Top news stories from AMA Morning Rounds®: Week of Dec. 20, 2021


**Pfizer-BioNTech say COVID-19 vaccine does not provide expected immunity in children ages 2 to 5, will add third dose to regimen in trials**

CNN (12/17, Fox, Langmaid) reported Pfizer-BioNtech on Friday “said...that trials of its vaccine in children ages 2 to 5 show that it did not provide the expected immunity in kids this age, and it is adding a third dose to the regimen.” CNN added, “The company decided to add the third dose for all children and babies ages 6 months to 5 years after its independent outside advisers took a look at the data so far.”

The Wall Street Journal (12/17, Hopkins, Subscription Publication) reported the companies said that if the third dose proved successful in trials, they would seek authorization during the first half of 2022.

**Moderna COVID-19 vaccine up to four times more likely than Pfizer-BioNTech shot to cause heart inflammation, study suggests**

Reuters (12/17, Skydsgaard) reported Moderna’s “COVID-19 vaccine is up to four times more likely to cause inflammation of the heart muscle...than its rival vaccine from Pfizer-BioNTech,” according to the results of a Danish study. Investigators said, “In general, the rate of myocarditis or myopericarditis was about threefold to fourfold higher for mRNA-1273 (Moderna) vaccination than that for BNT162b2 (Pfizer-BioNTech) vaccination.” The findings were published in The BMJ.
Starting in July, dialing 988 will help people reach National Suicide Prevention Lifeline network

The AP (12/20, Alonso-Zaldivar) reports, “People in crisis and those trying to help them will have a new phone number—988—to reach the national suicide prevention network starting in July,” now that “federal health officials” from the Department of Health and Human Services on Dec. 20 “announced more than $280 million to smooth the transition from the current 10-digit number to three digits.” In addition to voice calls, the 988 number will “handle text and chat.” People using 988 “will be able to reach trained counselors who belong to the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline network.”

The Hill (12/20, Coleman) reports, “Before July, Americans needing help should call the current National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK.”

Biden’s plan to fight Omicron variant surge includes federal resources, expanded testing

The Washington Post (12/21, A1, Jeong) reports that on Tuesday, President Biden “outlined plans to expand coronavirus testing sites across the country, distribute a half-billion free at-home tests and deploy more federal health resources to aid strained hospitals, as the Omicron variant drives a fresh wave of infections.” The “administration will start delivering a half-billion free rapid tests to homes next month...and health officials will set up a website where Americans can order them.” In addition, “new federal testing sites will...be established across the country, starting with one in New York City this week.”

The AP (12/21, Boak, Alonso-Zaldivar, Long) reports that in addition, the administration “is prepared to deploy an additional 1,000 troops with medical skills to assist hospitals buckling under the virus surge,” and “is immediately sending federal medical personnel to Michigan, Indiana, Wisconsin, Arizona, New Hampshire and Vermont.” Furthermore, “there are plans to ready additional ventilators and protective equipment from the national stockpile, expanding hospital resources.”

Editor’s note: Read the AMA’s statement on the Administration’s plan.

FDA authorizes Pfizer drug to treat COVID-19

The Washington Post (12/22, Johnson, Shepherd) reports, “Federal regulators Wednesday
authorized the first easy-to-take pill to treat COVID-19, a drug developed by Pfizer that will help refill the nation’s medicine cabinet even as the Omicron variant, now dominant in much of the country, has thwarted most other options.”

The New York Times (12/22, Robbins, Zimmer) reports that the treatment “is authorized for COVID patients age 12 and over who are vulnerable to becoming severely ill because they are older or have medical conditions such as obesity or diabetes.” And “tens of millions of Americans – including both vaccinated and unvaccinated people—will be eligible if they get infected with the virus.”

The AP (12/22, Perrone) reports, “The drug, Paxlovid, is a faster way to treat early COVID-19 infections, though initial supplies will be extremely limited. All of the previously authorized drugs against the disease require an IV or an injection.” Meanwhile, “An antiviral pill from Merck also is expected to soon win authorization,” although “Pfizer’s drug is all but certain to be the preferred option because of its mild side effects and superior effectiveness, including a nearly 90% reduction in hospitalizations and deaths among patients most likely to get severe disease.”

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