Top news stories from AMA Morning Rounds®: Week of Aug. 16, 2021

Read AMA Morning Rounds®’ most popular stories in medicine and public health from the week of Aug. 16, 2021–Aug. 20, 2021.

Extended signup period for Affordable Care Act ends

The AP (8/13, Alonso-Zaldivar) reported, “With the Obama health care law undergoing a revival under President Joe Biden,” Sunday marked “the deadline for consumers to take advantage of a special sign-up period for private coverage made more affordable by his COVID-19 relief law.” A strong close “would bolster Biden’s case that Congress needs to make permanent the temporary boost in health insurance subsidies provided by the COVID legislation.” The government “says more than 2.5 million people have signed up since Biden ordered the HealthCare.gov marketplace to reopen Feb. 15 to account for health insurance needs in the pandemic.”

Interrupting sitting every half hour may improve blood sugar levels, overall health, researchers say

HealthDay (8/16, Reinberg) reports research “suggests that getting out of your chair every half hour may help improve your blood sugar levels and your overall health.” Investigators arrived at that conclusion after conducting a three-week study that “followed 16” adults with obesity “who led a sedentary lifestyle or had a job where they sat all day.” For “10 hours each day, a fitness tracker signaled every 30 minutes, reminding each participant to get up and move.” The study revealed that “people in the active group had lower LDL...cholesterol, and lower blood sugar levels, compared with the inactive group.” In addition, those in the active group “had fewer spikes and dips in their blood sugar, which may have resulted from improved blood flow.” The findings were published online in the American Journal of Physiology-Endocrinology and Metabolism.

Studies highlight persistence of racial inequities in health care

The New York Times (8/17, Rabin) reports health care access “has improved in the wake of the
Affordable Care Act, which reduced the number of uninsured Americans across all racial and ethnic groups. But the racial health gap has remained, according to a series of studies published on Tuesday in the journal *JAMA.*” The racial health gap “did not significantly narrow from 1999 to 2018, according to one study whose author said it was tantamount to ‘a comprehensive national report card.’” The Times says the studies “paint a portrait of a nation still plagued by medical have and have-nots whose ability to benefit from scientific advances varies by race and ethnicity, despite the fact that the ACA greatly expanded insurance.”

According to CNN (8/17, Langmaid), the studies “show per-person health care spending increased with age for every racial and ethnic group, but White individuals spent the most per-person than any other group.” To view the studies, click here and here.

**Biden administration to launch COVID-19 booster shot campaign in a month**

The New York Times (8/18, LaFraniere, Mandavilli) reports the Biden administration on Wednesday announced several moves to fight “the surging Delta variant of the coronavirus, strongly recommending booster shots for most vaccinated Americans and using federal leverage to force nursing homes to vaccinate their staffs.” The administration “plans to offer third shots to adults who received the Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna vaccines eight months after they received their second dose, starting Sept. 20.” According to the Times, “Officials stressed that the Food and Drug Administration still needs to make a final determination that third shots are safe and effective – a ruling expected in the coming weeks.”

Reuters (8/18, O'Donnell, Aboulenein) reports, “The U.S. government expects to give out 100 million booster shots for free at around 80,000 locations nationwide, White House coronavirus response coordinator Jeff Zients said.” The AP (8/18, Stobbe, Perrone) says “the first boosters would go to people in high-priority groups that received the initial U.S. vaccinations: nursing home residents, health workers and those with underlying health conditions.”

USA Today (8/18, Subramanian) reports, “Officials emphasized that mRNA vaccines like Pfizer and Moderna continue to be effective in reducing risk of hospitalization and death, but conceded that recent data made clear that protections begin to wane after the initial doses and amid the dominant Delta variant.”

According to the Wall Street Journal (8/18, A1, Armour, Hopkins, Subscription Publication), Biden also signed a memorandum directing the Education Department to take steps to ensure students return to in-person learning safely, including allowing schools to institute mask mandates.

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U.S. administered more than 1M COVID-19 vaccine doses on Thursday, White House says

Politico (8/19, Sheehey) reports more than “one million Americans received a dose of COVID-19 vaccine on Thursday, a benchmark the nation has not met in nearly seven weeks amid a resurgence of the coronavirus pandemic.” The White House “announced the vaccine upswing on Twitter, noting a 31% week-over-week increase in the daily average of those becoming fully vaccinated.”

The Hill (8/19, Weixel) reports that this total includes 562,000 people who received their first dose of COVID-19 vaccine. Data indicate “the vaccination rate is increasing across the country after weeks of stagnating at about 500,000 per day. Vaccinations had slowed down after hitting a peak in mid-April of about 3.3 million doses per day.”

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