

China urges cartoon producers to resist 'unhealthy' content

SHANGHAI, Sept 25 (Reuters) - China's broadcasting regulator said it will encourage online producers to create "healthy" cartoons and clamp down violent, vulgar or pornographic content, as Beijing steps up efforts to bring its thriving entertainment industry to heel.

The National Radio and Television Administration said in a notice posted late on Friday that children and young people were the main audience for cartoons, and qualified agencies need to broadcast content that "upholds truth, goodness and beauty".

China's ruling Communist Party has stepped up a campaign to clean up its entertainment industry in recent months, taking action against "online idols" and promising tougher penalties for celebrities who engage in illegal or unethical behaviour.

The campaigns have been part of a wider effort to intervene in all aspects of the country's culture and economy, with the government also promising to tackle inequality, soaring property prices and profit-seeking education institutions.

The Communist Party celebrated its centenary in July, and President Xi Jinping marked the occasion by promising to "enhance" the party's powers and strengthen the unity of the Chinese people.



Mexico urges Haitians at US-Mexico border to give up and head south

CIUDAD ACUNA, Mexico, Sept 24 (Reuters) - Mexican officials are urging Haitians on the Texas border trying to reach the United States to give up and return to Mexico's frontier with Guatemala to request asylum, even as discontent grows over the treatment meted out to the beleaguered migrants.

Up to 14,000 mostly Haitians were camped just north of the Rio Grande river this month as they attempted to enter the United States, but hundreds retreated to Mexico after U.S. officials began sending planes of people back

to Haiti.

On Thursday, the U.S. special envoy to Haiti quit in protest over the Biden administration's deportations of migrants to the Caribbean nation, which has been rocked by the assassination of its president, gang violence and natural disasters.

That followed widespread outrage stirred up by images of a U.S. border guard on horseback unfurling a whip-like cord against the migrants near their camp.

Yet pressure is also growing on U.S.

President Joe Biden to tighten the border, and Mexico's National Migration Institute (INM) is starting to return migrants to the southern Mexican city of Tapachula so they can file asylum applications there.

"We're not taking them out of the country," INM chief Francisco Garduno told Reuters. "We're bringing them away from the border so there are no hygiene and overcrowding problems."

Haitians who made the perilous, costly journey from Guatemala to Ciudad Acuna on the Mexico-U.S. border are

skeptical about the merits of going back to a city where they had already unsuccessfully tried to process asylum claims.

Willy Jean, who spent two fruitless months in Tapachula, said if Mexico really wanted to help the migrants, it should allow them to make their applications elsewhere.

"Tapachula's really tough, really small, there's lots of people," he told an INM agent trying to persuade him to go south. "There's no work, there's nothing."

Editor's Choice



Children take part in the Settrington Cup Pedal Car Race as motoring enthusiasts attend the Goodwood Revival, a three-day historic car racing festival in Goodwood, Chichester, southern Britain, September 18, 2021. REUTERS/Toby Melville



An elderly woman looks at the ballots as members of a local election commission visit her in her house on the last day of three-day long parliamentary elections in the village of Duplevo in Nizhny Novgorod Region, Russia September 19, 2021. United...MORE



A woman wearing clothing made from dried flowers attends the RHS Chelsea Flower Show, delayed from its usual spring dates because of COVID restrictions in London, Britain, September 20, 2021. REUTERS/Toby Melville



Migrants seeking asylum in the U.S. walk in the Rio Grande near the U.S.-Mexico border bridge as they wait to be processed in Ciudad Acuna, Mexico, September 16, 2021. Some 15,000 Haitian migrants, around two-thirds of those families, were living in a squalid encampment under a bridge over the Rio Grande, as they fled profound instability in the Caribbean nation, the poorest in the Western Hemisphere, where a presidential assassination, gang violence and a major earthquake



Kate Winslet poses for a picture with the award for outstanding lead actress in a limited or anthology series or movie, for "Mare Of Easttown", at the 73rd Primetime Emmy Awards in Los Angeles, September 19, 2021. REUTERS/Mario Anzuoni



Canada's Liberal Prime Minister Justin Trudeau kisses his wife Sophie Gregoire during the Liberal election night party in Montreal, Quebec, Canada, September 21, 2021. Trudeau's Liberals were handed another minority mandate, in an election that ended with all the major parties holding virtually the same number of seats they had before the vote was called. REUTERS/

'Goldilocks Virus': Delta's Power Overwhelms All Other Variants As Scientists Race To Understand All Of Its Many Complexities



COVID-19 DELTA

The delta variant is called the "Goldilocks virus" because it has the right mutations to pass easily through humans quickly and infect a number of people, per Nevan Krogan, a senior investigator at the Gladstone Institute of Data Science and Biosciences.

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

The variant battle in the United States is over. Delta won. Correct? Not so fast. Since late last year, the country has been overrun by a succession of coronavirus variants, each with its own suite of mutations conferring slightly different viral traits. For much of this year, the alpha variant—officially known as B.1.1.7 and first seen in the United Kingdom—looked like the clear winner, accounting for the majority of cases by April. In second place was Iota, B.1.526, first seen in New York City. A few others made the rogue's gallery of variants: gamma, beta, epsilon. Then came delta—B.1.617.2. It had spread rapidly in India, but in the United States, it sat there for months, doing little as the alpha advanced. As recently as May 8, delta caused only about 1 percent of new infections nationally. Today, it has nearly wiped out all of its rivals. The coronavirus pandemic in America has become a delta pandemic. By the end of July, it accounted for 93.4 percent of new infections, according to the Centers

for Disease Control and Prevention. The speed with which it dominated the pandemic has left scientists nervous about what the virus will do next. The variant battles of 2021 are part of a longer war, one that is far from over.



Delta is sending thousands of people into hospitals every day and has knocked the Biden administration back on its heels. In a few short weeks, the delta variant changed the calculations for what it will take to end the pandemic. Epidemiologists had hoped getting 70 or 80 percent of the population vaccinated

in combination with immunity from natural infections, would bring the virus under control. But a more contagious virus means the vaccination target has to be much higher, perhaps in the range of 90 percent. Globally, that could take years. In the United States, the target may be impossible to reach anytime soon given the hardened vaccine resistance in a sizable fraction of the country, the fact that children under 12 remain ineligible and the persistent circulation of disinformation about vaccines and the pandemic. With so many people unvaccinated, in the United States and around the world, the virus has abundant opportunity not only to spread and sicken large numbers of people, but to mutate further. Some scientists have expressed hope that the virus has reached peak "fitness," but there is no evidence this is so. Just as schools and workplaces were ready to hit reset and embrace a level of normalcy, indoor mask-wearing is back in much of the country, regardless of vaccination status.

SYMPTOMS

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- ✓ WEAKNESS/FATIGUE
- ✓ RUNNY NOSE OR EYES
- ✓ BLOCKED NOSE
- ✓ MUSCLE ACHES
- ✓ SORE THROAT
- ✓ LOSS OF TASTE/SMELL AND/OR APPETITE

Hospitals in states with low vaccination rates are struggling to cope with a flood of patients. At the same time, vaccination rates are jumping as the reality of the pandemic and the efficacy of the vaccines overcome fear, inertia and disinformation.

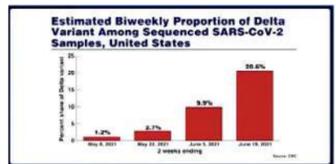
A Dangerous Brew Several factors have played a role in the rise of delta:

Behavior. This is almost impossible for researchers to quantify. As infection numbers started dropping in mid-April, people began returning to crowded gyms, restaurants, ballparks, indoor theaters, dance clubs. The CDC said vaccinated people didn't need to wear masks. Human nature took over. Only the hypervigilant refused to behave as if the pandemic had ended.

Vaccine resistance. When the United States was reporting 3 million inoculations each day, it appeared plausible that by July 4 the Biden administration would reach its goal of 70 percent of adults with at least one shot. But in May, the rate of vaccination slowed dramatically. As of

today, more than 90 million people nationwide who could get a shot haven't. Tens of millions of children remain ineligible because the vaccines do not have approval for those age groups yet.

The delta variant itself. The rapid ascendancy to total domination is the real-world proof that this variant is different. For virologists studying the coronavirus up close, that difference remains somewhat mysterious. Scientists are racing to understand what makes this variant so successful. They are studying it in animal models and in petri dishes, and scrutinizing the genomes of thousands of closely related lineages. What's most sobering to scientists is how the coronavirus keeps getting better at jumping from person to person.



The original strain that emerged in Wuhan, China, had an estimated reproductive number — an "R-naught" — of roughly 2.5. That's the average number of new infections generated by each infected person in a population without immunity or mitigations. Any number above 1 means that outbreaks will expand and spread. But the CDC and other scientists say delta has a reproductive number greater than 5.

The result is what the United States has endured this summer: viral explosion. Although the greater transmissibility of delta is clear at this point, scientists are less certain about whether it has enhanced virulence — that is, whether it's more likely to make a person severely ill. The evidence on disease severity is limited and largely anecdotal.

Stephen Brierre, chief of critical care at Baton Rouge General in Louisiana, said the onset of respiratory failure requiring ventilation seems to be more rapid: "This is observational and anecdotal at this point: They get sicker quicker."

Emily L. Tull, a nurse practitioner in the covid unit at Willis-Knighton Medical Center in Shreveport, La., said that under normal circumstances, one nurse manages two patients in intensive care. In recent weeks, Tull pointed out, "these patients are so sick they're requiring one-on-one care."

Patients are younger compared with earlier in the pandemic, perhaps because fewer young people are vaccinated. Tull

said health-care workers are "having to make the decision of do we start dialysis on a healthy 25-year-old?"



In Alabama, where about 43 percent of adults are fully vaccinated and virtually all 67 counties are reporting high levels of community transmission, health officials are seeing inpatient data supporting that "delta may be more harmful," according to Jeanne Marrazzo, director of the infectious-diseases division at the University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Medicine. At the 1,200-bed UAB hospital, patients hospitalized for covid-19 are younger, the patients who have died are younger, and there appears to be greater use of a last-resort treatment, called ECMO, that can mechanically substitute for badly damaged lungs. The heavy use of ECMO "connotes truly serious systemic illness," Marrazzo wrote in an email.

An internal CDC document, first disclosed late last month by The Washington Post, cited several studies from other countries showing that infections with delta are more likely to result in hospitalization. The document concluded that greater disease severity is "likely" with delta — one reason the authors said the agency needed to "acknowledge the war has changed."



CDC Director Rochelle Walensky said Thursday that such research is preliminary. She noted that the delta variant spread rapidly in a time when mitigation efforts such as masking and social distancing had been relaxed. That has led to many more people being exposed and made it difficult for researchers to disentangle the severity of the virus from important changes in how people are exposed to it.

(Article Continues Below)

COMMUNITY

(Article Continues From Above)

'Goldilocks Virus': Delta's Power Overwhelms All Other Variants As Scientists Race To Understand All Of Its Many Complexities

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

A Mystery Story – CDC Changes The War At the CDC, the war has indeed changed. The agency has often acted at the pace of an academic institution. It can be glacial in putting out new guidance. Delta forced it to accelerate its normal process when evidence emerged that vaccinated people with breakthrough infections are spreading the virus. The agency changed its masking guidance—without initially publishing the data that incited the change. A "full-court press" to understand the delta variant is underway at the agency and will continue "until we break this surge," said one official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because he wasn't authorized to speak publicly on the matter.



Vaccinations remain key. All three vaccines with emergency use authorization in the United States are highly effective at preventing severe illness or death from delta or other variants. Vaccinated people rarely need hospitalizations for covid-19, the disease caused by the virus. Delta is spreading fastest in areas with low vaccination rates. Vaccination lowers the risk of infection eightfold and the risk of hospitalization or death 25-fold, according to the CDC. But vaccinated people are getting sick, too. Delta appears to be slightly more capable than some other variants at causing breakthrough infections, which are usually mild to moderate cases that do not require hospitalization. The rising number of breakthrough infections isn't surprising: As the number of vaccinated people increases, and delta swarms the nation, it's inevitable that the virus will sometimes sneak past the enormously robust shield of protection afforded by vaccines. The recent Provincetown, Mass., outbreak that drew national attention illustrates the

point. The people who flocked to the tourist town at the tip of Cape Cod were overwhelmingly vaccinated. Hundreds of people became infected, three-fourths of them with breakthrough cases. But the vaccines kept them from becoming severely ill: Only four people with breakthrough infections were hospitalized. What alarmed the CDC were tests showing that vaccinated people with delta infections had viral loads similar to those among unvaccinated people. That suggested vaccinated people could spread the virus.



The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention last month recommended people — vaccinated or not — don face coverings inside public settings. (Scott Olson/Getty Images)

Walensky and Surgeon General Vivek H. Murthy have said in recent weeks that 97 percent of people hospitalized with covid-19 were unvaccinated. A document posted Aug. 2 by the White House stated, "Virtually all U.S. Hospitalizations and Deaths are Among Unvaccinated People." The document cited that in Ohio, 99.5 percent of deaths and 98.8 percent of hospitalizations were among the unvaccinated. But officials have relied on older data that does not capture the current impact of the delta. Walensky acknowledged Thursday when questioned at a White House covid-19 task force briefing. The Ohio health department, contacted by The Post, confirmed the numbers for the state but noted that the data covers Jan. 1 to July 21. Walensky said she had been relying on data from January to June. The use of figures from early in the year skews the picture by including a large number of people sickened and killed by the virus before vaccinations were widely

available. Walensky said Thursday that her agency plans to update the breakthrough data.



Demonstrators gather July 24 outside a Livonia, Mich., hospital to protest mandatory coronavirus vaccine shots for health-care workers. (Emily Elconin/Bloomberg News)

The uncertainty about breakthrough infections "is disconcerting, and I think the reality is it's humbling as a medical community," said William G. Morice II, chair of the department of laboratory medicine and pathology at the Mayo Clinic.

"Even with the whole world being focused on covid, we still don't truly understand the intricacies of the virus and its interplay with the immune system," he said.

A Numbers Game

A Colorado county, perched on the western slopes of the Rocky Mountains, tells the story of delta's swift spread. In early May, five cases of the delta variant were reported in Mesa County. The extent of the threat was still emerging, but public health officials urged residents to get vaccinated. They noted that only 36 percent of people eligible for a shot had been fully vaccinated. In late May, the county announced the first pediatric death from covid-19 — a child infected with delta and too young for a vaccine.

In late June, the Country Jam music festival opened. Public health officials sent a bus to administer vaccines on-site, and used signs and messages on the Jumbotron to warn concertgoers about delta.



By early August, there were nearly 900 known cases of infection caused by the delta variant. Vaccines remained the best protection against severe illness, but about half of known cases were in fully vaccinated

people.

The national numbers are similarly vertical. The seven-day rolling average of cases used by The Post showed about 13,000 new cases a day July 1. On Friday, that figure topped 100,000, and there is no sign of the curve flattening. Deaths are rising sharply as well: The daily average jumped from 209 on July 6 to 489 on Friday, a month later.

Because the delta variant replicates so well when it gets inside human cells, the infectious dose may be lower. Infected people may also begin shedding the virus sooner and in greater quantities. It's a numbers game, and delta has numbers on its side. Rapid replication of the virus has probably shortened the period between a person getting infected and becoming infectious, to perhaps two or three days rather than five or six.

The flip side is that the delta surge is expected to peak faster. A more contagious virus finds susceptible people quickly and burns through that "fuel" faster. This may explain why the United Kingdom and India have both experienced surprisingly swift drop in cases after recent delta surges.



People attend the Kaleidoscope Festival on July 24 in London, one of the first festivals in England since most coronavirus restrictions were lifted. (Justin Tallis/AFP/Getty Images)

'Delta Surprised Me'

Human beings have never before seen viral evolution in such vivid scientific detail. Genomic sequencing technologies developed in recent years allow scientists to witness the evolution of a pandemic virus in real time, as one lineage evolves into another. Scientists say the delta variant's mutations look, at first glance, unremarkable compared with the mutations in variants it has outcompeted. It lacks some of the immunity-evading mutations seen in gamma and beta, for example. But one mutation, P681R, may play an outside role in boosting delta. The coronavirus requires two steps to get into the cell, akin to putting a key into a lock and turning it to open the door. Most of the mutations identified in the other "variants of concern" seem to improve the key's fit to the lock, said Vinet

D. Menachery, a scientist who studies coronaviruses at the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston. The P681R mutation seems to improve how the key is turned, making it better at getting into cells. The delta has mutations that affect other regions — and little is known about what they do.



Menachery said he regularly debates with people in his laboratory and other scientists about the evolutionary potential of the virus. He describes this coronavirus as a "Goldilocks virus" — many things have to be just right for it to remain successful. A mutation that helps the virus enter a cell, for example, might come with an Achilles' heel, making it less stable. That leaves the open question of whether delta is the fittest — that is, the worst — version of the virus, or whether it could acquire some new mutations that make it even more formidable. "Nobody knows what tricks the virus has left," said Jeremy Luban, a virologist at the University of Massachusetts Medical School. "It's possible we've seen all of its chess moves, or its poker tricks, but it's got a very big complicated genome and it probably still has some space to explore." Like everyone else, scientists are wondering when SARS-CoV-2's contagiousness will peak.



"Delta surprised me," said Trevor Bedford, an expert on viral evolution at the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center. "This doesn't happen with an influenza pandemic. It doesn't happen with Ebola. It doesn't happen with most other things." He knows it can't keep evolving to become more transmissible forever. Eventually, the virus will hit a ceiling, he said. "But it's not exactly clear what that is." (Courtesy washingtonpost.com)



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Inside C2

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How to tell if Evergrande crisis is spilling beyond China

NEW YORK, Sept 24 (Reuters) - Worries surrounding debt-strapped property developer China Evergrande (3333.HK) have put investors on guard for evidence that the crisis may be spilling over into broader markets.

Evergrande, once China's top-selling property developer, owes \$305 billion, has run short of cash, and investors are worried a collapse could pose systemic risks to China's financial system and reverberate around the world.

So far, there have been few signs of stress in money and credit markets, as well as other areas that would signal that the crisis was spreading beyond China.

"The linkage of Evergrande's debt to other global financial actors is modest, despite the size of it," said Stan Shipley, fixed income strategist, at Evercore ISI in New York.

"As a result the risk of contagion is small. China has more than enough financial resources to dampen a possible bankruptcy or restructuring," he added.

The situation remains fraught, however, and few investors have forgotten the money market blow-ups during the 2008 global financial crisis, the 2011 euro zone sovereign mess that effectively shut European banks out of interbank lending, and most recently, the coronavirus pandemic that shook the global economy and led to massive bailouts from central banks.

Here are some key barometers of market stress investors are watching:

U.S. LIBOR-OIS
The U.S. LIBOR-OIS spread measures the difference between secured and unsecured lending in the United States and is seen as one measure of strain in money markets.

A higher spread suggests that banks are becoming more nervous about lending to each other because the cost has increased.

On Friday, the LIBOR-OIS spread narrowed significantly to 3.2 basis points from the pandemic high of 135.213 basis points in April last year, amid increased vaccinations and the reopening of U.S. states

Cross currency swaps allow investors to



raise funds in a particular currency from other funding currencies. For example, an institution with dollar funding needs can raise euros in euro funding markets and convert the proceeds into dollar funding obligations via an FX swap.

These instruments zoomed into the spotlight during the 2008 financial crisis and the euro zone debt crunch when global regulators poured in billions of dollars to unfreeze the market.

One-year euro/dollar basis swaps, which measure demand for dollars from European borrowers, was at -11 basis points on Friday, signaling willingness to pay a little more to get hold of dollars.

In other words, investors have to pay around 11 basis points over interbank rates to swap one-year euros into dollars. As the world's most liquid currency, the dollar is a popular destination for investors during uncertain times.

Those levels are far from the highs seen during the pandemic or during the 2008 crisis.

The same is true for dollar/yen basis swaps, currently at -19.75 basis points on Friday, way off from the -144 basis points hit in March 2020

Volatility for the three asset classes -- stocks, bonds, currencies -- has remained comparatively subdued.

The Cboe Volatility index (.VIX), which measures implied volatility in the S&P 500 and is known as "Wall Street's fear gauge," was at 20.38 on Friday, compared with a high of 85.47 in March 2020.

Broader currency market volatility, as gauged by Deutsche Bank's (.DBCX) vol measure, was also on a downtrend. Late on Thursday, the index was at 6.02, down significantly from the 14.17 hit during the pandemic.

The ICE BofA MOVE Index (.MOVE), which tracks traders' expectations of swings in the Treasury market, stood at 56.79 on Friday, compared to 163.70 touched in mid-March last year. CREDIT DEFAULT SWAP Credit default swaps offer insurance on corporate bond holdings - a way to hedge credit risk. A higher price on the CDS index, a bullish sign, indicates investors are less concerned about potential high-yield defaults. Markit's high-yield index of credit default swaps rose to 109.711 on Friday and stands at pre-pandemic levels.

The picture shows the Evergrande Automotive R&D Institute Headquarters of China Evergrande Group in Shanghai, China September 24, 2021. REUTERS/Aly Song

In line with the CDS market, the spread of the ICE BofA High Yield Index (.MERH0A0) - a commonly used benchmark for the junk bond market - has narrowed, suggesting improved sentiment on these assets.

On Friday, that spread stood at 303 basis points, compared to a pandemic peak of 1,009 basis points last year.



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