

New Year parties slashed as Covid wave hammers the world

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The number of daily new Covid cases worldwide has crossed one million for the first time, with more than 7.3 million in the last seven days.

A New Year shorn of mass celebrations beckoned Thursday for millions around the world as the number of daily Covid infections, driven by the Omicron variant, surged through another symbolic high.

Coronavirus, first detected two years ago and declared a global pandemic in March 2020, has killed more than 5.4 million people, triggered economic crises and seen societies ricochet in and out of lockdowns.

The latest variant, Omicron, while tentatively considered to cause milder illness, has pushed infection levels to record levels in recent days in the United States, Britain, France and other European countries, forcing governments to reimpose restrictions.

The number of daily new Covid cases worldwide crossed one million for the first time, according to an AFP tally Thursday, with more than 7.3 million in the last seven days.

From Greece to Mexico, from Barcelona to Bali and across swathes of Europe, authorities have cancelled or curtailed public gatherings, either closing or imposing curfews on nightclubs.

Only South Africa, the first country to report the Omicron variant, was bucking the trend. It lifted a midnight to 4 am curfew to allow celebrations to go ahead, after [health officials](#) said that a dip in infections in the past week indicated the peak of the current wave had passed.



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In France, wearing masks outdoors will be compulsory while walking the streets of Paris from Friday for everyone over the age of 11. Nightclubs have been closed until well into January.

In Spain, public festivities have been cancelled across most regions and in the biggest cities except Madrid, where a stripped-down gathering is scheduled with the crowd limited to 7,000 people compared to 18,000 in 2019.

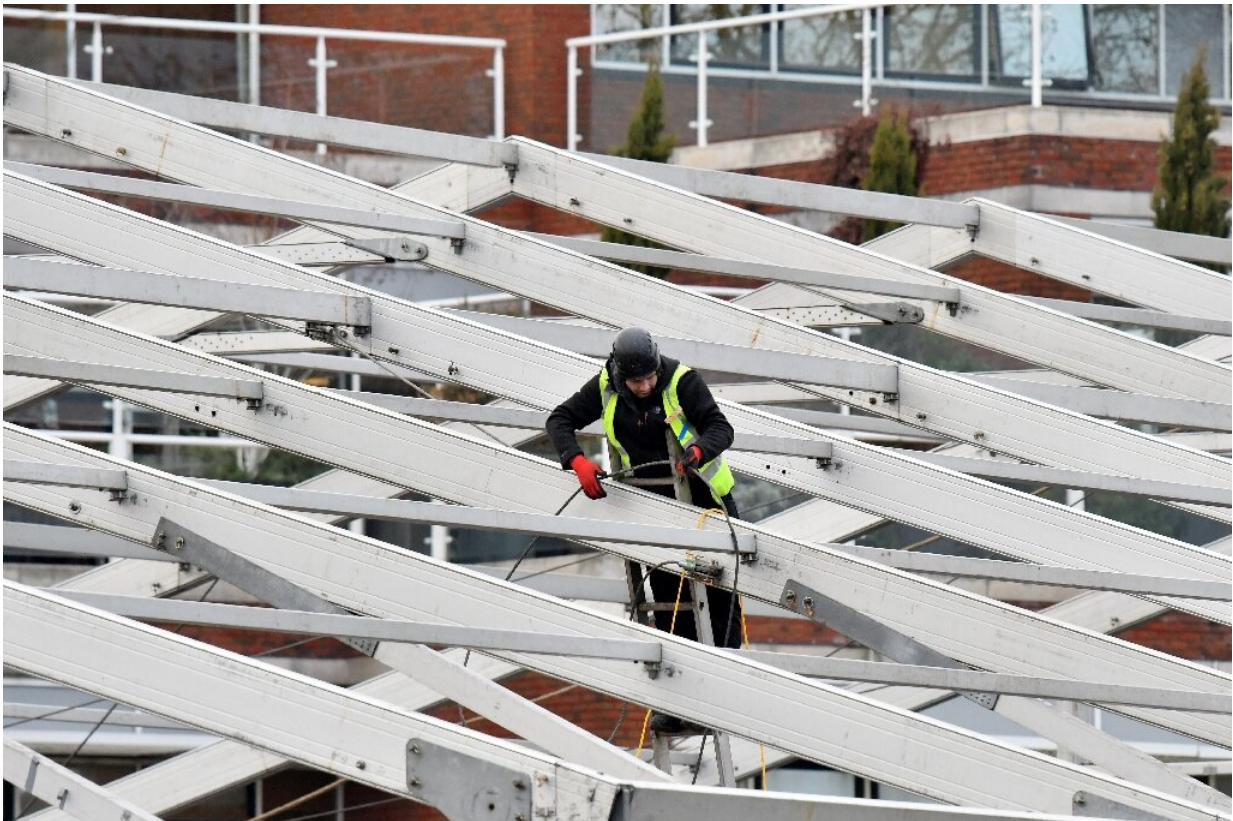
Britain's National Health Service said it would start opening temporary field hospitals to contain a possible overspill of patients in England,

where the government stopped short of mandating curbs on New Year festivities.

'War footing'

"Given the high level of COVID-19 infections and increasing hospital admissions, the NHS is now on a war footing," National Medical Director Stephen Powis said.

Indonesia, which has reported more than 4.2 million confirmed cases, warned that foreign travellers may be deported from the resort island of Bali if they are caught violating Covid health rules that bar carnivals, fireworks and gatherings of more than 50 people over the holidays.



A construction worker erects a temporary field hospital in Tooting, south London, to contain a possible overspill of inpatients.

"Get ready to be kicked out," said Bali immigration office head Jamaruli Manihuruk.

Mexico City has cancelled its massive New Year's Eve celebrations as a preventative measure after a rise in cases.

"I feel that this casts doubt on a lot of what we thought was already secure, because it is scary, it is worrying," said engineering student Aaron Rosas.

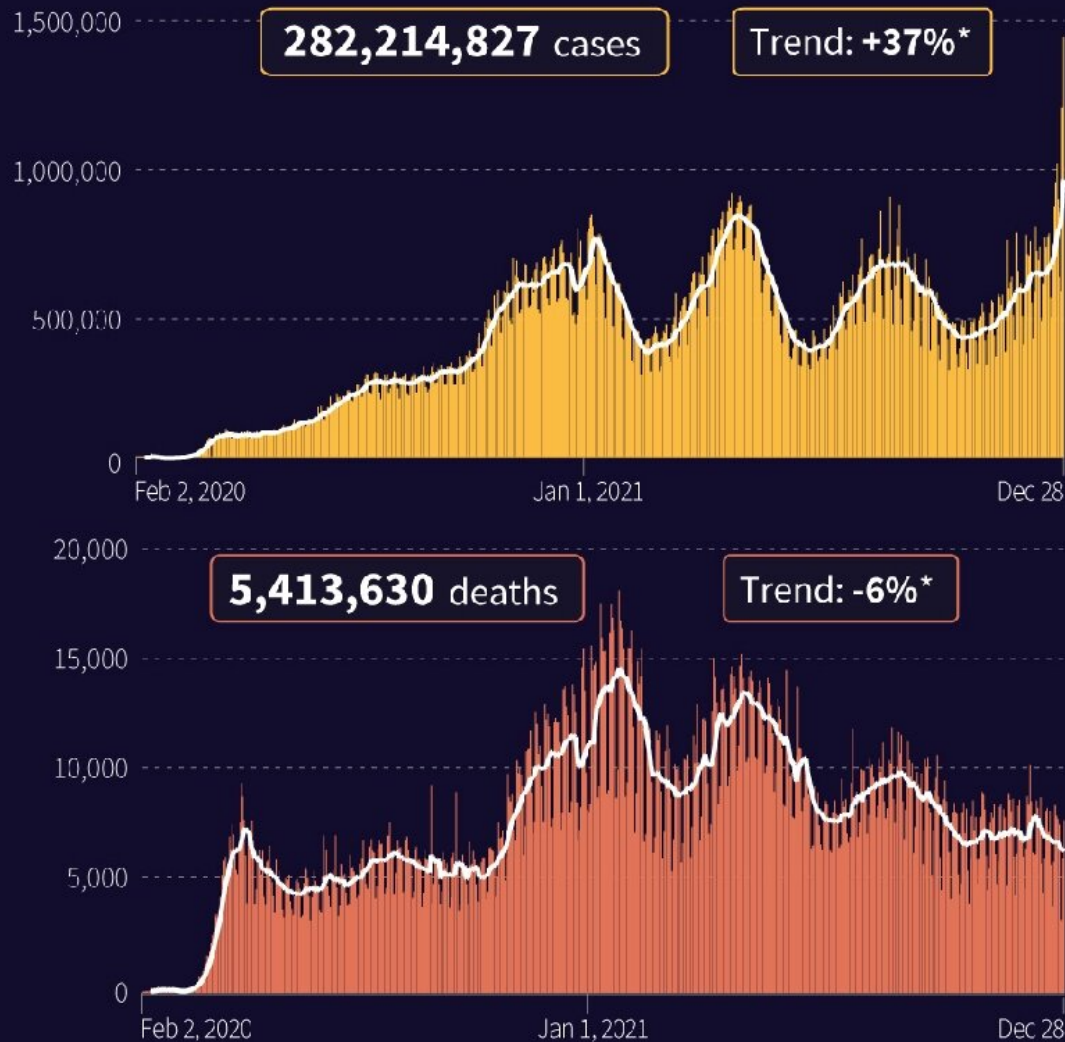
Israel meanwhile became one of the first countries to greenlight a fourth booster shot for immunocompromised people.

Authorities in Saudi Arabia reimposed social distancing measures at the Grand Mosque in the Muslim holy city of Mecca, after recording the highest number of infections in months.

"I am highly concerned that Omicron, being more transmissible, circulating at the same time as Delta, is leading to a tsunami of cases," said WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus.

Covid-19: record number of infections worldwide

Number of cases and deaths per day, 7-day rolling average



*number of cases/deaths per day over last 7 days compared to previous week
Source: A-FP count based on to.ls from local health authorities

AFP 

Record world Covid-19 cases.

'Brink of collapse'

"This is and will continue to put immense pressure on exhausted [health workers](#), and health systems on the brink of collapse."

Omicron has already started to overwhelm some hospitals in the United States, the hardest-hit country, where the seven-day average of new cases has hit 265,427, according to a Johns Hopkins University tracker.

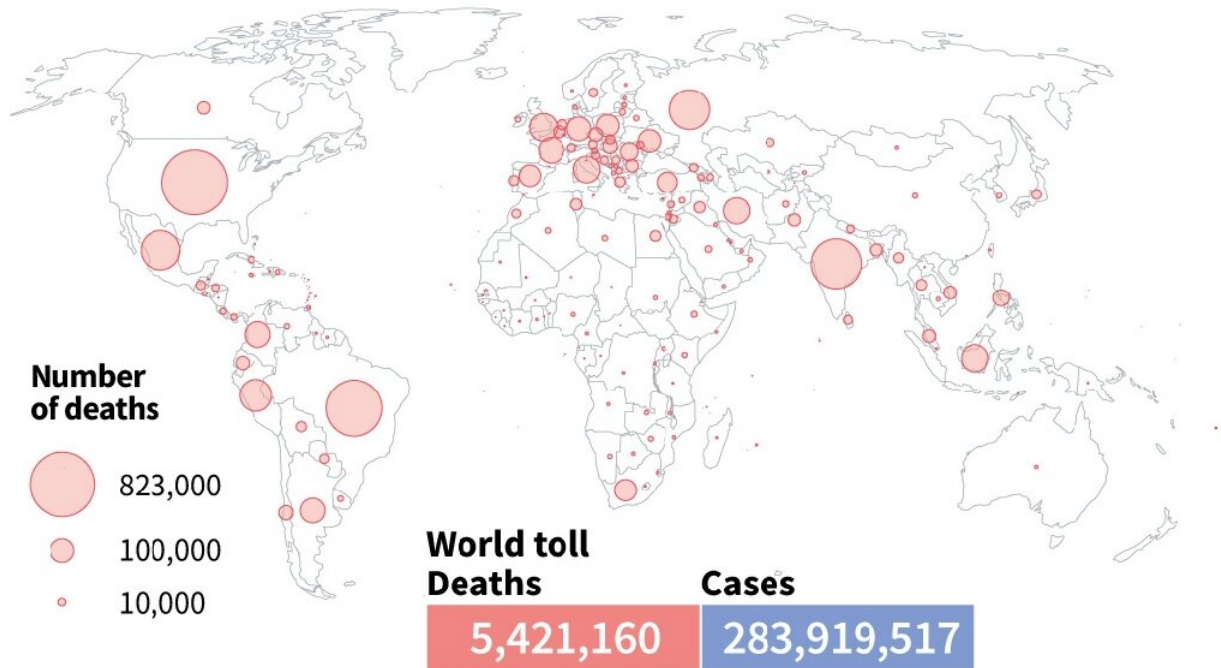
Harvard epidemiologist and immunologist Michael Mina tweeted that the count was likely just the "tip of the iceberg" with the true number likely far higher because of a shortage of tests.

US health authorities advised people to avoid taking cruises over the holiday period, even if they are fully vaccinated.

"Half of my family has it," said Victoria Sierralta at a testing site in Miami. "It's like we're back in like the first stage of Covid. It's absolutely crazy."

Spread of the coronavirus

As of December 30, 1100 GMT



Source: AFP count based on official tolls



Global death toll and coronavirus cases as of December 30 at 1100 GMT.

The NBA, NFL and NHL are scrambling to keep teams competing and [sports leagues](#) are grappling with how best to adjust their coronavirus protocols to protect players, staff and fans while keeping schedules intact.

In China, residents in the city of Xi'an, where 13 million people are under lockdown, said they were struggling to find enough food, despite Beijing insisting there were adequate supplies.

State TV showed footage of workers in hazmat suits sorting eggs, meat

and vegetables, before delivering food to residents door-to-door.

"I live on.... a bowl of porridge every day, just to keep alive," one resident surnamed Wang told AFP, saying she was working through all her supplies.

Russia said that more than 71,000 people died of coronavirus in the country in November, a new fatality record since the start of the pandemic.

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