U.S. death toll from coronavirus reaches 500,000

NBC News (2/21, Arkin) reports, “The U.S. death toll from the coronavirus topped 500,000 on Sunday, according to an NBC News tally – a milestone that underscores the grave threat the virus still poses nationwide even as more Americans get vaccinated.” CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky said, “We are still at about 100,000 cases a day. We are still at around 1,500 to 3,500 deaths per day. The cases are more 2½-fold times what we saw over the summer.”

A Washington Post (2/21, Galocha, Berkowitz) interactive features three ways to visualize the coronavirus death toll.

Editor’s note: View a video message from AMA President Susan R. Bailey, MD, read the joint statement by the AMA, AHA and ANA or see the AMA’s news coverage.

U.S. Supreme Court to hear case challenging former administration’s “gag rule”

The New York Times (2/22, Liptak) reports the Supreme Court announced it would hear a case challenging a former administration policy, sometimes known as the “gag rule,” that limited Title X funding for some reproductive health services. The case is expected to be argued in the fall, but it “may be moot by then, as President Biden has signaled that his Administration is reconsidering” the policy.

Reuters (2/22, Hurley) reports the AMA is one of many groups challenging the policy.

Editor’s note: Read the AMA’s joint statement.
Study: Collaboration among health care professionals in primary care setting may lead to better patient outcomes in hypertension and diabetes

HCPlive (2/23, Kaltwasser) reports, “Collaboration among [health care] providers in the primary care setting leads to markedly better patient outcomes in patients with hypertension and diabetes,” investigators concluded in a systematic review and meta-analysis that “focused on the concept of interprofessional collaborative practice...which the World Health Organization defines as when ‘multiple health workers from different professional backgrounds work together with patients, families, carers, and communities to deliver the highest quality of care.’” The findings were published online in JAMA Network Open.

Biden administration to distribute millions of face masks in support of “equity” in pandemic response

The AP (2/24, Miller, Superville) reports that President Biden “plans to distribute millions of face masks to Americans in communities hard-hit by the coronavirus beginning next month as part of his efforts to ensure ‘equity’ in the government’s response to the pandemic.” Biden, who “considered sending masks to all Americans, is instead adopting a more conservative approach, aiming to reach underserved communities and those bearing the brunt of the outbreak.”

Reuters (2/24, Brice, Chiacu) reports the government “will deliver the masks to more than 1,300 community health centers and 60,000 food pantries and soup kitchens between March and May, the White House said.” The masks “are expected to reach between 12 million and 15 million Americans, it said.” The White House “said two-thirds of the people served by community health centers live in poverty, 60% are racial and/or ethnic minorities, and nearly 1.4 million are homeless.”

New COVID-19 cases in nursing homes dropped by over 80% between late December and early February, analysis shows

The New York Times (2/25, A1, Conlen, Mervosh, Ivory) reports that “for the first time since the American” COVID-19 “outbreak began roughly a year ago...the threat inside nursing homes may have finally reached a turning point.” Since vaccines arrived, “new cases and deaths in nursing homes, a large subset of long-term care facilities, have fallen steeply, outpacing national declines, according to
a New York Times analysis of federal data.” Between late December and “early February, new cases among nursing home residents fell by more than 80%, nearly double the rate of improvement in the general population.”

Forbes (2/25, McEvoy) reports “the number of weekly deaths in nursing homes has decreased by 66% since vaccination efforts began, compared to an overall increase in deaths among the general population during the same time period.” Nursing home fatalities “began a steady decrease during the week vaccinations in long-term care facilities began, and that rate of decline ‘appears to have accelerated in recent weeks, as more...residents got fully vaccinated,' [a] Kaiser Family Foundation analysis found.”

The Hill (2/25, Jenkins) reports “the distribution of coronavirus vaccines across the nation has been largely credited by experts for the significant decrease in COVID-19 cases among nursing homes, the [New York] Times reported.”

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