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**John Robbins 281-965-6390**  
**Jun Gai 281-498-4310**

**Publisher:** Wea H. Lee  
**President:** Catherine Lee  
**Editor:** John Robbins

**Address:** 11122 Bellaire Blvd., Houston, TX 77072  
**E-mail:** News@scdaily.com



Inside C2

# Southern DAILY

Make Today Different

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## Oil settles down \$10/bbl in largest daily drop since April 2020

Nov 26 (Reuters) - Oil prices plunged \$10 a barrel on Friday, their largest one-day drop since April 2020, as a new variant of the coronavirus spooked investors and added to concerns that a supply surplus could swell in the first quarter.

Oil fell with global equities markets on fears the variant, could dampen economic growth and fuel demand. The World Health Organization has designated the new variant, which it named Omicron, as "of concern," according to the South African health minister.

The United States, Canada, Britain, Guatemala and European countries are among those to restrict travel from southern Africa, where the variant was detected. read more  
Brent crude settled down \$9.50, or 11.6%, to \$72.72 a barrel, a weekly decline of more than 8%.

U.S. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude settled down \$10.24 on Friday, or 13.1%, at \$68.15 a barrel, declining more than 10.4% on the week in high volume trading after Thursday's Thanksgiving holiday in the United States. "The market is factoring in a worst case scenario situation in which this variant causes massive demand destruction," said Bob Yawger, director of energy futures at Mizuho.

Both contracts fell to a fifth week of losses and their steepest falls in absolute terms since April 2020, when WTI turned negative for the first time amid a coronavirus-induced supply glut.

News of the variant caused ructions in a market previously caught between producer and consumer nations.

"The biggest fear is that it will be resistant to vaccines and be a massive setback for countries that have reaped the benefits from their roll-outs," said Craig Erlam, senior market analyst at OANDA.

OPEC+ is also monitoring developments around the variant, sources said on Friday, with some expressing concern that it may worsen the oil market outlook less than a week before a meeting to set policy. read more

Scientists have so far only detected the Omicron variant in relatively small numbers, mainly in South Africa but also in Botswana, Hong Kong and Israel, but they are concerned by its high number of mutations which could make it vaccine-resistant and more transmissible. read more

Drug makers Pfizer and BioNTech said if nec-



essary they would be able to redesign their shot within 6 weeks and ship initial batches within 100 days. read more

South Africa's foreign ministry said it would speak to Britain to try to get it to reconsider its travel ban.

"Our immediate concern is the damage that this decision will cause to both the tourism industries and businesses of both countries," Foreign Minister Naledi Pandor said in a statement.

Oil prices rose early in the week as the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and its allies (OPEC+) suggested it could taper production in response to a strategic release from large consuming countries that are members of the International Energy Agency. read more

Such a release was likely to swell supplies in coming months, an OPEC source said, based on findings of a panel of experts that advises OPEC ministers. read more

The forecasts cloud the outlook for a Dec. 2 meeting when the group will discuss whether to adjust its plan to increase output by 400,000 barrels per day in January and beyond.

"OPEC's initial assessment of the co-ordinated (stockpile) release and the sudden appearance of a new variant of the coronavirus raises serious concerns about economic growth and the oil balance in coming months," PVM analyst Tamas Varga said.

## Beijing presses Didi to delist from U.S. over data security fears - sources

HONG KONG/SHANGHAI, Nov 26 (Reuters) - Chinese regulators have pressed top executives of ride hailing giant Didi Global Inc (DIDI.N) to devise a plan to delist from the New York Stock Exchange due to concerns about data security, two people with knowledge of the matter told Reuters.

China's powerful Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC) has asked the management to take the company off the U.S. bourse due to worries about leakage of sensitive data, said one of the people. It also wants the ride-hailing giant to promise it would solve the delisting issue within a certain period of time, said the person.

The cyberspace regulator said, according to the person, the prerequisite for the relaunch of Didi's ride-hailing and other apps in China is that the company has to agree to delist from New York. Proposals under consideration include a straight-up privatisation or a second listing in Hong Kong followed by a delisting from the United States, said the person. In July, the CAC ordered app stores

to remove 25 mobile apps operated by Didi - just days after the company listed in New York. It also told Didi to stop registering new users, citing national security and the public interest.

Reuters reported earlier this month that Didi is preparing to relaunch its apps in the country by the end of the year in anticipation that Beijing's cybersecurity investigation into the company would be wrapped up by then, citing sources directly involved in the relaunch. read more

Neither Didi nor the CAC responded to Reuters' requests for comments. A trader works during the IPO for Chinese ride-hailing company Didi Global Inc on the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) floor in New York City, U.S., June 30, 2021.



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# WEA LEE'S GLOBAL NOTES

11/27/2021

## “Little Saigon” Sign Is Up In IMD

I was with State Representative Hubert Vo, City Councilwoman Tiffany Thomas and IMD Board Member Stephen Le Sr. to host the opening ceremony for installing the “Little Saigon” sign in the International District.

Since 1975, after the

Vietnam war, millions of refugees moved to America and Texas became the second largest state in the U.S. They came over here and many of them started their new lives and became very successful politicians and businessmen. This also represented many American success

stories and immigration legends.

Houston, Texas is an immigrants’ city. Almost twenty years ago under the leadership of Hubert Vo, we went door to door and got a petition signed by area business people and submitted it to form the



International District bill in the Texas House of Representatives. One year later our dream came true. We would now be able to manage a thirteen square mile area in Southwest Houston to improve this area with a budget of more than 1.5 million dollars annually.

Today the International District has become one of the success stories in the city of

Houston. More and more residents and businesses have moved here and made the district their home.

We are so happy the “Little Saigon” sign is up to represent our diversity and our part of America’s immigrant culture.

We need to live in our community with harmony and never forget our roots.



**Wea H. Lee**  
Wealee@scdaily.com

Chairman of International District Houston Texas  
Publisher Southern Daily Wea H. Lee

Southern News Group Chairman / CEO  
Chairman of International Trade & Culture Center  
Republic of Guiana Honorary consul at Houston Texas



**Southern DAILY** Make Today Different

## Editor's Choice



Migrants wait to get on buses after accepting an offer from the Mexican government to obtain humanitarian visas to transit Mexican territory, in Tapachula, Mexico November 25, 2021. REUTERS/Jose Luis Gonzalez



Migrants wait to get on buses after accepting an offer from the Mexican government to obtain humanitarian visas to transit Mexican territory, in Tapachula, Mexico November 25, 2021. REUTERS/Jose Luis Gonzalez



Migrants, mostly Haitians, walk as they take part in a caravan heading to the U.S. border, near Tapachula, Mexico, November 26, 2021. REUTERS/Jose Luis Gonzalez



A migrant rests as he takes part in a caravan heading to the U.S. border, near Tapachula, Mexico November 26, 2021. REUTERS/Jose Luis Gonzalez



Demonstrators react to tear gas during clashes with Palestinian security forces at a protest following the death of Nizar Banat, a Palestinian parliamentary candidate who criticised the Palestinian Authority and died after being arrested by PA forces, in Ramallah in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. REUTERS/Mohamad Torokman



U.S. President Joe Biden takes a photo with attendees at Green Road Community Center, where Biden delivered remarks on the U.S. COVID-19 vaccination effort, in Raleigh, North Carolina. REUTERS/Jonathan Ernst



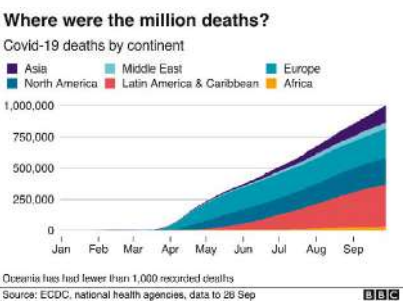
## COVID-19 Global Death Toll Tops Five Million In Under Two Years



Relatives of Luis Enrique Rodriguez, who died of COVID-19, visit where he was buried on a hill at the El Pajonal de Cogua Natural Reserve, in Cogua, north of Bogota, Colombia, Monday, Oct. 25, 2021. Rodriguez died May 14, 2021. Relatives bury the ashes of their loved ones who died of coronavirus and plant a tree in their memory. (AP Photo/Ivan Valencia)

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

The global death toll from COVID-19 topped 5 million on Monday, less than two years into a crisis that has not only devastated poor countries but also humbled wealthy ones with first-rate health care systems. Together, the United States, the European Union, Britain and Brazil — all upper-middle- or high-income countries — account for one-eighth of the world’s population but nearly half of all reported deaths. The U.S. alone has recorded over 745,000 lives lost, more than any other nation. “This is a defining moment in our lifetime,” said Dr. Albert Ko, an infectious disease specialist at the Yale School of Public Health. “What do we have to do to protect ourselves so we don’t get to another 5 million?” The death toll, as tallied by Johns Hopkins University, is about equal to the populations of Los Angeles and San Francisco combined. It rivals the number of people killed in battles among nations since 1950, according to estimates from the Peace Research Institute Oslo. Globally, COVID-19 is now the third leading cause of death, after heart disease and stroke.



The staggering figure is almost certainly an undercount because of limited testing and people dying at home without medical attention, especially in poor parts of the world, such as India. Hot spots have shifted over the 22 months since the outbreak began, turning different places on the world map red. Now, the virus is pummeling Russia, Ukraine and other parts of Eastern Europe, especially where rumors, misinformation and distrust in government have hobbled vaccination efforts. In Ukraine, only 17% of the adult population is fully vaccinated; in Armenia, only 7%. “What’s uniquely different about this pandemic is it hit hardest the high-resource countries,” said Dr. Wafaa El-Sa-

## BUSINESS

dr, director of ICAP, a global health center at Columbia University. “That’s the irony of COVID-19.”

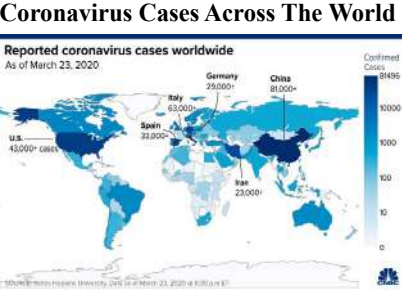


Patients lie on beds in a COVID-19 isolation room at the University Emergency Hospital in Bucharest, Romania, Oct. 22, 2021. (AP Photo/Andreea Alexandru, File)

Wealthier nations with longer life expectancies have larger proportions of older people, cancer survivors and nursing home residents, all of whom are especially vulnerable to COVID-19, El-Sadr noted. Poorer countries tend to have larger shares of children, teens and young adults, who are less likely to fall seriously ill from the coronavirus. India, despite its terrifying delta surge that peaked in early May, now has a much lower reported daily death rate than wealthier Russia, the U.S. or Britain, though there is uncertainty around its figures.

The seeming disconnect between wealth and health is a paradox that disease experts will be pondering for years. But the pattern that is seen on the grand scale, when nations are compared, is different when examined at closer range. Within each wealthy country, when deaths and infections are mapped, poorer neighborhoods are hit hardest. In the U.S., for example, COVID-19 has taken an outside toll on Black and Hispanic people, who are more likely than white people to live in poverty and have less access to health care.

“When we get out our microscopes, we see that within countries, the most vulnerable have suffered most,” Ko said.



Wealth has also played a role in the glob-

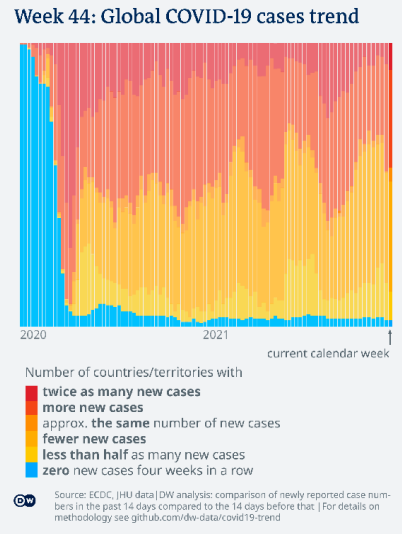
al vaccination drive, with rich countries accused of locking up supplies. The U.S. and others are already dispensing booster shots at a time when millions across Africa haven’t received a single dose, though the rich countries are also shipping hundreds of millions of shots to the rest of the world. Africa remains the world’s least vaccinated region, with just 5% of the population of 1.3 billion people fully covered. “This devastating milestone reminds us that we are failing much of the world,” U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres said in a written statement. “This is a global shame.” In Kampala, Uganda, Cissy Kagaba lost her 62-year-old mother on Christmas Day and her 76-year-old father days later. “Christmas will never be the same for me,” said Kagaba, an anti-corruption activist in the East African country that has been through multiple lockdowns against the virus and where a curfew remains in place. The pandemic has united the globe in grief and pushed survivors to the breaking point.



Reena Kesarwani holds a photograph of her husband, Anand Babu Kesarwani, who died of COVID-19, in their hardware shop, Monday, Oct. 25, 2021, in the Chhitpalgarh village, in India’s northern Uttar Pradesh state. (AP Photo/Rajesh Kumar Singh)

“Who else is there now? The responsibility is on me. COVID has changed my life,” said 32-year-old Reena Kesarwani, a mother of two boys, who was left to manage her late husband’s modest hardware store in a village in India. Her husband, Anand Babu Kesarwani, died at 38 during India’s crushing coronavirus surge earlier this year. It overwhelmed one of the most chronically underfunded public health systems in the world and killed tens of thousands as hospitals ran out of oxygen and medicine.

In Bergamo, Italy, once the site of the West’s first deadly wave, 51-year-old Fabrizio Fidanza was deprived of a final farewell as his 86-year-old father lay dying in the hospital. He is still trying to come to terms with the loss more than a year later. “For the last month, I never saw him,” Fidanza said during a visit to his father’s grave. “It was the worst moment. But coming here every week, helps me.” Today, 92% of Bergamo’s eligible population have had at least one shot, the highest vaccination rate in Italy. The chief of medicine at Pope John XXIII Hospital, Dr. Stefano Fagioli, said he believes that’s a clear result of the city’s collective trauma, when the wail of ambulances was constant.



In Lake City, Florida, LaTasha Graham, 38, still gets mail almost daily for her 17-year-old daughter, Jo’Keria, who died of COVID-19 in August, days before starting her senior year of high school. The teen, who was buried in her cap and gown, wanted to be a trauma surgeon. “I know that she would have made it. I know that she would have been where she wanted to go,” her mother said. In Rio de Janeiro, Erika Machado scanned the list of names engraved on a long, undulating sculpture of oxidized steel that stands in Penitencia cemetery as an homage to some of Brazil’s COVID-19 victims. Then she found him: Wagner Machado, her father. “My dad was the love of my life, my best friend,” said Machado, 40, a saleswoman who traveled from Sao Paulo to see her father’s name. “He was everything to me.” (Courtesy apnews.com)

## Threat Of A Vaccine-Proof Variant Only ‘A Few Mutations Away?’



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

July 30, 2021 -- CDC Director Rochelle Walensky, MD, made a dire prediction during a media briefing this week that, if we weren’t already living within the reality of the COVID-19 pandemic, would sound more like a pitch for a movie about a dystopian future. “For the amount of virus circulating in this country right now largely among unvaccinated people, the largest concern that we in public health and science are worried about is that the virus...[becomes] a very transmissible virus that has the potential to evade our vaccines in terms of how it protects us from severe disease and death,” Walensky told reporters on Tuesday. A new, more elusive variant could be “just a few mutations away,” she said. “That’s a very prescient comment,” Lewis Nelson, MD, professor and clinical chair of emergency medicine and chief of the Division of Medical Toxicology at Rutgers New Jersey Medical School in Newark, tells Medscape Medical News. “We’ve gone through a few mutations already that have been named, and each one of them gets a little more transmissible,” he says. “That’s normal, natural selection and what you would expect to happen as viruses mutate from one strain to another.” “What we’ve mostly seen this virus do is evolve to become more infectious,” says Stuart Ray, MD. “That is the remarkable feature of Delta — that it is so infectious.” He says that the SARS-CoV-2 has evolved largely as expected, at least so far. “The potential for this virus to mutate has been something that has been a concern from early on.” “The viral evolution is a bit like a ticking clock. The more we allow infections to occur, the more likely changes will occur. When we have

lots of people infected, we give more chances to the virus to diversify and then adapt to selective pressures,” says Ray, vice-chair of medicine for data integrity and analytics and professor in the Division of Infectious Diseases at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine in Baltimore, Maryland.



“The problem is if the virus changes in such a way that the spike protein — which the antibodies from the vaccine are directed against — are no longer effective at binding and destroying the virus, and the virus escapes immune surveillance,” Nelson says. If this occurs, he says, “we will have an ineffective vaccine, essentially. And we’ll be back to where we were last March with a brand-new disease.” **Technology to the Rescue?** The flexibility of mRNA vaccines is one potential solution. These vaccines could be more easily and quickly adapted to respond to a new, more vaccine-elusive variant. “That’s absolutely reassuring,” Nelson says. For example, if a mutation changes the spike protein and vaccines no longer recognize it, a manufacturer could identify the new protein and incorporate that in a new mRNA vaccine. “The problem is that some people are not

## COMMUNITY

taking the current vaccine,” he adds. “I’m not sure what is going to make them take the next vaccine.” **Nothing Appears Certain** When asked how likely a new strain of SARS-CoV-2 could emerge that gets around vaccine protection, Nelson says, “I think [what] we’ve learned so far there is no way to predict anything” about this pandemic. “The best way to prevent the virus from mutating is to prevent hosts, people, from getting sick with it,” he says. “That’s why it’s so important people should get immunized and wear masks.”



Both Nelson and Ray point out that it is in the best interest of the virus to evolve to be more transmissible and spread to more people. In contrast, a virus that causes people to get so sick that they isolate or die, thus halting transmission, works against viruses surviving evolutionarily. Some viruses also mutate to become milder over time, but that has not been the case with SARS-CoV-2, Ray says. **Mutations Not the Only Concern** Viruses have another mechanism that produces new strains, and it works even more quickly than mutations. Recombination, as it’s known, can occur when a person is infected with two different strains of the same virus. If the two versions enter the same cell, the viruses can swap genetic material and produce a third, altogether different strain. Recombination has already been seen with influenza strains, where H and N genetic segments are swapped to yield H1N1, H1N2, and H3N2 versions of the flu, for example. “In the early days of SARS-CoV-2 there was so little diversity that recombination did not matter,” Ray says. However, there are now distinct lineages of the virus circulating globally. If two of these lineages swap segments “this would make a very new viral sequence in one step without having to mutate to gain those differences.” “The more diverse the strains that are circulating, the bigger a possibility this is,” Ray says.



**Protected, for Now** Walensky’s sober warning came at the same time the CDC released new guidance calling for the wearing of masks indoors in schools and in any location in the country where COVID-19 cases surpass 50 people per 100,000, also known as substantial or high transmission areas. On a positive note, Walensky says: “Right now, fortunately, we are not there. The vaccines operate really well in protecting us from severe disease and death.” (Courtesy web-smd.com)

**Related**  
**Is The Lambda Variant Vaccine Resistant?**  
**KEY POINTS**  
*Japanese researchers found the lambda variant could be resistant to COVID-19 vaccines. Three mutations in the lambda variant’s spike protein allow the variant to resist antibodies.*

As the delta variant surges across the United States, there is a new COVID-19 variant that is just as transmissible, but could also be more resistant to vaccines. The lambda variant, first detected in Peru in August 2020 and spreading through South America, made its way to the U.S. for the first time on July 22 in a Houston hospital. There are 1,053 cases of the lambda variant in the U.S. since the first case was detected, according to GISAID, an initiative dedicated to promoting COVID-19 data through genomic sequencing. The U.S. ranks second in cases behind Chile, and 41 countries have reported at least 1 lambda case. The threat of lambda comes as the delta variant is the dominant variant of COVID-19 in the U.S. — it now accounts for 93% of cases, up from the previous rate of 83%, according to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

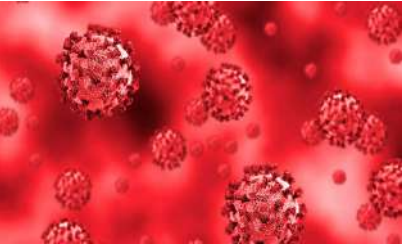


Houston Methodist Hospital, which operates eight hospitals in its network, said the first lambda case was confirmed last week. Here’s what we know about the lambda variant so far.

Japanese researchers at the University of Tokyo posted a lambda variant study that shows it is highly infectious and more resistant to COVID-19 vaccines. This study posted on July 28 on bioRxiv, a database for unpub-

lished preprinted studies, has not been peer reviewed or published. The study shows three mutations in the lambda variant’s spike protein — RSYLT-PGD246-253N, 260 L452Q and F490S — which allow for the variant to resist vaccine-induced neutralizing antibodies. Two other mutations — T76I and L452Q — are responsible for making lambda highly infectious. Spike protein is the part of the virus that helps it penetrate cells in the human body — which is what vaccines target.

**How does the lambda variant compare to delta?** The lambda variant isn’t showing signs to spark concern about it becoming the dominant strain of COVID-19 in the United States like delta, said Dr. Abhijit Duggal, a staff ICU physician and director for critical care research for the medical ICU at the Cleveland Clinic. Since the lambda variant was first detected in Peru, it hasn’t spread globally at the same pace as the delta variant. It has, however, become widespread in South America, but this could be due to the “founder effect,” according to Dr. S. Wesley Long, medical director of diagnostic biology at Houston Methodist, where the case was identified in the U.S. The founder effect means the variant first took hold in a densely populated and geographically restricted area, making it the primary variant over time.



**How concerned should you be about the lambda variant?** On June 14, the World Health Organization flagged the lambda variant as a “variant of interest” versus a “variant of concern.” A variant of interest depends on evidence about a unique outbreak cluster or limited expansion in the U.S. or other countries, according to the CDC. A variant of concern shows widespread evidence of treatments, vaccines and transmissibility. The University of Tokyo study said, “Because the Lambda variant is a (variant of interest), it might be considered that this variant is not an ongoing threat compared to the pandemic (variants of concern). However, because the Lambda variant is relatively resistant to the vaccine-induced (antibodies), it might be possible that this variant is feasible to cause breakthrough infection.” (Courtesy <https://www.tennessean.com/news/>)