

## Ask a Patient Health News April 17, 2022

### Health News: April 17, 2022

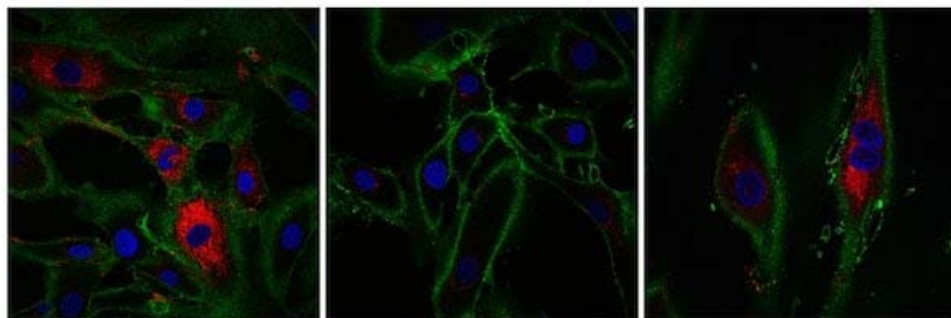
- In a large international study led by University of Cambridge and University of Pennsylvania researchers, 100,000 MRIs (images) of **human brains** ranging in age from 3 months to over 100 years old were analyzed. The scientists created a "map" of changes that normally occur in the brain over a lifetime. They also mapped changes that occur over time in the brains of people with mental illnesses such as schizophrenia. Increases and decreases in grey matter, white matter, cerebrospinal fluid volume, brain thickness, and other data is graphed on a time line. The study was published in *Nature*.

<https://medium.com/predict/a-map-of-the-aging-brain-928975ae6e68>

Datasets from the study are available at this open source site: <https://brainchart.shinyapps.io/brainchart/>

- Researchers at the Babraham Institute in Cambridge rejuvenated a 53-year-old woman's **skin cells** to take on the characteristics of a 23-year-old's skin cells. The scientists used a technique called "stem cell reprogramming," a way of turning back the cells' aging clock without losing their specialized function. Dr. Dilgeet Gill stressed that the work, which was published in the journal *eLife*, was at a very early stage but still has the potential to revolutionize regenerative medicine.

<https://www.futuretimeline.net/blog/2022/04/8-age-of-skin-cells-reversed-by-30-years.htm>



Left image: skin cells from someone in their early 20s. Middle: old skin cells, lacking the collagen needed for elasticity. Right: Reprogrammed skin cells, with restored collagen shown in red. (Source: [E-Life Sciences](#))

- Since large animals tend to live longer than small animals, it has been thought that size could play a role in longevity, along with other factors. Advances made in genetic research have made it possible to examine **chromosomal changes over a lifetime**. A study by Wellcome Sanger Institute in Cambridge revealed that once mutations reach a certain point, an animal can no longer survive; lifespan is inversely proportional to somatic mutation rate. For example, the small naked mole rat can live to be 25 years old, about the same lifespan of (the much larger) giraffe. Both experience around 95 DNA mutations a year. A mouse, on the other hand, experiences about 796 mutations a year and only lives for 3.7 years. The average lifespan of humans in the study was 83.6, with the annual mutation rate of just 47 per year. The study was published in *Nature*.

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2022/04/13/mystery-humans-die-around-80-may-finally-solved/>

- Columbia University researchers evaluated whether **dietary fiber** intake was associated with a decrease in **inflammation in older adults** and if fiber was inversely related to cardiovascular disease (CVD). The results showed that total fiber, and more specifically cereal fiber but not fruit or vegetable fiber, was consistently associated with lower inflammation and lower CVD incidence. Until now there had been limited data on the link between fiber and inflammation among older adults, who have higher levels of inflammation compared with younger adults.

<https://www.publichealth.columbia.edu/public-health-now/news/not-all-dietary-fiber-created-equal-cereal-fiber-linked-lower-inflammation>

- Jeneesa, a 30-year-old former rehab manager working as a waitress in California, suffered for years from **bipolar disorder** and also had **anxiety** that worsened during the Covid pandemic. She signed up for the telehealth service **Cerebral**, which she

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found through an Instagram ad. For \$325 a month, she got access to a therapist, a psychiatric nurse practitioner, and a "care coordinator", who was a gatekeeper for the other two professionals. After a 15 minute-long first appointment with the nurse practitioner, she was prescribed **Abilify** for her bipolar disorder. And in less than three months, she was taking **5 new drugs**, had new diagnoses, and felt worse, not better.

Bloomberg/Business Week's investigation uncovered reasons why Cerebral, which was funded by the same investors who launched drive service Uber, appears to be focused on growth rather than on patient care. They even found out that all patients had the same "care coordinator," an alter ego named Eileen Davis, who has since been replaced.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2022-03-11/cerebral-app-over-prescribed-adhd-meds-ex-employees-say>

### Online Pharmacy Price Comparison

- Cash-only (no insurance) online mail order pharmacies are a cost competitive option for consumers shopping for some generic drugs. In fact, the prices can often be cheaper than insurance co-pay or coupon prices at brick and mortar retail stores and through insurance plans' mail-order options. *Consumer Reports* published a price comparison of eight **online mail-order pharmacies** for generic drugs, including six "newcomers" to the market (**Amazon, CostPlusDrugs, GeniusRx, Honeybeehealth, Ro.co** and **Scriptco**) along with **Costco** and **Health Warehouse**.

The cheapest online pharmacy for the four generic medications they compared was **Scriptco.com**, with prices ranging from .54 for a 30 day supply of Atorvastatin (cholesterol drug Lipitor) to \$4.33 for a 30 day supply of Pioglitazone (diabetes drug Actos). Like Amazon and Costco, Scriptco has a membership fee (\$50 per quarter or \$140 per year). Check out the complete chart comparing the price of five common generic drugs at eight online pharmacies.

<https://www.consumerreports.org/online-pharmacies/online-pharmacies-can-help-you-save-big-on-prescription-drugs/>

- One major online pharmacy not included on the *Consumer Reports* list is **Walmart**, a store that has also has competitive prices at its retail membership program for its local stores (rx.walmartplus.com). The online mail order program, on the other hand, does not require a membership and has discounted cash prices on a small number of common generics, with 90 day supplies ranging from \$10 to \$38 for home delivery. Here are the mail order prices for three of the drugs also covered in the *Consumer Reports* article:

**Atovarstatin** ([generic](#) for cholesterol drug [Lipitor](#)): \$38 for 90 days supply

**Duloxetine** ([generic](#) for antidepressant [Cymbalta](#)): \$24 for 90 days supply

**Pioglitazone** (generic for diabetes drug [Actos](#)): \$24 for 90 day supply.

<https://www.walmart.com/cp/pharmacy-mail-order/1042239>

Insurance is accepted for some mail order products but prices can vary. Here is a [list of Walmart's pharmacy products](#) with the cash discount prices for home delivery for a 90 day supply.

### Covid-19 News

- New laws in eight states make it possible for **visitors see loved ones** in healthcare facilities, even during a disease outbreak such as the Covid-19 pandemic. Patients can designate "essential caregivers," or "compassionate caregivers," who are allowed to visit regardless of a health crisis. In some states (such as New York, Washington, and Texas), the laws only apply to long-term care facilities, but in other states (such as Arkansas, North Carolina, Oklahoma, and most recently, Florida) they also apply to hospitals.

<https://khn.org/news/article/new-laws-let-visitors-see-loved-ones-in-health-care-facilities-even-in-an-outbreak/>

- The U.S. FDA authorized **InspectIR's** mobile diagnostic test that uses a **breath sample** to determine if a person has Covid-19. The instrument is about the size of a piece of carry-on luggage and the test is administered by a trained operator. The results are provided in less than three minutes, and the machines can process about 160 screenings a day. FDA authorization was based on a clinical trial evaluating the performance of the InspectIR COVID-19 Breathalyzer in 2,409 individuals with or

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without symptoms. The test correctly identified 91.2% of positive samples and 99.3% of negative samples. Positive results should be screened with a secondary PCR test.

<https://www.fda.gov/news-events/press-announcements/coronavirus-covid-19-update-fda-authorizes-first-covid-19-diagnostic-test-using-breath-samples>

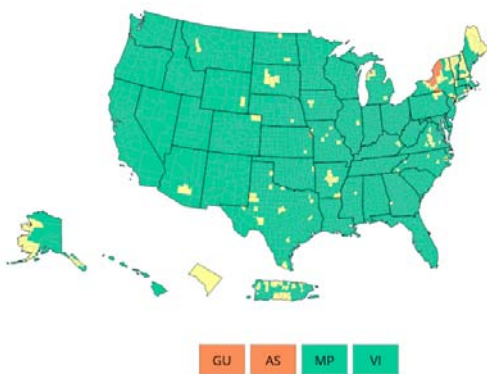


- **Covid relief fraud** has been widely publicized, but its enormous scope and disturbing implications are only now becoming clear. **Covid unemployment relief fraud** was carried out by individual criminals or organized crime groups using stolen identities to claim jobless benefits. The looting of the **Paycheck Protection Program** (PPP) involved authorizing banks and other financial institutions to make government-backed loans to fake businesses. These loans were to be forgiven if the companies spent the money on business expenses. NBC News looked at the scope of the **largest fraud in U.S. history**, involving as much as \$80 billion, along with efforts by the government to track down the culprits and stop future payments for fraudulent claims.

<https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/justice-department/biggest-fraud-generation-looting-covid-relief-program-known-ppp-n1279664>

### Covid-19: U.S. Statistics

Parts of the country, including northern New York and Vermont, are experiencing an increase in Covid cases. The areas in yellow in the map below are considered "medium" transmission while orange depicts an area of "high" transmission. Most of the country (94.4%) live in counties with a low community level of transmission. The CDC map below is for April 14, 2022. Use this [CDC interactive tool](#) to check the level in your city or county.



● Low ● Medium ● High ● No Data

The [CDC reported](#) that the 7-day moving average of new cases per day was 35,475 as of April 14 compared with 25,751 cases per day two weeks ago. The increase is due to the rapidly spreading "subvariant" "**BA.2**" (pink on the chart below) of the Omicron Covid-19 virus variant. This chart depicts the change in prevalence of virus variants in the U.S. so far this year. The light orange

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<https://www.askapatient.com/news/newsletter-archive/>

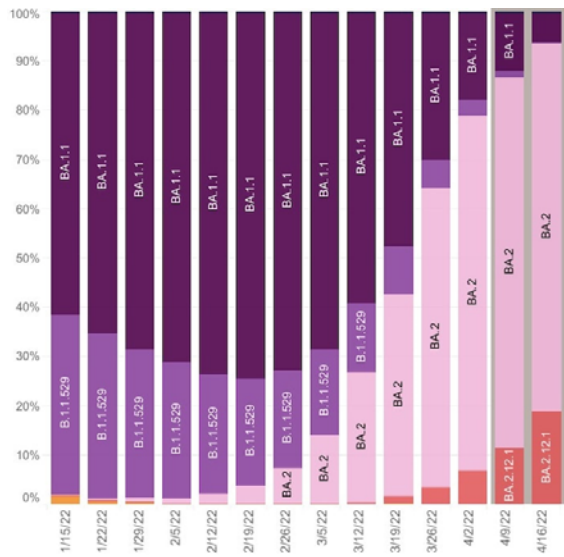
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color represents the waning presence of the "Delta" variant while the other colors represent various Omicron variants.

<https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#variant-proportions>



### Happy Spring Holidays:

Easter, Passover, and Ramadan coincide this weekend in 2022!

### Coming in May:

Ask a Patient's own medical mystery: "Strange Symptoms." When a young doctor began craving strange smells and salty flavors, he self-diagnosed it as a form of "pica," but it took more than a year to find out the underlying cause.

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