

News in brief

◆ **Germany reported a new daily record of 164,000 COVID-19 infections yesterday as the lower** house of parliament prepared to debate proposals to either require or robustly encourage residents to be vaccinated. Around 75% of the population have received at least one dose of a vaccine - less than in western European peers such as France, Italy or Spain, where the equivalent figures are 80%, 83% and 86% - and the vaccination campaign is stuttering. The proposals being debated include requiring all adult residents to be vaccinated against COVID-19, or only those above 50, or merely requiring all those who have not been vaccinated to receive counselling. Early on in the coronavirus pandemic, Germany was more successful than many of its peers in limiting infections through case tracking, strict lockdowns and quarantines.



**German parliament debates compulsory vaccination as COVID surges**

**COVID is less severe with Omicron than Delta, US study suggests**



◆ **The Omicron variant appears to result in less severe COVID-19 than seen during** previous periods of high

coronavirus transmission including the Delta wave, with shorter hospital stays, less need for intensive care and fewer deaths, according to a new US study. However, the fast-spreading Omicron variant has led to record numbers of infections and hospitalizations, straining the U.S. healthcare system. Despite the steep spike in COVID cases, the percentage of hospitalized patients admitted to intensive care units (ICU) during the current Omicron wave was about 29% lower than during last winter's surge and some 26% lower than during the Delta wave, the study published on Tuesday in the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report found. The lower COVID-19 disease severity during the Omicron period is likely related to higher vaccination coverage, booster use among those eligible for the extra shots, as well as prior infections providing some immune protection, the study said.

◆ **Early research suggesting that a popular non-psychoactive compound derived from marijuana might help prevent or treat COVID-19** warrants further investigation in rigorous clinical trials, researchers say. Several recent laboratory studies of cannabidiol, or CBD, have shown promising results, attracting media attention. However, many other potential COVID treatments that showed promise in test tubes, from hydroxychloroquine to various drugs used to treat cancer and other diseases, ultimately failed to show benefit for COVID-19 patients once studied in clinical trials. Marsha Rosner of the University of Chicago led a team that found CBD appeared to help curb SARS-CoV-2 in infected cells in laboratory experiments. "Our findings do not say this will work in patients. Our findings make a strong case for a clinical trial," she said. Using small doses of highly purified CBD that approximate what patients receive in an oral drug already approved for severe epilepsy, Rosner and colleagues found that CBD did not keep the coronavirus from infecting cells in test tubes. Rather, it acted soon after the virus entered the cells, blocking it from making copies of itself in part via effects on the inflammatory protein interferon. They found similar effects in infected mice, according to a report in Science Advances.

**Cannabis compound CBD stops coronavirus in test tube, but can it treat COVID?**

COVID-19 Countries worst affected

	Country	Total cases	Total deaths	Global tally
1	USA	73,449,185	894,880	360,046,061
2	India	40,085,116	491,154	
3	Brazil	24,334,072	623,901	
4	France	17,302,548	129,489	5,636,746
5	UK	16,047,716	154,356	
6	Russia	11,315,801	328,105	285,044,057
7	Turkey	11,090,493	86,299	
8	Italy	10,212,621	144,343	+880,789
9	Spain	9,395,767	92,376	
10	Germany	8,956,515	117,699	New deaths
11	Argentina	8,041,520	119,703	
12	Iran	6,279,410	132,303	+3,051
13	Colombia	5,780,910	132,737	
14	Mexico	4,730,669	303,776	

Middle East

Figures as of closing

Country	Total cases	new cases	Total deaths	New Deaths	Total recovered	Active cases
Egypt	413,558		22,431		347,557	43,570
Saudi Arabia	666,259	+4,526	8,927	+3	617,114	40,218
UAE	833,201	+2,369	2,228	+4	771,624	59,349
Kuwait	508,372		2,488		459,655	46,229
Oman	328,326	+2,162	4,133	+3	307,705	16,488
Qatar	328,644		637		293,182	34,825

# Saudi, Thailand agree to restore full

Reuters | Cairo

Saudi Arabia and Thailand agreed yesterday to exchange ambassadors in the first high-level meeting between the two countries since a row over a jewellery theft nearly three decades ago led the Gulf state to downgrade ties.

Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and visiting Thai Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha agreed on the appointment of ambassadors "in the near future" and to strengthen economic and trade relations, said a joint statement on Saudi state media.



A woman waves a flag as people celebrate Saudi Arabia's 90th annual National Day, amid the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabian Airlines announced in a Twitter post on Tuesday that it would restart direct flights to Thailand in May.

The statement said Prayuth expressed "sincere regret over the tragic events in Thailand between 1989 and 1990" and said his government was ready to "raise cases to the competent authorities in the event of new, relevant evidence".

The theft of the jewels remains one of Thailand's biggest unsolved mysteries and was followed by a bloody trail of destruction that saw some of Thailand's top police generals implicated.

# India celebrates 73rd Republic Day

Agencies

Thousands of Indians have braved chilly morning temperatures to gather on a ceremonial boulevard in the capital New Delhi to watch a display of the country's military power and cultural diversity, though the colourful spectacle was curtailed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Nearly 500 schoolchildren, folk dancers, police and military battalions, floats and stunt performers on motorbikes paraded from the presidential palace through the refurbished, tree-lined Rajpath Boulevard on Wednesday.

President Ram Nath Kovind took the salute from the marching columns, which also included a camel-mounted Border Security Force regiment, its moustachioed riders led by shiny brass bands with tubas.

The 90-minute parade ended with a flypast featuring 75 air force fighters, including Rafale jets, transport planes and helicopters.

Earlier on Wednesday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited the National War Memorial in New Delhi, where he laid a wreath as he paid his respects during a ceremony also attended by military personnel.

Only double-vaccinated adults and single-dose vaccinated children of 15 and above were allowed to attend the parade.

With COVID-19 cases surging around the country, attendance was slashed to between 5,000 and 8,000 from last year's 25,000, and there were no foreign guests of honour.

Republic Day marks the anniversary of the adoption of the country's constitution on January 26, 1950. India won independence from British colonial rule in 1947.



India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi talks to a presidential guard after the Republic Day parade

