Top news stories from AMA Morning Rounds®: Week of March 7, 2022

Read AMA Morning Rounds®’ most popular stories in medicine and public health from the week of March 7–March 11, 2022.

This season’s flu vaccine has not been effective against influenza A(H3N2), estimates indicate

Healio (3/10, Downey, Gallagher) reports “interim estimates published Thursday in” the CDC’s Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report “indicate that this season’s influenza vaccine has not been effective.” Based on the data “from more than 3,600 children and adults,” researchers “estimated that the vaccine has been 16% effective against mild or moderate influenza caused by the predominant circulating virus, influenza A(H3N2), with a 95% confidence interval...that suggests vaccination ‘did not significantly reduce the risk of outpatient medically attended illness’ caused by H3N2.”

People with serious mental illness may have up to double the risk of heart disease, study indicates

HealthDay (3/9, Preidt) reports, “People with serious mental illness,” that is, “bipolar disorder, schizophrenia and schizoaffective disorder,” appear to “have up to double the risk of heart disease, and should have their heart health monitored from a young age,” investigators concluded.

Healio (3/9, Buzby) reports the study observed “elevated 10-year” cardiovascular “risk...among patients with a serious mental illness aged 18 to 59 years without” cardiovascular disease “at baseline.” What’s more, “patients with serious mental illness were more likely to smoke and have BMI of 30 kg/m² or more compared with patients without a serious mental illness,” the study revealed. The findings of the 591,257-patient study were published online March 9 ahead of print in the Journal of the American Heart Association.
U.S. hurricanes, tropical storms associated with higher mortality months after landfall

USA Today (3/8, Rice) reports a study published Tuesday in the Journal of the American Medical Association shows that “over the past few decades, hurricanes and other tropical storms in the U.S. were associated with up to 33.4% higher death rates from several major causes in subsequent months” after landfall. Subsequent causes of death, according to the study, “included injuries, infectious and parasitic diseases, respiratory and cardiovascular diseases, and neuropsychiatric disorders.”

The Hill (3/8, Udasin) reports study researchers “said they collected 33.5 million U.S. death records from 1988 to 2018, which they analyzed using a statistical model to calculate how death rates changed after tropical cyclones and hurricanes.” They also found that “increases in respiratory disease death rates peaked one month after hurricanes and one month after cyclones, according to the study. Surges in cardiovascular disease death rates peaked during the month of the hurricane occurred and one month after cyclones.”

COVID-19 may cause greater loss of gray matter, tissue damage in the brain

The New York Times (3/7, Belluck) reports, “COVID-19 may cause greater loss of gray matter and tissue damage in the brain than naturally occurs in people who have not been infected with the virus, a large...study finds.” This study” found shrinkage and tissue damage primarily in brain areas related to sense of smell; some of those areas are also involved in other brain functions, the researchers said.” The findings were published in Nature.

USA Today (3/7, Weintraub) reports the study “used before-and-after brain images of 785 British people, ages 51 to 81.” USA Today adds, “Analysis of the ‘before’ and ‘after’ images from the U.K. Biobank showed that people infected with COVID-19 had a greater reduction in their brain volumes overall and performed worse on cognitive tests than those who had not been infected.” The findings also revealed brain changes among people “who had much milder disease.”
New “test to treat” program to increase patient access to COVID-19 drugs

The Washington Post (3/4, Shepherd) reported that “consumers will be able to walk into a clinic at a CVS or Walgreens, get tested for the coronavirus and, if the results come back positive, go home with a free course of antiviral medicine under a ‘test to treat’ program announced by President Biden” last week “as part of his new pandemic road map.” This “one-stop approach has been hailed as a potential breakthrough by some doctors, who say it will make it far easier for people at heightened risk of severe disease to get the lifesaving drugs quickly.” However, “the American Medical Association came out strongly critical of the plan Friday afternoon, saying prescribing decisions should be made ‘under the guidance and supervision of physicians with expertise to deal with complex medications.’”

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