

## News Highlights:

- Johnson & Johnson announced it will discontinue sales of its iconic **talc-based baby powder** in the U.S. and Canada because of declining demand and thousands of lawsuits claiming the powder was contaminated with **cancer-causing asbestos**. The company maintains the product is safe, however, and will continue selling it in other countries.



(image from M ke Mozart / CC BY 2.0)

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-johnson-johnson-babypowder/johnson-johnson-to-stop-selling-talc-baby-powder-in-u-s-and-canada-idUSKBN22V32U>

- San Diego-based Evofem won FDA approval for **Phexxi**, a **non-hormonal birth control gel** for women – the first such approval in 30 years. The contraceptive gel will be priced between \$250 and \$275 for a box of 12 applicators. The gel contains lactic acid, citric acid and potassium bitartrate, all of which are common food additives.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-evofem-fda/evofem-wins-fda-approval-for-non-hormonal-birth-control-gel-idUSKBN22Y2EA>

- **Minnesota** has a new **drug transparency law** that will require drug makers to give public notice **when the cost of certain medications rise sharply**. Manufacturers must explain the reasons for the cost increases and disclosures will be posted online by the Minnesota Department of Public Health. The new requirements only apply to medications that cost \$100 or more for a 30-day supply.

<https://www.startribune.com/minnesota-has-a-new-drug-price-transparency-law-here-s-what-it-does/570434962/>

- Generic drug maker **Teva walked away from negotiations** with federal prosecutors in **price fixing lawsuit settlement talks**. Teva appears to be gambling that the U.S. Department of Justice won't go forward with pursuing criminal price-fixing charges against the drugmaker since it is a **major producer of drugs needed** during the COVID-19 pandemic response.

<https://www.fiercepharma.com/pharma/teva-walks-away-from-price-fixing-settlement-talks-amid-covid-19-chaos-report>

- The **price fixing and collusion case against a group of generic companies** has grown since 2016. Some smaller companies have admitted guilt and paid fines. For more on the federal and states' actions against generic drug companies, check out AskaPatient's article:

<https://www.askapatient.com/news/generic-drug-price-conspiracy-lawsuit.asp>

- Weizmann Institute scientists' simple "**sniff test**" predicted **whether a person is likely to regain consciousness from a brain injury**. Jars containing various scents and odors were placed under **comatose patients' noses**, and nasal airflow changes were noted. All patients who were classified as being in a "vegetative state" yet responded to the sniff test later regained consciousness, even if it was only minimal. The study was published in *Nature*.

[https://www.eurekalert.org/pub\\_releases/2020-05/wios-wis052120.php](https://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2020-05/wios-wis052120.php)

### COVID-19 News

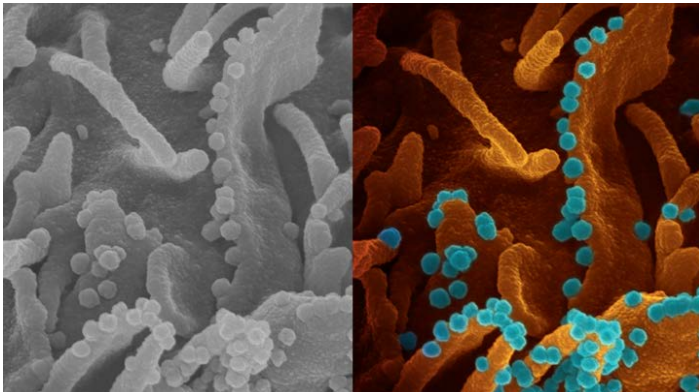
- Because of media reports suggesting that Centers for Disease Control (CDC) appeared to be changing its position on how COVID-19 can spread, and downplaying the risk of **surface transmission**, the CDC issued a press release saying that it **has not changed its position or guidance** and had merely been trying to reword its web page to make it easier to understand. The CDC edited the page once again, making it clear that the **primary way the virus is spread is through person-to-person contact, and that it is possible that it can be spread in other ways, such as from surfaces**.

Press release: <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2020/s0522-cdc-updates-covid-transmission.html>

Edited page: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/how-covid-spreads.html>

- The microscopy unit of National Institute for Infectious Diseases (NIAID) at **Rocky Mountain Labs** produces images of the world's deadliest plagues: Ebola, HIV, salmonella and **SARS-CoV-2**, the coronavirus that causes COVID-19. Kaiser Health News interviewed Elizabeth Fischer, who leads the microscopy team.

<https://khn.org/news/scientist-has-invisible-enemy-in-sights-with-microscopic-portraits-of-coronavirus/>



Electron microscope images are black-and-white; a visual artist colorizes them. This image depicts viral particles (blue) being released from a dying cell infected with the coronavirus. Image Credit: Rocky Mountain Laboratories, National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, Hamilton, MT

- The National Institute of Allergies and Infectious Diseases (NIAD) has a photo gallery of **electron microscope images** of the novel coronavirus.

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/niaid/albums/72157712914621487/>

- A study by Brigham and Women's Hospital (Boston) of **multinational hospital outcomes data found no benefit**, and **worse cardiovascular outcomes**, for COVID-19 patients given **hydroxychloroquine** therapy within 48 hours of diagnosis.

[https://www.eurekalert.org/pub\\_releases/2020-05/bawh-nii052220.php](https://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2020-05/bawh-nii052220.php)

### Antibody Tests: Quality problems

- A Mayo clinic-ABC News investigation found that many COVID-19 **antibody tests fail quality standards**.

Mayo Clinic doctors in Arizona and Minnesota ran over 4,500 tests on both rapid result and slower, traditional lab antibody tests (a total of nineteen brands). Four of the tests received an A+ rating.

<https://abcnews.go.com/US/mayo-clinic-doctors-find-covid-19-antibody-tests/story?id=70803740>

- The FDA released a list of 27 antibody tests that they **no longer recommend**. These include tests from vendors who voluntarily withdrew and those for which there is not a pending request for the Emergency Use Authorization (EUA).

<https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-usa-tests/us-fda-names-27-coronavirus-antibody-tests-no-longer-ok-to-be-sold-idUSL1N2D32FE>

### **Vaccine News: Three vaccines advance to phase 2 testing**

- U.S. vaccine maker **Moderna** announced that its NIH-funded test vaccine was able to stimulate an immune response against the COVID-19 infection and appeared to be safe. Critics would like to see the test data before celebrating, and call this "**science by press release**." Moderna has no products on the market yet and utilizes a new genetic vaccine (**mRNA**) technology that requires two doses. The announcement was **based only on results from eight people** (45 total have participated) and took place at Kaiser Permanente Washington Health Research Institute (KPWHRI) in Seattle. Moderna's Phase 2 testing will involve 600 volunteers.

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2020/05/18/coronavirus-vaccine-moderna-oxford-covid-19-positive-antibodies/5213337002/>

An explanation of **mRNA vaccine technology**: <https://www.phgfoundation.org/briefing/rna-vaccines>

- **Oxford University and AstraZeneca** are launching a Phase 2 clinical trial of their coronavirus vaccine, with plans to recruit 10,000 volunteers in the U.K. and then 30,000 more in the U.S. in a Stage 3 clinical trial. The vaccine is based on a **chimpanzee adenovirus (common cold virus)** which has been genetically changed to stop COVID-19 from replicating in humans. The U.S. has backed this project with \$1 billion, pre-ordering 300 million doses.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-astrazeneca-oxford-idUSKBN22Y1A4>

- Results from the first phase of a human vaccine trial by the **Beijing Institute of Biotechnology** looks promising, according to a report published in the *Lancet*. This vaccine uses a weakened common cold virus (**adenovirus**) to deliver genetic material that codes for the SARS-CoV-2 spike protein to the cells. About half of the 108 participants already had some immunity to the adenovirus, which could reduce those participants' immune response to the SARS-CoV-2 virus.

[https://www.eurekalert.org/pub\\_releases/2020-05/tl-tlf052220.php](https://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2020-05/tl-tlf052220.php)

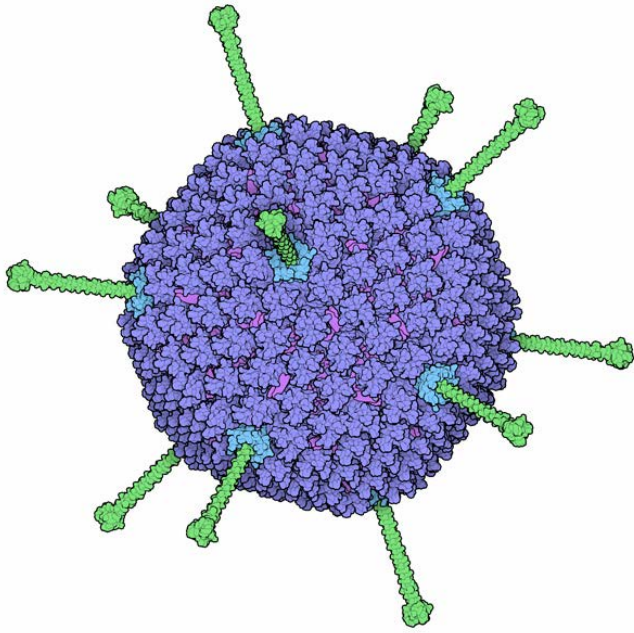


Image of an adenovirus from David S. Goodsell and the Education Portal of the RCSB Protein Data Bank.

**Updated stats for Sunday, May 24, 2020:** **Worldwide:** 5.3 million cases and over 342,000 deaths. **United States:** 1.63 million cases and more than 97,000 deaths. Source: Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Dashboard: <https://gisanddata.maps.arcgis.com/apps/opsdashboard/index.html#/bda7594740fd40299423467b48e9ecf6>

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