Top news stories from AMA Morning Rounds®: Week of July 18, 2022

Read AMA Morning Rounds®’ most popular stories in medicine and public health from the week of July 18, 2022–July 22, 2022.

BA.5 Omicron subvariant makes up about 80% of COVID-19 cases, driving U.S. surge

The New York Times (7/21, Hassan) reports that “in just eight weeks, the Omicron subvariant known as BA.5 has gone from a blip in United States case counts to the dominant version of the coronavirus in the country.” BA.5, “perhaps the most transmissible subvariant yet...is driving increases in positive tests, hospitalizations and intensive care admissions across the country.”

The Hill (7/21, Choi) reports, “About 78% of coronavirus cases in the U.S. are caused by the BA.5 subvariant, according to the most recent data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).”

In addition, CNN (7/21, Goodman) reports that more reinfections are occurring amid the current wave, “but on average, these reinfections do not seem to be happening more rapidly, according to a new analysis from...Helix.”

Administration reorganizing HHS to bolster pandemic response

The Washington Post (7/20, Diamond) reports, “The Biden administration is reorganizing the federal health department to create an independent division that would lead the nation’s pandemic response, amid frustrations with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.” This move “elevates a roughly 1,000-person team—known as the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response, or ASPR—into a separate division, charged with coordinating the nation’s response to health emergencies, according to seven people briefed on the plan who spoke on the condition of URL: https://www.ama-assn.org/about/publications-newsletters/top-news-stories-ama-morning-rounds-week-july-18-2022

Copyright 1995 - 2021 American Medical Association. All rights reserved.
anonymity.” The reorganization “is expected to be phased in over two years.”

Bloomberg (7/20, Griffin) reports ASPR “will be renamed and enabled to ‘mobilize a coordinated national response more quickly and stably during future disasters and emergencies,’ Dawn O’Connell, who heads the unit, said.”

**CDC recommends Novavax’s COVID-19 vaccine for adults**

The New York Times (7/19, Robbins, Zimmer) reports, “The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on Tuesday recommended that a newly authorized vaccine from Novavax be used as an option for adults seeking a primary immunization against the coronavirus.” A CDC advisory panel “unanimously endorsed the vaccine.” The fourth COVID-19 vaccine authorized in the U.S., it “is expected to play a limited role in the country’s immunization campaign, at least initially.” The shot “works differently from the three COVID vaccines previously authorized in the United States,” but CDC polling indicates few Americans who remain unvaccinated plan to seek out Novavax’s vaccine.

**High estimated blood viscosity tied to increased mortality risk for COVID-19, study finds**

Healio (7/18, Buzby) reports “blood viscosity calculated using the Walburn-Schneck model may serve as an effective prognostic tool in hospitalized patients with SARS-CoV-2 infection, according to” a study. Investigators “reported that high estimated blood viscosity in the arteries was associated with an approximately 60% increased risk for mortality among patients hospitalized with COVID-19.” These findings were published in the Journal of the American College of Cardiology.

MedPage Today (7/18, Lou) reports these findings “supported a link between hyperviscosity and the immune-mediated thrombosis of acute COVID-19 illness.”

**White House COVID-19 response coordinator warns virus still evolving**

The Hill (7/17, Mueller) reports that as COVID-19 “variants continue to circulate and develop,” White House COVID-19 Response Coordinator Dr. Ashish Jha “says the U.S. has ‘got to stay on top of this virus’ as it quickly evolves.” The Omicron subvariant BA.5 “is the most highly transmissible to date, Jha said. It’s also ‘immune-evasive,’ leading to high levels of reinfection and breakthrough infections.”
McClatchy (7/15, Roarty) reported “the federal government is ready to help states respond to the growing wave of BA.5 coronavirus cases across the country...wrote” Dr. Jha in a letter to governors. In the letter, Dr. Jha “outlined that the federal government can help states set up sites to both test and treat people with the coronavirus, encourage people to get vaccinated, and distribute a medicine, Paxlovid, that can help people recover from the virus even after infection.”

AMA Morning Rounds news coverage is developed in affiliation with Bulletin Healthcare LLC. Subscribe to Morning Rounds Daily.