Top news stories from AMA Morning Rounds®: Week of April 11, 2022

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U.S., U.K. public health officials investigating unusual cases of serious hepatitis in young children

STAT (4/14, Branswell) reports, “Public health officials in the United States and the United Kingdom are investigating a number of unusual cases of serious hepatitis in young children, the cause or causes of which are currently unknown.” Evidence out of “the U.K. and from Alabama—where nine cases have been recorded since last fall—points to the possible involvement of an adenovirus.” The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in a Thursday statement “said it is working with Alabama on its investigation into the cases, and is working with other state health departments to see if there are other cases elsewhere.”

U.S. renews COVID-19 public health emergency for three more months

Reuters (4/13, Aboulenein) reports, “The United States on Wednesday renewed the COVID-19 public health emergency, allowing millions of Americans to keep getting free tests, vaccines and treatments for at least three more months.” The emergency “was due to expire on April 16.” Now, “the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) in a statement said it was extending the public health emergency and that it will give states 60 days notice prior to termination or expiration.”

Drug overdose deaths spike among U.S. teens, even as drug use declines
The Los Angeles Times (4/12, Reyes) reports “deadly drug overdoses among U.S. teenagers have more than doubled in frequency in recent years, even as those in the age group became less likely to use illegal drugs,” according to an analysis of “overdose deaths among 14- to 18-year-olds.” The results published in a research letter in JAMA revealed “the death rate for drug overdoses in that age group had been generally stable for a decade, then nearly doubled between 2019 and 2020 and continued to rise early in 2021, reaching a rate of 5.49 deaths per 100,000 adolescents.”

CNN (4/12, Holcombe) reports the analysis revealed that “in 2021, fentanyl was involved in more than 77% of adolescent overdose deaths.”

NPR (4/12, Chatterjee) reports, “The highest rates were among Native American and Alaskan Native teens, followed by Latino teens.”

White House seeking to help lessen Americans’ medical debt burden

CNN (4/11, Luhby) reports, “The White House is seeking to help lessen Americans’ medical debt burden, Vice President Kamala Harris announced Monday.” In this “latest effort to help people deal with increased costs amid skyrocketing inflation, the White House laid out a four-point plan to help protect consumers” that “builds on President Joe Biden’s recent executive order on increasing access to affordable health care coverage.”

Modern Healthcare (4/11, Goldman, Subscription Publication) reports that under the effort, HHS “will soon request data from more than 2,000 providers related to medical debt, the White House announced Monday.” The agency will use this data “when making grantmaking decisions,” and will also “make some of the data public and share potential violations with enforcement agencies.”

Two-thirds of U.S. water systems have detectable levels of uranium

HealthDay (4/8) reported, “Two-thirds of U.S. community water systems have detectable levels of uranium, and the highest levels are in Hispanic communities, according to a new study.” Researcher Anne Nigra, assistant professor of environmental health sciences at Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health, said, “Previous studies have found associations between chronic uranium exposure and increased risk of hypertension, cardiovascular disease, kidney damage and lung cancer at high levels of exposure.” The findings were published in The Lancet Planetary Health.