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Inside C2

# Southern DAILY

Make Today Different

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## Germany, Italy, France suspend AstraZeneca shots amid safety fears, disrupting EU vaccinations

BERLIN/GENEVA (Reuters) - Germany, France and Italy said on Monday they would suspend AstraZeneca COVID-19 shots after several countries reported possible serious side-effects, but the World Health Organization

Teacher, Rene Kirstein, receives his first dose of AstraZeneca's COVID-19 vaccine from nurse Susanne Kugel, amid the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in Grevesmuelen, Germany, March 5, 2021. REUTERS/Fabian Bimmer (WHO) said there was no proven link and people should not panic.



Still, the decision by the European Union's three biggest countries to put inoculations with the AstraZeneca shot on hold threw the already struggling vaccination campaign in the 27-nation EU into disarray.

Denmark and Norway stopped giving the shot last week after reporting isolated cases of bleeding, blood clots and a low platelet count. Iceland and Bulgaria followed suit and Ireland and the Netherlands announced suspensions on Sunday.

Spain will stop using the vaccine for at least 15 days, Cadena Ser radio reported, citing unnamed sources.

The top WHO scientist reiterated on Monday that there have been no documented deaths linked to COVID-19 vaccines.

"We do not want people to panic," Soumya Swaminathan said on a virtual media briefing, adding there has been no association, so far, pinpointed between so-called "thromboembolic events" reported in some countries and COVID-19 shots.

WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said an advisory committee meeting on AstraZeneca would be held on Tuesday. EU medicines regulator EMA will also convene this week to assess the information gathered into whether the AstraZeneca shot contributed to thromboembolic events in those inoculated.

The moves by some of Europe's largest and most populous countries will deepen concerns about the slow

rollout of vaccines in the region, which has been plagued by shortages due to problems producing vaccines, including AstraZeneca's.

Germany warned last week it was facing a third wave of infections, Italy is intensifying lockdowns and hospitals in the Paris region are close to being overloaded.

German Health Minister Jens Spahn said that although the risk of blood clots was low, it could not be ruled out.

"This is a professional decision, not a political one," Spahn said, adding he was following a recommendation of the Paul Ehrlich Institute, Germany's vaccine regulator.

France said it was suspending the vaccine's use pending an assessment by EMA due on Tuesday.

"The decision taken, in conformity also with our European policy, is to suspend, out of precaution, vaccination with the AZ shot, hoping that we can resume quickly if the EMA's guidance allows," French President Emmanuel

Macron said.

Italy said its halt was a "precautionary and temporary measure" pending EMA's ruling. EU regulator to meet on Thursday to discuss AstraZeneca vaccine "The EMA will meet soon to clarify any doubts so that the AstraZeneca vaccine can be resumed safely in the vaccination campaign as soon as possible," said Gianni Rezza, Director General of Prevention at Italy's Ministry of Health.

Austria and Spain have stopped using particular batches and prosecutors in the northern Italian region of Piedmont earlier seized 393,600 doses following the death of a man hours after he was vaccinated. It was the second region to do so after Sicily, where two people had died shortly after having their shots.

The WHO appealed to countries not to suspend vaccinations against a disease that has caused more than 2.7 million deaths worldwide. WHO Director-General Tedros said systems were in place to protect public health.

"This does not necessarily mean these events are linked to COVID-19 vaccination, but it's routine practice to investigate them, and it shows that the surveillance system works and that effective controls are in place," he told the media briefing.

The United Kingdom said it had no concerns, while Poland said it thought the benefits outweighed any risks.

The EMA has said that as of March 10, a total of 30 cases of blood clotting had been reported among close to 5 million people vaccinated with the AstraZeneca shot in the European Economic Area, which links 30 European countries.

Michael Head, a senior research fellow in global health at the University of Southampton, said the decisions by France, Germany and others looked baffling.

"The data we have suggests that numbers of adverse events related to blood clots are the same (and possibly, in fact lower) in vaccinated groups compared to unvac-

inated populations," he said, adding that halting a vaccination programme had consequences.

"This results in delays in protecting people, and the potential for increased vaccine hesitancy, as a result of people who have seen the headlines and understandably become concerned. There are no signs yet of any data that really justify these decisions."

Italian medicine agency Aifa's general director, Nicola Magrini, said several European countries preferred to suspend the vaccine "in the presence of some very recent and very few cases of adverse events" in women and young people.

"...Those who have already had the vaccine can and must remain safe," she told a radio station. "I feel like saying the vaccine is safe, even having reviewed all the data."

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# WEA LEE'S GLOBAL NOTES

## CORONAVIRUS DIARY

03/15/2021

### We Are Fighting In The Battle Of Coronavirus

We attended the grand opening of Medx pharmacy in Houston's Chinatown. This is the first new business that has opened after the end of the pandemic. We are so proud of the owner of the pharmacy, Mr. Bin Yu, and his leadership in the community and the guts to open his new business in this difficult time.

I still remember on January 23, 2020, we were celebrating the Lunar New Year Festival at the Southern News compound. Mr. Yu brought 500 masks to our audience that was the time the coronavirus rumors were spreading around the town.

Nobody could imagine that after one



year we have lost more than one-half million lives in America. Here in Houston, in particular, we also suffered the winter storm and lost both power and water.

This horrible tragedy made it look like we were living in a third world country.

Today after President Biden signed the Rescue Bill, Texas Governor Abbott let all the businesses fully open up. We should now be at the end of the tunnel.

We want to congratulate Mr. Bin Yu for your courage to open a new business in Chinatown. This also represents the new Asian immigrants contribution to our society.

May God bless America. We pray that all of our brothers and sisters will get through this ordeal.



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**Southern DAILY** Make Today Different

## Editor's Choice



Asylum seeking unaccompanied minors hold hands amid adult migrants from Central America as they await transport after crossing the Rio Grande river into the United States from Mexico on a raft in Penitas, Texas. The unrelated minors, all from Honduras, are Pablo, 9, Doris, 6 and Marjorie, 11. REUTERS/Adrees Latif



Police detain a woman as people gather at a memorial site in Clapham Common Bandstand, following the kidnap and murder of Sarah Everard, in London, Britain. REUTERS/Hannah McKay



A man uses a slingshot during the security force crack down on anti-coup protesters in Mandalay, Myanmar. REUTERS/Stringer



New York Governor, Andrew Cuomo, walks on the grounds of the Governor's Mansion following allegations that he had sexually harassed young women, in Albany, New York. REUTERS/Angus Mordant

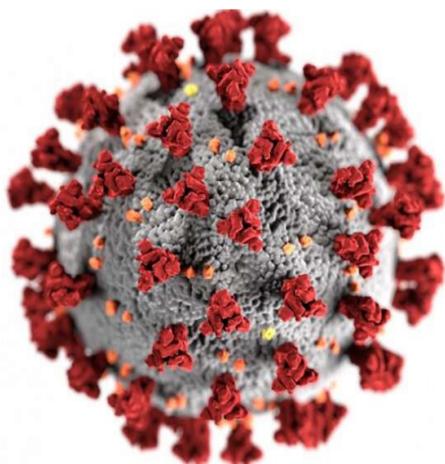


A jockey spurs his cows during Pacu Jawi practice in Tanah Datar, West Sumatra Province, Indonesia. Antara Foto/Iggyoy el Fitra



A demonstrator is bitten by a police dog while fighting with police during a protest against coronavirus restrictions in The Hague, Netherlands. REUTERS/Piroschka Van De Wouw

**One Year Of The Coronavirus**



**The Countries With The Most COVID-19 Cases**

Total number of confirmed COVID-19 cases, by country\*



\* As of 27 January 2021 at 11:30 GMT  
Source: Johns Hopkins University



**Total Cases**

Total	Worldwide	Recovered	Deaths
Cases	100M	55.4M	2.16M
	100,000,000	55,400,000	2,160,000
Location	Cases	Recovered	Deaths
United States	25.6M 25,600,000 +156K	--	429K 429,000 +4,101
India	10.7M 10,700,000 +11,666	10.4M 10,400,000 +14,301	154K 154,000 +123
Brazil	9M 9,000,000 +63,520	7.96M 7,960,000 +67,886	220K 220,000 +1,283
Russia	3.73M 3,730,000 +17,464	3.17M 3,170,000 +27,440	69,971 69,971 +580
United Kingdom	3.72M 3,720,000 +25,308	--	102K 102,000 +1,725

"+" shows new cases reported yesterday · Updated less than 6 hours ago-Sources: Wikipedia

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

One year ago today, a novel coronavirus was barely beginning to catch the public's eye. There were just over 2,000 confirmed cases worldwide, mostly in China, and five cases in the U.S.

**The big picture:** The sea of red (dark color) says it all. Today, there have been over 100 million cases worldwide, led by the U.S. with 25 million.

**Coronavirus Cases Fall In 41 U.S. States**

Change in new COVID-19 cases in the past week



Data: The COVID Tracking Project, state

**health departments; Map: Andrew Wither- spoon/Axios**

New coronavirus infections fell by 16% over the past week in the U.S. — the third straight week of significant improvement.

But the U.S. is still averaging roughly 165,000 new cases per day, meaning the virus is still spreading largely unchecked. And the rise of more contagious variants will ensure that Americans' risk remains high.

**Details:** In 41 states, the average number of new daily cases was lower over the past week than the week before. No states got worse.

• Nationwide, new cases are now at about the same level they were at in mid-December — down from their peak, but still a lot.

**What's next:** If Americans can accelerate this progress, we'll reduce the number of people who die before vaccines become universally available.

• But that will be a challenge, given the country's track record and the continued spread of more easily transmissible variants.

**Coronavirus Dashboard**



Illustration: Eniola Odetunde/Axios

- Health:** One year of the coronavirus — Bill and Melinda Gates warn of "immunity inequality" — Communities of color are falling behind in America's vaccine effort.
- Vaccine:** Vaccine hesitancy is decreasing in the U.S.
- Politics:** Biden admin to boost COVID vaccine delivery to states for at least 3 weeks — Hundreds of Biden staffers receive COVID vaccine — Axios-Ipsos poll: Trust in federal COVID-19 response surges.
- Business:** Bankruptcy filings hit decade-high last year.
- World:** U.K. surpasses 100,000 COVID-19 deaths — 44% of Israelis have already received at least one vaccine dose.
- Sports:** Europe's 20 richest soccer clubs report 12% revenue hit due to coronavirus — Pandemic has cost the NCAA \$600 million — CDC looks at lessons learned from NFL's testing and contact tracing.

**Cases:**

- Global:** Total confirmed cases as of 12 p.m. ET Wednesday: 100,418,923 — Total deaths: 2,161,547 — Total recoveries: 55,560,956 (no longer includes U.S. recoveries as of Dec. 15).
- U.S.:** Total confirmed cases as of 12 p.m. ET Wednesday: 25,450,135 — Total deaths: 425,406 — Total tests: 295,369,233.

Stay Home!

**COMMUNITY**

Wear Mask!

**What Covid Treatments Are Working And What More Is On The Horizon?**



New data from a large U.K. trial added to evidence indicating plasma may not make a difference in treating Covid-19. (Photo/Alex Edelman/AFP via Getty Images)

**Key Point**

*Some therapies that faced early questions are regaining their promise as we learn more. Others aren't, but it's important news either way.*

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

The arrival of Covid-19 vaccines has put the focus of the pandemic fight on inoculating as many people as quickly as possible. But outbreaks are still raging worldwide, with thousands of new infections every day and health systems under pressure to care for the sick, a reality that will continue for some time. Vaccine timelines also keep getting more and more stretched. With that in mind, it's a good time to take stock of where we are in treating the disease. The short answer is, there's progress but it's mixed.

For months, Gilead Sciences Inc.'s **remdesivir** and the generic steroid dexamethasone have been used on the front lines after being shown to reduce hospital stays and improve recovery speeds. Now, as we learn more about Covid-19, more treatments — including some that at first drew skepticism from physicians and scientists — are proving effective in certain circumstances. Others, such as convalescent plasma, are not. Let's take a look:

**"Toci":** Two arthritis drugs that previously failed in treating Covid-19 — Roche Holding AG's **tocilizumab** and Sanofi-Regeneron Pharmaceuticals Inc.'s **sarilumab** — are now showing a meaningful effect in helping reduce the burden of

disease in some patients. It seems that when the drugs are used is key. The latest data comes from a trial involving patients who were treated within 24 hours of needing hospital care in an intensive care unit. The drugs reduced mortality, suggesting that seven or eight lives would be saved for each 100 people treated.



The hope is that this data will be corroborated in the U.K.'s much larger and pioneering Recovery trial now underway, with more than 3,000 of the 28,000 and rising participants treated with "toci." This will provide the most concrete data behind the drug and will potentially enable global approvals beyond Britain. **"Bam-bam":** Next up are new drugs developed by Eli Lilly & Co. and Regeneron, part of a promising group of therapies called monoclonal antibodies that mimic the body's

response to infection. Lilly's **bamlanivimab**, affectionately known as "bam-bam," was the first to gain emergency use authorization by the Food and Drug Administration. Both Lilly's and Regeneron's treatment have now been cleared for high-risk patients to help prevent hospitalization. One obstacle for adoption of these drugs has been the logistics of administering them — they need to be delivered using specialized infusion equipment. This difficulty was compounded in bam-bam's case with a confusing efficacy story and lukewarm comments about it in the Covid-19 treatment guidelines from the National Institutes of Health, resulting in doses piling up on hospital shelves. This situation may be about to change, though, given an early read from a 2,000-patient Mayo Clinic study in which the use of bam-bam was shown to reduce hospitalizations and emergency-room visits by 70%.



There are also indications of a reduction in mortality. When data from this study is published, it is likely to drive increased interest in the use of bam-bam, and possibly Regeneron's antibody treatment, too. I do still remain cautious about the broad use of these drugs because of the risk they may hasten development of resistant mutations in the virus, which may, though unlikely, also impact vaccine-induced immunity.

**Plasma:** Convalescent plasma, a source of hope in the early days of the pandemic, has had a lot of subsequent failures and questions about its use. While not a drug per se, it is supposed to work in a similar way as monoclonal antibodies by giving patients ready-made immunity in a bottle in the form of plasma from recovered patients that is full of antibodies to the virus. The problem with previous attempts in showing a benefit from this approach was a lack of standardization and its use at the wrong time. Then recent data from a trial in Argentina raised hopes that if you use plasma with high amounts of antibodies early enough, when the infection itself is still active, it does make a difference. Unfortunately, there's since been another setback, and this time a very serious one. The

U.K.'s aforementioned Recovery trial has been comparing Regeneron's antibody treatment and convalescent plasma to standard care without those treatments in a very large patient group, making the data and its statistical analysis very robust.



Findings released Friday from the trial showed no difference in the mortality of those receiving plasma and those on placebo. We still need to see the data in published form to be able to judge if there were any other potential explanations for the outcome. But if the result is unequivocal, it at least means there will be no more time and money wasted treating patients with an ineffective therapy that carries some risks. In a way, the negative outcome is still a step forward in sharpening treatments of Covid-19.

**Once A Relic Of Medical History, Radiation Emerges As An Intriguing — And Controversial — Treatment For Covid-19**

The idea of low-dose radiation as therapy had long been dismissed in favor of more modern treatments. That all changed when Covid-19 snowballed into a crisis, fueling fresh interest in anything that might ease the devastating cases of pneumonia in some patients. At least 52,000 of the more than 135,000 deaths due to Covid-19 in the U.S. have involved pneumonia, according to federal health data. There are currently at least a dozen trials worldwide testing low-dose radiation therapy, or LDRT, as a treatment for pneumonia related to Covid-19, some spurred by the same historical data Calabrese and colleagues scoured years ago. The theory: Targeted radiation to the lungs will halt the out-of-control inflammation responsible for the devastating pneumonia that bookends the course of some Covid-19 patients. **General Photographic Agency/Getty Images** But the revived interest in radiotherapy has sparked a debate among physicians and researchers, who are divided on whether the idea is even ready for test-driving in clinical trials. With little known about the way LDRT works on inflamed lungs, some experts say it might

exacerbate respiratory damage, while introducing the additional risk of cancer. Others say patients participating in the trials may suffer by missing out on more promising treatments.

On the other side, though, are experts who say there's a clear and urgent need for Covid-19 treatments that work, particularly for cases that become severe. Antibiotics can help treat cases of pneumonia from bacterial infections, but not those caused by viruses. Those experts argue compelling historical data gives LDRT a promising head start.

"It seems to be such an almost emotional topic," said Dörthe Schae, a radiation oncologist at UCLA, on the debate raging over LDRT. "You get two extremes on the spectrum and the truth is probably somewhere in the middle, where you have to consider all the pluses and minuses."



The new wave of low-dose radiation trials are registered at academic centers and hospitals around the world, including in Italy, Spain, Iran, India, and the U.S. The studies are recruiting anywhere from five to 106 Covid-19 patients with pneumonia, and half require participants to be at least 40 years of age.

Arbab Chakravarti, chair of Ohio State's radiation and oncology department, is spearheading two of the four LDRT trials in the U.S. The first trial, PREVENT, will enroll around 100 oxygen-dependent Covid-19 patients at up to 20 hospitals around the country. The second trial, VENTED, is limited to Ohio State, where it will recruit 24 critically-ill patients who require ventilator support. Unlike PREVENT, VENTED is open to participants as young as 18. The end of the pandemic may be in sight, assuming we can control infections and the development of new variants, but it's still many months away. Fortunately, the more we learn, the better we know which treatments are helpful and how to use them. The arsenal is growing. We can use all the help we can get. (Courtesy Bloomberg.com and https://www.statnews.com/)