

Health News

- **Wildfires** in the Pacific Northwest are causing some of the world's worst air quality, and many residents worry about the short and long-term effects of **breathing the smoke-laden air**. Recent research on the outcomes of residents exposed to smoke from a 2017 fire in Montana has confirmed what public health experts feared: wildfire haze can have consequences long after it's gone.

<https://khn.org/news/wildfires-toxic-air-leaves-damage-long-after-the-smoke-clears/>

What you can do to protect yourself from smoke: <https://www.cdc.gov/air/wildfire-smoke/default.htm>

Airnow.gov includes fire and smoke maps: <https://fire.airnow.gov/>



Image Source: U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC)

- Six states (Colorado, Florida, Maine, New Hampshire, New Mexico and Vermont) have passed laws allowing them to seek federal approval to buy a **select group of drugs** from **Canada** to give their residents access to lower-cost medicines. Florida is expected to be the first state to win federal approval for a **drug importation plan**. The HHS and FDA-sponsored blueprint for different paths for drug importation was laid out in July 2019.

<https://khn.org/news/election-gift-for-florida-trump-poised-to-approve-drug-imports-from-canada/>

The plan:

<https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2019/07/31/hhs-new-action-plan-foundation-safe-importation-certain-prescription-drugs.html>

- With almost 500 reports of patient deaths and thousands of injuries and malfunctions related to **spinal cord stimulators**, the FDA sent a letter urging physicians to always conduct a **trial stimulation** before surgically implanting the devices in patients. In June 2020, patient advocacy group **Public Citizen** asked the FDA to tighten its regulations on the devices, but some say this FDA action does not go far enough in addressing safety concerns.

<https://www.medtechdive.com/news/fda-flags-428-spinal-cord-stimulator-patient-deaths-urges-more-tests-before/584714/>

FDA release, which includes a list of the **most frequently reported device problems**:

<https://www.fda.gov/medical-devices/letters-health-care-providers/conduct-trial-stimulation-period-implanting-spinal-cord-stimulator-scs-letter-health-care-providers>

- The CDC reported that cases of **obesity** have skyrocketed in the U.S. over the past three years. In 2019, 12 states had obesity rates of 35% or greater, up from nine states in 2018 and six states in 2017. The prevalence of obesity is much greater for certain ethnic and racial groups. With this report, the CDC warns that **obesity increases the risk of severe illness** from COVID-19.

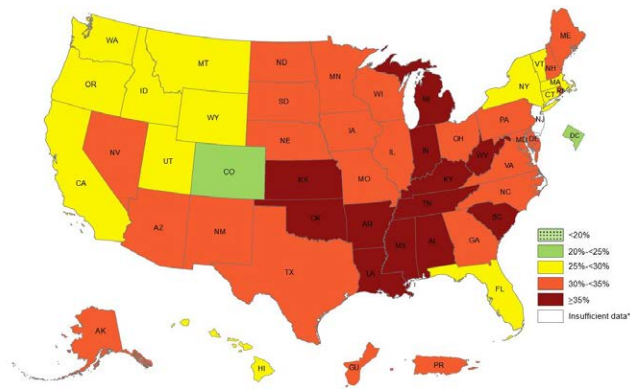


Image Source: CDC

<https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2020/s0917-adult-obesity-increasing.html>

- At least **27 health care systems** across the U.S. were victims of a **massive ransomware attack** against cloud computing company **Blackbaud**, resulting in theft of more than one million fundraising **donor records**, including some patient information. Electronic health records (EHR) apparently were not affected. Complete list of hospitals and health systems:

<https://www.beckershospitalreview.com/cybersecurity/6-more-health-systems-identified-in-blackbaud-security-breach-bringing-total-to-27.html>

- Faced with declining revenues, **rural** hospitals have been closing at a quickening pace, and now some **inner-city hospitals** face the same fate. Kaiser Health News profiles Chicago's first hospital, **Mercy Hospital & Medical Center**, which will shutter all inpatient services as soon as February 2021. Private "safety-net" hospitals like Mercy have been sources of civic pride as well as major providers of jobs in neighborhoods that have few.



Mercy Hospital survived the Great Chicago Fire of 1871 — but it lost the battle of modern health care economics. (source: KHN)

<https://khn.org/news/urban-hospitals-of-last-resort-cling-to-life-in-time-of-covid/>

- The practice of **at-home dialysis** was increasing even before the pandemic, but has accelerated even more due to social distancing concerns. While some patients find the process intimidating at first, patient training, remote monitoring technologies, and improved coverage by Medicare are making it a preferred option for many.

<https://khn.org/news/in-face-of-covid-threat-more-dialysis-patients-bring-treatment-home/>

In July 2019, an executive order was signed that pushed for **changes in three areas of kidney disease treatment**, including promoting at-home dialysis care. Kidney disease is the ninth-leading cause of death in the U.S.

<https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2019/07/10/740276389/trump-administration-announces-plans-to-shake-up-the-kidney-care-industry>

- Rutgers researchers found that children who take **high-dose steroids** to treat asthma or autoimmune disease are at increased risk of high blood pressure, and to a lesser extent, diabetes and blood clots.

<https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2020/09/200917084109.htm>

- The American Chemical Society reported promising research results for an **injectable hydrogel** that allows sustained release of vaccine components, resulting in the production of **superior antibodies** than those produced by standard immunization. In tests on mice, the material formed a localized area of inflammation that attracted certain types of immune cells, while slowly releasing the antigen and adjuvant over a period of several days. This improves the potency, quality, and duration of the immune response.

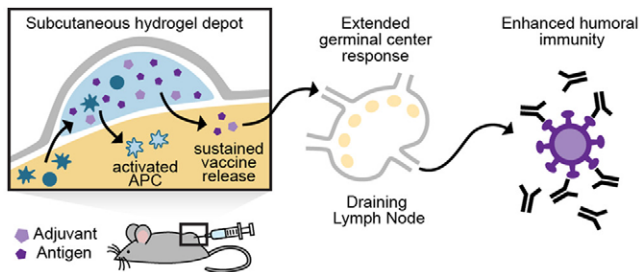


Image source: American Chemical Society Central Science

<https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2020/09/200916090536.htm>

- Bioengineers at Ecole Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne Institute (EPFL) have created **miniature intestines in a dish** that match up anatomically and functionally to the real thing better than any other lab-grown tissue models. This link contains a **2- minute video** (scroll down left side of page linked below to view) describing the bioengineered small intestine and depicting the growth of different kinds of cells in the dish as well as renewal and shedding of the cells over time.

<https://actu.epfl.ch/news/next-gen-organoids-grow-and-function-like-real-tis/>

Coronavirus News

- "The great student migration" has resulted in **COVID-19 outbreaks on college campuses** nationwide. While student move-in positivity rates were often very low (less than one percent) at some schools, the positivity rate jumped to double digits at some schools as students failed to isolate. Davidson College's COVID-19 dashboard indicates that out of about 1,500 four-year schools of higher education, around 800 started the fall opening with an in-person or hybrid model, and about 500 were fully or primarily online this fall.

https://www.stltoday.com/lifestyles/health-med-fit/coronavirus/students-mass-migration-back-to-college-gets-a-failing-grade/article_4afd9ca4-8cbe-5277-8f3b-a9c413d9f033.html

Check school reopening situations at colleges and universities in the U.S. and internationally.

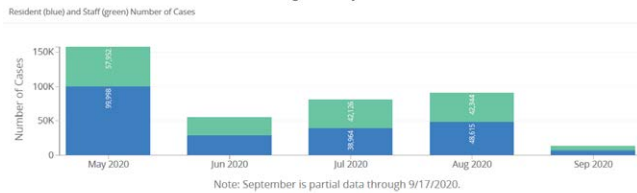
<https://collegecrisis.shinyapps.io/dashboard/>

- The U.S. set a record for testing with over **1 million coronavirus tests** conducted in a single day (Saturday), but some experts say the country needs 6 million to 10 million a day to bring outbreaks under control.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-usa-testing-idUSKCN26B001>

- The number of cases among staff and residents at **long term care facilities** rose during August, but was lower than the number of cases occurring in May 2020. The number of cases among staff almost equals the numbers occurring among residents. This chart was created with the Center for Medicare Services COVID-19 data visualization dashboard.

Number of Confirmed Cases of COVID-19 in Nursing Homes by Month



Click image to enlarge chart.

Data source:

<https://data.cms.gov/Special-Programs-Initiatives-COVID-19-Nursing-Home/COVID-19-Nursing-Home-Dataset/s2uc-8wpx/data>

- **Canada**'s public health web site provides an animated map of provinces and territories for visualizing how the virus has spread throughout the country over time. It covers statistics like total cases, active cases, recovered cases, and number of people tested. Click the play button on the lower left of the screen to **animate the map over time**. Currently, Canada has about 6,700 active cases, with a total of about 134,000 cumulative cases.

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection.html#a1>

- The CDC pre-released a study from the December issue of *Emerging Infectious Diseases* that demonstrates **human-to-feline transmission** of SARS-CoV-2. Of the 50 cats tested from coronavirus disease-quarantined households in Hong Kong, 6 cases were identified, and virus genomes sequenced from one cat and its owner were identical. COVID-19-like signs have also been reported in domestic cats infected with SARS-CoV-2 in other countries; no cat-to-human cases have been observed.

https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/eid/article/26/12/20-2786_article

Updated Covid-19 stats for Sunday, September 20, 2020: Worldwide totals: 30.87 million cases and over 958,000 deaths. **United States totals:** 6.79 million cases and almost 200,000 deaths. India continues to suffer from a spike in illnesses and reports 5.4 million cases. Brazil has the third-highest number of cases globally with over 4.5 million cases.

Source: Johns Hopkins University Coronavirus Dashboard

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

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Health and Drug News Feeds

2020-2021 Updates on Flu Season Amid Covid-19

2020-2021 Flu Vaccine Choices				
FLU VACCINE	AGE RANGE	TYPE	PRODUCTION	COMPANY
AFURIA QUADRIVALENT*	6 months and up	shot	egg-based	Seqirus
FLUAD QUADRIVALENT (adjuvanted)	65 and up	shot	egg-based	Seqirus
FLUAD TRIVALENT (adjuvanted)	65 and up	shot	egg-based	Seqirus
FLUARIX QUADRIVALENT*	6 months and up	shot	egg-based	Glaxo
FLUBLOK QUADRIVALENT	18 and up	shot	genetic recombining process	Sanofi
FLUCELVAX QUADRIVALENT*	4 and up	shot	cell-based	Seqirus
FLULAVAL QUADRIVALENT*	6 months and up	shot	egg-based	Glaxo
FLUMIST QUADRIVALENT	2 and 49	nasal spray	egg-based with live weakened vaccine	AstraZeneca
FLUZONE QUADRIVALENT (High Dose)	65 and up	shot	egg-based	Sanofi
FLUZONE QUADRIVALENT*	6 months and up	shot	egg-based	Sanofi

Guidance, statistics, and referrals to authoritative websites:

[Patient Guide to Coronavirus Websites](#)

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