

## Ask a Patient Health News January 9, 2022

### Health News: January 9, 2022

- An Emory University study of 918 patients with underlying heart disease suggests that **mental stress** may be just as or even more damaging to your heart than **physical stress**. In the study, patients were given both physical and mental stress tests to see if their hearts developed **myocardial ischemia** (significantly reduced blood flow to the muscles of the heart), and then they were followed for four to nine years. The results were published in the November edition of *JAMA*.

<https://www.sanjuandaily.com/post/stress-may-be-your-heart-s-worst-enemy>

- A new national standard for labeling **genetically modified food** (including the new super-sized genetically modified farmed salmon) came into effect in January. Food companies may choose from various labeling options. They may use a green label (see below) indicating "bioengineered" or "derived from bioengineering;" provide descriptive text, phone number, or web site link; or provide a QR code for the consumer to scan for information.

The rules defining when the label is necessary depend on the type of food and whether it is first, second, or later on the list of ingredients. Critics of the new policy, like the **Center for Food Safety**, say the rules will leave the majority of genetically modified foods unlabeled: the USDA sets an exemption threshold at 5 percent of "unintended" genetically engineered ingredients. In the European Union, the standard is just 0.9 percent.

<https://www.npr.org/2022/01/05/1070212871/usda-bioengineered-food-label-gmo>

Decision tree tool to determine which foods must be identified as genetically modified:

<https://www.ams.usda.gov/rules-regulations/be/zingtree>



Image Source: [USDA](#) - BE Symbols

- Elizabeth Holmes, former chief executive of the once high-flying biotech blood testing company **Theranos**, was found guilty on four of 11 charges of defrauding the company's investors and patients.

<https://www.engadget.com/elizabeth-holmes-theranos-trial-verdict-guilty-fraud-001725594.html>

- A *New York Times* investigation reveals that **newer prenatal tests** that check for rare conditions like Prader-Willi syndrome are **incorrect** more than 90 percent of the time. While long-available lab tests for Down syndrome are highly accurate, an increasing number of companies offer tests for rare conditions, with poor accuracy.

<http://www.compassionategynecare.com/blog-1/2022/1/5/when-they-warn-of-rare-disorders-these-prenatal-tests-are-usually-wrong>

- Long before drug store remedies became mainstream, "all you had to treat your illness was whatever you had around you." Time has shown that many **home remedies** can be useful, and there's often scientific evidence to back them up. Here's a roundup of some of the more popular ones, what they're used for, along with why they often work: ginger, peppermint, lavender oil, ice/heat, honey, cinnamon, garlic, and petroleum jelly or aloe.

<https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/us/home-remedies-can-be-useful-for-some-conditions-experts-say/ar-AASm5IF>

- At any given time, about one-sixth of adults overall and one-third of adults over age 60 have symptoms of **constipation**, and sometimes this can be caused by **medications**. Public Citizen's *Worst Pills* newsletter lists aluminum-containing antacids, antihistamines, antipsychotics, beta blockers, calcium channel blockers, diuretics, iron supplements, overactive bladder drugs,

Parkinson's disease drugs, tricyclic antidepressants and opioid analgesics as medications that may cause the condition. **Dietary suggestions** to alleviate the problem include: increase dietary fiber intake (such as whole-grain breads and cereals, raw vegetables, raw and dried fruits, and beans); drink plenty of sugar-free, nonalcoholic liquids (six to eight glasses per day); and exercise daily. If constipation persists, they suggest considering a bulk-forming laxative, such as **psyllium** (Metamucil), for a few days and to contact your doctor promptly if you experience severe or prolonged constipation.

<https://www.worstpills.org/newsletters/view/1443> (snippet only; full article is paywalled)

- Among individuals younger than age 60, **urinary tract infections** (UTIs) are much more common in women than in men. But after age 60, the rate of these infections in men begins to approach that seen in women. Results of a recent clinical trial published in the July 27, 2021, issue of the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (JAMA) indicate that in men with **acute UTIs and no fever**, a **7-day course of oral antibiotics** appears to be just as good for eradicating the infection as the commonly used 14-day course. Shorter courses of treatment can reduce the risk of adverse effects of antibiotic therapy.

<https://www.worstpills.org/newsletters/view/1445> (snippet only; full article is paywalled)

- Drug companies **raised the prices on 460 medications** on Jan. 1 2022, with most prices up 5% to 6% on average. Even though high drug prices remain a huge consumer concern, companies went ahead and raised prices as usual. Some examples: Purdue Pharma raised the price of "opioid poster child" OxyContin by 5%; Vertex raised the price of cystic fibrosis medication by 4.9%, even though it already has a list price of more than \$311K per year; Gilead raised the price of HIV drugs Biktarvy and Descovy by 5.6%.

<https://news.yahoo.com/big-ticket-drugs-higher-prices-100043200.html>

- If using your **fitness tracker** gives you **anxiety** or stress, you may want to consider ditching it. For many people, tracking can become a negative obsession, with users constantly worried about their number of steps, heart rates, diets, or sleep patterns. Furthermore, results can even be inaccurate. Some psychiatrists advise patients who struggle with **obsessive compulsive disorder** or **disordered eating habits** to avoid using trackers.

<https://www.seattletimes.com/life/is-it-time-to-stop-using-your-fitness-tracker/>

- Are we **overtreating** high blood pressure in older patients? Syndicated columnist and pharmacist Joe Graedon answers a question from a reader about this topic. He notes that a recent study published in *JAMA Internal Medicine* suggests that older people might live longer and have less dementia if their blood pressure is higher.

<https://www.spokesman.com/stories/2021/dec/29/peoples-pharmacy-do-older-people-benefit-from-high/>

## 2021 Novel Drug Approvals Highlights

In 2021, the FDA's Center for Drug Evaluation and Research (CDER) approved **51 "novel" drugs**, which are drugs with an active ingredient that have never before been approved in the U.S. In addition, the FDA's Center for Biologics Evaluation and Research approved 13 therapeutic products, including the Pfizer Covid-19 vaccine, Prevnar-20 pneumococcal vaccine, and several blood plasma treatments. Pfizer expects that its COVID-19 vaccine, **Comirnaty**, will generate **\$36 billion** in sales in 2021, an amount that far exceeds the \$20 billion in sales generated by top-selling drug Humira in 2020.

Like in recent years, many of 2021's novel CDER drug approvals (52% in 2021) were for rare or "orphan" diseases (diseases that affect fewer than 200,000 people in the U.S.). **Rare diseases** with new treatments in 2021 include the autoimmune disease myasthenia gravis, Alagille syndrome, Pompe disease, achondroplasia (dwarfism), Duchenne muscular dystrophy, and others.

Notable approvals of 2021 include the controversial drug **Aduhelm** for treating Alzheimer's, and the once-a-month **Cabenuva Kit** complete treatment for **HIV**. A new birth control pill was also introduced, Nextstellis (drospirenone and estetrol). This drug includes estetrol or "E4," a plant-derived, naturally produced estrogen. Brexafemme is a new treatment option for vaginal yeast infection. A new fast-acting **ADHD drug** for kids that does **not** contain an amphetamine is now on the market: Qelbree (viloxazine) capsules. According to *Fierce Pharma*, the last non-scheduled (non-amphetamine) ADHD medication to win FDA approval was Shire's **Intuniv** (click for reviews), back in 2009.

The migraine market is getting crowded, but Abbvie's **Qulipta** (ATOGEPAANT) was approved last year to help prevent **migraine** attacks in patients. It competes with another "gepant" drug, Nurtec ODT (RIMEGEPANT).

Check out the link below to view the **list of all 51 drugs**. They are divided according to how the drug is administered, with more than

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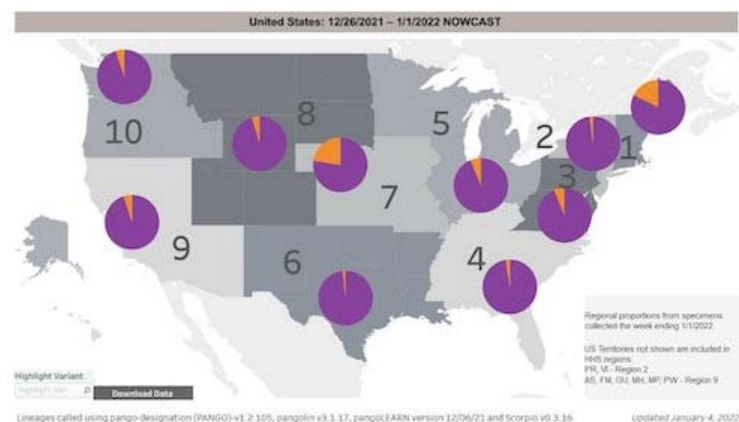
half of 2021's drugs being administered through **injection, infusion or I.V.** in a hospital or health care setting. These include cancer chemotherapy treatments or treatment adjuncts for small cell lung cancer, lymphoma, endometrial cancer, cervical cancer, and diagnostic agents to help detect prostate cancer or ovarian cancer lesions during surgery. The remaining 24 drugs are taken **orally in pill or capsule form, with one taken as a liquid.** [View](#) the complete list of 2021 drug approvals on our website, with drug name, company, treatment description, and date of approval, and sources for this article.

<https://www.askapatient.com/news/list-new-drugs-approved-2021.asp>



## Covid-19 News: Omicron Variant Wreaks Havoc

- **Omicron** now accounts for 95.4% of the Covid-19 virus in the U.S. according to the CDC's Nowcast model. The purple color in this map represents the proportion of Omicron variant in the region; orange color represents the Delta variant (as of week ending January 1).



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

- A federal judge in Texas ordered the Food and Drug Administration to **make public the data it relied on to license Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine**, imposing a dramatically accelerated schedule that should result in the release of all information within about eight months. That's roughly 75 years and four months faster than the FDA said it could take to complete a Freedom of Information Act request by a group of doctors and scientists seeking an estimated 450,000 pages of material about the vaccine.

<https://www.reuters.com/legal/government/paramount-importance-judge-orders-fda-hasten-release-pfizer-vaccine-docs-2022-01-07/>

- Rising demand for Covid tests, fueled by Omicron variant, holiday travel, and school or employment requirements, make it almost impossible to find tests at stores. Long lines at community testing centers, delays in processing the tests, price gouging, and fraudulent pop-up testing sites also have created problems. However, if all goes as planned by the Biden administration, in a couple weeks **Americans will be able to order a test online** and have it delivered to their home - free of charge.

<https://www.self.com/story/covid-test-shortage>

- **Ask a Patient** recently updated its list of **useful Covid-19 web sites** for consumers and researchers. It contains descriptive links to more than 50 sites providing guidance, statistics, and medical research.

<https://www.askapatient.com/news/patient-guide-coronavirus-websites.asp>

## Covid Statistics

### Cases & Testing

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

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The average U.S. 7-day average daily case load has soared to the highest levels on record, with an average 668,497 cases a day as of January 7. This is more than a five-fold increase since our last newsletter on December 12, 2021. The average percentage of COVID-19 NAATs (nucleic acid amplification tests) that are positive (percent positivity) for the week ending November 21 was 27.2%, an almost four-fold increase since four weeks ago.

### Vaccines

As of January 8, 2022, 84.3% of those age 12 and up have received at least one vaccine, while 71.5% of those age 12 and up are fully vaccinated. Approximately 26% of children age 5 to 11 have received a vaccine (about 7.5 million children). 60% of people age 65 and older have received a booster dose and 95% of people age 65 and up have received at least one vaccine. As of January 5, 2022, the 7-day average number of administered vaccine doses reported to CDC per day was 1,075,148, a 3.1% increase from the previous week.

### Deaths

As of January 6, 2022, the 7-day moving average of new deaths (1,246) has increased 14.4% compared with the previous 7-day moving average (1,089).

### 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 December 28, 2021–January 4, 2022 was 16,419. This is a 60.2% increase from the prior 7-day average (10,271) from December 21–December 27, 2021.

*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.*

CDC sources for the above information:

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

[https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#trends\\_dailycases](https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#trends_dailycases)

Vaccine data:

[https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#vaccinations\\_vacc-total-admin-rate-total](https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#vaccinations_vacc-total-admin-rate-total)

### Global Cases

During the week 27 December 2021 to 2 January 2022, following a gradual increase since October, the global number of new cases increased sharply by 71% to 9 million cases as compared to the previous week, while the number of new deaths (42,000) decreased by 10%.

<https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/weekly-epidemiological-update-on-covid-19---6-january-2022>

**Have you received your Covid-19 vaccine booster? Click to read comments about these Covid-19 vaccines and/or add your experience:**

[Pfizer](#)   [Moderna](#)   [Janssen](#)

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*Happy New Year!*

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[Novel Drugs of 2021 List](#)

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