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Some Countries With The Highest Vaccination Rates Are Facing A Surge In Covid Deaths And Infections—Experts Say Complacency Is Partly To Blame

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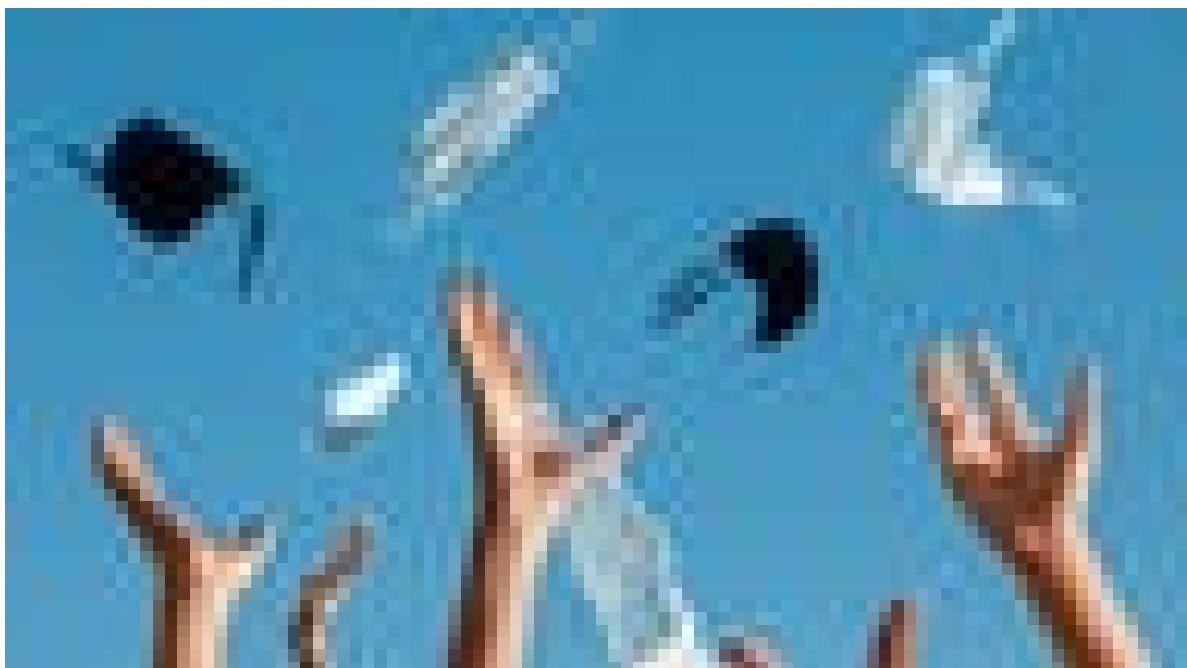
Business

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TOPLINE Some countries with the world's highest vaccination rates are also battling devastating surges of Covid-19 and the highest death tolls, a worrying trend that has left experts and officials wondering whether successful inoculation drives have lulled governments into easing restrictions too soon and the public into a false sense of security.



Many parts of the U.S. have loosened restrictions for the vaccinated, including mask mandates.

GETTY

KEY FACTS

- Uruguay has endured the [highest](#) Covid-19 death rate in the world per capita for several weeks, despite having one of the world's most successful inoculation drives, a common situation in a number of other highly vaccinated countries like Bahrain and the Maldives.
- Uruguay, a small country of around 3.5 million people, recorded an average of 55 deaths a day over the last week, approximately 1.6 deaths per 100,000 inhabitants according to data [compiled](#) by the *New York Times*, a figure that has remained roughly the same since cases surged in April.
- Controlling for population, Bahrain (0.9 deaths per 100,000 people) and the Maldives (1) have similarly grim metrics and have reported far greater death rates than countries like the U.S. (0.15) and India (0.29) for a large part of May.
- Other countries like Chile and the Seychelles rank among the worst Covid infection surges in the world, though each have higher vaccination levels than the U.S., with experts warning that lifting restrictions too early may have made the public unduly complacent.
- Dr. Jude Gedeon, public health commissioner of the Seychelles, [told](#) a local paper the outbreak was partially fueled by the resumption of economic activity and “complacency” over public health measures like mask wearing and social distancing, a sentiment [echoed](#) to Reuters by Maldives President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, who said the country had lifted restrictions too soon.
- Uruguay's approach to the pandemic, which involved as few restrictions as possible, has also engendered a sense of complacency, AFP [report](#),

and the country is in a similar situation to Argentina where, despite strict restrictions in the country, many are flouting guidelines.

KEY BACKGROUND

In the U.S., as in many wealthy countries, vaccines are seen as an exit strategy from the economic and social restrictions of the pandemic. As vaccination rates rise in the U.S., experts and officials have [urged](#) people not to become complacent and for officials not to remove restrictions too soon for fear of a resurgent wave of the disease. Changes to CDC [guidance](#) allowing vaccinated people to forgo facemasks swiftly led a slate of states to [rescind](#) mask mandates—some have even [banned](#) local officials from putting their own in place—leading many to [question](#) whether a weakening of the policies is wise considering a [slowing](#) vaccination rate and persistent levels of [hesitancy](#) that could prevent the coverage needed to stop transmission.

WHAT WE DON'T KNOW

The relaxation of restrictions is just one variable contributing towards an outbreak. New variants could drive infections—Uruguay's outbreak is partly [fueled](#) by the P.1 variant first identified in Brazil. The [efficacy of the vaccines used](#) is also a pertinent worry, with a number of highly vaccinated countries having made heavy use of Chinese vaccines.

BIG NUMBER

50%. Of the world's most vaccinated countries mentioned in this story, all have at least this proportion of their population partially vaccinated against Covid-19. [Data](#) is available for Bahrain (53%), Chile (55%), the Maldives (57%), the Seychelles (72%) and Uruguay (50%). [According](#) to the CDC, the U.S. has a similar level of partially vaccinated people to Uruguay (50%), though a much higher proportion of fully vaccinated people (40% against Uruguay's 29%).

WHAT TO WATCH FOR

Bahrain's health ministry undersecretary Waleed Al Manea [attributed](#) the country's surge in cases to more testing and the large gatherings associated with the holy month of Ramadan and Eid al-Fitr celebration. However, Bahrain, alongside the nearby UAE, is already [offering booster](#)

[shots](#) for the heavily used Sinopharm vaccine (which already requires two doses), amplifying [worries](#) it may not be as effective as others on the market at preventing the disease. A third of Seychellois cases are among [vaccinated individuals](#), the country's health ministry revealed in mid May and the majority of vaccines given were also the Sinopharm vaccine. The WHO said it would review cases from the archipelago in light of this.

SURPRISING FACT

Polling in the U.S. [indicates](#) unvaccinated people are more likely to be comfortable engaging in everyday activities than their vaccinated compatriots, a potential issue for the states relaxing pandemic restrictions based on high vaccination rates.

FURTHER READING

[Biden's 70% Covid Vaccination Goal Could Be Achievable By Summer, Poll Finds \(Forbes\)](#)

[CDC Director Says New Mask Guidance—Which Relies On A Vaccine Honor System—Is A 'First Step' \(Forbes\)](#)

[Covid Surges In 4 Of 5 Most Vaccinated Countries—Here's Why The U.S. Should Worry \(Forbes\)](#)

[Same morbid fate despite different Covid approaches in Uruguay, Argentina \(AFP\)](#)

[Travel Interest Surging As States Reopen — But Unvaccinated Americans Are More Likely To Be Getting Out, Poll Finds \(Forbes\)](#)

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