Top news stories from AMA Morning Rounds®: Week of Aug. 9, 2021

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U.S. to authorize COVID vaccine boosters for those with weakened immune systems within days or weeks, officials say

The Washington Post (8/6, McGinley, Sun, Hawkins) reported, “Federal health officials are racing to ensure that millions of Americans with weakened immune systems can get additional shots of coronavirus vaccines to protect them against the highly contagious Delta variant.” They could be “authorized in days or weeks,” according to unnamed “federal officials.” The FDA “is expected to review data from the Centers for the Disease Control and Prevention supporting the use of additional vaccine doses for the immunocompromised.”

The New York Times (8/6, Mandavilli, LaFraniere) reported the policy shift “reflects a growing concern within the Biden administration about these vulnerable patients as the contagious Delta variant surges nationwide.” According to the Times, “The regulatory move would mean that people with impaired immune responses who need an extra shot, such as certain cancer patients, would be able to get one legally. That is a safer alternative than patients seeking shots on their own, as many now do, several experts said.”

Delta variant causing COVID-19 surge growing across the country

Reuters (8/9, Caspani, Bernstein, Shumaker) reports, “Coronavirus cases and hospitalizations in the United States are at a six-month high, fueled by the rapid spread of the Delta variant across swaths of the country grappling with low vaccination rates.” Nationally, “COVID-19 cases have averaged 100,000 for three days in a row, up 35% over the past week,” with the “strongest” surge “in Louisiana, Florida and Arkansas.” Hospitalizations were up 40% and deaths 18% “in the past week with the most fatalities by population in Arkansas.”
Bloomberg (8/9, Levin) reports the COVID-19 “wave that started in low-vaccination states in the Ozarks and Deep South has now engulfed the country, with cases and hospitalizations at their highest since February.” According to the CDC, 38 “states have transmission levels considered high...meaning they’re posting at least 100 cases per 100,000 residents or have positivity rates of at least 10%.” The rest of the country has “transmission rates that are considered substantial, the second-worst category.”

**CDC study finds benefits of COVID-19 vaccines outweigh risks**

Bloomberg (8/10, Rutherford) reports a study issued by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found the “benefits of COVID-19 vaccines used in the U.S. outweigh the risk of serious adverse events seen in a relatively small number of Americans.” The CDC found that “the impact of a few cases of a rare nerve disorder, blood vessel clots and heart infections following the shots was surpassed by thousands of COVID-19 cases prevented, many that would have had consequences.” The findings were published in the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report.

The New York Times (8/10, Anthes) reports, “For adults, the benefits of the three coronavirus vaccines authorized in the United States outweigh the risks of serious side effects, which remain rare,” according to the CDC. The risks of myocarditis, and Guillain-Barre? syndrome, remain “small” and “are exceeded by the benefits of the vaccines, which provide powerful protection against disease and death, experts concluded.”

**CDC recommends pregnant women be vaccinated against coronavirus**

The Washington Post (8/11, Bernstein, Shammas) reports that on Wednesday, the CDC recommended “that pregnant women be vaccinated against the coronavirus, updating its advice after it found no increased risk of miscarriage among those who have been immunized.” Vaccination rates have been low among pregnant women, and this “new guidance officially moves the CDC off its previous neutral stance on whether immunization is safe for them.”

The New York Times (8/11, Rabin) reports, “The new guidance brings the CDC in line with recommendations made by the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists and other medical specialty groups, which strongly recommend vaccination.”

USA Today (8/11, Rodriguez) reports, “A CDC analysis of safety data on 2,500 women showed no increased risks of miscarriage for those who received at least one dose of the Pfizer or Moderna
vaccine before 20 weeks of pregnancy.” As “miscarriages typically occur in 11%-16% of pregnancies,” this “study found miscarriage rates after receiving a COVID-19 vaccine were about 13%, which is within normal range.”

**Biden urges Congress to address high drug prices**

Reuters (8/12, Heavey) reports that on Thursday, President Biden “called on U.S. lawmakers to enact legislation aimed at lowering drug prices, including allowing Medicare to negotiate drug prices and imposing penalties on drugmakers that hike prices faster than inflation.” Biden “said U.S. prescription drug costs were higher than any other nation in the world by two to three times.”

The New York Times (8/12, Thrush) reports that Biden “wants Medicare to be granted the power to negotiate lower drug prices, pharmaceutical companies to face penalties if they raise prices faster than inflation, and a new cap on how much Medicare recipients have to spend on medications.”

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