

# EU approves fifth jab as WHO urges greater effort to end pandemic

December 20 2021, by Marc Burleigh With Nina Larson In Geneva

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The European Union approved its fifth Covid-19 vaccine Monday, stepping up its battle against the Omicron virus variant as the WHO

called for greater efforts to ensure the pandemic ends next year.

Europe is already far ahead of other parts of the world with its rollout of vaccines and booster shots, but the Omicron variant has helped fuel record case surges, forcing a return to harsh restrictions in some countries.

Despite indications that Omicron is not more severe than the still-dominant Delta variant, early data suggests it could be more infectious and possibly have higher resistance to vaccines.

Since it was first reported in South Africa in November, Omicron has been identified in dozens of countries, dashing hopes that the worst of the pandemic is over.

But US President Joe Biden said Monday that he was not planning on "locking the country down".

WHO director general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus called for nations to redouble efforts to help end the pandemic, calling for new year events to be cancelled because it was better to "celebrate later than to celebrate now and grieve later.

"We have to focus now on ending this pandemic," he said.

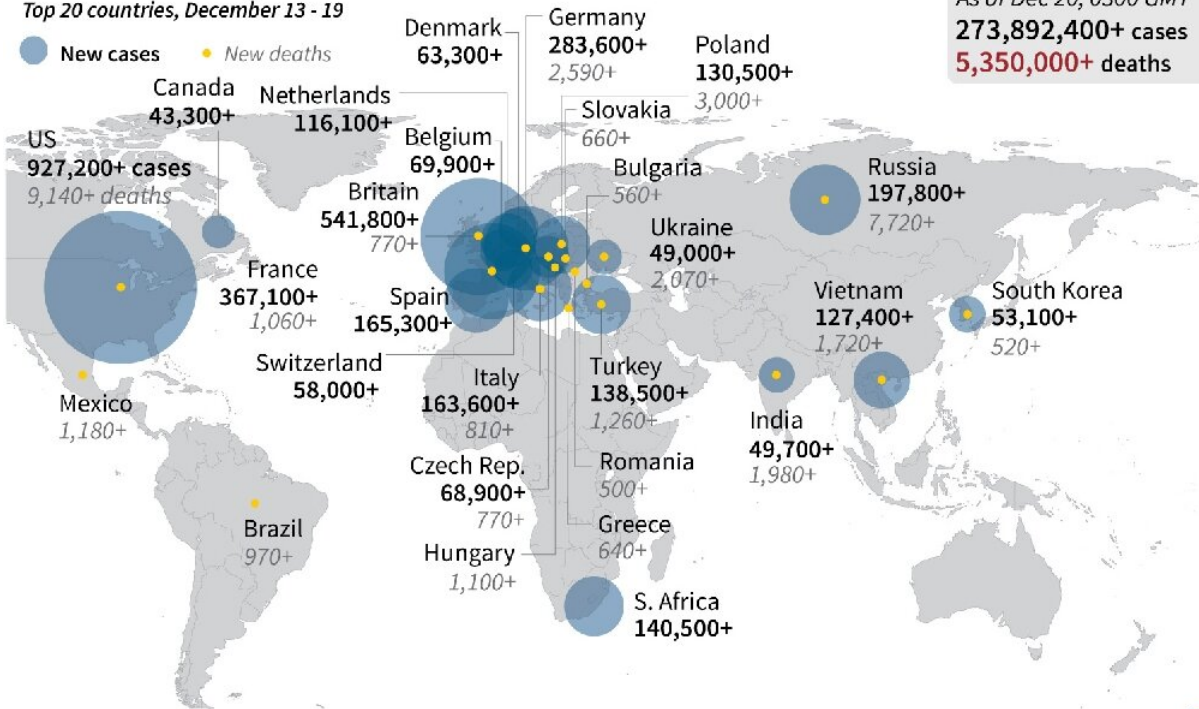
## **More restrictions**

London on Monday announced it had cancelled a New Year's Eve event in the central Trafalgar Square for 6,500 people.


## One week of new Covid-19 cases

Top 20 countries, December 13 - 19

● New cases ● New deaths



**Global total**  
As of Dec 20, 0300 GMT  
**273,892,400+ cases**  
**5,350,000+ deaths**

Source: AFP toll 

Graphic highlighting 20 countries with the largest number of Covid-19 cases and deaths in the past week.

Paris has already cancelled its new year celebrations and Germany is expected to roll out tight restrictions on private parties and close nightclubs, according to a proposal seen by AFP.

"New Year's Eve celebrations with a large number of people are unjustifiable in the current situation," reads the draft document.

German government advisers were already urging much tighter restrictions across the board, with experts in several countries warning repeatedly that vaccinations alone will not be enough to stop Omicron.

Morocco has announced a blanket ban on New Year's Eve celebrations.

But British Prime Minister Boris Johnson ruled out any further tightening of England's coronavirus rules over Christmas, while pledging to keep the situation "under constant review".

Queen Elizabeth II is nonetheless understood to have cancelled plans to spend Christmas at her Sandringham estate and will instead take "sensible precautions" and stay at Windsor Castle, according to British media.

The Netherlands has already imposed a Christmas lockdown and EU chief Ursula von der Leyen has warned that the Omicron variant could be dominant in Europe by mid-January.



Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus called for new year celebrations to be cancelled.

The EU's authorisation of the jab from US firm Novavax, which uses a more conventional technology than other Covid vaccines, has raised hopes that people worried about getting vaccinated might now come forward.

It is the fifth vaccine approved in the bloc after shots from Pfizer, Moderna, AstraZeneca and Johnson & Johnson, and the EU has already signed a deal to buy up to 200 million doses of the two-shot Novavax vaccine.

"At a time where the Omicron variant is rapidly spreading... I am particularly pleased with today's authorisation of the Novavax vaccine," von der Leyen said in a statement.

## **WEF off**

As the pandemic gathers pace, weary populations are faced once again with new rounds of restrictions and cancellations of big events.

The World Economic Forum said it was postponing its annual January get-together of the world's rich and powerful in the Swiss ski resort of Davos because of the new variant.

"Despite the meeting's stringent health protocols, the transmissibility of Omicron and its impact on travel and mobility have made deferral necessary," the WEF said Monday.



Restrictions have caused violent protests in several European cities, most recently this weekend in Brussels.

Israel's health ministry recommended banning nationals from travelling to the United States, and added several European countries to its Covid "red list".

The world of sport continues to be buffeted by the virus spread with several English Premier League football teams recording outbreaks that forced games to be abandoned in recent days.

However, the Premier League said after a meeting on Monday it had rejected a plan to temporarily halt the season, saying "it is the League's collective intention to continue the current fixture schedule where safely

possible".

Tennis also continues to suffer major blows, with Spanish star Rafael Nadal the latest player to test positive, throwing his participation in next month's Australian Open into doubt.

"As a consequence of the situation, I have to have total flexibility with my calendar and I will analyse my options depending on my evolution," he said.

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