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Inside C2

Southern DAILY

Make Today Different

Southern Daily News is published by Southern News Group Daily

Monday, November 15 2021

Biden and China's Xi will hold virtual meeting on Monday night

WASHINGTON, Nov 12 (Reuters) - U.S. President Joe Biden will hold a virtual meeting with Chinese leader Xi Jinping on Monday, the White House said, talks Washington hopes will create some stability amid increased tensions between the world's two largest economies.

It is expected to be the leaders' most extensive meeting under the Biden administration and will follow on from a telephone call between the two on Sept. 9. read more
Washington and Beijing have been sparring on issues from the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic to China's expanding nuclear arsenal. U.S. officials believe direct engagement with Xi is the best way to prevent ties spiraling toward conflict.
"The two leaders will discuss ways to responsibly manage the competition ... as well as ways to work together where our interests align," White House press secretary Jen Psaki said in a statement. "President Biden will make clear U.S. intentions and priorities and be clear and candid about our concerns."

Beijing is also keen to avoid confrontation as Xi faces a crucial year ahead with China's hosting of the Winter Olympic Games and a key Communist Party Congress where he looks to secure an unprecedented third term. read more

A senior U.S. official said Biden would make clear he welcomes stiff competition with China, but doesn't want conflict, and played down the likelihood of a long list of outcomes often tied to top-level meetings.
"This is not about seeking specific deliverables or outcomes," the official said, adding in reference to the People's Republic of China: "As we compete with the PRC, President Biden expects President Xi and the PRC to play by the rules of road—and he will make that point throughout the meeting."

The meeting will come after Biden signs a \$1 trillion bipartisan infrastructure deal in a big ceremony on Monday to celebrate domestic renewal plans he believes will position the United States to out-compete China. read more

U.S. officials have played down the possibility of progress on trade, where China is lagging in a commitment to buy \$200 billion more in U.S.



Chinese President Xi Jinping shakes hands with U.S. Vice President Joe Biden (L) inside the Great Hall of the People in Beijing December 4, 2013. REUTERS/Lintao

goods and services.

China has nevertheless continued to push for relief from hundreds of billions of dollars of tariffs imposed under former President Donald Trump, arguing this could help both sides by easing inflation and boosting employment.

Biden and Xi outlined competing visions at meetings of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum this week, with Biden stressing the U.S. commitment to a "free and open Indo-Pacific," which Washington says faces increasing Chinese "coercion," while Xi warned against a return to Cold War tensions. read more

Addressing APEC leaders on Friday, Xi spoke of the need to "stick to dialogue rather than confrontation, inclusiveness rather than exclusion, and integration rather than decoupling," an apparent reference to U.S. moves to make key supply chains independent of China.

Climate is a priority for Biden, and China and the United States, the world's two biggest carbon emitters, unveiled a deal at global talks in Glasgow this week to ramp up cooperation, including by cutting methane emissions, phasing out coal consumption and protecting forests.

However, the superpowers have clashed increasingly over self-ruled Taiwan, which Beijing claims as its own and that Washington is required to provide with the means to defend itself.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken angered China this week when he said Washington and its allies would take unspecified "action" if China were to use force to alter the Taiwan status quo, further muddying the long-held U.S. policy of "strategic ambiguity" as to whether the United States would respond militarily. read more

Daniel Russel, the top U.S. diplomat for Asia under the Obama administration, said both Biden and Xi were worried by the risk of a military incident escalating.

"Biden knows that the tools for prevention and crisis management are rusty, so we should expect him to push to put in place safeguards or 'guardrails' to reduce risk," he said.

Russel said the Sept. 9 Biden-Xi call began with Xi listing complaints, but ended with a constructive agreement for officials to continue discussions.

"This suggests that the personal relationship Biden built with Xi a decade ago is still strong, and that each conversation can add some stability to the mix."

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Chinese embassy lobbies U.S. business to oppose China bills -sources

WASHINGTON, Nov 12 (Reuters) - China has been pushing U.S. executives, companies and business groups in recent weeks to fight against China-related bills in the U.S. Congress, four sources familiar with the initiative told Reuters, in letters to and meetings with a wide range of actors in the business community.

Letters from China's embassy in Washington have pressed executives to urge members of Congress to alter or drop specific bills that seek to enhance U.S. competitiveness, according to the sources and the text of a letter sent by the embassy's economic and commercial office seen by Reuters. Chinese officials warned companies they would risk losing market share or revenue in China if the legislation becomes law, according to the text of the letter.

The Chinese embassy and the head of its economic and commercial office did not return separate requests for comment.

The sources said China's request also left some individuals who received a letter concerned that they could be seen as violating the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) if they lobbied lawmakers on similar issues in the future.

As a result, none of the sources wanted to be identified as having received or seen the letter. Sweeping legislation to boost U.S. competition with China and fund much-needed semiconductor production, known as the U.S. Innovation and Competition Act (USICA), passed the Senate with bipartisan support in June. A related bill in the House of Representatives called the Eagle Act, which is more strictly policy focused, has stalled as Congress has been preoccupied with other domestic initiatives.

The language in the letters, which Reuters determined were sent separately to a wide number of people, explicitly asks companies to oppose USICA and the Eagle Act.

Beijing sees the measures, which take a hard line toward China on human rights and trade issues, as part of a U.S. effort to counter the country's growing economic and geopolitical might.



"We sincerely hope you ... will play a positive role in urging members of Congress to abandon the zero-sum mindset and ideological prejudice, stop touting negative China-related bills, delete negative provisions, so as to create favorable conditions for bilateral economic and trade cooperation before it is too late," the Chinese embassy said in one letter sent in early November.

Reuters confirmed the shared language of the letter with the four sources.

"The result of those China-related bills with negative impacts will not be that the interests of U.S. companies will be protected while those of Chinese companies will suffer. It is only going to hurt everyone," it said.

"Promoting a China-free supply chain will inevitably result in a decline in China's demand for U.S. products and American companies loss of market share and revenue in China," it said.

Two of the sources said similar messages were conveyed in meetings with staff of China's embassy.

"It's an outright ask by a foreign government," one of the sources said, highlighting the implications for FARA, which requires persons acting on behalf of a foreign power or political party to disclose those relations to the Department of Justice.

A second source said the approach appeared geared at getting companies to delay the legislative process rather than block the bills entirely.

Editor's Choice



People attend a protest at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP26), in Glasgow, November 12. REUTERS/Yves Herman



A person demonstrates near the UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) venue, in Glasgow, Scotland, Britain November 12, 2021. REUTERS/Dylan Martinez



Miranda Lambert performs on stage. REUTERS/Harrison McClary



Chris Stapleton wins Male Vocalist of the Year award. REUTERS/Harrison McClary



Gabby Barrett performs on stage. REUTERS/Harrison McClary



People attend a protest at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP26), in Glasgow, November 12. REUTERS/Yves Herman

SPECIAL REPORT

The World Has Entered A New Age Of Epidemics

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



Illustration above depicts the world in a Petri dish.

In the 1950s, 400-500 Americans died every year from measles and another 100 from chicken pox. In the last major outbreak of rubella — in 1964-’65 — some 11,000 pregnant American women lost their babies and 2,100 newborns died.

• **The 1960s vaccine revolution** all but wiped out these diseases by 2000. But now they are back — in the U.S. and around the world.

• **Much onus for this regression** so far has been laid on the global anti-vaccination movement. But experts blame much more sweeping reasons, primarily a tectonic change in how humans live now as opposed to three, four and five decades ago.

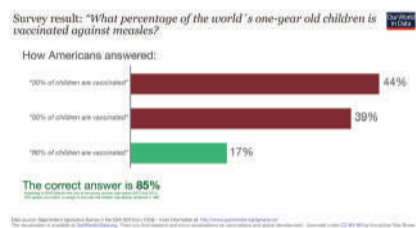
• **At the top of the list:** we are living closer together in ever-swelling cities, trading and traveling much more, creating climate change, migrating in big numbers — and failing to keep vaccination levels high enough for “herd immunity.”

“What changed is that society changed,” Jeremy Farrar, an expert on infectious disease and director of the U.K.-based Wellcome Trust, tells Axios.

• **Driving the news:** Disease was un-

der control for a few decades, but now the environmental circumstances under which they were contained have utterly changed. So new answers have to be found.

The big picture: For 2019, U.S. officials have confirmed 481 measles cases in 16 states as of Saturday, according to the website Precision Vaccinations. The Centers for Disease Control confirms 151 cases of mumps for January and February in 30 states and the District of Columbia. And Kentucky alone has an outbreak of 32 cases of chickenpox as of last week. Measles cases will “certainly” surpass 2018 due to lack of vaccinations



Europe, too, has had a surge of mumps, pertussis, rubella and tetanus over the last two years, reports the World Health Organization. Measles alone killed 72 people in Europe last year, among 82,596

who contracted the disease, according to the agency.

• In the U.S., the outbreaks are often concentrated in tight-knit communities like former Soviet immigrants in Clark County, Washington.

• Three states — New York, Texas and Washington — are the “leading measles hot-spots” in the U.S., per Precision Vaccinations.

• The diseases are often brought into these communities by travelers returning from countries like Israel, Madagascar, the Philippines and Ukraine.

How the revolution happened: The vaccine against measles was licensed in 1963, chickenpox in 1995, mumps in 1967, and rubella in 1969. Jonas Salk’s polio vaccine — igniting the vaccine revolution — came into use in 1955, and the oral version, created by Albert Sabin, was commercialized in 1961.

But the revival of these once-unavoidable, disfiguring and sometimes deadly diseases is only part of the new age of epidemics — they are a component of the general breakdown of the decades-old political and social order.

• **This is particularly apparent in the anti-vaccination movement,** what has been rebranded “vaccine hesitancy.” “People wonder, ‘Why am I still getting vaccinated if disease no longer exists?’ It’s not a stupid question,” Farrar said.

• **But the trend includes the other social factors as well:** climate change, migration, urbanization and elevated travel, which are spreading disease-carrying species such as mosquitoes, bats and rats.



What’s next: Farrar is pressing for governments to create a commercial impetus for companies to figure out how to navigate the new age. But to get started, says Peter Hotez, dean at the Baylor College of Medicine and author of “Vaccines Did Not Cause Rachel’s Autism,” they need to separate out the various factors.

• **Malaria in Greece and Italy** have been blamed on climate change, but Hotez

says human migration and re-emerging poverty may also be at fault.

• **In Texas, the appearance of Zika and dengue** may be attributable to any or all the same factors. “We don’t know,” he said. (Courtesy axios.com)

Related
Measles outbreak is bringing vaccine exemptions into spotlight

The federal government may try to take action if states don’t tighten their vaccine exemption laws and measles continues to spread in sections of the U.S., FDA Commissioner Scott Gottlieb tells Axios.

Driving the news: Overall case numbers of measles remain low in the U.S. but the disease is growing in areas of high non-vaccination rates. Some states like Washington are considering tightening their exemptions even as they continue to face a more organized anti-vaccination movement.



“It’s an avoidable tragedy,” Gottlieb, who says he’s usually a proponent of state rights, tells Axios. “Too many states have lax laws.”

Background: The highly contagious disease can only be controlled if there’s a large vaccination rate in the population, which the World Health Organization says should be 93%-95% of people.

• States are allowed to adopt their own rules over what types of exemptions are allowed for vaccines. All of them allow exemptions for medical reasons, but many also provide exemptions on religious and/or philosophical grounds.

• These pockets of unvaccinated people are transmitting measles in the U.S., which is particularly dangerous to those who can’t get vaccinated, including babies under 12 months and people with susceptible immune systems.

• Gottlieb says the vaccine is one of the most effective ones (97% with 2 doses) created so far, and for one of the most contagious viruses.

• Measles can cause various complications, including pneumonia, brain damage and sometimes death, and it has been

linked to longer term immune problems.

Who’s happening now
WHO reported last week that measles cases tripled globally in 2018 from the prior year, and current reports show multiple deadly outbreaks in the Philippines, Ukraine, Israel and Madagascar.

In Washington state, the number of confirmed cases has more than doubled since Gov. Jay Inslee declared a state of emergency on Jan. 25, to 54 as of Feb. 13.

• Clark County, where a majority of the Washington cases are located, reported a 70% MMR vaccination rate for 19-35 month olds. But since the outbreak, there was an almost 450% increase in vaccination rates in January compared with the same month the prior year.



In New York, there is an outbreak in Rockland County, Monroe County and New York City, and Texas reported 8 cases in 5 different counties as of Feb. 14.

“It’s a self-inflicted wound,” says Peter Hotez, dean at Baylor College of Medicine who published a study last year showing possible U.S. “hotspots” of measles due to vaccine exemptions, that he says is already proving to be true.

• Pro-vaccination groups are “losing the battle” to anti-vaccination groups, who’ve been very active on social media and forming at least one PAC to promote their message, he says.

The other side: Barbara Loe Fisher, co-founder and president of the nonprofit National Vaccine Information Center often labeled as anti-vaccination, tells Axios that 100 cases of measles in a population of 320 million “is not a public health emergency.”

• “[I] should not be used to justify eliminating the legal right to exercise informed consent to vaccination, which is protected by the inclusion of flexible medical, religious and conscientious-belief vaccine exemptions in public health laws,” she says. (Courtesy axios.com)

Aggressive Lambda COVID Variant Found In Houston Methodist Hospital

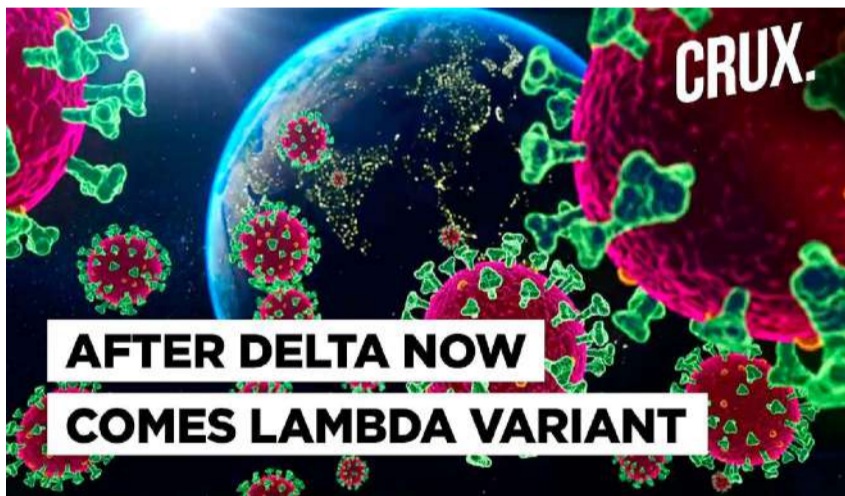


Photo: Francois Picard/AFP via Getty Images

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

The Houston Methodist Hospital System has reported its first case of the Lambda COVID-19 variant on Monday as cases rise across the state, per ABC News. The Lambda variant was first detected in Peru last August. From this April through June, the variant made up 81% of COVID-19 cases in Peru, according to the World Health Organization. The WHO categorizes it as a “variant of interest.” It has already been detected in 29 countries. The hospital had a little more than 100 COVID-19 patients across the eight hospitals in its network last week, but that number rose to 185 as of Monday. The majority of the infections are in those who remain unvaccinated. 85% have been diagnosed with the Delta variant, per ABC News, which is the top concern across the U.S. as it accounts for 83% of nationwide cases.

“I don’t think there’s sufficient evidence at this point that we should be more concerned about lambda than delta, I still think delta is the primary concern for us,” Wesley Long, medical director of Diagnostic Microbiology at Houston Methodist, said, per ABC.



Photo: Francois Picard/AFP via Getty

Images
“There’s a lot more evidence that we have that delta is much more contagious, the viral loads are much higher,” he added.

Data on the lambda variant is currently limited, though it has been designated as a “variant of interest” by the World Health Organization. The designation places it apart from a “variant of concern” such as the delta variant.

News of this new variant in Texas comes as cases in the U.S. have surged, with health officials stating that the highly contagious delta variant has become the dominant strain of coronavirus in the country.

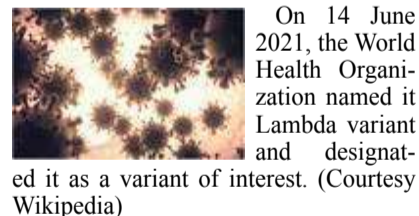
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Director Rochelle Walensky said Tuesday that the delta variant now makes up for more than 80 percent of confirmed coronavirus cases in the U.S. The director has previously stated that the pandemic will now become one that directly effects the unvaccinated, and U.S. health officials, in addition to the Biden administration, have pushed for Americans to get the shot.

Wesley Long, medical director of Diagnostic Microbiology at Houston Methodist, told ABC that there is not enough evidence to suggest that the lambda variant is of more concern than the delta strain at this moment. ABC reports that the number of COVID-19 cases at Houston Methodist have nearly doubled in the past week, going from just

over 100 last week to 185 on Monday.



The SARS-CoV-2 Lambda variant, also known as lineage C.37, is a variant of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19. It was first detected in Peru in December 2020.



On 14 June 2021, the World Health Organization named it Lambda variant and designated it as a variant of interest. (Courtesy Wikipedia)

“We’re seeing an alarming spike in the number of COVID-19 cases across the Houston area, with the steepest increase happening over the weekend,” the hospital system told ABC. “The increased hospitalizations add stress to many of our hospitals that are nearing capacity.” Houston Methodist had a little over 100 COVID-19 patients across the hospital system last week. That number rose to 185 Monday, with a majority of those infected being unvaccinated, according to a statement released by the hospital Monday.

Among those infections, about 85% have been diagnosed with the delta variant, hospital officials said.

“We’re seeing an alarming spike in the number of COVID-19 cases across the Houston area, with the steepest increase happening over the weekend,” Houston Methodist said. “The increased hospitalizations add stress to many of our hospitals that are nearing capacity.” Hospital president and CEO Dr. Marc Boom stressed it is “imperative” that the community “get vaccinated and decrease virus spread.”



Francois Picard/AFP via Getty Images, FILE
Houston Methodist Baytown Hospital in Baytown, Texas, June 22, 2021.

Houston Methodist had a little over 100 COVID-19 patients across the hospital system last week. That number rose to 185 Monday, with a majority of those infected being unvaccinated, according to a statement released by the hospital Monday.

Despite the report of the lambda variant, experts at Houston Methodist say delta is still the primary concern in the U.S. “The lambda is the dominant variant in Peru and Peru has had a very difficult time with COVID-19. It shares mutations in common with the alpha variants, the beta, the gamma, which is the dominant variant in Brazil,” Dr. Wesley Long, medical director of Diagnostic Microbiology at Houston Methodist, told ABC News.

“I don’t think there’s sufficient evidence at this point that we should be more concerned about lambda than delta, I still think delta is the primary concern for us. There’s a lot more evidence that we have that delta is much more contagious, the viral loads are much higher,” he added. The lambda variant “has been associated with substantive rates of community transmission in multiple countries, with rising prevalence over time concurrent with increased COVID-19 incidence,” the WHO said in its June report. In June, the variant was detected in 29 countries.



Brandon Bell/Getty Images, FILE
Volunteer doctors and nurses prepare ahead of a COVID-19 vaccine clinic on May 13, 2021 in Houston.

The delta variant, which was first detected in India in December, now accounts for about 83% of all sequenced COVID-19 cases in the United States, Center for Disease Control and Prevention Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky said during a Senate hearing Tuesday. The WHO designates delta as a “variant of concern.”

Long noted that Houston Methodist has seen its positivity rate increase and hospitalizations rise, but the situation on the ground is still “far below” the winter peak.

“[Infections are] on the increase. How many more cases are we going to get?”

Long said. “We’re going to need more folks to get vaccinated and folks who aren’t vaccinated in particular to practice all the safe practices that we learned through the pandemic to help slow the spread of COVID. All those are critically important to keep this delta wave under control.”

At the moment, 51% of Texas’ state population aged 12 and up is fully vaccinated, according to state data. (Courtesy thehill.com and abcnews.com)

Related
Delta Variant Now Makes Up 83% Of U.S. COVID Cases, CDC Director Says

The more transmissible Delta variant now accounts for 83% of COVID-19 cases in the United States, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention director Rochelle Walensky said during a Senate hearing Tuesday.

Why it matters: The “dramatic increase,” up from 50% on July 3, has led to a rise in virus-related deaths, Walensky told lawmakers. COVID fatalities have risen by nearly 48% since last week to an average of about 239 per day, according to Walensky.



Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Director Rochelle Walensky (Photo: Greg Nash/The Hill/ Bloomberg via Getty Images)

The CDC director also said that the percentage of cases from the Delta variant is “even higher” in some parts of the country, “particularly in areas of low vaccination rates.”

“To date, our data indicates that vaccines are available to neutralize the circulating variants in the United States and provide protection against severe disease, hospitalization, and death,” Walensky added.

“The message from CDC remains clear: The best way to prevent the spread of COVID-19 variants is to prevent the spread of disease and vaccination is the most powerful tool we have.”

“Each death is tragic and even more heartbreaking when we know that the majority of these deaths could be prevented with a simple, safe, available vaccine.” (Courtesy axios.com)