

Connecting Communities for COVID19 News

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Isolation Tips

'It's Like There's No Covid': Booster Shots Bring Tel Aviv Back to Life

Tel Aviv's mayor has a message for cities struggling to reopen: Covid booster shots are allowing his city to roar back to life. The mass distribution of third shots in Israel has driven down new cases and hospital admissions, allowing restaurants and shops to fill up with customers. New variants of the disease could change the pandemic's trajectory again, but for now, the boosters are working, Mayor Ron Huldai said in an interview with Bloomberg News. "On the streets of Tel Aviv now, it's like there's no Covid," said Huldai, 77, who has run Tel Aviv for more than two decades since he was elected in 1998. He said 99% of city workers are vaccinated.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-10-05/covid-booster-shots-bring-tel-aviv-back-to-life>

Hygiene Helpers

Schools could be big battleground in coronavirus vaccine mandate fight

The resistance to coronavirus vaccine mandates isn't quite what it's been cracked up to be. As businesses, hospital systems and governments have moved forward with such mandates, many of the earliest test cases have gained compliance numbers well north of 90 percent. As The Post's Philip Bump wrote last week, the numbers suggest many supposed never-vaxxers were actually in the "I'll get it if required" camp. But that doesn't mean vaccine mandates won't hit roadblocks in the months ahead. And one increasing prospect seems most likely to truly test people's true opposition to the mandates: schools requiring them. California Gov. Gavin Newsom (D) on Friday became the first governor to say that his state would mandate fully approved vaccines for schoolchildren when they are available. (The Pfizer vaccine is fully approved only for children 16 and older and authorized for emergency use for children 12 to 15.)

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2021/10/04/real-battle-over-vaccine-mandates-might-lie-ahead-schools/>

Western Australia mandates COVID-19 vaccine for miners, natural gas workers

Western Australia said that it would require all employees that work with natural resources to have a first COVID-19 shot from December to help protect vulnerable Indigenous communities as the country begins opening up. People working in mining, oil and gas exploration are required to have their first dose by Dec. 1 and must be fully vaccinated by Jan. 1, the government said. The mandate also applies to any workers flying in and out of remote sites and any visitors to these operations, it said. "The new directions will address the risks posed by movement of resources sector workers... to and from regional and remote locations in WA, with many sites and operations located at or near remote Aboriginal communities," State Premier Mark McGowan said

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/western-australia-mandates-covid-19-vaccine-miners-natural-gas-workers-2021-10-05/>

Ireland coming 'close to suppressing' Covid - Nolan

In Ireland, the population seems to have come close to suppressing Covid-19 and "we're in a good place" in relation to lifting the remaining restrictions by 22 October, NPHET's Prof Philip Nolan has said. The Chair of NPHET's Epidemiological Modelling Advisory Group said suppressing the virus is down to very high levels of vaccination and the adherence to public health measures. Speaking on RTÉ's News at One, he said: "We're fortunate with our very high level of vaccinations and frankly the very sensible manner in which each and every one of us is taking the precautions, we seem to have

come close to suppressing what is a very transmissible virus."

<https://www.rte.ie/news/coronavirus/2021/10/05/1250805-coronavirus-ireland/>

Community Activities

How has COVID-19 affected Australia's homeless?

When Melbourne went into lockdown between March and October last year, the city's rough sleepers were considered to be at high risk. Without a secure and isolated place in which to lock down, the concern was that they could easily catch and transmit COVID-19. The Victorian government responded by providing funding for people experiencing homelessness to access hotel rooms across the city, which were empty due to the lack of tourists. Dave Lovelock is an outreach worker at Launch Housing, a not-for-profit organisation that assists people experiencing homelessness. Launch Housing are one of a number of similar organisations who were involved with the government hotel programme due to their close connections with rough sleepers. Dave Lovelock's job was to scour the streets to find people who were at risk of rough sleeping during the pandemic and offer them a place to stay at one of the designated hotels.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2021/10/5/how-has-covid-19-affected-australias-homeless>

Anti-vaccine villagers in Guatemala hold coronavirus team

Anti-vaccine residents of a village in Guatemala seized and held a team of nurses who were trying to administer coronavirus shots Monday, authorities said. The team was held for about seven hours in the village of Nahuila, in the province of Alta Verapaz, north of Guatemala City. The villagers said they didn't want the shots, and later blocked a road and let the air out of the nurses' tires. A cooler and about 50 doses of vaccine were destroyed. Police and local officials later negotiated their release. Officials said they had previously encountered villages that rejected vaccination teams, but Gabriel Sandoval, the director of the provincial health department, said it was the first time they faced such physical opposition.

<https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/anti-vaccine-villagers-guatemala-hold-coronavirus-team-80407563>

Working Remotely

Remote Work Has Vastly Improved the Black Worker Experience

Working remotely has its downsides: Cramped apartments, endless Zoom calls, juggling child care duties. But for many Black workers in white-collar jobs, getting out of the office has resulted in a vast improvement in their employee experience. Over the past year, Black workers in so-called "knowledge" roles, like graphic design or data analysis, are more likely to say they've been treated more fairly, value their co-workers more and feel more supported by management, according to a survey by the Future Forum. The findings support longstanding research that shows Black workers, especially Black women, feel less valued and respected by colleagues.

<https://www.bloombergquint.com/onweb/return-to-office-black-workers-are-happier-more-valued-working-from-home>

Citadel's founder says those early in their career 'are making a grave mistake' if they work from home

Employees just starting out are risking their career advancement by continuing to work remotely, hedge fund manager Ken Griffin said. "If you are early in your career, you are making a grave mistake not being back at work," Griffin said in a conversation with Bloomberg's Erik Schatzker. "It's incredibly difficult to have the managerial experiences and interpersonal experiences that you need to have to take your career forward in a work-remotely environment." Griffin, who runs Citadel's hedge fund business and Citadel Securities, also said working outside the office hinders innovation and indicated it may hurt the country's competitiveness.

<https://fortune.com/2021/10/05/citadel-founder-ken-griffin-work-from-home-career-development/>

Virtual Classrooms

500 digital learning activities for the in-person or virtual classroom

When schools abruptly shifted to online learning in March of 2020, a flurry of announcements about free digital learning resources followed. Gradually, schools returned to hybrid learning and, now, most districts are back to full in-person learning. But a new move puts 500 daily resources into teachers' hands for free, no matter where students are learning. In an effort to continue its support of educators during the COVID-19 pandemic, Discovery Education—an edtech partner offering a digital platform designed to support learning wherever it takes place—announced today that it will offer approximately 500 daily classroom activities available to teachers nationwide at no cost throughout the school year.

<https://www.eschoolnews.com/2021/10/05/500-digital-learning-activities-for-the-in-person-or-virtual-classroom/>

Public Policies

AstraZeneca Submits Preventive Covid-19 Treatment for FDA Authorization

The company asked U.S. regulators for emergency-use authorization for an antibody drug that earlier this year showed strong efficacy in preventing symptomatic Covid-19, offering a potential alternative in evading the disease.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/preventive-covid-19-treatment-submitted-for-fda-authorization-11633428799>

Spain approves COVID booster shot for over 70s

Spain on Tuesday approved administering of third doses of the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines, which are based on the same messenger RNA technology, for people aged 70 or over, the health ministry said. Spain has fully vaccinated around 78% of its population, and authorised the booster shot from six months after people receive their second jab, the ministry said in a statement. The campaign to administer the boosters will begin at the end of October. The country had already authorised booster shots for cancer patients, nursing home residents and other vulnerable groups.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/spain-approves-covid-booster-shot-over-70s-2021-10-05/>

New Zealand to phase out zero-covid strategy, Jacinda Ardern says

After months of back-and-forth between virus-free life and lockdowns, New Zealand will phase out its pursuit of zero covid-19 cases and instead rely on vaccines to allow the country to live with the coronavirus. Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said on Monday that New Zealand will transition from relying on harsh restrictions, instead using vaccines and “everyday public health measures” to keep residents safe. She added that the change was one “we were always going to make over time.” But the delta variant, Ardern said, had “accelerated” this transition. New Zealand’s admission that it cannot fully eliminate the virus and must instead learn to live with it marks a dramatic shift from the strategy it had employed throughout the pandemic

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/10/05/new-zealand-zero-covid-strategy/>

Johnson & Johnson seeks emergency authorization from FDA for coronavirus booster shot

Johnson & Johnson asked the Food and Drug Administration on Tuesday to grant emergency use authorization for a booster dose of its single-shot coronavirus vaccine. The action is part of an effort by Biden administration officials to provide increased protection against covid-19, the disease caused by the coronavirus, which has claimed more than 700,000 lives in the United States. Johnson & Johnson “is asking the FDA to look at our data and agree with us that we have enough data to support a boost” for people 18 and older, said Mathai Mammen, global head of research and development for the Janssen Pharmaceuticals division of Johnson & Johnson.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2021/10/05/johnson-johnson-booster-covid-vaccine/>

Australia to buy experimental Covid-19 drug - Morrison

Australia is to purchase 300,000 courses of Merck & Co's experimental antiviral pill, Prime Minister Scott Morrison said. The announcement came as Victoria logged the highest number of daily

Covid-19 infections of any state in the country since the pandemic began. Molnupiravir, which would be the first oral antiviral medication for Covid-19 if it gets regulatory approval, could halve the chances of dying or being hospitalised for people most at risk of contracting severe Covid-19, according to experts.

<https://www.rte.ie/news/coronavirus/2021/10/05/1250764-global-covid/>

EU regulator OKs Pfizer vaccine booster for 18 and older

The European Union's drug regulator gave its backing Monday to administering booster shots of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine for people 18 and older. The European Medicines Agency said the booster doses "may be considered at least 6 months after the second dose for people aged 18 years and older." The agency's human medicines committee issued the recommendation after studying data for the Pfizer vaccine that showed a rise in antibody levels following boosters given around 6 months after the second dose in people from 18 to 55 years old. The agency also said it supports giving a third dose of either the Pfizer-BioNTech or the Moderna vaccine to people with severely weakened immune systems at least 28 days after their second shot.

<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-business-european-union-europe-coronavirus-vaccine-c045dcf8099d8bbe4144ce61bd8e1a6a>

Maintaining Services

Arizona can't use COVID money for anti-mask grants, feds say

The Biden administration on Tuesday ordered Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey to stop using the state's federal pandemic funding on a pair of new education grants that can only be directed to schools without mask mandates. In a letter to Ducey, the Treasury Department said the grant programs are "not a permissible use" of the federal funding. It's the latest attempt by the Biden administration to push back against Republican governors who have opposed mask mandates and otherwise sought to use federal pandemic funding to advance their own agendas. Ducey, a Republican, created the grant programs in August to put pressure on school districts that have defied the state's ban on mask mandates.

<https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-doug-ducey-arizona-health-education-eeef3cfa74d609eecdcd71d6cc2cdd3c>

English Schools Drop Mask Mandates, but Questions Rise Along With Cases

England took a high-stakes gamble when it sent millions of students back to school last month with neither vaccines nor a requirement to wear face masks, even as the coronavirus continued to course through the population. On Tuesday, the country's Education Department issued its latest report card on how the plan is working: 186,000 students were absent from school on Sept. 30 with confirmed or suspected cases of the virus, 78 percent more than the number reported on Sept. 16, and the highest number since the pandemic began. Yet to hear many parents tell it, the bigger risk would have been to force the students to keep wearing masks or, worse, to keep them home.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/05/world/europe/england-schools-masks-mandate.html>

Rapid COVID-19 tests increasingly scarce, pricey as demand from employers jumps

Surging demand for COVID-19 tests from U.S. employers has exacerbated a nationwide shortage of rapid tests in recent weeks and is driving up costs for state and local testing programs, according to industry executives and state officials. Testmakers including Abbott Laboratories, Quidel Corp and LumiraDX Ltd are scaling up production to meet rising demand. But significantly boosting test output will take weeks to months, half a dozen industry executives told Reuters, making the tests harder to procure in the near term.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/rapid-covid-19-tests-increasingly-scarce-pricey-demand-employers-jumps-2021-10-05/>

Thai Red Cross delivers COVID-19 vaccines to Thailand's vulnerable migrant workers

The Thai Red Cross Society kicked off a vaccination campaign on Tuesday for migrant workers, one of the country's most vulnerable groups that has been largely left behind in the broader COVID-19 inoculation rollout. About 300 workers received their first doses along with a small number of undocumented refugees as part of a campaign due to run until the end of the month that is initially targeting 5,000 workers. "The more migrant workers we're able to vaccinate, the better for the Thai people, too," said Tej Bunnag, secretary-general of the Thai Red Cross Society.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/thai-red-cross-delivers-covid-19-vaccines-thailands-vulnerable-migrant-workers-2021-10-05/>

Covid-19: November vaccines 'likely' for 12 to 15-year-olds

It is likely to be November before most schools in Northern Ireland begin to vaccinate 12 to 15-year-old pupils. Letters and consent forms for the Covid-19 vaccine are expected to be sent to parents of eligible children in mid-to-late October, according to the Public Health Agency (PHA). The UK's four chief medical officers have recommended healthy 12 to 15-year-olds be offered one vaccine dose. Vaccinations for pupils in Scotland and England are already taking place. However, the approach being taken by each nation differs.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-58795317>

India begins delivering Covid-19 vaccines by drone

In India, the vast landscape, difficult terrain and remote location of some of its population has presented challenges for the coronavirus vaccine drive. Officials in the vast nation have come up with a unique solution to deliver the vaccine to such areas; by drafting in drones. The drones can travel up to 22 miles and could bring the country closer to its target of vaccinating each of its 950 million adults by the end of this year. The system has already been used to transport Covid vaccines from a hospital in north east state of Manipur to a health centre on Karang Island, which lies 10 miles away in the middle of a lake.

<https://www.itv.com/news/2021-10-05/india-begins-delivering-covid-19-vaccines-by-drone>

At a rural ICU, Covid-19's summer surge put telehealth to the test

On the surface, there's little about Whitfield Regional Hospital that would make it a safety net for Alabama's sickest Covid-19 patients. It has a small ICU with eight beds, and no critical care doctors on staff. The rural hospital has spent decades focused on caring for the community surrounding Demopolis, population 7,000, in the heart of the state's Black Belt. But over the summer, Whitfield became an unlikely landing pad for critically ill Covid-19 patients from across the entire state — with the help of a team of telemedicine specialists calling in from more than 100 miles away. As Covid-19 swept through unvaccinated communities, every ICU bed in the state was full for weeks on end — including those at the state's largest hospital, at the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

<https://www.statnews.com/2021/10/05/telemedicine-icu-covid19-hospitals/>

Healthcare Innovations

EU Panel May Start Accelerated Review of Merck's Covid Pill

A European Union advisory committee will consider starting an accelerated review for Merck & Co.'s experimental antiviral pill against Covid-19 following the company's announcement last week that it will seek emergency-use authorization from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration as soon as possible. The panel will consider starting a "rolling review" in coming days, Marco Cavaleri, the head of biological health threats and vaccines strategy at the European Medicines Agency, said at a press briefing Tuesday. That's a procedure where data is evaluated as it becomes available to speed up the process. Merck's new drug, molnupiravir, has led to optimism about the course of the pandemic after early studies show the drug has the potential to cut the rate of hospitalization and death by around 50% in mild to moderate Covid patients.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-10-05/eu-panel-may-start-accelerated-review-of-merck-s-covid-pill>

Long Covid Symptoms May Be Caused by Micro Clots, Scientists Say

Some of the symptoms of so-called long-covid, the ailments that can persist for months after a Covid-19 infection, may be caused by inflammatory molecules trapped inside tiny blood clots, a scientist at South Africa's Stellenbosch University said. High levels of inflammatory molecules were found in micro clots in blood samples from people with long-covid, Resia Pretorius, a researcher at the university, said in a statement on Monday. The molecules contained fibrinogen, a clotting protein, and alpha(2)-antiplasmin, which prevents the breakdown of blood clots, she said. These "might be the cause of some of the lingering symptoms experienced by individuals with long-covid," the university said in the statement. This "provides further evidence that Covid-19, and now long-covid, have significant cardiovascular and clotting pathologies."

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-10-05/long-covid-symptoms-may-be-caused-by-micro-clots-scientists-say>

Pfizer/BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine effectiveness drops after 6 months, study shows

The effectiveness of the Pfizer Inc/BioNTech SE vaccine in preventing infection by the coronavirus dropped to 47% from 88% six months after the second dose, according to data published on Monday that U.S. health agencies considered when deciding on the need for booster shots. The data, which was published in the Lancet medical journal, had been previously released in August ahead of peer review. The analysis showed that the vaccine's effectiveness in preventing hospitalization and death remained high at 90% for at least six months, even against the highly contagious Delta variant of the coronavirus.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/pfizerbiontech-covid-19-vaccine-effectiveness-drops-after-6-months-study-2021-10-04/>

CHMP positive option for Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine in the EU

Pfizer and BioNTech have announced that the Committee for Medicinal Products for Human Use (CHMP) has issued a positive opinion for the administration of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine as a booster shot six months after the second dose. CHMP, part of the EMA, has approved the use of the booster jab for individuals over the age of 18. Following the CHMP positive opinion, the European Commission (EC) will make a final decision on its update to the vaccine's current Conditional Marketing Authorisation in the EU. In the clinical trial data provided by Pfizer and BioNTech, the COVID-19 vaccine, Comirnaty, was found to elicit significantly higher neutralising antibody titers against SARS-CoV-2, and protection from both the Beta and Delta variants of the disease.

https://www.pharmatimes.com/news/chmp_positive_option_for_pfizer-biontech_covid-19_vaccine_in_the_eu_1379864

Merck and Ridgeback Biotherapeutics' Oral Antiviral COVID-19 Treatment Reduces Risk of Hospitalization or Death by 50%

Merck, known as MSD outside of the United States and Canada, and Ridgeback Therapeutics announced on Oct. 1st, 2021, that their investigational oral antiviral medicine molnupiravir significantly reduced severe outcomes associated with COVID-19. According to a planned interim analysis, molnupiravir reduced the risk of hospitalization or death by 50% in non-hospitalized adult COVID-19 patients with mild-to-moderate symptoms. According to a company press release, 7.3% of patients who received molnupiravir (28/385) were either hospitalized or died through Day 29 of the study. Conversely, 14.1% of patients given placebo (53/377) were either hospitalized or died as a result of COVID-19 through Day 29. Additionally, no patients that were given molnupiravir died, whereas eight of those given the placebo did.

<https://www.pharmtech.com/view/merck-and-ridgeback-biotherapeutics-oral-antiviral-covid-19-treatment-reduces-risk-of-hospitalization-or-death-by-50->