

Lockdown 3 in the UK; praying for jabs and Trump's last roll

Welcome to another edition of the Guardian Weekly.

Monday should have been a celebratory day in the United Kingdom as the potentially game-changing Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine was administered for the first time since being approved. Alas ... it was also the day when it became clear that the country's Covid crisis had moved drastically out of control.

The spread of a new, more transmissible variant of the virus has seen infections in the UK soar and hospitals at breaking point. In a primetime television address, Boris Johnson informed the nation that all schools in England - openings had already been delayed elsewhere in the UK - would be closed until at least mid-February and that already-tight lockdown restrictions would be extended further.

Will vaccines offer a way out of this disaster? And when? In this week's cover story, Observer science editor Robin McKie looks at how we might judge the success of mass inoculation programmes. Then Peter Beaumont considers the global vaccine picture and Oliver Holmes reports from Israel which has stormed ahead, having already given more than 10% of its population the jab.

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Elsewhere, it's a vital week in American politics. As the Weekly was being printed, Georgians were voting in a double special Senate election that could tip the balance of the upper house. That vote was preceded by the wild phone call made by Donald Trump to Georgia state election officials demanding that they find him enough votes to reverse the decision of the state to elect Joe Biden in November. There were also extraordinary, dangerous moves by other Republicans to challenge the electoral college results in Congress on Wednesday. David Smith tries to make sense of Trump's final, desperate attempt to subvert democracy.

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On the cover

Inspired by the artwork for Spiritualized's 1997 classic Ladies and Gentleman We Are Floating in Space, Guardian Weekly designer Christophe Gowans took a pharmaceutical approach to our cover story this week. Unlike that album, budgets didn't allow us to produce a limited edition that looked like an actual pharmaceutical product. *Photograph: Alamy*



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