

Top news stories from AMA Morning Rounds®: Week of Oct. 4, 2021

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Diabetes, heart, lung associations urge Americans to get both flu, COVID-19 vaccines ahead of flu season

Healio (10/1) reported, “Three associations are urging eligible individuals to receive their annual flu shot and the COVID-19 vaccine in order to reduce hospital burden and protect the vulnerable ahead of flu season.” A statement was issued by “the American Heart Association, American Lung Association and American Diabetes Association.” According to an AHA press release, “patients with cancer, chronic lung disease, diabetes and heart disease are at a higher risk for severe complications from serious respiratory diseases like the flu and COVID-19,” and, “according to the release, the 2021 to 2022 flu season could be severe and begin early, meaning that preventing the flu is an important step in relieving overcrowded hospitals and protecting vulnerable and at-risk people.”

Young men at three times the risk of myocarditis following second shot of Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna COVID-19 vaccines compared to first dose, study finds

The New York Times (10/4, Mandavilli) reports on research finding “a second dose of the coronavirus vaccines made by Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna can nearly triple the chances of a rare heart condition in young men,” but “the absolute risk of the condition, called myocarditis, remains extremely low.” Specifically, after a second dose, men around 25 years old were found to have “5.8 cases per million” while after a first dose, there were “0.8 cases per million.” The Times also reports that the researchers “may have missed people whose heart problems were not severe enough to require hospitalization.” The findings were published in *JAMA Internal Medicine*.

Frequency of anxiety, depression symptoms among U.S. adults amplified during winter COVID-19 surge, research suggests

The New York Times (10/5, Mueller) reports, “The arrival of vaccines and declining COVID-19 cases in the first half of 2021 coincided with an easing of symptoms of anxiety and depression across the” U.S., but “symptoms remained much more common in June 2021, the end of the survey period, than before the pandemic, and could be on the rise again because of the summer surge in cases of the Delta variant, CDC scientists said.” The findings were published online in the CDC’s Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report.

The Hill (10/5, Coleman) reports, “The frequency of anxiety and depression symptoms among American adults amplified during the winter COVID-19 surge, according to a” CDC “study showing the pandemic’s impacts on the country’s mental health.” The study, “spanning from August 2020 to June 2021, found anxiety and depression frequency peaked between December 2020 and January 2021, as COVID-19 cases skyrocketed to new heights during the holiday season.” Despite a drop of 26.8% by June 2021, researchers also found that “the frequency of anxiety and depression still remained ‘substantially’ higher than compared to before the pandemic.”

WHO recommends malaria vaccine for children in hardest-hit regions

The Washington Post (10/6, Firozi, Iati, Cunningham) reports the World Health Organization (WHO) recommended on Wednesday “the world’s first vaccine to prevent malaria for widespread use in children, a tool it said can help save tens of thousands of lives each year.” WHO “said it is recommending use of the vaccine among children in places with moderate to high malaria transmission.”

The New York Times (10/6, A1, Mandavilli) says the novel vaccine from GlaxoSmithKline “rouses a child’s immune system to thwart Plasmodium falciparum, the deadliest of five malaria pathogens and the most prevalent in Africa.” By one estimate, the vaccine “will save tens of thousands of children each year. Malaria kills about half a million people each year, nearly all of them in sub-Saharan Africa—including 260,000 children under 5.”

The AP (10/6, Cheng) reports “WHO said its decision was based largely on results from ongoing research in Ghana, Kenya and Malawi that tracked more than 800,000 children who have received

the vaccine since 2019.” The shot does have issues: it “is only about 30% effective, it requires up to four doses, and its protection fades after several months.” Nevertheless, “scientists say the vaccine could have a major impact against malaria in Africa, home to most of the world’s more than 200 million cases and 400,000 deaths per year.”

Health experts concerned about possibility of severe flu season as many Americans say they may not get vaccine

The New York Times (10/7, Hoffman) reports, “Lockdowns helped keep last year’s flu season historically mild in both the United States and around the world, but U.S. officials fear a more serious season this fall and winter, with unmasked people out and about far more, and nearly half of adults in a new survey saying they are unlikely to get a flu shot.” On Thursday, “top health experts said they were particularly concerned that, with the coronavirus still coursing around the country, nearly one in four people at higher risk for flu-related complications indicated they did not intend to get the flu vaccine.” CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky “noted that while experts did not yet know how severely the flu would hit the United States this fall, other respiratory infections had already returned, including RSV, a common cause of pneumonia and bronchitis in babies and a serious threat to older adults.”

USA Today (10/7, Miller) reports the survey, commissioned by the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases, “found that while more than 60% of Americans agreed the flu shot was the best way to prevent flu deaths and hospitalizations, 44% said they were unsure about or not planning to get a flu vaccine this year.” Public health experts are concerned this “could exacerbate a worse-than-average flu season.”

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