

Health News

- The U.S. FDA's Oncology Center of Excellence launched **Project Patient Voice**, a web site with clinical trial participants' reported side effects beyond what you would find on a drug label. **TAGRISSO (osimertinib)**, approved in 2015 for **lung cancer** (NSCLC), is the first drug featured. In the trial, patients received **Tagrisso or chemotherapy treatment**.

<https://www.fda.gov/about-fda/oncology-center-excellence/project-patient-voice>

Demographic information about Tagrisso's clinical trial participants:

<https://www.fda.gov/drugs/drug-approvals-and-databases/drug-trials-snapshot-tagrisso>

- The U.S. Department of Justice brought charges against **Regeneron Pharmaceuticals** for using a charity (**Good Days**, previously known as the **Chronic Disease Fund**) to orchestrate millions of dollars in kickbacks for **macular degeneration drug Eylea**. The Anti-Kickback Statute prohibits pharmaceutical companies from offering or paying, directly or indirectly, any money that will induce Medicare patients to purchase a company's drugs. In October, the charity itself, Good Days, agreed to pay \$2 million to resolve allegations related to other companies' kickbacks.

<https://www.barrons.com/articles/regeneron-used-a-charity-to-pay-kickbacks-justice-department-alleges-51593178899>

- **Human hair**, which grows as much as a half inch a month, can provide a timeline of information about substances that have been in a person's body. A Swiss-German research team (University of Bern and Ruhr-Universität Bochum) analyzed the hair of a group of female first-year university students for the **stress hormone cortisol**. Their results supported social science research findings that children from **academic households** exhibit more stress when they go to university compared with those from non-academic families.

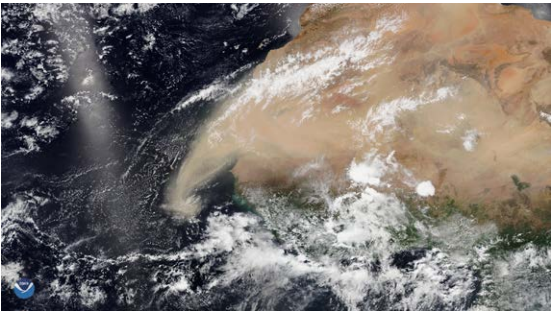
<https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2020/06/200625144820.htm>

- The fight against malaria, HIV, and tuberculosis has been severely disrupted by the coronavirus pandemic, risking a huge rise in the number of deaths and infections, based on a survey of the 106 countries where the **Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria** targets its budget.

<https://www.theglobalfund.org/en/covid-19/news/2020-06-17-global-fund-survey-majority-of-hiv-tb-and-malaria-programs-face-disruptions-as-a-result-of-covid-19/>

- Islands in the Caribbean and southern cities in the U.S. are experiencing high levels of air pollution, and some people are experiencing more troubles with **allergies** because of a **transatlantic Saharan dust storm**. The cloud plume is a normal phenomenon during hurricane season, but this year it has been dubbed a "Godzilla Dust Cloud" because it is much thicker and larger than usual.

<https://www.usnews.com/news/health-news/articles/2020-06-25/how-the-saharan-dust-plume-could-make-your-allergies-worse>



Plume blowing west over the Atlantic from the Sahara desert was captured on June 7, 2020 by the NOAA-20 satellite. NOAA Environmental Visualization Laboratory

This video shows the movement of the Saharan Dust plume across the Atlantic from June 15 to 25, 2020:

<https://climate.nasa.gov/news/2999/nasa-noaa-satellite-analyzes-saharan-dust-plume/>

A useful interactive map to check out **air quality** in your area: <https://gispub.epa.gov/airnow/>

Sneak Peek at 2020-2021 Flu Shot Options

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has a new information page on the upcoming flu season. While specific brand names of flu shots are not yet available, the line-up of **vaccine choices** will be almost the same as last year, with two changes for special vaccines seniors age 65 and up, and a few changes to flu strains:

- 1- quadrivalent high dose vaccine (covering 4 flu strains) will replace trivalent Fluzone High Dose
- 2- quadrivalent adjuvanted vaccine will replace the trivalent Fluad adjuvanted vaccine

<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/season/faq-flu-season-2020-2021.htm>

For descriptions of last year's flu season options, check out our 2019-2020 Flu Vaccine Information page. The 2020-2021 influenza vaccine information page will be released once vaccine names are available.

<https://www.askapatient.com/news/flu-vaccines-for-2019-2020.asp>

COVID-19 News – CDC Latest Guidance and Press Conference

On June 25, CDC director Dr. Robert Redfield and CDC's COVID-19 incident manager, Dr. Jay Butler presented the **latest guidance on risk factors for COVID-19**. The CDC reviewed evidence related to various underlying conditions and determined which of them put people at greatest risk; they also evaluated if there was strong, mixed, or limited evidence whether conditions were associated with increased risk of more severe illness, which may be measured by hospitalization, ICU admission, or death. These are the underlying conditions they identified that put someone at **greatest risk of becoming ill with COVID-19**.

Underlying conditions that put someone at greatest risk of becoming ill with COVID-19:

Cardiovascular disease
Chronic kidney disease
Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, such as emphysema
Obesity — that is, a body mass index of more than 30
Any immunosuppressing condition or treatment
Sickle Cell Disease
History of organ transplants
Type 2 diabetes
<i>CDC guidance as of June 25, 2020</i>

These were identified as underlying conditions that can worsen the severity of the illness.

Underlying conditions that might increase the risk of severe illness:

Chronic lung diseases, including moderate to severe asthma and cystic fibrosis
High blood pressure
A weakened immune system, as may occur among persons after blood or bone marrow transplant, immune deficiencies, poorly controlled HIV, or use of other immune weakening medicines
Neurologic conditions, such as dementia or history of stroke
Liver disease
Pregnancy*
<i>CDC guidance as of June 25, 2020</i>

*The CDC health officials pointed out that **pregnant patients** with COVID-19 are not more likely to die from the disease, but they do have an increased risk of being hospitalized or having severe illness.

Other news highlights from the press conference:

- Results from antibody test blood sampling so far suggest that between **5 percent and 8 percent of Americans have contracted the virus**. Most people who contract the SARS-CoV-2 virus show few if any symptoms, and only a small percentage require hospitalization.

- The federal government has disbursed over **\$10 billion to states to augment their testing, contact tracing and isolation capability**. The states' formal plans for the rest of the year are due July 10. States are looking at different strategies for contact tracing, including using state employees and **AmeriCorps** volunteers. State plans need to address the capacity to isolate or quarantine people under difficult circumstances, such as those living in group settings or those who are homeless.

- The CDC considers **about 120 counties in the U.S. to be COVID-19 hot spots**, or areas having significant transmission. Areas in the west and south are particularly of concern.

Complete transcript of the press conference:

<https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2020/t0625-COVID-19-update.html>

More Coronavirus News:

- Louisiana State University and Tulane University researchers suggest that live attenuated vaccines, like the common childhood vaccine for **measles, mumps and rubella (MMR)**, may prevent severe lung inflammation and sepsis associated with COVID-19 infection. The authors suggest that adults working in high-risk settings who are not immuno-compromised, pregnant or allergic to vaccinations, get an MMR vaccine/booster: "If we're correct, an MMR-vaccinated person may suffer less if infected with COVID-19. If we're wrong, the person has better immunity to measles, mumps, and rubella. A sort of no harm no foul action."

<https://www.lsuhscc.edu/newsroom/Common%20Childhood%20Vaccine%20Might%20Prevent%20Severe%20Complications%20of%20COVID-19.html>

- **California** public health officials have identified nearly a **dozen counties with dangerously growing numbers of cases** as economies reopen. Recent hot spots include **Avenal State Prison** in Kings County, where more than 900 inmates and workers have been infected. In Santa Cruz County, 50 new cases stemmed from one infected individual who attended a Mother's Day gathering. The counties of Imperial, Tulare, Sacramento, Contra Costa, and Los Angeles (which has 10 million residents) are also experiencing spikes. State officials launched **public service announcement campaigns** with reminders about how to stop the spread of the disease.

<https://khn.org/news/as-covid-cases-spike-california-shifts-its-strategy/>

- **Texas** is also seeing a surge in cases, and in response Governor Greg Abbott paused its schedule for reopening (but still allowing restaurants and bars to operate at reduced capacity) and halted elective surgeries in four hot-spot counties to leave hospital rooms available for coronavirus patients.

<https://www.texastribune.org/2020/06/25/texas-elective-surgeries-coronavirus-greg-abbott/>

- More patients are **recuperating at home** from common illnesses and surgeries that would have involved a hospital stay just four months ago. Care is managed by health professionals in **remote "command centers."** Insurers have picked up the tab, but it remains to be seen if this will be a long-term change to the way health care is delivered in the U.S. "Long established in parts of Australia, England, Italy and Spain, remote programs for hospital care have not caught on here, in large part because U.S. hospitals make money by filling beds."

<https://khn.org/news/pandemic-forced-insurers-to-pay-for-in-home-treatments-will-they-disappear/>

Updated stats for Sunday, June 28, 2020: **Worldwide:** 10.06 million cases and over 500,000 deaths. **United States:** 2.5 million cases and more than 125,000 deaths. Brazil has the second-highest number of cases globally with over 1.3 million cases.

Source; Johns Hopkins University Coronavirus Dashboard

<https://www.arcgis.com/apps/opsdashboard/index.html#/bda7594740fd40299423467b48e9ecf6>

The Ask a Patient Weekly Healthcare Newsletter will be on vacation next week.

Coming soon: Feature Article on Generic Drugs and Drug Safety

Ask a Patient is "powered" by your contributions, so please add your medication ratings and reviews!

Ask a Patient Weekly Healthcare Newsletter: June 28, 2020

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