Top news stories from AMA Morning Rounds®: Week of May 16, 2022

Read AMA Morning Rounds®’ most popular stories in medicine and public health from the week of May 16, 2022–May 20, 2022.

CDC recommends Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine booster for children five to 11

The New York Times (5/19, Mandavilli) reports, “The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on Thursday recommended a booster dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine for children ages 5 to 11.” This “booster shot would be the third dose available for most children and the fourth dose for some immunocompromised children.”

The Washington Post (5/19, Shepherd) reports the agency “advisers voted 11-1, with one member abstaining from the vote, to recommend that 5-to-11-year-olds should get a third dose of the Pfizer vaccine at least five months after completing their initial two shot series.” American Medical Association President Gerald E. Harmon, M.D., said, “According to the (CDC), the highly transmissible variant not only sent more children to the hospital and ICU than previous waves, but children who were unvaccinated were twice as likely to be hospitalized as those were vaccinated.”

The AP (5/19, Neergaard) reports the move “also means that 5- to 11-year-olds with severely weakened immune systems...would be eligible for a fourth dose.”

Editor’s note: Read Dr. Harmon’s full statement on ACIP recommendation for COVID vaccine booster for children.

Genetic testing, health screenings could identify over one million U.S. adults with inherited risk for a cholesterol disorder
HealthDay (5/18, Preidt) reports, “A combination of genetic testing and health screenings could identify more than one million U.S. adults with an inherited risk for a cholesterol disorder that increases their risk for premature heart attack and death,” investigators concluded in findings published online ahead of print in the Journal of the American Heart Association. By “using health records and genetic test results from about 50,000 40- to 69-year-olds in the United Kingdom, researchers estimated the percentage who had a familial hypercholesterolemia gene,” then they “used the relationships found in the U.K. data to estimate the rate in nearly 40,000 U.S. adults 20 and older with no genetic test results.” The study authors concluded that “when both clinical criteria and genetic testing were combined, 6.6 cases per 1,000 adults screened would be identified.”

**FDA authorizes Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine booster for children ages five to 11**

The New York Times (5/17, LaFraniere) reports that the FDA “authorized booster shots of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine on Tuesday for children 5 to 11, the latest in a series of actions intended to bolster waning protection against infection from the coronavirus vaccines.” Over “eight million of the 28 million children in that age group in the United States have received two vaccine shots, and will now be eligible for the extra dose at least five months after their second shot.”

The Washington Post (5/17, A1, Johnson, McGinley) reports, “Advisers to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention are scheduled to meet Thursday and are expected to recommend the booster, which was shown in laboratory tests to strengthen children’s immune defenses—particularly against the Omicron variant.”

**U.S. to extend COVID-19 public-health emergency past mid-July**

Bloomberg (5/16, Griffin) reports, “The U.S. government will extend the COVID-19 public-health emergency past mid-July, continuing pandemic-era policies as the nearly 2 1/2-year outbreak drags on.” Last week, several health organizations “wrote to HHS Secretary Xavier Becerra urging the Biden administration to maintain the emergency ‘until it is clear that the global pandemic has receded and the capabilities authorized by the PHE are no longer necessary.’”
Researchers identify potential biomarker that may help identify newborns at risk for SIDS

Reuters (5/13, Lapid) reported “Australian researchers have identified a biochemical marker in the blood that could help identify newborn babies at risk for sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).” In the study published in eBioMedicine, “babies who died of SIDS had lower levels of an enzyme called butyrylcholinesterase (BChE) shortly after birth, the researchers said.”