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For news and information consideration, please send to News@scdaily.com or contact
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

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FBI probes pre-Capitol riot meeting of far-right groups



WASHINGTON, Feb 8 (Reuters) - The Federal Bureau of Investigation is probing a meeting in a downtown DC garage the day before the January 6 Capitol Hill riot between the then-leader of the Proud Boys extremist group, the now-indicted leader of the Oath Keepers militia and other far-right figures, according to two witnesses interviewed by FBI agents.

Among the half dozen people gathered at a garage near the Phoenix Park Hotel was Oath Keepers head Stewart Rhodes, who was indicted this year on charges of “seditious conspiracy” in the insurrection. Proud Boys Chairman Enrique Tarrio, who was not present at the riot, was also at the garage meeting but left Washington afterward. The meeting put the heads of the nation’s two best-known violent far-right pro-Trump groups in immediate proximity to each other 24 hours before the breach of the Capitol. Three attendees or their representatives contacted by Reuters say they did not discuss matters related to January 6.

Bianca Gracia, who heads a pro-Trump coalition called Latinos for Trump and an affiliated Political Action Committee named Latinos For America First, was at the garage meeting as well, according to witnesses and video taken by a documentary film crew. Also present was Kellye SoRelle, a lawyer for the Oath Keepers and Latinos for Trump. SoRelle told Reuters she was invited by Gracia to meet Tarrio and share information about criminal defense attorneys. She said her role in the meeting was brief, and did not concern plans for the next day. Take care and thrive Focusing on your well-being creates positive effects in every part of your life. That’s why, at Panasonic, we create convenient technologies that help you take care of you and your family. Discover easy ways to incorporate taking care of your family into your day. #whatmovesus See more Report ad A U.S. House of Representatives committee is investigating the January 6 riot, in which supporters of then-President Donald Trump sought

to block Congress’ certification of Joe Biden’s election as president. The committee has subpoenaed the phone records of a photographer who accompanied Tarrio to parts of the garage meeting.

Tarrio told Reuters last June that his meeting at the garage with Rhodes was unplanned and not significant. “By coincidence,” Tarrio said, “he was inside ... that parking garage.” He said he shook hands with Rhodes solely to be polite. “He’s here, I’m not going to not shake somebody’s hand.” He has denied any Proud Boys planning ahead of January 6.

Reached again in January, Tarrio said he would not answer further questions. “I usually speak to all reporters,” he texted back after one question, “but when they become conspiracy theorists ... that’s usually when I sever ties.” Tarrio has said he stepped down as Proud Boys chairman earlier this year.

An attorney for Rhodes, who is being held pending trial, emailed Reuters that “there was no coordination” between Rhodes and Tarrio.

The FBI’s investigation of the meeting has not previously been reported, nor have the circumstances of the gathering. A short clip of the gathering appeared in a British Channel 4 documentary last year about the Proud Boys, spurring some chatter on Twitter.

Michael Simmons, who was present during part of January 6 with Rhodes, said Rhodes had not mentioned meeting Tarrio. When Reuters told him of the meeting, Simmons said he was shocked because, he said, Rhodes had been critical of Tarrio and the Proud Boys. “Why would you meet Enrique in a fucking parking garage?” said Simmons, who has not been charged. “It just blows my mind. That’s crazy!”

Federal prosecutors have charged multiple leaders of the Proud Boys and Oath Keepers with playing leading roles in the mayhem of January 6. Tarrio has not been indicted in the case. The Proud Boys is an all-male group that encourages street brawling against leftist protesters and calls itself “Western chauvinist.” Oath

Keepers wear military-style uniforms, train in military tactics and often carry firearms in operations.

Last March, prosecutors cited the social media messages of one Oath Keeper leader indicted in the January 6 case. “This week I organized an alliance between Oath Keepers, Florida 3%ers, and Proud Boys,” he allegedly wrote in a Facebook message before the riot, citing a different gathering, prosecutors said in a court filing. The Three Percenters is a loosely organized far right militia, some of whose members have been charged in the Capitol attack.

So far, however, the Justice Department has not disclosed clear evidence that the far-right groups plotted to come together on January 6.

An FBI spokesperson declined to comment.

‘OUT OF SIGHT’

On the afternoon of January 5, 2021, Washington teemed with Trump supporters preparing for January 6, when Congress was scheduled to ratify Biden’s presidential victory at the Capitol. Tarrio had just been released after a night in a Washington jail, where he was held on charges of burning a Black Lives Matter flag in December 2020. A judge ordered him to leave town until his court appearances. Tarrio later served nearly six months for burning the banner and carrying illegal rifle magazines into the city that December.

After he was released on January 5, the documentary film crew working on the Proud Boys report drove Tarrio to the Phoenix Park Hotel, not far from the Capitol building, said a source familiar with the matter.

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WEA LEE'S GLOBAL NOTES

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Wea H. Lee
Wealee@scdaily.com

Chairman of International District Houston Texas

Publisher Southern Daily Wea H. Lee

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Chairman of International Trade & Culture Center
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We Gave Red Envelopes To Rural People In Louisiana -- They Love Chinese Ku Fung And Dances

The STV Art Troupe gave a very wonderful performance and good will trip to the state of Louisiana and brought good luck to them for the year of the Tiger.

I would like to especially thank the performers who did a beautiful job to bring

the joy of the New Year to all of us.

Since the Covid-19 virus attacked us in over more than the last two years, 900,000 of our brothers and sisters have already lost their lives. It is estimated that we will lose a million lives by March of this year.

The catastrophe brought by this virus is hard to imagine. Let's question whether this is still the country in which we are living in?

Today with the New Year blessing, we visited a rural area in Louisiana to hold the hands of the people



and give them lucky red envelopes just to express our care and blessing. The smiles of the people were deeply rooted in my mind. Do they care about what is going on between the U.S. and China trade war? They are more concerned about the price of gas and goods at the supermarket.

On the way back, we drove past Lamar University in

Beaumont, the city where my wife and I spent a few years studying in graduate school. Many decades have passed away, but our memories are still very fresh.

Dear brothers and sisters, tomorrow the sun will still rise. No matter what you want to do, we must continue to live in hope.



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Editor's Choice



Gold medalist Ireen Wust of the Netherlands celebrates on the podium after the Women's Speed Skating 1500m. REUTERS/Tyrone Siu



Alexander Bolshunov of the Russian Olympic Committee celebrates winning gold Men's Cross-Country Skiing - Men's 15km + 15km Skiathlon. REUTERS/Marko Djurica



Gold medallist Quentin Fillon Maillet of France celebrates with his team members in the Men's Biathlon - 20km Individual. REUTERS/Kim Hong-Ji



Ren Ziwei of China celebrates after winning gold in the Men's Short Track Speed Skating - 1000m. REUTERS/Aleksandra Szmigiel



Gold medalist Zoi Sadowski Synnott of New Zealand celebrates after her win in the Women's Snowboard - SBD SS Final Run. REUTERS/Lisi Niesner



Arianna Fontana of Italy celebrates after winning gold in the Women's Short Track Speed Skating - 500m. REUTERS/Aleksandra Szmigiel

Southern DAILY

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BUSINESS

Asia Sees Spike In COVID-19 Cases After Lunar New Year Celebrations

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



Thai classical dancers wearing face masks to help protect themselves from the coronavirus perform at the Erawan Shrine in Bangkok, Thailand, on Monday. (Photo/Sakchai Lalit/AP)

SINGAPORE (AP) — Many Asian countries are facing a spike in COVID-19 infections after the widely-celebrated Lunar New Year holidays, as health officials grapple with the highly-transmissible omicron variant and expectations that numbers will continue to rise in coming weeks. The Lunar New Year, which is China's biggest holiday, was celebrated across Asia on Feb. 1 even as pandemic restrictions in many countries kept crowds and family outings to a minimum. Hong Kong's authorities are confronting record cases that are straining its so-called "zero-COVID" policy. On Monday, the city reported a new high of 614 local infections. "We expect there will be more cases coming in a few days. We consider this as some effects after the holiday events and clusters," told reporters on Monday Edwin Tsui, an official with the Centre for Health Protection. "With our current containment measures, we hope we can still contain the disease." Hong Kong currently requires all cases to be hospitalized. On Monday, authorities announced that close contacts of infected persons will be allowed to isolate at home, starting from Tuesday. Those who test positive while in home isolation will be transferred to a hospital.



Residents line up to get tested for the coronavirus at a temporary testing center for COVID-19 in Hong Kong.

Hong Kong on Monday. (Photo/Vincent Yu/AP) Hong Kong has aligned itself with China's "zero-COVID" policy that aims to totally stamp out outbreaks, even as many other countries change their approach to living with the virus. Authorities look to impose lockdowns on residential buildings wherever clusters of infections are identified, and have banned public dining after 6 p.m. In Singapore, a dramatic rise in coronavirus infections followed last week's holiday, with cases tripling to 13,000 on Friday. Daily infections have since dipped to 7,752 on Sunday, amid restrictions that include limited capacity for restaurants and capping the number of unique visitors to each household. Singapore has reported over 100,000 cases spanning the last month, although over 99% of the cases are mild or asymptomatic.

COVID-19 cases are rising but there are fewer serious cases than in the delta surge

Across Asia, authorities are confronting a similar pattern as the more easily transmissible omicron becomes dominant, even as health officials in several countries report that omicron surges are not driving hospitalizations or deaths as high as the previous delta variant. In Japan, nearly 90,000 new cases nationwide were reported on Sunday, including 17,526 in Tokyo, as local omicron infections showed no signs of slowing. Experts say the infections are now spreading to vulnerable elderly people who are beginning to fill more hospital beds. Less than 5% of the country's population has received their third dose of the coronavirus vaccine. Local outbreak numbers are similarly rising in Indonesia, edging toward the caseloads that marked the height of last year's devastating delta outbreak. On Jan. 6, Indonesia recorded 533 new COVID-19 cases and seven deaths. A month later on Sunday, the daily figure had soared to 36,057. Daily deaths have also climbed to 57, almost four times the rate a week ago. In Thailand, officials on Monday reported more than 10,000 daily cases for the third day in a row, but the Department of Disease Control said that the number of severely ill patients was dropping, while the fatality rate has remained stable. Department chief Opas Karnkawinpong said that Thailand might consider relaxing some of the country's pandemic restrictions, as the omicron variant seemed to be less severe. "The global situation of COVID-19 seems to be moving in the same direction," he was quoted as saying in The Bangkok Post. "Many countries have started to ease measured despite spikes in daily infections."



Students wearing face masks as precaution against the coronavirus wait during class at the Nurul Fattah Islamic Boarding School in Tangerang, Indonesia, on Monday. (Photo/Tatan Syuflana/AP)

Officials warn that wave of infections will continue. In other countries where the Lunar New Year is a major holiday, governments are likewise on high alert ahead of expectations that omicron will continue to stoke higher infections. New cases in Malaysia have been hovering higher, with the health ministry reporting 11,034 on Monday. The rise came after the Lunar New Year when many Malaysians travel, but health officials said most of the cases were asymptomatic or have light symptoms. Top health official Noor Hisham Abdullah has warned that daily cases could double by the end of March and urged Malaysians to take their booster dose. Some 98% of adults in the country have completed their vaccination and half of them have received their third jab. In South Korea, health experts warn that the country may see daily jumps of 130,000 or 170,000 by late February. The country reported 38,691 new cases of the virus, a nine-fold increase from the levels seen in mid-January, when omicron became the country's dominant strain.



South Korean prospective soldiers wearing face masks have their blood taken during a medical checkup at the Seoul office of the Military Manpower Administration in Seoul, South Korea, on Monday. (Ahn Young-joon/AP) In Vietnam, authorities have warned that infections may rise after the popular new year holiday. Vietnam reported 192 cases of the omicron variant in the past month, with most of those showing only mild symptoms or no symptoms at all. With low hospitalization and death rates, Vietnam had previously moved toward resuming most social activities. The Philippines has moved to ease coronavirus restrictions and open its doors to tourists as outbreak numbers eased to about 8,300 on Sunday, down from a peak of 39,000 in mid-January.

But social distancing restrictions remain in place amid fears of an outbreak ahead of the country's presidential and general elections May 9. Campaigning begins on Tuesday, with a ban in place on handshakes, kissing, hugging and large crowds. In mainland China, new local infections continue to fluctuate, falling as low as nine on Friday, but rising again to 45 on Monday, most of them in the southern region of Guangxi.



Meanwhile, the far-flung Pacific archipelago nation of Tonga has been trying to contain its first outbreak since the start of the global pandemic, which might have been brought in with the delivery of emergency medical supplies and water after last month's volcanic eruption and tsunami. Two Tongan men who worked handling shipments tested positive last week. Over the weekend, Prime Minister Siaosi Sovaleni said two more positive cases were confirmed, bringing the total of active cases to seven. (Courtesy npr.org)

Related
Japan Is Ramping Up COVID-19 Restrictions As Omicron Cases Surge

TOKYO — Restaurants and bars will close early in Tokyo and a dozen other areas across Japan beginning Friday as the country widens COVID-19 restrictions due to the omicron variant causing cases to surge to new highs in metropolitan areas. The restraint, which is something of a pre-state of emergency, is the first since September and is scheduled to last through Feb. 13. With three other prefectures — Okinawa, Hiroshima and Yamaguchi — under similar measures since early January, the state of restraint now covers 16 areas, or one-third, of the country. While many Japanese adults are fully vaccinated against COVID-19, few have gotten a booster shot, which has been a vital protection from the highly contagious omicron variant of the coronavirus.



People wearing face masks to help protect against the spread of the coronavirus walk on a street lined with bars and restaurants in Tokyo on Jan. 19, 2022. (Photo/Koji Sasahara/AP File Photo) The Health Ministry on Friday approved Pfizer vaccinations for children aged 5-11, who are increasingly vulnerable to infection. Throughout the pandemic, Japan has resisted the use of lockdowns to limit the spread of the virus and has focused on requiring eateries to close early and not serve alcohol, and on urging the public

to wear masks and practice social distancing, as the government seeks to minimize damage to the economy. Under the latest measure, most eateries are asked to close by 8 or 9 p.m., while large events can allow full capacity if they have anti-virus plans. In Tokyo, certified eateries that stop serving alcohol can stay open until 9 p.m. while those serving alcohol must close an hour earlier. Mitsuru Saga, the manager of a Japanese-style "izakaya" restaurant in downtown Tokyo, said he chose to serve alcohol and close at 8 p.m. despite receiving less compensation from the government. "We cannot make business without serving alcohol," Saga said in an interview with Nippon Television. "It seems only eateries are targeted for restraints."



Japan says it will stick to the stringent border policy through end of February as the country tries to reinforce medical systems and treatment. The tough border controls have triggered criticism from foreign students and scholars who say the measures are not scientific. Some experts question the effectiveness of placing restraints only on eateries, noting that infections in the three prefectures that have already been subjected to the measures for nearly two weeks show no signs of slowing.

Tokyo logged 8,638 new cases of coronavirus infection Thursday, exceeding the previous record of 7,377 set the day before. At a Tokyo metropolitan government task force meeting, experts sounded the alarm at the fast-paced upsurge led by omicron. Norio Ohmagari, Director of the Disease Control and Prevention Center of National Center for Global Health and an advisor to the Tokyo metropolitan government panel, said Tokyo's daily new cases may exceed 18,000 within a week if the increase continues at the current pace.

Surging infections have already begun to paralyze hospitals, schools and other sectors in some areas.



While about 80% of Japanese have received their first two vaccine doses, the rollout of booster shots has been slow and has reached only 1.4 % of the population so far. (Courtesy npr.org)

Southern DAILY

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COMMUNITY

How To Handle Quarantining, Testing, And Masking After Covid-19 Exposure

Omicron Is Exploding. What To Do If You're Exposed

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



People line up for a Covid-19 test in Los Angeles on January 5, 2022, as the omicron variant continues to spread at a blistering pace. (Frederic J. Brown/AFP/Getty Images)

If you find out you've been exposed to someone who's tested positive for Covid-19, a rush of questions might come to mind: Do I have to quarantine? What if I can't find a good mask or a test? Even if I test negative, can I be certain that I'm not contagious? With omicron causing record-shattering case growth over the past few weeks, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) guidelines about what to do after exposure have shifted, and they remain frustratingly unclear. The last thing anyone wants to do when they've just learned they've been exposed is to dig through a bunch of confusing guidelines. Yet we all need to know what to do in this situation. Even if you're not worried about omicron's effects on you personally — maybe because it appears to be milder, because you're in a low-risk group, or because you think Covid-19 is inescapable at this point — it's crucial to do all you reasonably can to avoid spreading it to others right now, especially anyone who might be elderly, immunocompromised, or unvaccinated. Testing capacity is currently very strained and some hospitals are already running out of staffing and beds. It's really important that we not contribute to that crunch. Experts aren't suggesting Americans have to go back to a March 2020-style lockdown. Unlike at the start of the pandemic, we have vaccines and boosters that are highly effective at preventing serious illness and death. But they are advising people to be thoughtful about risk right now — both in terms of the precautions we take to avoid being exposed to omicron, and in terms of what we do if we have been exposed. There's a spectrum of views here from three epidemiologists; within this spectrum, you can decide where you fall depending on your own risk calculus, the people you come in contact with, and the community spread in your area.



1) I just found out I've been exposed to someone who tested positive — what's the first thing I should do?

There's broad unanimity on this front. "Don't run to get tested. And don't panic," said David Dowdy, an epidemiologist at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. If you spent time indoors with someone and then find out they've tested positive, it's possible you might get Covid-19 from the exposure, but you won't test positive immediately after it. So if it's only been a day or two since your exposure, the thing to focus on first is not testing, but the possibility of needing to quarantine — and the certainty of needing a good mask. If you're unvaccinated, or are vaccinated with two doses but not yet boosted, you should quarantine for five days and continue to wear a mask around others for five more days after that. If you're boosted, then you don't need to quarantine, according to the CDC guidelines. But you should still wear a mask around others for 10 days after the exposure.



And yes, "wear a mask around others" includes others in your home — like children or roommates — if possible. Dowdy acknowledged that's hard to do, but said his family did it when one of them recently had Covid-19: They opened the windows in the house, wore N95s, and slept in different

rooms. "Not everyone will be able to do this," he said, "but for those who can, it's the ideal way to halt transmission." All that said, the CDC guidance has also led to other questions. **2) The CDC says I don't need to quarantine if I'm vaccinated and boosted. Is that really sound guidance?** When I asked the epidemiologists whether they agreed with the CDC on this point, they expressed a range of opinion. "I think this is a safe bet. Boosters prevent infection from omicron very well," Katelyn Jetelina, an infectious diseases epidemiologist with the University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston, told me by email. In other words, if you're boosted, the chance that you'll spread the omicron variant is significantly lowered because there's a lower chance of you becoming infected with it in the first place.



Dowdy, for his part, said of the CDC guidance, "I think this is reasonable, depending on the level of transmission in your area. If you're in the midst of a hot spot, it probably makes sense to quarantine even if you are vaccinated. But if transmission levels are low, this is reasonable advice." He added that it's important to consider a couple of other factors in making your personal decision: first, whether you frequently come into contact with other people who could get really sick if they got infected, and second, if it's been more than a few months since your last vaccine dose. "In either of these cases, it makes sense to quarantine, even if you are vaccinated," he said. Tara Smith, an epidemiologist at Kent State University, told me she doesn't think we have enough data about omicron to know if the CDC's advice is solid. "If you can quarantine, I would still recommend it," she said.



3) When should I take a test? What should I do if I have difficulty getting a test?

The best time to get tested seems to be about five days after exposure (or at any time after a fever develops). Just remember that tests

— especially rapid antigen tests — are not foolproof. "Testing negative doesn't mean you can go mask-free. You should still mask around others in public" until it's been 10 days since the exposure, Smith said. "Even with a negative test, if you have exposure and symptoms, it's best to assume you are Covid-positive and act as such." What about if you can't get access to a test? "In that case, Dowdy said, "The best thing to do is continue quarantine for 10 days after any exposure. If you haven't developed symptoms within 10 days, it's reasonable to end quarantine at that time." With all of this, he said, there is a balance of risks and benefits — as well as personal circumstances — that must be assessed on an individual level. "What I'm describing is the ideal situation — for example, someone who can easily quarantine and continue working at home," he said. "But most of us don't live in those ideal situations, and it's important for all of us to be understanding of others who may not have the same support systems that we have."



Jetelina agrees that if you have difficulty getting a test, you should assume that you are positive and isolate until you can get your hands on one. "If you're still asymptomatic after five days (and still can't get a test), you can stop isolation as long as you can wear a good mask for five more days," she wrote, noting N95s are the best option.

4) The CDC says I'm supposed to mask up for 10 days after exposure. Is that really necessary?

Both Jetelina and Smith were crystal-clear on this one: Yes! "This is incredibly important as you can still be infectious after five days," Jetelina said. We're still learning about the transmission dynamics of omicron, and although many people will probably stop being infectious before 10 days have passed, "wearing a mask during that period will help to reduce any chance of spreading the virus," Smith explained. Dowdy noted that compared to other measures that could be enacted (like lockdowns), wearing a mask in public places is arguably not the hardest thing to do. So wearing a mask for 10 days is "the ideal," he said, though he reemphasized the caveat that "we have to be understanding of people for whom this might not be possible."

5) What kind of mask should I wear? What should I do if I can't get an N95?

The best bet is an N95. KN95 masks work great, too. Even though these masks are in high demand right now, you can still order them from mass suppliers like Walmart or Amazon, or from

retailers like WellBefore, Bona Fide Masks, DemeTECH, and N95 Mask Co. (There may be a shipping lag for some of these masks, so even if you haven't been exposed, it's a good idea to stock up now so you'll be prepared.) "Remember that the fit of the mask is just as important as the type of mask," Dowdy said. "Wearing an N95 without fitting it to your face is defeating the purpose of wearing an N95 in the first place." If you can't get an N95 or a KN95, the next-best option is a tight-fitting surgical mask. Adding a cloth mask on top of your surgical mask will further help eliminate gaps around your face. If you've been exposed or tested positive, do not rely on a cloth mask alone to prevent you from spreading the virus to others.



6) If I get a negative rapid test result, can I trust the result enough to go see, say, my elderly parents?

It's important to remember that rapid tests aren't perfect — and even with more sensitive tests like PCR, being negative one day doesn't mean you won't be positive in another day or two.

"If you have symptoms or a close contact [with an infected person], I would not trust one negative test," Jetelina said, adding that it's a good idea to retest at least 24 hours later.

Likewise, Smith said, "I would still try to mask around others if you have been exposed, when possible, especially if individuals you may spend time with are in high-risk categories."

She noted that there have been some reports recently that sampling the nose isn't sensitive enough early on to detect omicron infection, and that samples from the throat or saliva may detect it earlier. (Note that these reports are not yet peer-reviewed.) However, we don't yet know if those early throat or saliva samples mean infected individuals are already spreading virus to others. According to Dowdy, it's "really a judgment call at this point" whether you should feel comfortable visiting parents after one negative rapid test result. You have to consider your level of exposure, your parents' health, how long and in what setting you'll be seeing each other, and how both you and your parents weigh the value of seeing each other against the risk of them getting sick.

"If your parents are relatively healthy and you haven't been closely exposed (and are feeling well), it's probably reasonable to trust that negative test result," he said. "If your parents are much more frail and you're living with someone who has Covid in your house, I'd wait." (Vox.com)