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COVID-19 Update

The INC is the international umbrella organization for the nut and dried fruit industry. Its members include more than 800 nut and dried fruit sector companies from over 75 countries. INC membership represents over 85% of the world's commercial "farm gate" value of trade in nuts and dried fruits. The INC's mission is to stimulate and facilitate sustainable growth in the global nut and dried fruit industry. It is the leading international organization on health, nutrition, statistics, food safety, and international standards and regulations regarding nuts and dried fruits.

Global COVID-19 cases surpassed [97.8 million](#). The global death toll recently surpassed 2.12 million people. The worst affected country is the US, followed by India and Brazil. In the Americas, there are more than 43.7 million confirmed cases, over 32 million in Europe, more than 12.6 million in South-East Asia, and over 2.4 million in Africa. Despite the negative numbers of both infected people and those who died because of the pandemic, mass vaccination campaigns continue to grow worldwide. To this day, more than [65.6 million](#) people in 56 countries have been vaccinated against COVID-19. However, the recent discovery of new variants of the virus raises questions about the efficacy of the different vaccines against the new strains.

According to a [new study](#), the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine is likely to protect against the highly infectious variant of the COVID-19 first identified in the UK. Other laboratories such as Moderna and AstraZeneca are currently testing if their vaccines protect against the new variants.

Shipping costs skyrocket by 300%

[Shipping costs](#) have skyrocketed due to lack of empty containers and delays for goods purchased from China.

The European Association for Forwarding, Transport, Logistics and Customs Services (CLECAT) and the European Shippers' Council (ESC) have [alerted](#) the European Commission on the current practices of liner shipper carriers as European supply chains are becoming more distorted. These include the violation of existing contracts, the establishment of unreasonable conditions concerning the acceptance of bookings and the unilateral setting of rates far in excess of those agreed in contracts. The delays and lack of space, combined with the surge in tariffs, present a serious risk to the ability of economic recovery.

The World Shipping Council wrote in a [statement](#) early last month, "Vessel capacity is fully utilized, and little excess is available." The pandemic has severely impacted access to containers and equipment. As inland transportation, port and warehousing operations have been hit by lockdowns, labour shortages and volume overloads, the positioning, use and return of containers within the global supply chain has slowed.

WHO

The World Health Organization (WHO) Director-General, Dr. Tedros Adhanom [announced](#) that the WHO emergency committee met and made a series of recommendations on the COVID-19 pandemic. The committee emphasized the need for governments to do anything within their means to curb down the number of new infections through tried and tested public health measures. Dr. Adhanom also emphasized the need to roll out COVID-19 vaccines equitably, especially in the least developed countries.

The WHO Director-General also [highlighted](#) the importance of safe and effective vaccines in order to curb down the spread of the pandemic. The recent emergence of rapidly-spreading variants makes the rapid and equitable rollout of vaccines all the more important.

IMF

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) [forecasts](#) a 7.9% growth of China's GDP in 2021, slightly [down](#) from its previous prediction of 8.2% growth. The IMF [report](#) states that: "The Chinese economy continues its fast recovery from the health and economic crisis as a strong containment effort and macroeconomic and financial policy support have mitigated the crisis impact and helped the economy rebound."

Australia

Since January 22, foreign nationals traveling to Australia are required to provide COVID-19 [tests](#) with negative results, taken 72 hours of their departure. All passengers are asked to face a 14-day hotel quarantine upon their arrival, and face masks are mandatory on all international flights. Among the COVID-19 mitigation measures adopted, there are border closures, mass screenings and strict lockdowns. However, the economic damage caused by these measures is beginning to ease and the economy rebounds as outbreaks seem to be under control.

Brazil

On January 17, Brazil [approved](#) two COVID-19 vaccines and started a vaccination campaign amid a steep surge in new cases. On January 15, the state of Amazonas declared a ten-day curfew from 7:00 pm to 6:00 am to stop the rapid spread of the virus. In addition to this, non-essential businesses closed for 15 days.

China

China declared a [state of emergency](#) in the northeastern province of Heilongjiang, to curb down the spike of new cases. Previously, China locked down the [cities](#) of Xingtai and Shijiazhuang, as the daily number of new coronavirus cases doubled on January 10. Both cities tested all 13 million

residents. On January 22, Beijing started mass [screening](#) of more than 2 million people in the city center, after the discovery of two cases of the COVID-19 variant first found in the UK.

In addition to this, more than [15 million](#) people have been vaccinated in China against COVID-19, as the country prepares for the upcoming Lunar New Year Festival. It is also expected that the holiday traffic will drop by about 40% compared with 2019.

Regarding economic recovery, China's economy [grew](#) 2.3% in 2020, being the only major economy that avoided a contraction. However, China experienced its slowest economic expansion in more than 40 years. According to the latest trade figures, exports in December grew 18.1% compared to the same month last year, and imports to China increased by 6.5%.

EU

On January 21, the European Council held a [videoconference](#) focused on responding to the second wave of the pandemic. EU leaders highlighted the seriousness of the situation, especially regarding the new variants, and they aim to limit the spread of the pandemic by the adoption of similar measures in all EU member states. Some of the conclusions are the following: 1) Internal borders need to stay open in order to ensure the flow of essential goods and services. However, EU leaders strongly discourage non-essential travel, and warned that stricter restrictions may be implemented if the spread of new cases continues; 2) EU leaders welcomed the agreement on rapid antigen tests and the mutual recognition of the results; 3) Vaccination plans need to be accelerated, and delays should be avoided; 4) Leaders agreed to work on a standardized and inter-operable form of proof of vaccination for medical purposes, and 5) leaders reaffirmed their solidarity with third countries.

The European Council reached an [agreement](#) on mutual recognition of COVID-19 tests. Tests carried out in any member country will be recognized by all 27 EU Member States. This is an essential tool to stop the spread of the virus and contribute to the smooth functioning of the internal market. In addition to this, the mutual recognition of test results is expected to facilitate cross-border movement, cross-border contact tracing and treatment.

It is expected that by January 29, the EU will approve the Oxford-AstraZeneca [vaccine](#). This jab would be the third one approved in the EU, following BioNTech-Pfizer and Moderna. The EU has sealed six vaccine contracts for up to 2 billion doses for a population of approximately 450 million.

The European Commission recently [approved](#) a €12 billion scheme which will enable Germany to compensate businesses for the damages suffered because of the restrictions imposed to contain the COVID-19 outbreak. Under the scheme, companies from all sectors will be entitled to compensation for damages suffered during the lockdown periods imposed by the German government in 2020. The compensation, in the form of direct grants, covers either up to 100% of the actual damage incurred during the lockdown periods, or 75 % of the turnover in the reference months of November and December 2019, whichever amount is lower.

Belgium

Belgium extended COVID-19 mitigation measures until [March 1](#), in order to avoid a new resurgence of the pandemic caused by the premature relaxation of the measures. However, in case that the public health situation improves significantly, the measures could be relaxed in February. Belgium's Consultation Committee [plans](#) to ban non-essential travel, due to the fact that, on January 21, the European Council didn't reach an EU-wide solution regarding this matter.

France

On January 16, France adopted a 6 pm nationwide [curfew](#) for at least 15 days, to contain the spread of the COVID-19, as well as its new strains. In addition to this, France tightened border controls for non-EU citizens, which, since January 18, are required to provide a negative COVID-19 test before the departure.

Germany

A new [strain](#) of the COVID-19 has been found in Bavaria. For the moment, it is not known if it is more contagious or more deadly than the COVID-19 and its already discovered variants in the UK and South Africa. Regarding the public health situation, Germany [surpassed](#) 50,000 COVID-19 deaths on January 22. As the situation in Germany did not improve, the government strengthened [restrictions](#). These new restrictions include the extension of a partial lockdown until February 14, border checks, mandatory wearing of medical-quality masks in certain places, as well as the obligation to work from home.

Greece

[Studies](#) suggest that the pandemic may cause the closure of between 80,000 to 100,000 businesses in Greece, if additional post-pandemic supportive measures are not taken.

Italy

Italy announced that COVID-19 restrictions already in force, such as night curfew from 10 pm, [continue](#) to be applicable until March 5. Therefore, travel restrictions will also be in place, a regional travel ban will remain until February 15, and other non-essential businesses such as gyms and pools will remain closed until March 5. More than one million people have been [vaccinated](#) against COVID-19 in Italy, and it is expected that most of the population could be inoculated by September.

Spain

Spain is planning certain [reforms](#) in order to access the EU funding sooner, with the aim to mitigate the economic impact of the pandemic. The reforms, focused on digitalization and the transition to a greener economy are expected to accelerate the €72 billion of EU funds over three years.

On January 25, Spain reported 93,822 new coronavirus cases –the highest weekend figure since the start of the pandemic. The country has likely reached the peak of the third wave and the Health Ministry has [warned](#) the situation in hospitals is “critical”. New restriction [measures](#) are going into effect in Valencia, Galicia, Madrid, Murcia, Andalusia and the Basque Country to curb the virus, from tighter limitations on public gatherings to perimeter lockdowns on weekends. Spain is under state of alarm since October.

Portugal

Portugal ordered a strict COVID-19 [lockdown](#), to curb down the increasing number of new cases. Under the lockdown terms, it is mandatory to stay home, including for work. However, schools and companies that provide essential services keep functioning. The non-essential businesses that remain closed will receive financial help. In addition to this, [schools](#) will close for two weeks, in order to stop the spread of the new variants of the COVID-19. The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) attributed the increase of new cases due to the relaxation of restrictions during December holidays, and to the new COVID-19 strains.

The Netherlands

To stop the spread of the new COVID-19 variant, the Netherlands introduced a [curfew](#) from 9 pm and 4:30 am, starting on January 23, until February 9. These measures were set to [expire](#) on January 19, but the reports on the spread of new COVID-19 variants forced the decision. Since mid-December, there is a lockdown which closed non-essential businesses, schools and restaurants, and there is also a limitation of social contacts. In addition to this, flights from the UK, South Africa and South America are banned, due to the number of new variants that have been reported there.

India

India [reported](#) more than 10.63 million COVID-19 cases and 153,032 deaths. However, the country has already inoculated more than one million people within a week. About 30 million healthcare workers will be the first to get vaccinated, followed by 270 million high-risk people and people over 50.

Trade volumes fell 9% for India's top 12 state-run ports, from April to December, compared to the same period of 2019, according to a recent [USDA GAIN report](#). Mumbai Port cargo volume dropped 18% during the same period, if compared to the previous year. Mudra port handled 44% more cargo volume in December, compared to the same period of 2019. The cargo volume in Tuticorin, Kandla, Chennai, Mangalore, Kolkata and Cochin ports dropped 12%, 9%, 15%, 7%, 7% and 14%, respectively, during April-December, compared to the same period of the previous year.

Japan

Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga told the Parliament that the already postponed Olympic Games in Tokyo will [go ahead](#). The President of the International Olympic Committee also agrees with the statement of the PM. If the Olympics take place in 2021, there will be preventive and mitigation measures in place in order to avoid new infections. However, polls indicate that the public support for the 2021 Olympics has plummeted.

Malaysia

Malaysia declared a [state of emergency](#), and the Parliament has been suspended for six months, in order to curb down the spread of the pandemic.

South Africa

The number of new cases in South Africa has almost [doubled](#) in January. It is suspected that a more contagious strain of COVID-19 may be causing this second wave of infections in the country. The restrictions in force to contain the spread of the pandemic include the closure of beaches and reintroduced curbs on alcohol sales, among others. The [World Bank](#) projects South Africa's GDP to rebound by 3.3% in 2021.

South Korea

The country is in talks to secure 40 million COVID-19 [vaccines](#) from Novavax. If this agreement is reached, it will ensure 146 million doses, more than enough for its 52 million inhabitants. In addition to this, it is expected that South Korea will start mass vaccinations in February.

Turkey

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development recently [issued](#) an Economic Survey of Turkey. The report highlights that the COVID-19 pandemic hit Turkey's people and economy hard, accentuating pre-existing challenges. The OECD also says that a full recovery from the crisis will take time, given the uncertainty over the future evolution of the pandemic, the decrease of tourism, as well as Turkey's limited welfare provisions and high levels of corporate and household debt. It is also expected that when the recovery comes and investor confidence is restored, a combination of market, institutional and education reforms could lift the GDP by 1% per year.

United Kingdom

The COVID-19 related [death toll](#) in the UK approaches 100,000. For the moment, it is Europe's worst figure and the fifth worst worldwide, after the US, Brazil, India and Mexico. The early relaxation of COVID-19 mitigation measures in the country would represent a higher number of infections. In addition to this, [Scotland](#) extended lockdown measures until mid-February. The measures include the closure of schools and non-essential businesses.

United States

US president Joe Biden [unveiled](#) a \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief package aimed to revive the economy. The spending proposal will build on the two massive relief packages approved by Congress in 2020. It includes a series of measures such as stimulus payment checks for individuals, \$160 billion for the COVID-19 vaccination campaign, about \$440 billion for small businesses and communities particularly hit by the pandemic, among others.

In addition to this, it is expected that the new presidency will sign an order requiring face [masks](#) on federal property as well as for interstate travel. POTUS also asked citizens to commit to wearing face masks for at least 100 days, in order to curb down the spread of the pandemic.

The US will require COVID-19 negative tests for inbound air [travelers](#) within the previous three days. The new measure came into effect on January 26. This measure was announced by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), expanding the measures currently in place for UK travelers, after the emergence of new variants. The CDC will also recommend that travelers stay home for seven days and get another test some days after their arrival.

From January 19 until February 26, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Farm Service Agency is accepting new or modified [applications](#) for the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP). USDA announced the additional assistance on January 15, which includes expanding CFAP eligibility for some agricultural producers and commodities, and updating payments to accurately compensate some producers who already applied for earlier assistance. This additional assistance builds on about \$23.6 billion in payments made available through CFAP 1 and CFAP 2 earlier signups.

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