

## News Highlights:

- As of today, January 26, the World Health Organization had **not** declared a Global Health Emergency over the new **coronavirus** outbreak. Around 2,000 people in China and at least 25 people in other countries have been infected. Wuhan China, the epicenter for the pneumonia-like virus, has been placed on virtual lock down to try to contain the spread. While originally it was thought that the virus was only transmitted from animals to people, authorities have confirmed cases of human-to-human transmission in China.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-health/more-than-2000-now-infected-with-coronavirus-56-dead-in-china-idUSKBN1ZP02B>

- A **stethoscope-equipped robot** is "taking care" of a Seattle-area man in his 30s who contracted the **coronavirus**. Nursing staff stationed outside of his isolation room can maneuver the robot and view and talk to the patient, who is in good condition, using a screen. Four other patients have been diagnosed with the virus in the U.S., with more expected. All affected patients in the U.S. recently traveled from Wuhan.

<https://edition.cnn.com/2020/01/23/health/us-wuhan-coronavirus-doctor-interview/index.html>

- Experts say this season's **influenza virus** poses a far greater threat to Americans than the coronavirus from China. Influenza has already sickened at least 13 million Americans this winter, hospitalizing 120,000 and killing 6,600, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC).

<https://khn.org/news/flu-far-deadlier-than-wuhan-virus/>

- The U.S. FDA and the Department of Homeland Security's Cybersecurity Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) warned of six severe **cybersecurity vulnerabilities** in **GE Healthcare Carescape** Information Stations and related devices. Used at nursing stations in thousands of hospitals worldwide, the systems display **patients' vital signs** like temperature and cardiac status. The risk is considered "Exploitable remotely with a low skill level to exploit." For now, CISA and FDA are advising hospitals to **disconnect** the Central Station network from the rest of the hospital network. The vulnerabilities were identified by third-party security firm Cybermdx.

<https://www.itworld.com/article/3516093/insecure-configurations-expose-ge-healthcare-devices-to-attacks.html>

FDA communication:

<https://www.fda.gov/news-events/press-announcements/fda-informs-health-care-providers-facilities-and-patients-about-potential-cybersecurity?>

- Inexpensive, almost do-it-yourself teeth straightening services, such as the **Smile Direct Club**, have become very popular. But as the industry has grown, so too have complaints from customers, pushback from dentistry's professional trade groups and scrutiny from regulators.

<https://khn.org/news/in-home-teeth-straightening-business-is-booming-%e2%80%95-but-better-brace-yourself/>

- Researchers at Amsterdam University and University of Michigan Medical School studied the **lung microbiome** of 91 patients with **acute respiratory distress syndrome** (ARDS), a life threatening illness in which the lungs are severely inflamed. They found that patients' immune functions for this condition are highly variable, and that those patients with higher levels of gut bacteria in the lungs had worse outcomes in the intensive care unit. Differences in lung bacteria can help explain who recovers and who doesn't, according to researchers.

[https://eurekalert.org/pub\\_releases/2020-01/ats-lmm011720.php](https://eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2020-01/ats-lmm011720.php)

- The U.S. FDA approved Horizon Therapeutic's **Tepezza**, the first treatment for thyroid eye disease. The condition is often caused by **Grave's disease**, an autoimmune disease that causes overproduction of the thyroid hormone, which can cause bulging and pain in the eyes. Horizon priced its new drug at \$14,500 a vial, and expects peak U.S. annual net sales of more than \$1 billion. About 15,000 to 20,000 patients may be candidates for this drug.

<https://www.fda.gov/news-events/press-announcements/fda-approves-first-treatment-thyroid-eye-disease>

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-horizon-fda/horizons-prices-thyroid-eye-disease-therapy-at-14900-per-vial-idUSKBN1ZK2KG>

- Researchers tested the cancer-fighting properties of more than 4,500 non-cancer drugs using data from the **Broad Institute's** "Drug Repurposing Hub," and found nearly 50 drugs that demonstrate at least some cancer-killing ability. Four of those drugs were chosen to study further: a treatment for diabetes, a drug for inflammation, a treatment for alcohol abuse and one for treating arthritis pain in dogs.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-cancer-treatments/researchers-find-cancer-fighting-potential-in-non-cancer-drugs-idUSKBN1ZN2KE>

- One of the causes of **breast cancer** may be inflammation triggered by harmful bacteria, according to researchers from Lancaster University, who suggest that eating **yogurt** on a daily basis might help prevent breast cancer. Yogurt contains beneficial lactose fermenting bacteria commonly found in milk, similar to the microflora found in the breasts of mothers who have breastfed. Studies have shown that breast feeding reduces the risk of breast cancer.

[https://www.eurekalert.org/pub\\_releases/2020-01/lu-wey012320.php](https://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2020-01/lu-wey012320.php)

- New thinking among radiologists and medical physicists challenges the decades-old practice of covering patients' reproductive organs, fetuses, and thyroid glands during x-rays with heavy **lead aprons** to protect those parts of the body from radiation. According to physicists who work in hospitals, lead shields don't protect against "scatter," which occurs when radiation ricochets inside the body, including under the shield and depositing its energy in those tissues as well as the targeted tissues.

<https://khn.org/news/no-shield-from-x-rays-how-science-is-rethinking-lead-aprons/>

- Confused about how the various pharmaceutical industry players figure into the pharmaceutical pricing equation? It is a complicated topic, with much disagreement even within the industry. Check out **Consumer Reports** recent article on some possible reasons **why drug prices keep going up** in the U.S. They present a dramatic info-graphic, "Anatomy of a Drug Price," which depicts the price increase for rheumatoid arthritis drug **Humira** between 2015 and 2019. The list price over those four years rose from **\$2,914** for a **one-month supply** in 2015 (already expensive) to **\$5,174** in 2019. Middlemen in the drug supply chain, **Pharmacy benefit managers** (PBMs) took an enormous cut of that monthly price. Their share jumped from **\$291** in 2015 to **\$2,070** in 2019. Cost burdens are often shouldered by consumers directly, since consumers with coinsurance may have to pay 30 percent of a drug's list price.

<https://www.consumerreports.org/drug-prices/the-shocking-rise-of-prescription-drug-prices/>

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