

Connecting Communities for COVID19 News

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Isolation Tips

Beijing Cautiously Reopens After Covid-19 Wave

China's capital took tentative steps toward reopening on Monday as much of Beijing lifted restrictions on dining in restaurants and many workers returned to their offices. But new flare-ups of Covid-19 clusters around the country and fresh lockdowns in parts of Shanghai continued to pose major risks for China's economy. For more than a month, Beijing health authorities imposed increasingly stringent measures on the city's businesses and residents' personal movements in a bid to stamp out the Chinese capital's worst Covid-19 outbreak since the early days of the pandemic. City officials say those efforts are working as new daily infections have dipped to around a dozen cases or fewer in recent days, following weeks of mass testing of much of the city's more than 20 million residents. By allowing restaurants, gyms and other businesses to reopen, Beijing authorities are signaling that they believe they have managed to control the latest outbreak without having to resort to the sorts of harsh lockdown measures experienced recently in Shanghai and elsewhere.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/beijing-cautiously-reopens-after-covid-19-wave-11654519507>

Hygiene Helpers

Covid-19: Hong Kong steps up checks on bars and restaurants as cases linked to nightlife area rise

Hong Kong has seen an uptick in Covid-19 infections amid the recent easing of social distancing rules, with clusters linked to a number of bars in Central. In the seven-day period from last Monday to Sunday, authorities confirmed an average of 153 positive nucleic acid tests per day, up from 103.9 the week before.

<https://hongkongfp.com/2022/06/06/covid-19-hong-kong-steps-up-checks-on-bars-and-restaurants-as-cases-linked-to-nightlife-area-rise/>

XpresSpa and Ginkgo Bioworks Are Hunting For New Covid Variants at Airports

As the pandemic engulfed the world in March 2020, no one was thinking much about getting a manicure. So XpresSpa Group Inc., an airport chain that offers mani-pedis and massages to travelers, closed all 50 of its locations. To survive the next two years, it would have to pivot. It turned to the most obvious next market: Covid testing. Through a partnership with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and synthetic biology firm Ginkgo Bioworks Inc., XpresSpa launched a surveillance operation to hunt for new and emerging Covid variants among international travelers. Over the last eight months, the trio has tested tens of thousands of passengers arriving from more than 15 countries around the globe.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-06-05/xpresspa-and-ginkgo-bioworks-are-hunting-for-new-covid-variants-at-airports>

Community Activities

UK shoppers cut spending by most since COVID lockdown in 2021

British shoppers facing a surge in inflation cut their spending in May by the most since the country was in a coronavirus lockdown in early 2021, according to a survey published on Tuesday. The British Retail Consortium (BRC) said total retail spending was 1.1% lower than a year earlier, the biggest fall since January last year and representing an acceleration from April's 0.3% decline.

<https://www.reuters.com/markets/europe/uk-shoppers-cut-spending-by-most-since-covid-lockdown-2021-2022-06-06/>

Turkey removes all Covid-related restrictions for Indian travellers

Turkey has relaxed all the conditions for travellers entering the country and is expecting to welcome the highest-ever number of Indian tourists this year, Turkiye Tourism Board said on Monday. Earlier, Indian travellers were required to submit either a vaccination certificate or an RT-PCR test report to visit Turkey, according to a statement. Now, Indian travellers no longer have to show proof of vaccination against coronavirus or proof of recovery from the disease or a negative RT-PCR test result, it added. With both Indigo and Turkish Airlines resuming direct international flights to Turkiye, the country is expecting to welcome the highest-ever number of Indian tourists this year, it said.

<https://www.msn.com/en-in/news/other/turkey-removes-all-covid-related-restrictions-for-indian-travellers/ar-AAy8pnE>

U.S. aims to ramp up international tourism hit hard by COVID

The U.S. Commerce Department on Monday will unveil a new strategy aimed at boosting international tourism hit hard by COVID-19 and government travel restrictions by streamlining the entry process and promoting more diverse destinations. The "National Travel and Tourism Strategy" sets a goal of 90 million international visitors by 2027 who will spend an estimated \$279 billion annually, topping pre-pandemic levels, the department told Reuters.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-aims-ramp-up-international-tourism-hit-hard-by-covid-2022-06-06/>

Working Remotely

Remote, hybrid work dividing Canadian employees as many required on-site

Remote work flourished during the pandemic as companies temporarily closed their offices, but it has created a schism among Canadian workers. While 40 per cent of work in Canada can be done remotely, experts say, that means 60 per cent of workers are unable to access this benefit because they are required to be on-site. And that can create resentment and a backlash from workers viewed as essential, such as nurses, ambulance workers and retail employees, who were applauded during the pandemic but are unable to realize the benefits that come from working remotely, said change management expert Linda Duxbury

<https://globalnews.ca/news/8897956/remote-hybrid-work-divisions-canada/>

Flexible work won't solve employee isolation and loneliness

When work shifted to remote settings for many employers in early 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, companies assumed the situation would be temporary. However, as months stretched into years, much of the working population found that they enjoyed working remotely, at least part of the time. In a 2021 remote work survey, background check provider GoodHire found that 68% of employees preferred working from home, with nearly half declaring they'd either quit or search for new jobs offering remote work if their employers ordered them to return to the office. Many employees expressed they'd take a pay cut or forfeit benefits in exchange for remote work options.

<https://www.fastcompany.com/90758227/why-a-flexible-workplace-shouldnt-mean-we-ignore-individual-employee-experiences>

Working remotely? How to talk to your boss if you're worried about being overlooked

As the return-to-office debate drags on, some executives are sending the message that long-term flexible work will come at a price, namely losing out on opportunities to get ahead. Leaders have the most power to stop proximity bias by being conscious of it and changing up processes, like by letting remote participants speak first during hybrid meetings. But some will still default to thinking in-person work gives the best results, so you'll need to speak up about keeping your remote flexibility while also "showing up" in a way they'll understand. Advocating for yourself as a remote worker can feel daunting, but it's not too different from working in an office and being encouraged to socialize or "walk the floor," says therapist, author and podcast host Esther Perel. You'll just have to be more upfront about it and change up how you get face-time with your manager or their boss.

<https://www.cnn.com/2022/06/06/how-to-talk-to-your-boss-about-being-overlooked-while-working-remotely.html>

Virtual Classrooms

Uses for Audiovisual Technology Beyond Remote Learning

K-12 school districts invested in many remote learning devices for teachers and students to ensure continued education during the pandemic. Districts rolled out one-to-one device programs and opted for peripherals that supported remote learning. Of these, webcams and microphones were two of the most popular products. Frequently, districts purchased USB plug-and-play peripherals for learning, but they also made large investments in classroom technology such as pan-tilt-zoom cameras. These technologies served as a life raft during emergency remote learning. However, now that students are largely back in classrooms, some schools are struggling to find ways to use these audiovisual devices.

<https://edtechmagazine.com/k12/article/2022/06/uses-audiovisual-technology-beyond-remote-learning>

Public Policies

Egypt pledges 30 mln COVID-19 vaccine doses to African states

President Abdel Fatah al-Sisi says that Egypt would supply fellow African states with 30 million doses of anti-COVID-19 vaccines. The president made this announcement on Sunday during the maiden edition of Africa Health ExCon, online news portal, Egypt today reported. This is in fulfilment of the country's selection as one of six African states that would receive the mRNA technology used in the manufacturing of vaccines and other medical drugs necessary to confront many incurable diseases. Egypt was among Senegal, Kenya, South Africa, Tunisia and Nigeria that were selected for this purpose in early 2022. Africa Health ExCon is held by the Egyptian Authority for Unified Procurement (UPA) and is attended by participants from around 100 countries.

<https://www.africanews.com/2022/06/06/egypt-pledges-30-mln-covid-19-vaccine-doses-to-african-states/>

East European countries ask EU to reopen vaccine contracts

A group of ten Eastern European countries have petitioned the European Commission to renegotiate coronavirus vaccine contracts, in a letter seen by POLITICO that cites an oversupply of doses and the need to protect state finances. Contracts should be able to be terminated "if they are no longer needed from a health and epidemiological perspective," reads one of the letter's demands. In other cases, it should be possible to reduce the number of doses that are ordered so that they better reflect the demand for shots. The letter was sent Friday night and is addressed to EU Health Commissioner Stella Kyriakides. Poland led the initiative, and the letter was also signed by Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia. A number of countries in Eastern Europe had previously raised concerns that existing coronavirus vaccine contracts, signed at the height of the pandemic when the EU was under intense public pressure to procure jabs, have locked them into buying too many doses that are now not needed.

<https://www.politico.eu/article/eastern-europe-coronavirus-vaccine-commission/>

Maintaining Services

Pfizer to spend \$120 mln to boost U.S. COVID pill manufacturing

Pfizer Inc said on Monday it would spend \$120 million to expand manufacturing of its COVID-19 antiviral treatment at its Michigan plant, as demand ramps up. Use of the pill, Paxlovid, authorized to treat newly infected, at-risk people to prevent severe illness, has soared recently as infections rise. Biden administration officials have pushed for the wider use of Paxlovid, which the government distributes for free

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/pfizer-spend-120-mln-boost-us-covid-pill-manufacturing-2022-06-06/>

Beijing reopens restaurants as new COVID-19 cases drop

Diners returned to restaurants in most of Beijing for the first time in more than a month Monday as

authorities further eased pandemic-related restrictions after largely eradicating a small COVID-19 outbreak in the capital under China's strict "zero-COVID" approach. Museums, cinemas and gyms were allowed to operate at up to 75% of capacity and delivery drivers could once again bring packages to a customer's door, rather than leave them to be picked up at the entrances to apartment compounds. The return to near-normal applied everywhere in Beijing except for one district and part of another, where the outbreak lingered. Schools, which partially reopened earlier, will fully do so on June 13, followed by kindergartens on June 20. Authorities conducted multiple rounds of mass testing and locked down buildings and complexes when infections were discovered to stamp out an outbreak that infected about 1,800 people over six weeks in a city of 22 million. The number of new cases dropped to six on Sunday. The ruling Communist Party remains wedded to a "zero-COVID" strategy that exacts an economic cost and inconveniences millions of people, even as many other countries adopt a more relaxed approach as vaccination rates rise and treatments become more widely available.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/diners-ap-beijing-covid-china-b2094667.html>

Healthcare Innovations

COVID-19 increases risk of psychiatric diagnoses in the months after infection, OSU study finds

A recent Oregon State University study found that COVID-19 patients had a roughly 25% increased risk of developing a psychiatric disorder in the four months following their infection, compared with people who had other types of respiratory tract infections. The findings support previous research on psychiatric disorders among post-COVID patients, though the current study found a smaller effect than the earlier studies, said co-author Lauren Chan, a Ph.D. student in nutrition in OSU's College of Public Health and Human Sciences. For the current study, published in *World Psychiatry*, researchers used data from the National COVID Cohort Collaborative (N3C) to match 46,610 COVID-19 positive individuals with control patients who were diagnosed with a different respiratory tract infection so they could compare how COVID specifically affected patients' mental health.

<https://today.oregonstate.edu/news/covid-19-increases-risk-psychiatric-diagnoses-months-after-infection-osu-study-finds>

Strong T-cell response for blood cancer patients after vaccine; COVID breakthrough often serious for cancer patients

The following is a summary of some recent studies on COVID-19 and cancer presented at the annual meeting of the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) in Chicago. Blood cancer patients show strong T-cell response to COVID vaccines. Patients with blood cancers have a significantly weaker antibody response to COVID-19 vaccines than patients with solid tumors, but they may still be well protected against severe illness from the virus, new data suggests.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/strong-t-cell-response-blood-cancer-patients-after-vaccine-covid-breakthrough-2022-06-06/>

Ofatumumab for Multiple Sclerosis Does Not Increase COVID-19 Severity

No increased risk for breakthrough COVID-19 infection, severe COVID-19, or fatal outcomes among patients receiving ofatumumab for relapsing multiple sclerosis (MS) was found in an updated analysis presented at the 2022 Annual Meeting of the Consortium of Multiple Sclerosis Centers (CMSC) held from June 1-4, in National Harbor, Maryland. SARS-CoV-2 is associated with a severe respiratory infection which can be fatal. Since the beginning of the pandemic, there has been concern and uncertainty about specific risks for patients receiving disease-modifying therapy (DMT).

<https://www.neurologyadvisor.com/conference-highlights/cmhc-2022/ofatumumab-multiple-sclerosis-covid-19-severity/>

Long-term exposure to air pollution associated with greater risk of severe COVID-19

Long-term exposure to air pollution is linked to a greater risk of severe COVID-19, new research being presented at Euroanaesthesia, the annual meeting of the European Society of Anaesthesiology and Intensive Care (ESAIC) in Milan, Italy (4-6 June), finds. The German study found that people living in counties with higher levels of the pollutant nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) were more likely to need ICU care and mechanical ventilation if they had COVID-19. Long-term exposure to NO₂, a gas released into the atmosphere when fossil fuels are burned, can have harmful effects on the lungs. This includes damage to the endothelial cells, which play a key role in oxygen transfer – the transfer of oxygen from inhaled air to the blood.

<https://www.news-medical.net/news/20220606/Long-term-exposure-to-air-pollution-associated-with-greater-risk-of-severe-COVID-19.aspx>

U.S. FDA flags risk of heart inflammation after Novavax COVID vaccine

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has raised concerns about a possible risk of heart inflammation from Novavax Inc's COVID-19 vaccine, even as the company's data showed it could reduce the chances of mild-to-severe disease. In Novavax's nearly 30,000 patient trial, conducted between December 2020 and September 2021, there were four cases of a type of heart inflammation called myocarditis detected within 20 days of taking the protein-based shot. "These events raise the concern for a causal association with this vaccine, similar to the association documented with mRNA COVID-19 vaccines," FDA staff wrote in briefing documents released on Friday.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-fda-staff-says-novavax-vaccine-lowers-covid-risk-2022-06-03/>