

Ask a Patient Health News February 6, 2022

Health News: February 6, 2022

- Migraine and seizure drug **Topamax** had a safety update that affects **pediatric** patients: the drug may decrease **bone density** and slow **growth and weight gain progression** in children and adolescents when the drug is used over a long period. Topamax is a popular migraine and seizure drug for adults and is also approved to treat **epilepsy** in children age 2 and older.

[FDA Label Change for Topamax](#)

[Reviews](#) for Topamax

- The U.S. Food and Drug Administration announced the approval of Mylan's generic version of **Restasis** (cyclosporine ophthalmic emulsion) single-use eye drops vials to treat dry eye. Restasis was first approved 20 years ago.

<https://www.fda.gov/news-events/press-announcements/fda-approves-first-generic-restasis>

- Center for Medicare Services (CMS) announced a 15% increase for premiums and deductible amounts, one of the largest increases ever. CMS originally blamed part of the price increase on the possibility that they might have to provide coverage for the recently approved Alzheimer's drug Aduhelm; now that they announced they won't cover it in most cases, some lawmakers are demanding that **CMS reduce the price hikes**.

<https://www.worstpills.org/newsletters/view/1448> (snippet only; full article is paywalled)

- President Biden announced a new "Cancer Moonshot" effort that aims to cut the number of cancer deaths in half by 2047. In 2016, Vice President Biden launched the original **Cancer Moonshot** after his son Beau died from brain cancer, winning congressional backing to spend \$1.8 billion over 7 years. That project has focused largely on immunotherapies, pediatric cancer treatments, and data sharing and aimed to make a decade of progress in 5 years. The new focus will be on **preventive vaccines and blood tests** that screen for multiple cancers. No proposed funding sources were announced.

<https://www.science.org/content/article/biden-s-reignited-cancer-moonshot-would-develop-blood-tests-detect-cancer-and-vaccines>

- Researchers at Mayo Clinic analyzed data from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) and found that the number of people taking **melatonin**, an over-the-counter natural supplement, is growing. While short-term use for jet lag, shift workers and people who have trouble falling asleep appears to be safe, long-term safety is unknown. CNN presents highlights from the Mayo Clinic [study](#) and looks at the topic of melatonin overuse.

<https://www.cnn.com/2022/02/01/health/melatonin-overuse-wellness/index.html>

- University of Buffalo and Ohio State University researchers found that college-age study participants who used **social media** excessively had higher levels of C-reactive protein (CRP), a biological marker of **chronic inflammation** that predicts serious illnesses, such as diabetes, certain cancers, and cardiovascular disease. Higher social media use was also related to symptoms like **headaches, chest and back pains**, and more frequent visits to doctors and health centers. The [study](#) is in pre-publication in *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*.

<https://www.futurity.org/social-media-physical-health-college-students-2687212-2>

- A study of 200 patients at **geriatric hospitals** in Spain found that patients participating in **in-hospital exercise** including resistance training machines in the morning and low-key exercises such as walking and leg extensions in the evening, had **better outcomes** for physical performance and pain than those who had typical care. The study involved use of the "Vivifrail" physical training program and was published in *JAMA Internal Medicine*.

<https://reachmd.com/news/bed-rest-after-hospitalization-may-hamper-recovery-for-older-patients-study-suggests/2156355/>

More on the "[Vivifrail](#)" exercise regimen for people over the age of 70.

- **CostPlus Drugs**, a new **low-cost online pharmacy** with first-of-its kind **transparent pricing**, opened for business. The pricing model is simple: consumers pay the cost of the drug plus 15% mark-up, a \$3 pharmacy processing fee, and \$5 shipping. Mark Cuban's [CostPlus Drugs](#) opened with 100 generics to start, but CEO Alex Oshmyansky hopes to be "cranking out orders for more than 1,000 prescription drugs by the end of the year." They are building a 22,000 square foot manufacturing facility in Dallas to support these efforts. A prescription from a U.S. provider is required to place an order, and they don't accept insurance.

<https://www.dallasnews.com/business/health-care/2022/02/01/mark-cubans-prescription-drug-company-takes-shape-in-deep-ellum/>

Flu Season Updates

- The CDC estimates that so far in the **2021-2022 flu season**, which began in October 2021, there have been at least **2.1 million cases of flu**

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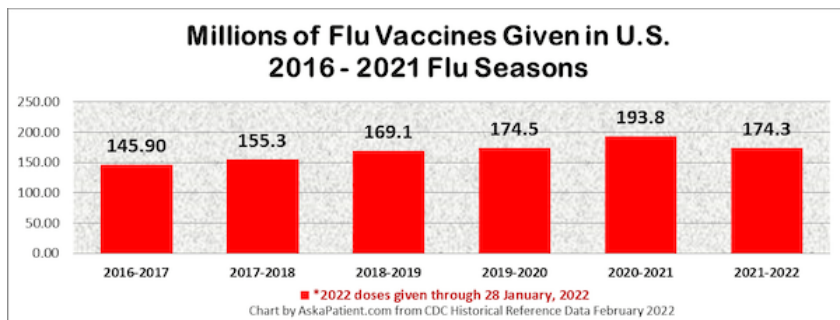
illnesses, 21,000 hospitalizations, and 1,200 deaths from influenza. Last year, flu cases were **so low** that there is no chart available in the "[Flu Burden](#)" section of the CDC web site for the 2020-2021 season. For the **2019-2020 flu season**, the CDC reported a total of **34.9 million cases** of flu illness in the U.S., along with over 380,000 hospitalizations and 20,342 deaths.

<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/weekly/#NCHSMortality>

Number of flu cases by year: <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/burden/past-seasons.html>

- As flu **vaccination season wraps up**, **coverage** remains much **lower** this season compared with last. As of January 28, 2022, 174.3 million people in the U.S. had received a flu vaccine. Last year, 193.8 million received influenza vaccines, which was an all-time record. Check out this AskaPatient article for more on vaccines offered this year and charts showing low incidence of the virus last flu season.

<https://www.askapatient.com/news/flu-vaccines-for-2021-2022-season.asp>



Health Podcast Suggestions

- For those interested in healthcare policy and drug research: listen to this week's **StatNews** podcast to find out why **Robert Califf's confirmation** as head of the FDA may be in jeopardy, a brief conversation about **Covid vaccines** for young children, and an interview with Merck's head of research, Dean Li, who talks about the company's efforts to develop an **oral cholesterol pill** targeting PCSK9, a gene responsible for regulating the amount of cholesterol in the bloodstream. (about 30 minutes in length).

<https://www.statnews.com/2022/02/03/podcast-robert-califf-fda-pcsk9-covid-vaccine-kids/>

- Do you feel that as you get older you are much more sensitive to medications? Because your body changes even over the course of just ten years, you can have different reactions to medications over time. Listen to **Aging Matters** host Cheryl Beversdorf interview Kristin Zimmerman, PharmD, and Emily Peron, PharmD, Associate Professors, Virginia Commonwealth University School of Pharmacy, about issues related to prescription drugs affecting patients over the age of 65. Topics include **drug metabolism**, polypharmacy, causes/risks of multiple prescriptions and over-the-counter medications, **deprescribing medications**, and medication management. Free podcast, 57 minutes.

<https://open.spotify.com/episode/635vxSQSv99AHffrCMo3dh>

Covid-19 News

- The new Covid-19 Omicron subvariant BA.2 may be even **more contagious** than the original BA.1, but it doesn't seem to cause more severe illness. Unfortunately, it appears to be more likely than the original to infect vaccinated people, according to a Danish study that involved 8,500 households.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/omicron-subvariant-ba2-more-infectious-than-original-danish-study-finds-2022-01-31/>

- The FDA gave full approval for the **Moderna** COVID-19 Vaccine, which will be marketed as **Spikevax** for the prevention of COVID-19 in individuals 18 years of age and older.

<https://www.fda.gov/news-events/press-announcements/coronavirus-covid-19-update-fda-takes-key-action-approving-second-covid-19-vaccine>

- Medical waste generated from the Covid pandemic has reached colossal proportions, and a new report from World Health Organization (WHO) says there is a "dire need" to **reform how waste is disposed of globally**. The materials being discarded include protective clothing, syringes, gloves, face masks and test kits. **Disposable gloves** contributed to more waste than any other item procured through the UN's system, the report said. The WHO's own guidance does not recommend that healthcare workers be required to wear gloves while administering the Covid-19 vaccine, despite it being common practice in many places. In one study cited by the report, it was estimated that **3.4 billion single-use masks** were discarded **every day in 2020** around the world. At that rate of use, well **over a trillion single-use masks** have been discarded as waste by now.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-60214689.amp>

- After the Biden administration faced criticism for not providing free Covid tests for Medicare recipients while at the same time requiring private insurance to cover up to eight tests a month, Center for Medicare Services (CMS) announced that Medicare and Medicare Advantage recipients

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

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will be eligible for **free over-the-counter COVID-19 tests** beginning in early spring.

<https://health.wusf.usf.edu/npr-health/2022-02-03/over-the-counter-covid-tests-will-soon-be-free-for-medicare-recipients>

- Evidence suggests that people with COVID-19 infection have an increased risk of stroke and worse stroke outcomes. According to the American Heart Association Covid-19 Registry, one in 65 patients hospitalized with Covid-19 will suffer a stroke. A new **scoring system helps predict stroke risk** among adults hospitalized with COVID-19 using six clinical factors: history of stroke, no fever at time of hospital admission, no history of pulmonary disease, high white blood cell count, history of high blood pressure and elevated systolic blood pressure. Patients with **four or more** of these clinical risk factors were more than **10 times as likely** to have a stroke compared to those with fewer factors. This preliminary research will be presented at the American Stroke Association's **International Stroke Conference** taking place Feb. 8-11, 2022.

<https://newsroom.heart.org/news/scoring-system-helped-predict-stroke-risk-for-people-hospitalized-with-covid-19>

- The CDC added **wastewater treatment Covid detection** statistics to its Covid Tracker. So far, it includes data from 400 wastewater treatment plants across the U.S., and soon will add 250 more. Screening the sewer system allows public health officials to track the virus and even predict community outbreaks without depending on individuals to seek out testing or go to the doctor when they are sick. This CBS report includes a 5-minute video that explains how wastewater monitoring at the **University of Arizona** resulted in the identification of two asymptomatic cases at an on-campus dorm.

<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/covid-19-wastewater-monitoring-program-cdc/>



Image: Carmel Indiana, was one of the first wastewater plants to test for Covid-19 in the community. From [Indiana Public Radio](#)

- Lawsuits continue to pile up against a Covid testing chain (Center for Covid Control and Doctors Clinical Laboratory and its owners) for **improperly handling tests, reporting false results, or sometimes not reporting results at all**. According to a Washington state press release, "the company's unlawful practices included storing tests in garbage bags for over a week rather than properly refrigerating them, and backdating sample collection dates so that stale samples would still be processed." At its peak, the company says it was operating hundreds of locations across at least 26 states and collecting about 80,000 tests per day.

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2022/01/31/washington-files-complaint-against-center-covid-control/9200590002/>



Tests stored in garbage bags at a facility. Image from January 31, 2022 [Washington State press release](#)

Covid Statistics:

Cases & Testing

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The average U.S. 7-day average daily case load for the week ending February 2 was 378,015, a decrease of 37.6% compared with the week before. The average percentage of COVID-19 NAATs (nucleic acid amplification tests) that were positive (percent positivity) for the week January 21-27, 2022, was 18.7%, down 5.75% from the previous seven days.

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/covid-data/covidview/index.html>

Vaccines

As of February 5, 2022, 85.3% of people in the U.S. age 12 and up have received at least one vaccine, while 72.7% of those age 12 and up are fully vaccinated. Approximately 32% of children age 5 to 11 have received a vaccine (about 8.9 million children). 43.6% of people age 12 and older have received a booster dose.

https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#vaccinations_vacc-total-admin-rate-total

Deaths

As of February 2, 2022, the 7-day moving average of new deaths (2,404) has increased compared with the previous 7-day moving average (2,366).

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/covid-data/covidview/index.html>

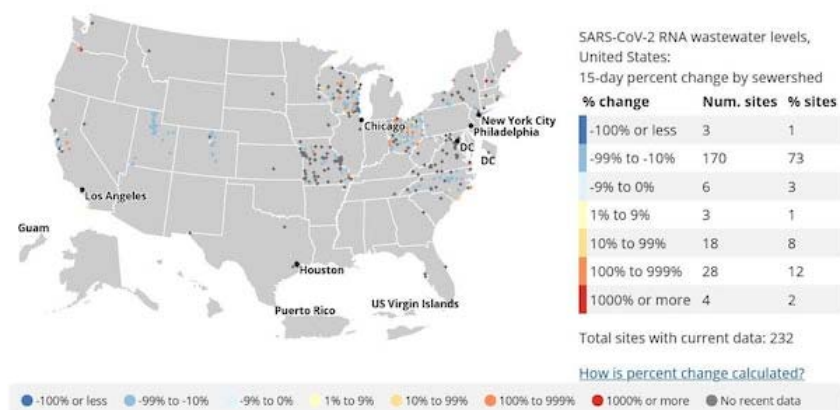
New Hospitalizations

The 7-day daily average number of new hospitalizations of patients admitted to a hospital who also tested positive for Covid-19 for January 26–February 1, 2022 was 16,068. This is an **18% decrease** from the prior 7-day average (19,593) from January 19–25, 2022.

New hospital admissions data is from the Unified Hospital Dataset, which tracks newly admitted patients who test positive for Covid-19. The reason for the patient's hospital admission may not be for Covid-19 illness.

Many regions of the country have decreasing amounts of covid virus in the wastewater. If your area of the country on the map below has a **dot**, it has a participating wastewater treatment facility. Click to see past or present results. Grey dots mean there is no current data available.

<https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#wastewater-surveillance>



Map Image Source: CDC Covid-Data-Tracker Wastewater Surveillance Page

Global Cases

The World Health Organization reports that during the week of 24 to 30 January 2022, over 22 million new cases and over 59,000 new deaths were reported globally. The number of new COVID-19 cases remained similar to that reported during the previous week, while the number of new deaths increased by 9%

<https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/weekly-epidemiological-update-on-covid-19---1-february-2022>

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