

## News Highlights:

- The "**Worldometer**" live update web site provides almost real-time data on the number of cases by country and other important facts about the **Wuhan Coronavirus**. For example, the virus has now spread to **27 countries** and territories worldwide, with **17,387 confirmed cases** and **361 deaths** as of February 3, 2020, 02:00 GMT. There has been a rapid spike in the number of cases: **just one week ago on January 26, there were just 2,801 confirmed cases worldwide**. On Thursday, January 30, the World Health Organization declared the outbreak to be a Global Public Health Emergency.

<https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/countries-where-coronavirus-has-spread/>

- China instituted the **largest quarantine in human history**, locking down more than 50 million people in the center of the country. Those who are residents of Wuhan or recent visitors are feeling the stigma, as they are monitored, turned away from hotels and placed into isolation at their homes or in makeshift quarantine facilities.

<https://apnews.com/7f7336d2ed099936bd59bf8cb7f43756>

- People who develop **Parkinson's disease** before age 50 may have been born with disordered brain cells that went undetected for decades, according to new Cedars-Sinai research. A drug has been identified that potentially could prevent the disease. <https://www.news-medical.net/news/20200127/Parkinsons-disease-may-affect-brain-cells-before-birth.aspx>

- The U.S. FDA issued a warning that **schizophrenia** drug **clozapine** (brand names Clozaril, Fazaclor ODT, Versacloz) can cause complete blockage of the bowels. The effect is intensified if the patient is taking other anticholinergic drugs or opioids, which can also cause severe constipation.

<https://www.fda.gov/drugs/drug-safety-and-availability/fda-strengthens-warning-untreated-constipation-caused-schizophrenia-medicine-clozapine-clozaril-can>

- The U.S. FDA announced the release of six guidance documents related to **gene therapy** product development. Gene therapy treats disease by inserting new genetic material into a patient's cells. The guidance can't come soon enough, since there are more than 900 investigational new drug (IND) applications currently in process for gene therapy products. So far, only four gene therapy drugs have been approved.

<https://www.fda.gov/news-events/press-announcements/fda-continues-strong-support-innovation-development-gene-therapy-products?>

- The U.S. FDA approved Aimmune Therapeutics' **Palforzia** product for children age 4 to 17 with **peanut allergies**. It represents the **first FDA-approved drug for treating food allergies**, with others in the pipeline for egg allergies and a peanut allergy patch. Palforzia consists of specially calibrated peanut powder that is mixed with semi-soft food. The powder induces tolerance and lessens the severity of peanut allergies, working in much the same way that allergy shots or allergist-created immuno-therapies do. Around one million children in the U.S. have a peanut allergy and only one in five will outgrow it, according to the FDA. The list price is \$890 a month, much higher than what market forecasters were predicting.

<https://www.fda.gov/news-events/press-announcements/fda-approves-first-drug-treatment-peanut-allergy-children?>

- The U.S. FDA issued a safety alert for patients with **Medtronic cardiac implantable cardioverter defibrillators**

(ICDs) and cardiac resynchronization therapy defibrillators, due to vulnerabilities (lack of encryption, authentication, and authorization) in the wireless communication between the devices, clinics, and home monitors. This alert does not include pacemakers. Around 20 affected devices are listed.

<https://www.fda.gov/medical-devices/safety-communications/cybersecurity-vulnerabilities-affecting-medtronic-implantable-cardiac-devices-programmers-and-home>

- Retired pharmacist Dennis Miller shares his thoughts about the **economic forces of running a pharmacy** or being employed by one. He explains (and sometimes laments) about the reasons why pharmacists are often cheerleaders for drugs, even when there is some evidence that the medicines carry risks.

<https://www.peoplespharmacy.com/articles/have-pharmacists-become-cheerleaders-for-drugs>

- Hundreds of **hospitals across the U.S.**, including a number with sterling reputations for cutting-edge care, are paid less (between and 1 and 3% less) by Medicare if they have higher rates of infections, patient injuries, or readmissions than other hospitals. Hospitals say these penalties, known as **HAC penalties**, are arbitrary and unfair, while some patient advocates believe the fines are too small to make a difference.

<https://khn.org/news/medicare-punishment-hac-preeminent-hospitals-penalized-for-rates-of-patients-injuries-medicare-hospital-acquired-conditions-reduction-program-aca/>

- **Look up your hospital** to find out if it was penalized by Medicare for high rates of complications. Note: not all states are listed in the drop-down menu, so for more accurate results, search by city or town or the name of the hospital.

<https://khn.org/news/hospital-penalties/?penalty=hac>

- **Find out your hospital's "Quality Star Rating,"** including patient ratings of the hospital using the "**Hospital Compare**" database at Center for Medicare Services (CMS). It was recently updated, according to this week's announcement by the CMS.

<https://www.medicare.gov/hospitalcompare/search.html>

- A measurement scientist at the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) was surprised to find that a **used cigarette butt** can in one day give off the equivalent of up to 14% of the nicotine that an actively burning cigarette emits.

<https://www.nist.gov/news-events/news/2020/01/butt-emissions-study-finds-even-extinguished-cigarettes-give-toxins>

- The first type of **influenza virus** we are exposed to in early childhood dictates our ability to fight the flu for the rest of our lives, according to a new study from a team of infectious disease researchers at McMaster University and Université de Montréal.

<https://healthsci.mcmaster.ca/news-events/news/news-article/2020/01/30/research-establishes-how-first-exposure-to-a-flu-virus-sets-immunity-for-life>

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