Top news stories from AMA Morning Rounds®: Week of March 1, 2021

Read AMA Morning Rounds®’ most popular stories in medicine and public health from the week of March 1, 2021 – March 5, 2021.

FDA grants emergency use authorization to Johnson & Johnson’s single-dose coronavirus vaccine

The Washington Post (2/27, A1, McGinley, Johnson) reported the FDA “granted emergency use authorization to Johnson & Johnson’s single-dose coronavirus vaccine.” As a result, the U.S. now has three authorized coronavirus vaccines, “a singular scientific achievement that few would have predicted a year ago.”

The New York Times (2/27, Weiland, LaFraniere) reported the authorization “arrived at a critical moment, as the steep decline in coronavirus cases seems to have plateaued and millions of Americans are on waiting lists for shots.” The Times adds, “Johnson & Johnson has pledged to provide” 100 million doses of its vaccine to the U.S. “by the end of June,” and “when combined with the 600 million doses from the two-shot vaccines made by Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna slated to arrive by the end of July, there will be more than enough shots to cover any American adult who wants one.” However, “health officials are concerned that even with strong data to support it, some people may perceive Johnson & Johnson’s shot as an inferior option.”

The Wall Street Journal (2/27, Loftus, Burton, Subscription Publication) reported that in clinical trials, Johnson & Johnson’s vaccine was not as protective as the vaccines made by Pfizer or Moderna.

Nurses working in nursing homes may see average turnover rate of greater than 100% in a given year, researchers say

The New York Times (3/1, Abelson) reports, “Extraordinarily high turnover among staffs at nursing homes likely contributed to the shocking number of deaths at the facilities during the pandemic,” investigators concluded in a study representing “a comprehensive look at the turnover rates in 15,645 nursing homes across the country, accounting for nearly all of the facilities certified by the federal
government.” The study revealed that “the average annual rate was 128%, with some facilities experiencing turnover that exceeded 300%.” In an emailed statement, Dr. David Gifford, “the chief medical officer for the American Health Care Association and National Center for Assisted Living, a trade group,” stated, “Workforce recruitment and retention is among the most pressing challenges confronting long-term care providers, and we have been calling for help for years.”

Modern Healthcare (3/1, Christ, Subscription Publication) reports, “Nurses working in nursing homes saw an average turnover rate of greater than 100% in a given year,” researchers concluded. Even though “the rates by position varied, the averages were all above 100%: registered nurses, 140.7%; licensed practical nurses, 114.1%; and certified nursing assistant,” the study revealed. What’s more, “high turnover rates matter, the authors said, because they are often associated with poor quality.” The findings were published in the journal Health Affairs.

**Biden says there will be enough SARS-CoV-2 vaccines for all adults in the U.S. by the end of May with teachers and childcare workers given priority**

USA Today (3/2, Groppe, Subramanian) reports President Biden announced that there will be enough SARS-CoV-2 vaccines for all adults in the U.S. by the end of May, two months earlier than previously expected. The President made the announcement following a “historic” deal under which Merck will help manufacture Johnson & Johnson’s newly approved single-dose SARS-CoV-2 vaccine. Biden “also said he’s using the federal government’s pharmacy vaccination program to prioritize getting teachers and child care workers vaccinated by the end of the month.”

**Over 200K Americans signed up for ACA health plans during first two weeks of extended enrollment period**

The Washington Post (3/3, Goldstein) reports, “More than 200,000 Americans signed up for Affordable Care Act health plans during the first two weeks of an extended enrollment period President Biden ordered to help more people find insurance amid the economic ripple effects caused by the coronavirus pandemic.”

The AP (3/3, Alonso-Zaldivar) reports, “The numbers released Wednesday by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services show that more than 206,000 people signed up for coverage from Feb. 15-28,” but “the figures are partial, since they cover only the 36 states served by the federal HealthCare.gov insurance market.”

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The Hill (3/3, Weixel) reports that according to CMS, “the number of signups from Feb. 15 to Feb. 28 was nearly three times higher than during the same period last year, when only 76,000 people signed up.”

**Inflammatory heart disease appears rare among professional athletes who tested positive for COVID-19 and underwent cardiac screening, study finds**

The Washington Post (3/4, Sheinin) reports, “Only five of the 789 U.S. professional athletes who tested positive for the coronavirus in 2020 developed serious heart disease, and none had significant issues after being cleared to return to play, according to an unprecedented, collaborative study among MLB, MLS, the NBA, the NFL, the NHL and the WNBA that was published Thursday in a leading medical journal.” The study “was authored by the top medical officials of those leagues and grew out of the weekly teleconferences those officials began holding at the onset of the coronavirus pandemic in March 2020.” The findings were published in JAMA Cardiology.

The Wall Street Journal (3/4, Beaton, Radnofsky, Subscription Publication) reports that the study’s findings suggest that long-term heart complications in non-severe COVID-19 cases are unlikely.

USA Today (3/4, Zillgitt) reports, “The positive findings extend to athletes at colleges and high schools that may not have the financial and medical resources to conduct screenings or provide cardiac MRIs.”

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