It’s 2021, and the pandemic is still here

I regret to inform you that even with all of the other news happening this week, there is still a pandemic going on. It would have been great to sweep it out the door with the old planners and dead Christmas trees. But it’s 2021, and COVID-19 is still here.

More than a year after this coronavirus made its big debut, it’s bigger than ever. Days after it was sequenced on January 7th, 2020, the World Health Organization reported that there were 41 cases in China and one death. A year later, the toll now stands at 88,617,915 infected, and 1,907,608 dead.

Those numbers are rising rapidly. One in 30 Londoners has COVID-19, London Mayor Sadiq Khan tweeted on Friday. New variants of the virus, which appear to be more transmissible, are spreading in the UK, South Africa, and around the world.

The US broke records for COVID-related deaths multiple days this week, topping 4,000 on Thursday. “We believe things will get worse as we get into January,” Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, told NPR. “Now’s not the time to pull back on this.“

It’s the time to speed up the manufacturing and distribution of vaccines. It’s time to keep wearing masks and keep our distance from one another.

It’s time to prioritize ending the pandemic that stole last year before it takes over this one, too.

Hindsight is 20/20. Let’s see if we learned anything from it.

Here’s what else is going on this week.

Research

U.S. Is Blind to Contagious New Virus Variant, Scientists Warn
A national surveillance program could help track the new variants, but that kind of program doesn’t yet exist in the US. A quirk in some COVID-19 tests could help labs look for the variant, but they fall short of a more widespread system. (Carl Zimmer, *The New York Times*)

Why epidemiologists are so worried about the new COVID-19 variants, in 2 charts
This breaks down why the new variants are particularly worrying for experts tracking the new strains. In short: if they are more easily transmissible, it’s easier for more people to get sick or die. (Brian Resnik, *Vox*)

Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine not affected by mutation seen in contagious coronavirus variant, study indicates
Early research suggests that the Pfizer vaccine may be effective against one of the mutations found in some of the worrying variants. This is a good early sign, but the study was small and has not been reviewed by outside experts. (Andrew Joseph, *Stat*)

Development

Its freezer kaput, this NorCal hospital had two hours to give out 600 vaccine shots
By the time workers realized a freezer stopped working at a California hospital, time was running out. They had just two hours to safely administer 600 doses of the Moderna vaccine. Incredibly, they did it. (Anita Chabria, *Los Angeles Times)*

Florida counties use Eventbrite to schedule COVID-19 vaccine appointments

Some counties in Florida have turned to Eventbrite to schedule appointments after their phone systems went down. (Nicole Westman, *The Verge)*

Here's How The U.S. Can Jump Start Its Sluggish COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout
The vaccine rollout has been exceedingly slow in the US. To speed up, we'll need more money, more vaccines, and more communication with the public. (Selena Simmons-Duffin and Pien Huang, *NPR*)

FDA tells US health providers not to modify COVID-19 vaccine dose schedule
The FDA told providers that they should stick to the two-dose schedule for the vaccines that have been authorized in the US. Other countries, including the UK, have decided to delay the second dose, in an effort to vaccinate more people. (Nicole Westman, *The Verge)*

Severe allergic reactions reported in the US after getting COVID-19 vaccine, but CDC says cases are rare
There have been some cases of severe allergic reactions to COVID-19 vaccines, but incidents are rare – at a rate of about 11 in every million doses administered. (Adrianna Rodriguez, *USA Today*)

Perspectives

> *It's an enviable kind of know-how, the muscle memory of care. But like so much in medicine, it comes with complications, the everyday rifts that open up between your world and others', the repetitive stress injuries of the soul.*

– Reporter Eric Broodman writes for *Stat* about the experience of Caroline McNamara, an ICU nurse, and her father, Tom, who ended up in her ward with COVID-19.

More than numbers

To the more than 88,617,915 people worldwide who have tested positive, may your road to recovery be smooth.

To the families and friends of the 1,907,608 people who have died worldwide – 367,635 of those in the US – your loved ones are not forgotten.

Stay safe, everyone.

https://www.theverge.com/2021/1/9/22221182/pandemic-covid-19-2021-toll-antivirus