Top news stories from AMA Morning Rounds®: Week of May 10, 2021

Read AMA Morning Rounds®’ most popular stories in medicine and public health from the week of May 10, 2021–May 14, 2021.

CDC updates public guidance on coronavirus, emphasizing airborne transmission

The New York Times (5/7, Rabin, Anthes) reported on Friday, the CDC “updated public guidance about how the coronavirus spreads, emphasizing that transmission occurs by inhaling very fine respiratory droplets and aerosolized particles, as well as through contact with sprayed droplets or touching contaminated hands to one’s mouth, nose or eyes.” The agency “now states explicitly—in large, bold lettering—that airborne virus can be inhaled even when one is more than six feet away from an infected individual.”

Biden administration to prohibit discrimination in health care based on gender identity, sexual orientation

The Washington Post (5/10, Goldstein) reports, “The Biden administration said Monday it will provide protections against discrimination in health care based on gender identity and sexual orientation.” This “reversal is a victory for transgender people and undoes what had been a significant setback in the movement for LGBTQ rights.”

The New York Times (5/10, Shear) reports that “the new interpretation will apply to ‘covered health programs or activities,’ which includes doctors, hospitals and other health care organizations that receive public funding.”

The AP (5/10, Alonso-Zaldivar) reports, “Speaking for the medical community, the American Medical Association said in a statement the Biden administration ‘did the right thing’ by ending ‘a dismal chapter which a federal agency sought to remove civil rights protections.’”

Reuters (5/10, Chiacu) reports that AMA President Susan R. Bailey, M.D., said, “It’s unfortunate that
such an obvious step had to be taken; the AMA welcomes this common-sense understanding of the law.”

Editor’s note: Read the full statement from AMA President Susan R. Bailey, MD.

Biden administration says more than one million people have signed up for health insurance on federal exchange during ongoing special enrollment period

USA Today (5/11, Groppe) reports, “More than 1 million Americans signed up for health insurance during the ongoing special enrollment period for HealthCare.gov, the Biden administration announced Tuesday.” In addition, about 12 million people “selected 2021 coverage during the regular enrollment period that ended in December in most states.”

The AP (5/11) reports the special enrollment period will continue through August 15.

CDC’s ACIP supports use of Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine for children as young as 12

The Washington Post (5/12, Sun, Nirappil) reports the CDC’s Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) “threw its support Wednesday behind the use of the Pfizer-BioNTech coronavirus vaccine in children as young as 12, paving the way for millions of adolescents to get the shots, and making it easier for state and local officials to reopen schools and summer camps.”

People who are fully vaccinated can go without masks or physical distancing when indoors or in large groups, CDC says

The Washington Post (5/13, Abutaleb, McGinley) reports, “Americans who are fully vaccinated can go without masks or physical distancing in most cases, even when they are indoors or in large groups, federal officials said Thursday, paving the way for a full reopening of society.” This “change represents a huge shift symbolically and practically for pandemic-weary Americans, millions of whom have lived with the restrictions for more than a year.” CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky “cited a growing body of real-world evidence demonstrating the efficacy of the coronavirus vaccines.”

The New York Times (5/13, Rabin, Mandavilli) reports that during a news briefing, Walensky “warned
that unexpected twists in the pandemic could require the CDC to once again amend the guidance.” And “fully vaccinated people who develop symptoms should still use masks and get tested, she said.”

The Wall Street Journal (5/13, Abbott, Subscription Publication) reports that according to the CDC, people who are fully vaccinated should continue to wear masks when traveling by bus, plane, or train. In addition, the CDC guidance does not apply to places like hospitals or prisons.

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