

## Top news stories from AMA Morning Rounds®: Week of Oct. 18, 2021

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Read *AMA Morning Rounds*®' most popular stories in medicine and public health from the week of Oct. 18, 2021–Oct. 22, 2021.

### **FDA panel backs booster dose for all J&J COVID-19 vaccine recipients**

The New York Times (10/15, A1, LaFraniere, Weiland, Zimmer) reported that a key FDA "advisory committee voted unanimously Friday to recommend Johnson & Johnson booster shots, most likely clearing the way for all 15 million people who got the company's one-dose coronavirus vaccine to receive a second shot." If the FDA and the CDC "accept the recommendation, as expected, boosters could be offered by late next week." However, "many committee members made clear that they believed Johnson & Johnson recipients might benefit from the option of a booster of the Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna vaccine, something a top FDA official said the agency was considering."

The AP (10/15, Perrone, Neergaard) reported the FDA advisers "cited growing evidence that J&J recipients are more vulnerable to infection than people who got vaccines from competitors Pfizer or Moderna – and that most got their single dose many months ago." The AP added, "Although Friday's meeting is part of an ongoing evaluation of vaccine boosters, many of the experts said it makes more sense to think of J&J's vaccine as a two-dose vaccine."

### **Administration announces plans to regulate "forever chemicals"**

The Washington Post (10/18, A1, Dennis, Fears) reports that on Monday, the Biden Administration moved "to regulate a group of long-lasting, human-made chemicals that pose health risks to millions of Americans, even as they continue to be used in an array of products such as cosmetics, dental floss, food packaging, clothing and cleaning supplies." The Environmental Protection Agency "said it will

move with urgency to set enforceable drinking water limits on certain polyfluoroalkyl and perfluoroalkyl substances, or PFAS, more commonly known as 'forever chemicals.'" In addition, the EPA "will require manufacturers to provide detailed data about entire classes of compounds they produce, and plans to designate some of them as hazardous chemicals under the nation's Superfund law."

The New York Times (10/18, Friedman) reports that "exposure to the chemicals has been linked to certain cancers, weakened immunity, thyroid disease, and other health effects."

## **FDA unveils proposal to make hearing aids available over the counter**

The Washington Post (10/19, Shepherd) reports, "A long-awaited Food and Drug Administration proposal would allow millions of consumers to buy over-the-counter hearing aids in stores or online without a prescription or medical exam." The FDA's "move Tuesday to make hearing devices more accessible and affordable for millions of patients with mild to moderate hearing loss is the first step in a process that could make them available to consumers as soon as next fall."

The AP (10/19, Perrone) reports over "37 million Americans, or 15% of adults, have trouble hearing, according to the FDA, but only about one-fifth of people who can benefit from a hearing aid use one." According to the AP, "Cost is a big obstacle. Between the device itself and fitting services, Americans can pay more than \$5,000 to get a hearing aid," as "insurance coverage is very limited, and Medicare doesn't pay for hearing aids, only diagnostic tests."

## **White House outlines plans to administer COVID-19 vaccines to children aged five to 11**

The Washington Post (10/20, Sun, Sellers, Wang) reports that on Wednesday, the White House "announced plans to distribute vaccines to a huge group that has been ineligible so far to receive the coronavirus shots – 28 million children aged 5 to 11." The Biden administration plans "to begin as soon as federal health officials sign off on a reduced dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, which the Biden administration anticipates could come as soon as the first week of November." The White House will "make the specially packaged vaccine available at more than 25,000 pediatricians' and doctors' offices, hospitals, pharmacies, community health centers, and school- and community-based clinics."

The New York Times (10/20, A1, Rogers) reports the 5-to-11 age group "has far more members than the teenage cohort already approved to receive the vaccine." American Medical Association President Gerald E. Harmon, M.D., said in a statement, "Laying this advance groundwork, ensuring supply is available at physician practices and that a patient's own physician is available to answer questions, is critical to the continued success of this rollout."

The AP (10/20, Miller, Tanner) reports, "Federal regulators will meet over the next two weeks to weigh the safety and effectiveness of giving low-dose shots to the roughly 28 million children in that age group" and then, "within hours of formal approval, which is expected after the Food and Drug Administration signs off and a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention advisory panel meets on Nov. 2-3, millions of doses will begin going out to providers across the country, along with the smaller needles needed for injecting young children."

## **CDC endorses advisory panel's recommendation for J&J, Moderna, and mix-and-match COVID-19 boosters**

The Washington Post (10/21, A1, Sun, Shepherd) reports, "Tens of millions of Americans can sign up to get Moderna and Johnson & Johnson boosters beginning Friday after" CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky "endorsed recommendations from expert advisers that the shots are safe and effective at bolstering protection against the coronavirus." The approval means "eligible Americans at risk of severe disease can choose any of the three boosters now authorized in the United States regardless of their original shot."

The Hill (10/21, Weixel) says the "green light will also allow Americans to choose the brand of booster they receive. Some people may have a preference for the vaccine type that they originally received and others may prefer to get a different booster. CDC's recommendations now allow for this type of mixed dosing for booster shots."

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