE in all health and care settings.

The prime minister says it is too soon to say when the lockdown will be lifted with the most vulnerable to be offered vaccination by mid-February. Lockdown is impacting infection levels with new case numbers falling. There are only tentative signs it has filtered through to slow new hospital admissions and even if they reduce, the overall number of patients in hospital will remain high as patients are discharged at a slower rate than entry.

NHS Providers predicts hospitals will remain under the current intense pressure perhaps until the end of February. With no headroom in the NHS, ministers will be cautious about lifting many of the restrictions, especially with the threat of the new faster-spreading variant. There are no guarantees the government will meet the mid-February target.

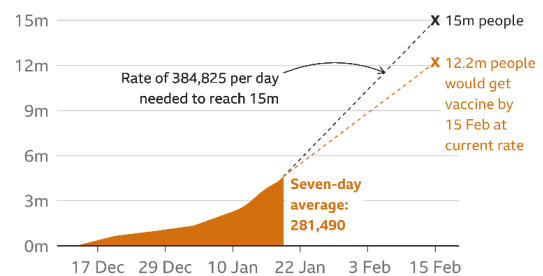
**Number of patients in hospital still rising**  
People in hospital with coronavirus, by date



Most recent data for all nations is for 18 Jan. Welsh figures include suspected cases  
Source: Gov.uk dashboard

**Target to offer vaccine to 15 million people by mid-February**

Vaccine first doses received across the UK, to 19 Jan



15m target includes all over-70s, care home residents and workers, other health and social care workers, and clinically extremely vulnerable people  
Source: Government dashboard, 20 Jan

The UK has made a good start. Per head of population, only Israel, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates have vaccinated more. Last week over two million people received their first dose. That puts the government on track to achieve its aim to offer a vaccine to everyone over 70, the extremely clinically vulnerable and frontline health and care workers.

The supply chain remains fragile. Pfizer will reduce manufacturing in the next few weeks to upgrade facilities and ramp up Spring production. The UK relies less on the Pfizer vaccine than other countries. Millions of doses await final packaging or safety checks. Ensuring this will enable continuity especially as vaccination clinics must handle second doses from late February. It will be doubtful if extra Pfizer vaccine supplies are not on stream as committed. Even if supply is good, there will still be many vulnerable people as nearly 90% of Covid deaths are in groups being jabbed by mid-February.

No vaccine is 100% effective and uptake will not be 100%. There will still be many vulnerable people over-60. As we progress into spring, everyone over 50, and younger adults with health conditions, will be offered a vaccine. But even that may not be enough, according to some.

University of Warwick modelling suggests that even with 85% uptake, a complete lifting of restrictions in April could cause very high death levels. Vaccines are not a panacea, says Prof

Matt Keeling. Younger people at little risk of Covid death still risk long-Covid. Although there is little hard data some studies suggest 10% suffer long-lasting symptoms from infection.

The factor that could significantly impact on spread is whether vaccination stops transmission. Trials showed the vaccines stopped symptoms developing. It is not known if those vaccinated will still pass the virus on. Most people expect some disruption to transmission but the amount is unclear and will not be for months. But conversely is the huge impact of lockdown. The first priority will be to re-open schools. The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health President says everything must be done as while schools contribute to spread of Covid they were not a significant driver, schools closed to benefit the population at great expense to children once schools are open tough calls will have to be made.

Backbench Tory MPs are calling for a gradual unwrapping of society from early March. Ultimately, it will be what society will tolerate. The UK chief medical adviser has spoken of "de-risking" Covid arguing we will reach a situation where death and illness caused by Covid is at a level society can tolerate as we tolerate 7,000 - 20,000 people dying from flu each year. The government adviser on human behaviour believes this will occur sooner rather than later."

UK Arrivals must quarantine for 10 days on arrival and have had a negative test 72 hours prior to departure. More action could be taken on border closures amid the sustained death rate,: A traveller at Heathrow terminal two, photographed lines of dozens of people crowded into lanes at passport control. Currently, arrivals in the UK must quarantine for 10 days on arrival, with a negative COVID-19 test 72 hours before departure. A Heathrow spokesman explained that the requirements caused longer lines at immigration controlled by the Home Office border force controls. He said last May that social distancing is not feasible in an airport. A flight of 300 people, who were to all two metres apart would form a kilometre line. To mitigate for lack of space passengers are asked to wear a face covering.

The only UK flight bans are from South America and Portugal, after a new variant was discovered in Brazil earlier this month. It comes after a government minister said earlier that a everything is kept under review when asked if a full border shutdown could be introduced He said. There is concern currently at various mutant strains of Covid emerging in other countries and a risk that a strain might evade the vaccine.

As the UK acknowledges a new variant is spreading quicker, it's now also been shown to be more lethal another cruel twist in the pandemic. Indications are that the death rate in those infected is around a third higher than the previous version though risk of death is still low.

Sir Patrick Vallance, the chief scientist, said with the old Covid strain 1% of men aged 60 would die, for the new variant it is 1.3 or 1.4. Evidence is not strong but an announcement at a news briefing underlined it is taken seriously at the highest level. The new variant, B.1.1.7, is now the dominant strain in much of the UK. The latest weekly ONS infection survey shows that in London, the South East and Northern Ireland it comprises around 70% of COVID cases, elsewhere is lower. In Scotland, Wales and Yorkshire have around 40% of cases. Lockdown is slowing the epidemic. He said growing evidence from multiple sources suggest vaccines will work against the UK coronavirus strain. experts have not yet found any variants that could make a vaccine less effective and the virus has been slow to mutate.

Daily cases reduced over a third last week and ONS data suggested infections are falling fast in new variant hotspots. Social distancing works. There are early signs too that serious cases requiring hospital admission are levelling off, though there is big regional variation and the NHS is still under enormous pressure. That should - even with a more lethal virus begin to affect total deaths by the end of January. The vaccine is also bringing hope. Both the Pfizer/BioNtech and Oxford /AstraZeneca vaccines are effective against the variant. Almost 9

out of 10 deaths are in the top four priority groups, those in care homes or over 80 who should be jabbed in February. Latest figures show just under 5.5 million people have had at least one dose. Rolling out the vaccine as fast as humanly possible will be a lifesaver.

Crowds at Heathrow Airport sparked super spreader concerns after pictures emerged of a packed departures hall with limited social distancing. Heathrow claims social distancing in an airport is not possible. A photo posted of Terminal 2 on Friday stated "T2 Heathrow Friday afternoon. No ventilation. Long delays. Super spreading." Other pictures and videos of huge queues for passport control have appeared on social media, despite international travel being largely banned. Britons are only allowed to go abroad for limited "legally permitted reasons" during lockdown, with arrivals requiring a negative coronavirus test from the past 72 hours before they are allowed entry. Labour described the airport scenes as incredibly worrying. Claiming the government was lurching from one crisis to another." E-gates have been closed, requiring border guards to check paperwork and passports manually. A government spokesperson said it is ultimately for individual airports to ensure social distancing on site but Heathrow argues Border Force enforce the rules. The airport said a two-metre rule inside airports was never feasible. ", if you have an aircraft of 300 people, you'd need a queue about 1km long to socially distance just one aircraft, which is why we mandated face coverings in the airport." The government insists Border Force is increasing enforcement, with those breaking the new negative test rule getting £500 fines. At a news briefing last week the Prime Minister suggested travel restrictions may have to be tightened further amid fears the new variant of the virus is more deadly. This could require people to complete their 10-day self-isolation at airport hotels rather than allowing them to travel to their home or destination first.

The UK travel corridor scheme was scrapped earlier this month meaning every UK arrival must quarantine for 10 days except for limited exemptions. Ministers banned all travel to and from Brazil and Portugal after a new COVID-19 variant emerged. On Friday, Portugal reciprocated the measure, blaming their dramatic rise in cases on the UK new variant.

The strain, known as VUI-202012/01, may be up to 70% more transmissible - and has a "very clear genetic make up". The new UK variant of COVID-19 which is up to 70% more transmissible could be more deadly than the original virus. There is new evidence that the new variant may cause a higher degree of mortality than the original virus. But evidence showed that current vaccines remain effective against the old COVID variant and the new one.

After genome analysis was conducted on a few suspected cases, Northern Ireland's health department said it was likely the variant had existed for some time.

In December, the Health Secretary said the faster-spreading variant caused most UK new cases. Dr Hopkins Public Health England who previously said the strain was predominantly in London and southeast England stated every region now has cases, but in "very small numbers" The variant, VUI-202012/01 has a very clear genetic make up to follow which can be detected via whole genome sequencing, taking two to three weeks. Other nations are also affected. "Similar strains were detected in Denmark and Australia, and other variants looking very similar were detected in South Africa, the Netherlands and other countries," She said it was initially found in a patient in September, with full genome sequencing returning in October. At first, there was nothing to particularly highlight that this was of major concern, as variants come and go, she added. By late November, scientists struggled to understand why Covid 19 infections were not lowered by national restrictions.

Dr Hopkins said "Detailed clinical, behavioural and epidemiological investigations" were conducted including whole genome sequencing and a cluster of the new variant spread to those areas. The government was notified on 11 December, after which further work to understand what events were conducted. Scientists subsequently discovered the new strain

was more transmissible than other variants, the first time all of the evidence came together". Dr Hopkins said PHE has been working with modelling experts from Imperial College London to compare the new variant with others circulating. She said 70% looked like a good one but we don't have very good confidence intervals around that".

Boris Johnson has said the new strain could increase the R number by 0.4. The latest figures suggest that the strain accounts for 43% of South East new infections rising to 59% of new cases in the east of England and 62% in London. WHO was alerted to its existence and will analyse data on the mutation's spread. The prime minister warned that emerging evidence showed the new variant to be more deadly than the original virus. Chief scientific adviser Sir Patrick Vallance highlighted signs of an increased risk of death for those with the new UK variant compared to the old virus. He said that for a man in their 60s, around 10 in 1000 are likely to die with the old variant, compared to 13 or 14 with the new variant.

A new paper by the New and Emerging Respiratory Virus Threats Advisory Group (NERVTAG) confirmed there is a realistic possibility that the new variant is associated with an increased risk of death compared to infection with non-VOC viruses. Reflecting on these findings, Dr Hopkins said: "There is evidence from some but not all data sources suggesting that the variant of concern first detected in the UK may lead to a higher risk of death than the non-variant. Evidence is still emerging and more work underway to fully understand behaviour. She said the vaccine should induce a broad immune response, adding that mutations do not imply that the jab will not work. Definitive answers will come from studies in a couple of weeks.

## **United States**

Many troops were deployed to Washington for Joe Biden's inauguration following the riots and looting of Capitol buildings on 6 January. Former president Trump now faces an impeachment after rallying his supporters to march to the White House. 10,500 National Guard troops remain on duty, with 15,000 due to return to their home states in the next 10 days. It comes amid outrage that troops slept in a parking garage on their breaks in Washington. Up to 200 National Guard members on duty in Washington DC for inauguration day tested positive for Covid. Over 25,000 troops came from across the US to ensure a smooth transition of power. Under 1% of troops were infected whilst working in Washington. Around 7,000 will remain until the end of January, with 5,000 by mid-March, officials said whilst pictures of troops forced to sleep in a parking garage on their breaks in Washington sparked outrage. On Friday morning the president expressed dismay that troops had no place to rest. There are now calls for an investigation. The White House press secretary thanked the Guard for all their help after the events of 6 January and offered them assistance if they needed anything. First Lady Jill Biden distributed cookies to remaining troops on Friday, acknowledging their work.

The former White House coronavirus task force coordinator said she always considered quitting. Dr Birx said the role affected people's perceptions of her. Colleagues she had known for decades. Decided she had become a political person, even though they had known her forever. She questioned herself every day if there was a way she could respond to the pandemic. She was criticised last year for attending a family get-together at Thanksgiving, despite urging Americans to restrict gatherings to their immediate household". She announced her retirement in December after the incident. Earlier this week, top US expert Dr Anthony Fauci said he now feels liberated to explain science.

## **Yemen**

As Yemen braces itself for a second wave of Covid-19, a doctor recalled battling Covid alone after colleagues fled a hospital, and fake news that plagued assistance which eventually arrived. She recalled supporting a hastily painted red quarantine line in the middle of the

hospital. A patient on the other side was all alone struggling to breathe. The hospital, in Aden had its first suspected coronavirus patient. She hovered, terrified with the rest of the medical staff. When she asked what happened they said they had given the man oxygen but wanted no further contact and then left the hospital. She signed up when WHO organised a Yemen Covid training conference. Attendees were taught how to protect themselves and treat Covid patients safely. Despite training, she was terrified knowing the real state of the hospitals.

Soon Covid spread across Aden. As other hospitals became unable to cope, over a dozen doctors in those hospitals died with suspected Covid-19 and they shut their doors. Ambulances and cars driven by patients' relatives flooded al-Amal's hospital car park, all waiting for available beds. There were nine beds in the makeshift Covid ward. Each had oxygen cylinders until they ran out, with no support staff to refill them. By May, international media reports about Covid in Yemen stated that the government finally acknowledged the gravity by contacting Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) for help. Within days, MSF arrived and took over al-Amal hospital, bringing both manpower and much-needed supplies. It also set up a makeshift Covid hospital in a wedding hall next door.

Respite was short lived. Trouble was brewing. A voice recording went viral in Aden where the narrator said MSF staff at al-Amal hospital were killing Covid patients with a lethal injection without evidence, a local doctor who remained anonymous said people who were terminally ill and about to die, were given euthanasia injections. It was crazy but people believed it. Patients arriving for hospital treatment dramatically declined after the recording. A patient, struggling to breathe begged his brothers to take him to hospital as they all believed he would die there. Armed men entered the hospital opened by the hospital manager pushing and threatening local staff. The Doctor was suspended while MSF oversaw running of al-Amal, and alleged that relief agency staff stole hospital equipment. A video was shown on Facebook of supplies being removed from the hospital and loaded into lorries. MSF said that it was returning equipment it had borrowed from another Aden facility. The Doctor entered the hospital to check supplies and when obstructed, armed security intervened to stop a clash between him and the hospital's own security denied anyone was threatened or attacked.

Such events might seem extraordinary in a country desperate for help in a pandemic but the political vacuum from Yemen's ongoing war and an exiled government bred chaos and mistrust, with local officials vying for power. Domestic media networks were used by warring factions enabling false rumours to flourish.

Late July, MSF left Al-Amal hospital, citing security concerns moving to another Aden hospital facing management problems and after six weeks left Aden completely. Thousands of people have died from Covid at home, too afraid to seek healthcare. The Aden virus toll is stark. A Gravedigger realised the severity of the situation when bodies arrived faster than burials. Official Covid death figures in Aden are not available with little testing, so it's difficult to establish how many deaths were from Covid. But he kept his own records. The family of the deceased provided a certificate stating cause of death. He noted each person buried who died in al-Amal hospital with Covid-like symptoms. In May alone the pandemic's peak, he buried over 1,500 people. The Aden death rate was six times higher in May compared to 2019 according to official records.

Currently Covid is relatively stable in Aden People think Covid has disappeared, but scientists say not and Yemen is expected to suffer a second wave.

## **MUTATIONS**

A specific mutation, D614G, is the most common variant. Some experts say the variation has made the virus more infectious, but other studies have contradicted this. Meanwhile, earlier

strains such as the original L strain and the V strain are gradually disappearing. Analysis by Reuters shows that Australia's quick reaction to the pandemic and effective social distancing measures have eliminated transmission of the earlier L and S strains in the country and that new infections result from G strains brought in from overseas. G strains are now dominant globally, particularly in Italy and Europe, coinciding with spikes in outbreaks. In Asia, strains G, GH and GR have increased since March, over a month after they started spreading in Europe.

A University of Bologna researcher who co-ordinated a study into strains of COVID-19, told Science Daily: " The SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus is presumably already optimised to affect human beings and this explains its low evolutionary change.

Treatments being developed including a vaccine, might be effective against all virus strains." This is not the first time the virus mutated since the pandemic started and it may not even be the first time a mutation or a change in the virus's genetic material alters its infectiousness. So far at least seven major groups or strains of COVID-19 as it adapts to its human hosts.

The original strain, discovered in Wuhan in December 2019, is known as the L strain. It then mutated into the S strain early 2020, followed by the V and G strains. Strain G was most common in Europe and North America but as continents slowly restricted movement, it allowed the virus to spread faster and mutate into strains GR, GH and GV. Meanwhile, the original L strain persisted for longer in Asia as countries including China quickly shut their borders stopping movement. Several other less frequent mutations are grouped as strain O.

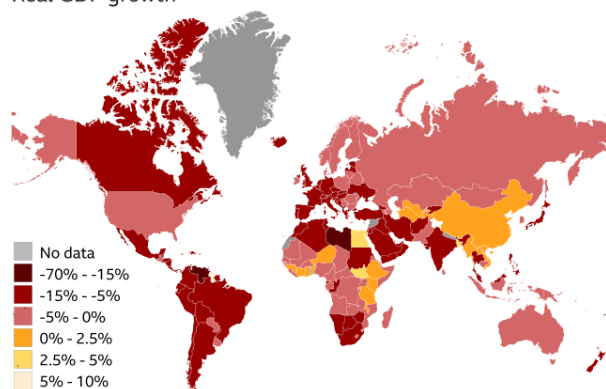
Danish authorities worried that a strain related to mink farming fearing mutation could hamper vaccine effectiveness from the spike protein, so the government ordered a mass cull of up to 17 million animals and a month's lockdown for people in the northwest of Denmark.

## Global Information

Spread of Covid-19 has left national economies and businesses counting costs as governments struggle with lockdowns. Despite vaccine development many still wonder what recovery could look like.

### Majority of countries in recession

Real GDP growth



Source: International Monetary Fund

BBC

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