

Top news stories from AMA Morning Rounds®: Week of Aug. 30, 2021

Read *AMA Morning Rounds*®' most popular stories in medicine and public health from the week of Aug. 30, 2021–Sept. 3, 2021.

Delta variant could double risk of hospitalization for unvaccinated, large analysis finds

The New York Times (8/27, Anthes) reported that a study published in *The Lancet Infectious Diseases* on Friday found that people who are infected with the Delta variant “are twice as likely to be hospitalized as those who are infected with the Alpha variant.” The study “is an analysis of more than 40,000 coronavirus infections in England. It adds to evidence suggesting that Delta may cause more severe illness than other variants do.” According to the Times, “Fewer than 2 percent of the infections occurred in fully vaccinated people, and there was not enough data to draw firm conclusions about hospitalization risks in that group specifically, the researchers said.”

Biden establishes “Climate Change and Health Equity” office within HHS

The New York Times (8/30, Friedman) reports that the Biden administration is “creating a new federal office to address the health consequences of climate change and their disproportionate effects on poor communities.” The Department of Health and Human Services’ Office of Climate Change and Health Equity, “which the administration announced on Monday, will be the first federal program aimed specifically at understanding how planet-warming greenhouse gas emissions from burning fossil fuels also affect human health.”

The AP (8/30, Alonso-Zaldivar) reports the “new health office...will prod hospitals to cut carbon emissions, aiming to provide greener, more environmentally friendly medical care.” HHS Secretary Xavier Becerra “said the new Office of Climate Change and Health Equity will also work with localities

to mitigate harmful effects of climate change.”

The Wall Street Journal (8/30, Armour, Subscription Publication) reports that dozens of organizations already are urging the new office to address specific actions, while hospitals worry the initiative will come with new and costly regulations.

Childhood obesity increased during first year-and-a-half of COVID-19 pandemic, study finds

The Washington Post (8/31, Reiley) reports, “Childhood obesity rose significantly during the pandemic, according to a new study” published in Journal of the American Medical Association Network. Drawing on electronic health record data from nearly 200,000 children ages 5 to 17, the research “is considered one of the largest of its kind, experts said.” It “pointed to an increase in obesity among the youngest age group” – children between the ages of 5 and 11 – “during the pandemic year that was higher than the increase in this group over the past 20 years.” The Post adds, “Among 12- to 15-year-olds, the study showed a rise in obesity levels during the pandemic that matched the increase that had occurred over the past 20 years. And among 16- to 17-year-olds, the pandemic year weight gain was about half the rate of increase in obesity compared to what teenagers that age had shown over the past 20 years.”

Supreme Court refuses to block Texas law SB8 prohibiting access to reproductive care

The New York Times (9/1, A1, Liptak, Tavernise, Goodman) reports, “The Supreme Court refused just before midnight on Wednesday to block a Texas law prohibiting most abortions, less than a day after it took effect and became the most restrictive abortion measure in the nation.” The court’s “vote was 5 to 4, with Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr. joining” in the dissent. ”

The Washington Post (9/1, Barnes, Marimow, Wax-Thibodeaux, Kitchener) reports, “Because the court did not act earlier in the day, the law already had taken effect, and clinics in Texas said they had stopped providing abortions starting at six weeks after a woman’s last period.” The ban “relies on private citizens to sue people who help women” seeking access to clinical care.

The AP (9/1, Sherman, Gresko, Weber) reports that “the American Medical Association said it was deeply disturbed by ‘this egregious law’ and disappointed by the Supreme Court’s inaction. The law ‘not only bans virtually all abortions in the state, but it interferes in the patient-physician relationship

and places bounties on physicians and health care workers simply for delivering care,' said a statement from" AMA President Gerald E. Harmon, M.D.

Editor's Note: Read the full statement from AMA President Gerald E. Harmon, M.D. on Texas SB8.

Drug-resistant infections rose in hospitals amid pandemic, CDC reports

The New York Times (9/2, Richtel) reports that during the pandemic, "drug-resistant infections have increased in hospitals." The trend, reported on Thursday by the CDC and also published in the journal *Infection Control & Hospital Epidemiology*, "came about in part because drug-resistant bacteria thrived on reused protective equipment, intravenous lines and medical equipment like ventilators." During the last three months of 2020, "drug-resistant bloodstream infections at hospitals rose 47%...compared to the same period a year earlier." Similar findings "showed up with regard to infections traced to ventilators, which rose 45% in the fourth quarter of 2020 over the previous year."

According to Bloomberg (9/2, Tozzi), "four types of health-care infections commonly tracked as core measures of hospital quality increased significantly in 2020, compared with what would have been expected based on prior years' rates," according to the CDC data. However, "two other types of infections, associated with surgical sites and an illness known as C. diff, didn't increase."

Modern Healthcare (9/2, Devereaux, Subscription Publication) reports, "The study attributes the steady rate of surgical-site infections to hospitals performing fewer elective surgeries and mostly conducting them in operating rooms with infection control processes that were separate from COVID-19 wards."

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