

News Highlights:

- Caffeine is probably present in the blood you receive through a transfusion, based on what these Oregon State University researchers found. They examined 18 batches of human blood serum pooled from multiple donors, the kind that is from blood bank donation supplies. All 18 batches tested positive for caffeine. In many of the samples, the researchers also found traces of **dextromethorphan** (an over-the-counter cough medicine) and **alprazolam** (an anti-anxiety drug also known as **Xanax**). "From a 'contamination' standpoint, caffeine is not a big worry for patients, though it may be a commentary on current society," said one of the researchers. "But the other drugs being in there could be an issue for patients, as well as posing a problem for those of us doing this type of research because it's hard to get clean blood samples."

<https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2019/11/191126092718.htm>

- **Rapamycin**, an FDA-approved drug used to prevent organ rejection after transplant surgery, may also slow aging in human skin, according to a study from Drexel University College of Medicine. Previous studies found that the drug slowed aging in mice, flies, and worms, but the current study is the first to show an effect on aging in human skin, including decreased wrinkles and more even skin tone. In the eight-month long study, participants applied the drug topically to one hand and a placebo to the other hand.

<https://drexel.edu/now/archive/2019/November/Rapamycin-for-skin-aging/>

- For the second time since its May 31 public hearing on cannabis-derived products, the FDA sent warning letters to companies for selling CBD (**cannabidiol**) products as dietary supplements. The 15 companies receiving letters represent just a tiny fraction of CBD businesses, but for now the FDA seems to be targeting those making explicit or misleading health claims on their web sites.

<https://www.fda.gov/news-events/press-announcements/fda-warns-15-companies-illegally-selling-various-products-containing-cannabidiol-agency-details>

More on this topic: <https://www.fda.gov/consumers/consumer-updates/what-you-need-know-and-what-were-working-find-out-about-products-containing-cannabis-or-cannabis>

Our article explaining CBD and comparing it to Rx cannabidiol: <https://www.askapatient.com/news/cbd-oil-drug-comparison.asp>

- While **Shingrix** vaccine can be more than 90% effective at preventing shingles, that level of protection lasts only for about four years or so. So what does a person do after a number of years, since there is no Shingrix booster shot? AARP says that "for now, it remains to be seen if the agency (CDC) will recommend getting the shot again, after, say, five years, as its effectiveness starts to wane."

<https://www.aarp.org/health/conditions-treatments/info-2018/every-vaccine-needed-after-age-50.html>

<https://www.askapatient.com/viewrating.asp?drug=581490&name=SHINGRIX+VACCINE> (29 reviews)

- The FDA approved the first ear tube delivery system that can be performed using **local anesthesia** in a doctor's office. Tympanostomy tubes are frequently used to treat recurrent ear infections in young children.

<https://www.fda.gov/news-events/press-announcements/fda-approves-system-delivery-ear-tubes-under-local-anesthesia-treat-ear-infection>

- A Pennsylvania appeals court upheld a \$70 million verdict against Johnson & Johnson in a lawsuit charging its **Risperdal** anti-psychotic drug caused a Tennessee man, who had been taking the drug since he was a toddler, to grow female breasts. That court also ruled that the case could lead to additional punitive damages. In October, a jury awarded a whopping \$8 billion in punitive damages to a different Risperdal patient. J&J faces more than 13,000 suits claiming Risperdal use led to breast development.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-11-26/j-j-fails-to-get-70-million-risperdal-award-tossed-on-appeal>

- Average life expectancy in the U.S. stopped increasing in 2010 and has been declining since 2014. Death rates have increased among people 25 – 65 years old, especially in economically depressed areas of the country. Other rich countries have not had a similar increase in mortality. The troubling trends are detailed in a study by Virginia Commonwealth University School of Medicine. <https://www.latimes.com/science/story/2019-11-26/life-expectancy-decline-deaths-of-despair>

- Outcome Health, a start-up tech company providing screen-based advertising (what it markets as "health intelligence") to patients in doctors' offices and cancer clinics, has been indicted for fraud by the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission and the Department of Justice. The SEC and DOJ says that Outcome misled investors about how many doctors' offices had the screens, how engaged the patients were, and about its revenue numbers. The allegedly made-up numbers resulted in high-profile investors (including Goldman Sachs, Google-affiliated CapitalG, and the Pritzker Group) backing the company with hundreds of millions of dollars.

<https://www.statnews.com/2019/11/26/health-tech-fraud-new-indictment-outcome-health/>

- A large, long-term study by Lund University and Uppsala University compared almost 200,000 very physically active people (competitive long distance cross country skiers participating in Vasaloppet) with a matched cohort of the general population, and found some differences in prevalence of some brain diseases. The good news: after 20 years, only half as many of the skiers had been diagnosed with depression as the control group, and skiers had reduced risk of developing vascular dementia. While Parkinson's diagnoses were about the same, the onset happened later on. The bad news: there was no difference in the incidence of Alzheimer's disease.

<https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2019/11/191126121217.htm>

- **Baloxovir** (brand name **Xofluza**), the new one-dose antiviral flu medication, may not be the best medication choice for children. An 11-year-old boy in Japan with influenza was treated with Xofluza and improved for a few days, but then he relapsed and transmitted the flu to his three-year-old sister. Scientists found that the sister's flu virus contained a mutation with resistance to Xofluza. University of Wisconsin researchers ran tests on larger numbers of patients and discovered that in children, the drug can cause the flu virus to mutate and become resistant to the medication. For now, it is only approved for patients age 12 and up in the U.S.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-roche-hldg-flu-resistance/new-roche-flu-drug-can-drive-resistance-in-influenza-viruses-researchers-idUSKBN1XZ27J>

- Today is **World AIDS Day**. Always on December 1, it has become one of the most recognized international health days and a key opportunity to raise awareness, commemorate those who have passed on, and celebrate victories, such as increased access to treatment and prevention services. In the U.S., the program *Ending the HIV Epidemic: A Plan for America* aims to reduce new HIV transmissions by 75% in five years and by 90% in 10 years.

<https://www.hiv.gov/blog/hot-presses-read-all-about-world-aids-day-2019>

<https://www.un.org/en/observances/world-aids-day>

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