Top news stories from AMA Morning Rounds®: Week of May 24, 2021

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Daily coronavirus cases in U.S. drop below 30,000 for first time in 11 months

The Washington Post (5/22, Bernstein, Achenbach) reported, “For the first time in 11 months, the daily average of new coronavirus infections in the United States has fallen below 30,000 amid continuing signs that most communities across the nation are emerging from the worst of the pandemic.” On Friday, “the seven-day average dipped to 27,815...the lowest since June 22 and less than a tenth of the infection rate during the winter surge, according to state health department data compiled by The Washington Post.”

Scientists use gene therapy to partially restore vision of French man with genetic eye disease

The New York Times (5/24, Zimmer) reports a group of scientists announced they had used a new form of gene therapy to partially restore the vision of a 58-year-old French man. The findings were published in Nature Medicine.

The Wall Street Journal (5/24, Marcus, Subscription Publication) reports the man has retinitis pigmentosa, a genetic eye disease. The treatment was developed by GenSight Biologics SA, a company based in Paris.

HealthDay (5/24, Thompson) reports the disease “breaks down cells that absorb and convert light into brain signals,” but the treatment “genetically altered retinal ganglion cells to become light-sensitive.” Before treatment the man was completely blind, but now he can use special goggles “to detect a large notebook, a smaller staple box, glass tumblers and even the stripes of a street crosswalk.”
CDC to stop investigating breakthrough COVID-19 infections unless people are hospitalized or die

The New York Times (5/25, Rabin) reports the CDC “has stopped investigating breakthrough [COVID-19] infections among fully vaccinated people unless they become so sick that they are hospitalized or die.” Until recently, “the agency was monitoring all cases,” but found that breakthrough infections were rare.

Healio (5/25, Dreisbach) says that as of April 30, there had been 10,262 breakthrough infections among around 101 million people in the U.S. who had been fully vaccinated, according to a study in the CDC’s Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report.

MedPage Today (5/25, Walker) says the researchers also reported how many of the breakthrough infections were caused by different variants, when the information was available. Out “of the 555 cases available for sequencing, the B.1.1.7 variant was responsible for more than half (56%) of cases; followed by B.1.429 in 25%; B.1.427, another California variant, in 8%; and P.1, the Brazilian variant, also in 8%.”

Coronavirus immunity lasts at least a year, two studies indicate

The New York Times (5/26, Mandavilli) reports, “Immunity to the coronavirus lasts at least a year, possibly a lifetime, improving over time especially after vaccination, according to two new studies.” In a study published in Nature, researchers found that among “people who had been exposed to the coronavirus about a year earlier,” memory B cells “persist in the bone marrow and may churn out antibodies whenever needed.” In the other study, posted on bioRxiv, researchers found that “memory B cells continue to mature and strengthen for at least 12 months after the initial infection.”

Rates of out-of-hospital cardiac arrest increased significantly during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, study indicates

Cardiovascular Business (5/27, Walter) reports researchers found “rates of out-of-hospital cardiac arrest (OHCA) increased significantly during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic.” In addition, “OHCA outcomes were also much worse during that same time period, making a tough situation even more chaotic for patients and health systems alike.” The findings were published in