Top news stories from AMA Morning Rounds®: Week of Sept. 13, 2021


** CDC studies show COVID-19 vaccines are highly effective against hospitalization, death**

The New York Times (9/10, A1, Mandavilli, Rabin) reported the CDC on Friday issued “three large studies” highlighting the effectiveness of COVID-19 vaccines “at preventing infection and hospitalizations with the virus” and underscoring “a deep conviction among scientists that vaccine hesitancy and refusal have prolonged the pandemic.” One study examined “more than 600,000 virus infections in 13 states” and “concluded that Americans who were not fully vaccinated were far more susceptible to infections, illness and death from the virus.” The second study, “an analysis of 32,867 patient visits in nine states, found that even as the Delta variant predominated,” coronavirus “vaccines had an overall effectiveness rate of 86% at preventing hospitalizations, though they were less protective for adults aged 75 and over.” The third study found that the COVID-19 “vaccines' protection against hospitalization declined with age, to 80% for those aged 65 and older, down from 95% for adults aged 18 to 64.”

**There are no credible data to support coronavirus booster shots for general population, review says**

The New York Times (9/13, Mandavilli) reports, “None of the data on coronavirus vaccines so far provides credible evidence in support of boosters for the general population, according to a review published on Monday” in The Lancet “by an international group of scientists, including some at the Food and Drug Administration and the World Health Organization.” In the new review, “experts said that whatever advantage boosters provide would not outweigh the benefit of using those doses to protect the billions of people who remain unvaccinated worldwide. Boosters may be useful in some people with weak immune systems, they said, but are not yet needed for the general population.” In addition, the experts warned that prematurely promoting boosters and any reports of side effects
caused by booster shots could undermine confidence in the initial vaccine series.

Bloomberg (9/13, Kresge) reports review authors “based their assessment on a wide range of real-world observational studies as well as data from clinical trials.”

**Biden administration takes over distribution of monoclonal antibodies**

The Washington Post (9/14, Bernstein) reports the Biden administration “moved this week to stave off shortages of monoclonal antibodies, taking over distribution of the critical COVID-19 therapy and purchasing 1.4 million additional doses.” The policy, which went into effect Monday, “is all but certain to result in cuts of the medication to some states, especially seven in the Deep South with high infection rates that have been using about 70% of the national supply.” Now, HHS “will, at least temporarily, set the rules for distribution of monoclonal antibodies instead of allowing states, medical facilities and doctors to order them directly.”

Politico (9/14, Cancryn) reports the move has prompted criticism from some states which are warning of limited access in hospitals already struggling with COVID-19 infections.

Reuters (9/14, Nadeem) says the government “will buy 1.4 million additional doses” of Regeneron Pharmaceuticals’ COVID-19 antibody cocktail, REGEN-COV, a combination of casirivimab and imdevimab.

**Number of states with high obesity rates nearly doubled in two years, CDC says**

USA Today (9/15, Alltucker) reports, “The number of states with high obesity rates nearly doubled over two years as Americans grappled with pandemic stress, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported Wednesday.” While twenty years ago, “no state had an adult obesity rate above 25%,” now “a total of 16 states had obesity rates of 35% or more in 2020, up from nine states in 2018.”

The Hill (9/15, Coleman) reports, “Delaware, Iowa, Ohio and Texas were the four new additions to the list of states with the higher obesity rate this year” and “they joined Alabama, Arkansas, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, Mississippi, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee and West Virginia.”
Pandemic accelerated childhood obesity in U.S., study indicates

The AP (9/16, Stobbe) reports, “A new study ties the COVID-19 pandemic to an ‘alarming’ increase in obesity in U.S. children and teenagers.” The study also indicates a “vicious cycle,” as “the pandemic appears to be worsening the nation’s longstanding obesity epidemic, and obesity can put people at risk for more severe illness after coronavirus infection.”

The Hill (9/16, Coleman) reports, “The CDC’s Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR) released Thursday determined that the monthly rate of BMI increase among 2- to 19-year-olds accelerated during the pandemic to reach 0.1 kg/m² per month,” while before the pandemic, “the rate of increase was 0.052 kg/m² per month.”

MedPage Today (9/16, Walker) reports the authors “divided the children and teens into BMI categories, and found significant increases in the rate of BMI among all categories except underweight.” Additionally, “among those with overweight, moderate obesity, and severe obesity, the rates of BMI increase more than doubled, the team said, and even those with healthy weight had a rate of BMI change that almost doubled (ratio 1.78).” They found that “these changes were most pronounced among elementary school children ages 6 to 11, whose rate of BMI change more than doubled versus the pre-pandemic rate (ratio 2.50).”

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