



COVID-19 Weekly Update

17 February 2022

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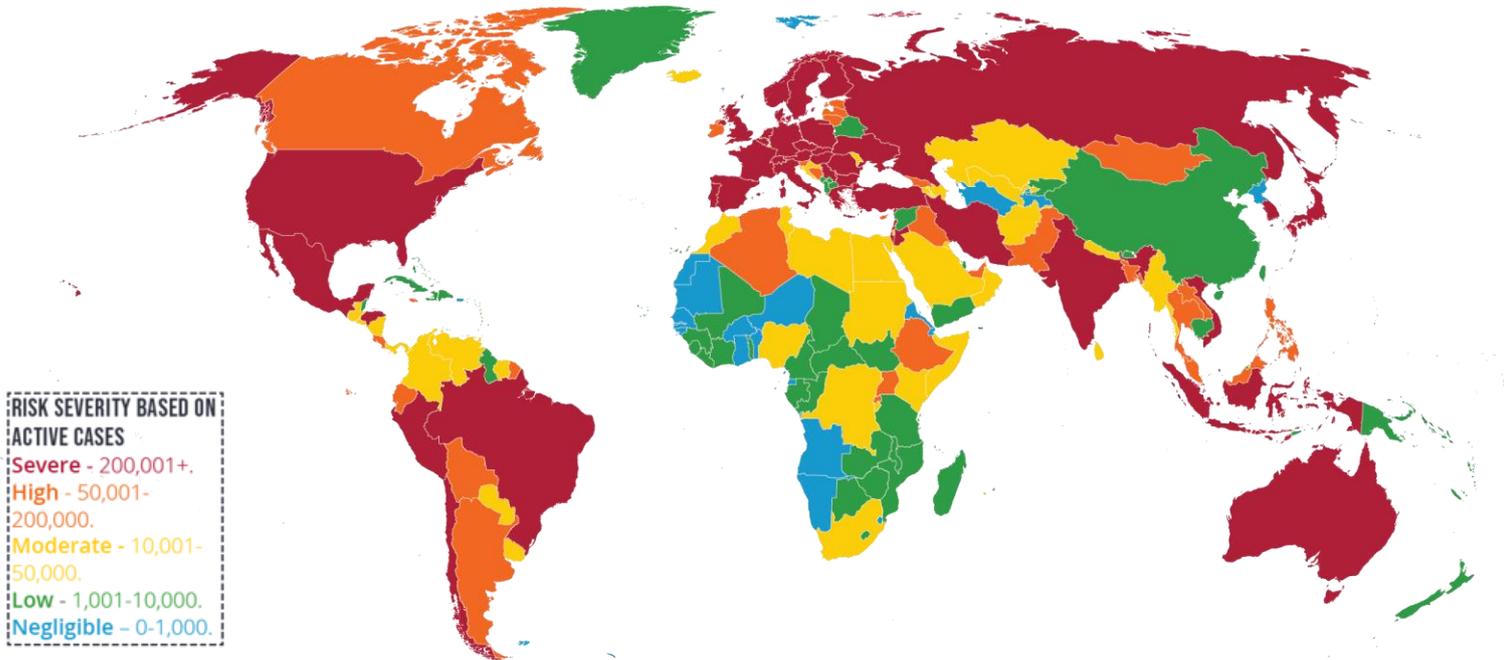
SOLACE GLOBAL

Executive Summary

The global incidence of COVID-19 has decreased for a second week in a row, this time by nineteen percent. The number of global fatalities however has increased slightly to 75,000. The total number of new weekly cases was around sixteen million compared to nineteen million whilst the death rate has risen from 68,000.

Russia and Germany have both surpassed the United States this week to report the highest new weekly infection count, with 1.32 million cases, with Russia reporting a weekly increase of twenty-three percent, whilst levels remained broadly similar in Germany. The United States has seen a forty-three percent decrease lowering its weekly new infections to 1.23 million. The United States remains the nation reporting the highest weekly death toll, with over 17,000 new deaths, whilst Brazil reported over 6,600 new deaths a forty-four percent increase.

Overall, the pandemic continues to be dominated by the Omicron variant with the variant making up 98.3 percent of genetic submissions to GISAID. This week saw no sequencing reported for the variants, Alpha, Beta, Gamma or Mu. Delta made up 1.7 percent whilst less than 0.1 percent were Lambda.



Notable Updates

The Novavax vaccine has recently been introduced in several countries, including the European Union, Australia, Singapore and the United Kingdom. Governments hope that the Novavax jab will encourage uptake amongst vaccine-hesitant segments of their populations. Many of those who are hesitant cite the mRNA technology used by the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines, which has never been used before, as the reason for their hesitancy. In contrast, the Novavax vaccine uses a long-established protein technology used to provide vaccination for diseases such as hepatitis B, bacterial meningitis, and the human papillomavirus that causes cervical cancer. Data from several German states indicate that several unvaccinated citizens are willing to be administered with the Novavax jab. In Rhineland Palatinate, for example, some 14,300 people have put their names onto the state’s Novavax waiting list.

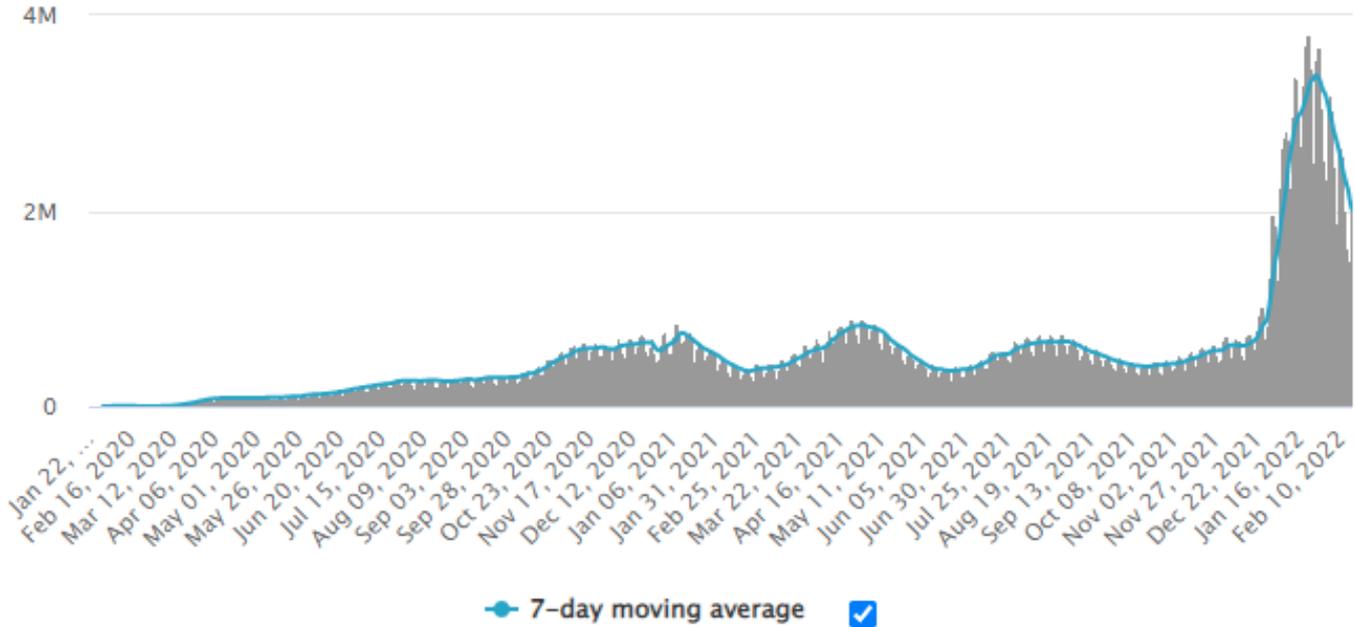
Whilst cases linked to the Omicron variant in Western Europe look as though they are beginning to decline, the World Health Organisation has warned that the variant will soon lead to a ‘tidal wave’ of cases in Eastern Europe. Six countries in the region, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Russia, and Ukraine, have seen a doubling of cases in the previous two weeks. Additionally, ten Eastern European countries have now detected the Omicron variant. As a result, the WHO has called on governments in the region to boost vaccination efforts. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Kyrgyzstan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan, less than 40 percent of the population has been fully vaccinated. In addition to this, the healthcare sector of Bulgaria, Georgia, and North Macedonia each have less than 40 percent of their workers receiving at least one dose of a vaccine.

In the West, the so called ‘Freedom Convoys’ that originated in Canada against COVID-19 regulations, have inspired similar protest action in other countries. In Canada itself, protesters were responsible for the closing of the Ambassador Bridge connecting Ontario with Michigan, with truckers in Ottawa prompting Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to invoke national emergency laws for the first time. On 12 February, French police deployed tear gas against a convoy of vehicles attempting to enter Paris. Similar such convoys were reported in Brussels and West Jerusalem. In New Zealand, a small group of protesters continue to remain in the vicinity of the parliament building in Wellington, with municipal authorities in the city worried that protesters will trigger further community transmission in the capital.

Daily Case and Death Graphs via *Worldometer*

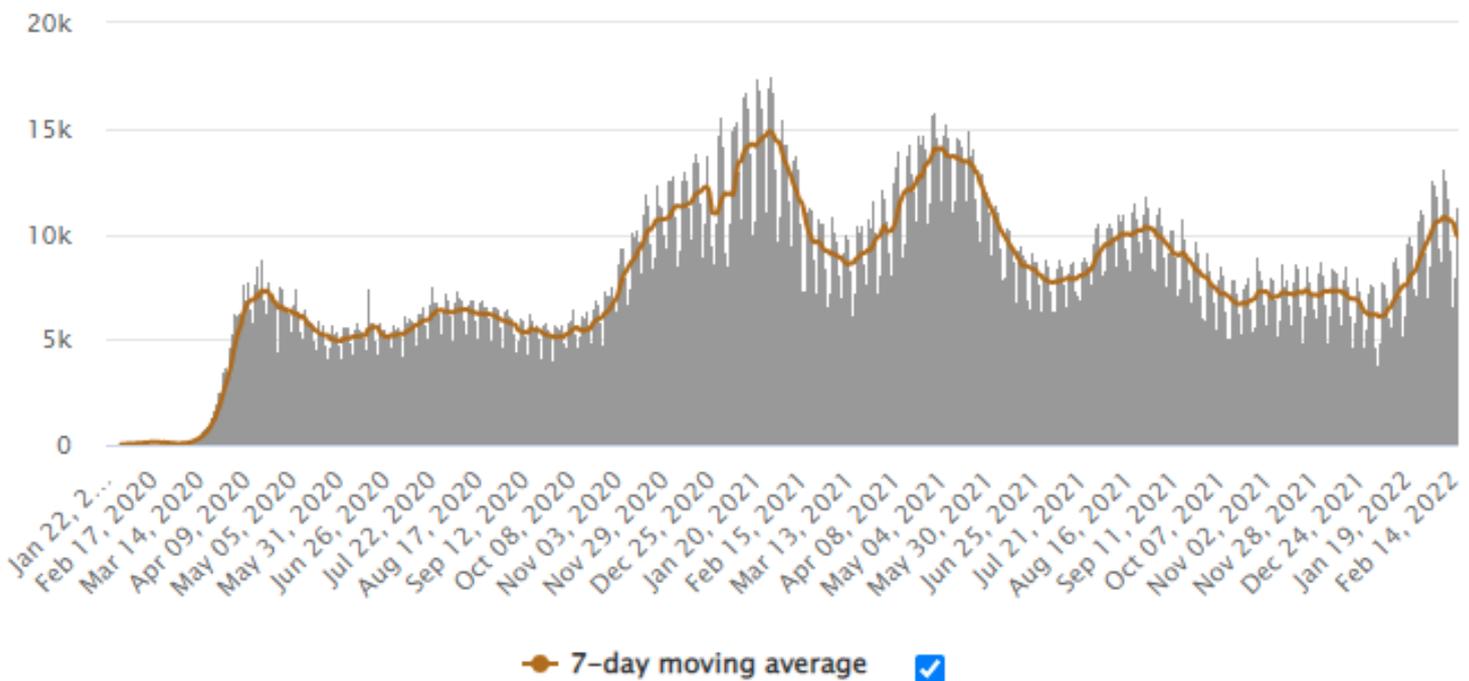
Daily New Cases

Cases per Day
Data as of 0:00 GMT+0



Daily Deaths

Deaths per Day
Data as of 0:00 GMT+0



Select Country Updates

South Korea

COVID-19 cases continue to spike in South Korea. The daily infection rate has consistently been above 50,000 in recent days. The government anticipates that cases will continue to rise and hit a peak of between 130,000 to 170,000 cases.

The U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention updated its travel notice for South Korea to level 4, the highest risk, advising Americans to avoid travel to the country or to make sure they are fully vaccinated if traveling is necessary.

Deaths have also begun to rise. Sixty-one deaths were reported on 15 February, the highest number since the seventy-four reported on 19 January.

On 14 February, the country reported that there were 306 patients in intensive care. This was the first time in 17 days that the intensive care occupancy was above three hundred. Despite this, occupancy remains well below the total national capacity of 1,500.

The government hope that the booster programme currently underway will slow an exponential rise in hospitalisations. Some 58 percent of the South Korean population has received a booster thus far.

Japan

Cases in Japan have begun a decline in recent days. The 5 February saw the highest daily total since the beginning of the pandemic at 102,275, whilst cases in 14 February stood at 60,053.

Deaths in the country continue to rise and are at the highest seen since the start of the pandemic. 149 deaths were reported on 14 February,

On 15 February, Japan signed an agreement with Pfizer to purchase an additional ten million vaccine doses by March. In addition, the government has agreed to buy ninety-three million shots from Moderna and 150 million shots this year from Novavax.

The country has opened new vaccination centres operated by the Self Defence Forces (SDF) with the aim to increase booster rollout. The current booster rollout is far lower than other developed countries at 9.5 percent.

On 17 February, the Japanese government announced the easing of border controls. The daily cap on international arrivals is set to increase to 5,000 from 3,500. Arrivals from countries with a lower risk will have a reduced quarantine time of three days rather than one week. These measures are expected to come in effect from March.

Hong Kong

The Special Administrative Region of Hong Kong has seen a severe rise in cases amid a fifth wave of

infections. Cases have risen from around one hundred at the start of February to more than 1,300 on 13 February, which has all but destroyed the government's previous 'zero-COVID' strategy.

Hospital beds for COVID patients are at 90 percent capacity, with worst case scenario forecasts predicting a peak of 28,000 daily infections.

Given that Hong Kong imports 90 percent of its food, coupled with a deluge of lorry drivers testing positive for COVID, supply disruptions have occurred.

In response, mainland China announced that it would assist Hong Kong with tests, quarantine, and resources for medical treatment. The Beijing government continues to refuse permission to reopen the border until the city reaches zero cases. In a rare intervention, President Xi Jinping has urged the Hong Kong government to 'take all necessary measures' to bring the surge in cases under control.

Public gatherings of more than two individuals remain banned, and most public venues remain closed. Employees are instructed to work from home and restaurants must close at 18:00 each day.

Egypt

Egypt has begun to see a decline from an Omicron-driven all time high. On 14 February, daily cases stood at 2,129 and deaths at 62. Vaccines in use in the country include Sinovac, Sinopharm, AstraZeneca, Sputnik, Johnson & Johnson, Pfizer, and Moderna, with the country being rare in using such a wide array of vaccines.

Health Minister Khaled Abdel Gaffar announced on 16 February that the drug Molnupiravir, manufactured by Merck and believed to cut hospitalisations and deaths by up to 30 percent amongst high-risk patients, will be sold in government-affiliated pharmacies. Lateral flow testing kits will also be made available at pharmacies for the first time since the start of the pandemic.

The Egyptian Health Ministry has ordered hospitals to convert into COVID-only facilities, and to increase the number of beds in the internal departments and intensive care units designated for patients with coronavirus to 50 percent of the total number of beds as a minimum.

Russia

Russia continues to see the highest rates of new infections globally, but like other countries, the Omicron-driven surge has peaked. On 15 February, Russia reported a total of 180,456 new infections and 683 deaths. Hospitalisations have reached a record high of 21,833.

From 21 February, Russians will be able to take an

antibody test to obtain a COVID health pass. QR codes will be issued for those who test positive for COVID antibodies regardless of if they are vaccinated.

Germany

Germany continues to see the highest rates of infection in Europe and the second highest globally after Russia. On 14 February, Germany saw 76,400 new infections, a decline from 20 percent from the previous week. Forty-two additional deaths were also recorded.

The German federal and state governments have planned a phased easing of COVID restrictions. Initially, indoor gatherings with more than ten individuals would be allowed. From 4 March, nightclubs will be permitted to reopen. The final phase is expected on 20 March when the rule for employees to work from home will end. Health officials anticipate a plateauing of cases to be followed by a decline in the coming weeks.

Canada

The provinces of Canada continue to ease restrictions amid a nationwide decline in cases. This week, Ontario Premier Doug Ford announced that the country's most populous province would end its COVIDproof of vaccination requirements to enter public venues on 1 March. Capacity limits in restaurants also ended on 17 February, four days earlier than planned. The mandate to wear face coverings in public settings remains in effect until further notice.

On the other side of the country in British Columbia,

Provincial Health officer Dr Bonnie Henry announced a plan for gradually easing COVID restrictions on 15 February.

Meanwhile, in Nova Scotia, Phase 1 of the province's restriction easing plan began on 14 February. All restrictions on domestic travellers were lifted, with retail venues able to operate at full capacity. Phase 1 is due to last for a month before restrictions are further eased in Phase 2 before being fully brought to an end a month later in Phase 3.

Chile

The government of Chile has announced that the fourth round of vaccinations has opened in the country. Initially the fourth vaccination dose is for all those over the age of fifty-five. The opening up for a fourth round of vaccinations comes as the country sees its highest rate of infections since the pandemic. Health authorities are recording over 35,000 cases a day at the time of writing.

The vaccination rate in Chile is an impressive 94 percent, which is both one of the highest in the world, and also the highest within Latin America. The country was one of the initial non-Chinese countries to use the SinoVac developed vaccine. Research later showed this vaccine was significantly less likely to protect against catching COVID-19 compared to other vaccines. This lack of complete protection is likely to be behind some of the high case numbers seen in the country currently, especially when coupled with the global prevalence of Omicron.