



The Delta variant of the coronavirus is as contagious as chickenpox and could cause severe illness, according to an internal document at the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The New York Times reported.

The variant was also more likely to break through protections afforded by the vaccines, the report said, adding that CDC's decision to reverse course on masking guidelines for fully vaccinated citizens on Tuesday is based on the document.

The agency had previously said the vaccinated did not need to wear masks.

Still, the CDC's figures show that the vaccines are highly effective in preventing serious illness, hospitalization and death in vaccinated people, according to experts quoted by the newspaper.

The Delta variant is more transmissible than the viruses that cause MERS, SARS, Ebola, the common cold, the seasonal flu and measles, the report said.

The immediate next step for the agency is to "acknowledge the war has changed," the report cited the document as saying before adding that the CDC "is expected to publish additional data on the variant on Friday."

UK's Daily Herald's Vladimirsky told the Times that new research showed the vaccinated people infected with the Delta variant carried less severe symptoms of the virus in the nose and throat.

Officials have warned of rising COVID-19 infections in the US, particularly among about half of the population that remains unvaccinated, despite a successful rollout that has sent an excess stock of the inoculant. The vaccine hesitancy among large swaths of the country, fuelled largely by misinformation, has curbed the government's hopes of controlling the virus within months of the vaccine being approved for emergency use. Washington has reversed to increasingly blunt methods to encourage the remaining citizens to be vaccinated, including requiring federal employees to get the jab or be subject to mandatory testing and other restrictions.

On Thursday, the Biden administration asked state and local governments to offer \$100 payments for newly vaccinated Americans. Funded by \$250m in aid granted under the American Rescue Plan Act, Mr. Joe Biden

HK man sentenced to 9 years in first national security law case

The first person convicted under Hong Kong's national security law was sentenced on Friday to nine years in prison, judges said, in a watershed ruling with long-term implications for the city's judicial landscape.

Former waiter Tong Ying-kit was sentenced to six and a half years in jail for the incitement to secession charge, and another eight years for allegedly committing acts of terror.

Considering the widely principle of the court, Tong is to serve two and half years of his "remnant" sentence consecutively with those of a half-year incitement to secession charge, bringing his total time to prison to nine years.

Other parts of the sentence will be served consecutively.

He was also barred from obtaining a driver's license for 10 years.

The court did not consider mitigating circumstances. Tong's past behavior and his personal situation at the breakdown of his family.

At the sentencing on Friday, Tong told his family: "I will watch the sunset, you guys keep sitting," shouting in Cantonese.

In a statement, Amnesty International said the sentencing payments for newly vaccinated Americans, funded by \$250m in aid granted under the American Rescue Plan Act, Mr. Joe Biden

Duterte restores Philippines's key military agreement with US

President Rodrigo Duterte has restored a pact governing the presence of US troops in the Philippines, the two countries' defense secretaries announced on Friday, removing an election that had caused increasing tensions over military policy.

The Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) provides rules for the rotation of US troops in and out of the Philippines for war and peacekeeping. It also contains additional provisions on the United States and its allies, including an increasingly assertive China, particularly in the disputed South China Sea.

Let me thank President Duterte for his decision to fully restore the visiting forces agreement," US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said on Friday in a joint press briefing with his Philippine counterpart, Delfino Lorenzana.

Duterte's decision provides the US "some degree of certainty going forward," he said, noting the US role in "countering emergency of force" in the southern island of Mindanao.

"We are plus factor to advance and with that long-range planning, we can actually do more comprehensive exercises."

The US Embassy in Manila also welcomed the news saying that the agreement "strengthens not only the security of our two nations, but also the rules-based order" in the region.

Duterte said last year that he planned to cancel the VFA but extended it until December.

Lorenzana said he was unsure why Duterte had changed his mind but made the decision after meeting Austin in Manila on Thursday night.

"Our countries face a range of challenges, from the climate crisis to the pandemic," he said, adding that the Philippines-US alliance "will remain vital to the security, stability and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific."

"A fully restored VFA will help us achieve that goal together."

Saudi Arabia inaugurates 4th Industrial Revolution Center in partnership with WEF

Saudi Arabia has inaugurated its 4th Industrial Revolution Center in partnership with the World Economic Forum (WEF) on Wednesday, according to Eng. Abdullah bin Ali Al-Saud, Chairman of the Board of Directors of King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology (KACST).

The Saudi Press Agency (SPA) reported that the center was inaugurated in partnership with the WEF on the occasion of the first Saudi Forum for the 4th Industrial Revolution, organized by KACST at its headquarters with the participation of the founder and Chairman of the Board of Directors of the World Economic Forum, Professor Klaus Schwab, a number of ministers and officials, and a number of local and international specialists.

Al-Saud said the center is a key element to move forward in the 21st century, citing Saudi Arabia's experience in "THE LINE" project in NEOM.

He considered that what is happening in NEOM today is the largest innovative platform for planning urban models and future cities for the next 50 years.

Prof. Klaus Schwab congratulated Saudi Arabia for inaugurating the 4th Industrial Revolution Center, which aims to harness new technologies with the best principles of flexible governance, which seeks government, business, and civil society to work together to make technology a force for good and not more than society benefits from it.

The ISS was picking out of alignment at the rate of about a half a degree per second, Mustafa said. The NASA engineers were ultimately unable to fix the problem, so the mission was ended. The crew was lost for several minutes once during the disruption, Mustafa said, but those on board "quickly didn't let any movement."

Had the situation become as dangerous as to require the evacuation of personnel, the crew could have escaped in a "SpaceX" crew capsule still parked at the cargo port and designed to serve as a "life boat" if necessary, said Steve Stich, manager of NASA's commercial crew program.



Russian space module misfire mishap knocks ISS out of position

Flight controllers have regained control of the International Space Station (ISS) after it was knocked off course by a newly arrived Russian research module.

The module was on the ground when it was launched, but it was launched about three hours after it had landed on the orbiting complex, briefly throwing it out of control, officials with the United States space agency NASA said.

It took place as mission controllers in Moscow were performing some post-deck "reconfiguration" procedures, according to NASA.

The module's job is to help position the ISS to pick up its normal flight position, some 400km (250 miles) above the Earth. In response, the mission's flight director declared a "spacecraft emergency," NASA officials said.

But the seven crew members on board — two Russian cosmonauts, three NASA astronauts, a Japanese astronaut and a European Space Agency astronaut from France — were never in any immediate danger, according to NASA.

An unexpected tilt in the module's orientation was first detected by automated ground sensors, followed 15 minutes later by a

