

## Ask a Patient Health News March 20 2022

### Health News: March 20, 2022

- President Joe Biden signed a \$1.5 trillion omnibus spending bill that includes a provision allowing the FDA to regulate **synthetic nicotine** like any other tobacco product. Manufacturers marketing a tobacco product with synthetic nicotine – including many used in electronic cigarette vaping products - will need to file a premarket tobacco product application (PMTA) with the FDA by May 14, or 30 days after the act becomes effective, to remain on the market. This law has the potential to vastly change the vaping industry.

<https://www.natlawreview.com/article/fda-receives-authorization-to-regulate-synthetic-nicotine>

- Novartis, Eli Lilly and AbbVie joined a growing list of large pharmaceutical companies **severing ties** with Russia amid a global backlash pulling out of Russia for a full slate of business activities and, for some, handing over profits on anything that remains. The latest moves come after criticism of pharma for failing to stop doing business in Russia — while many of the world's businesses have been pulling a hasty retreat out of Russia as bombs fall in Ukraine. <https://endpts.com/breaking-novartis-eli-lilly-and-abbvie-join-growing-list-of-big-pharmas-severing-ties-with-russia>

- For years, U.S. voters have overwhelmingly been in favor of legislative measures that would reduce **drug price gauging** by pharmaceutical companies, and yet no such laws have been passed. Alexander Zaitchik's latest piece in the *Intelligencer* explains how for decades, such measures have been thwarted because the pharmaceutical industry has successfully convinced people that they won't have medicines if profits are touched, because of enormous research and development costs. But Zaitchik and others argue that in reality, not only is the government footing much of the bill for early stage research, industry is mainly "producing" medicines that don't provide truly "new" benefits; most of them are repurposed. Why the industry produces so many drugs without new therapeutic benefits is the subject of a new report by the House Reform and Oversight Committee.

<https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2022/02/this-is-how-big-pharma-wins.html>

- A study at Pusan National University in South Korea sheds light on why premenopausal women are more resistant to **nonalcoholic fatty liver disease** (NAFLD) than men. In an experiment with mice, the researchers found that the female liver produces higher levels of a protein that has a protective effect against NAFLD. The protein formyl peptide receptor 3 (FPR2) is known to play an important role in mediating inflammatory responses in multiple organs.

<https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2022/03/220317120405.htm>

- The FDA released a report with the results of its assignment to test samples of **processed avocado and guacamole** (domestic and imported) for Salmonella and Listeria bacteria. Between November 2017 and September 2019, the FDA detected Listeria monocytogenes in 15 samples and salmonella in two out of the 887 total samples. Notably, the data showed that a treatment method called high-pressure processing (HPP) used to reduce bacterial growth works; the estimated prevalence of these pathogens in the non-HPP-treated samples was higher than in the HPP-treated samples.

[FDA Summary Report on Processed Avocado Sampling Assignment](#)

- During high pressure processing (HPP), food products are submersed in water and subjected to **compression pressures** approximately six times greater than the highest pressures reached in the biosphere; that would be pressures found at the bottom of the Marianas Trench in the Pacific Ocean where, at 36,000 feet underwater, pressures reach 100 megaPascals (MPa) or approximately 15,000 pounds per square inch (psi). In comparison, packaged guacamole is pressure-treated at **580 MPa (100,000) psi** for several minutes to preserve the product and deliver premium sensory quality.

<https://www.newfoodmagazine.com/article/1264/high-pressure-processing-of-foods/>

- A **purple tomato**, genetically modified to make it rich in the beneficial pigments found in "superfoods" such as blueberries, could soon be available in the U.S. U.K.-based Norfolk Plant Sciences applied for approval last year and is confident of getting the go-ahead from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). There are already tomato varieties with purple skins, but the genetically modified purple tomatoes have purple flesh as well. They contain around 10 times more anthocyanins, which are **antioxidant pigments**.

<https://www.newscientist.com/article/2309346-purple-superfood-tomato-could-finally-go-on-sale-in-the-us/>

- Northwestern University researchers found that exposure to even moderate ambient lighting during nighttime sleep, compared to sleeping in a dimly lit room, harms your **cardiovascular function** during sleep and increases your **insulin resistance** the following morning. Just a single night of exposure to moderate **room lighting** during sleep can impair glucose and cardiovascular regulation, which are risk factors for heart

disease, diabetes and metabolic syndrome.

<https://news.northwestern.edu/stories/2022/03/close-the-blinds-during-sleep-to-protect-your-health/>

- Taking **increasingly long naps** could be a precursor of **Alzheimer's** disease, according to a University of California San Francisco study that tracked the daytime sleeping habits of elderly people. Scientists think it is more likely that excessive napping could be an early warning sign, rather than it causing mental decline. In the study, the rate of increased napping doubled after a diagnosis of mild cognitive impairment and nearly tripled to a total of 68 minutes after a diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease, according to the research published in the journal *Alzheimer's and Dementia*.

<https://www.ucsf.edu/news/2022/03/422446/extended-napping-seniors-may-signal-dementia>

- Widowed and usually living alone, Gloria Bailey walks with a cane after two knee replacement surgeries and needs help with housekeeping. So she was thrilled last summer when her **Medicare Advantage plan, SummaCare**, began sending a worker from a company called "Papa" to her house in Akron, Ohio, to mop floors, clean dishes, and help with computer problems. Some days, they would spend the two-hour weekly visit just chatting at her kitchen table. "I love it," she said of the free benefit. Papa began working with Medicare Advantage plans in 2020, a year after the program began allowing the private insurers to have more flexibility addressing members' **social needs**, such as transportation, housing, and food, which are not typically covered by Medicare but could influence health. There are ample **financial incentives for the plans**, since by gleaned more information from patients, plans may discover members have health issues that may earn higher reimbursement rates from Medicare or boost their star ratings, leading to more payments.

<https://khn.org/news/article/medicare-advantage-plans-senior-companions-profits/>

- Our various **organs** and systems may have **different biological ages**, according to research conducted by Beijing Genomic Institute. The study involved more than 4,000 volunteers between the ages of 20 and 45. 403 distinct features were measured using biomarkers, statistical modeling, and other techniques for measuring the biological ages of various organ systems. Based on their findings, the researchers report that there are multiple 'clocks' within the body that vary widely based on factors including genetics and lifestyle in each individual. A person could have, for example, a younger gut based on more diverse microbiota while at the same time having a kidney that was aging faster, possibly because the diversity of species causes the kidneys to do more work. The research was published in *Cell Press*.

<https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2022/03/220308115810.htm>

- Dozens of drugs now on the market were approved without the supporting studies confirming their effectiveness. Also, there is no requirement that patients be told they have been prescribed one of these "**accelerated approval**" drugs – which is why some doctors fear that patients are being misled. Some in Congress are looking to tighten the rules for these drugs. Energy and Commerce House Committee Chairman Frank Pallone [introduced legislation](#) that would eliminate long grace periods and instead require the approvals to expire one year after post-approval studies are scheduled to be complete. (See the January 23 issue of *Ask a Patient Health News* for more on the topic of accelerated approvals.)

<https://www.latimes.com/business/story/2022-03-03/fda-accelerated-approval>

## Panels and Podcasts

- A panel at Georgetown University's Pharmed Out public health education program discussed how some drug companies **manipulate** and even "groom" **patient advocates** in order to **sell their products**. A Canadian patient advocate and mother of a child with a rare disease called cystinosis was one of the three panel members. Her organization remains free of pharma funding, but that is the exception, not the rule. Such funding has a profound impact on the drug approval process, as testimony from patient advocates has become more common.

<https://lowinstitute.org/how-some-drug-companies-manipulate-patient-advocates/>

- Pharma-sponsored **co-pay cards** and payments made on the behalf of patients through pharma-funded foundations can actually end up being very expensive for the patient. In many states, insurance companies state that if the copay comes from a drug company, the payment is not considered out-of-pocket and does not count toward the patient's out of pocket maximum, leaving patients with enormous medication bills. In this KHN podcast, a patient using an expensive drug for a chronic condition describes her frustrating experience with "**copay accumulators**."

<https://khn.org/news/article/podcast-an-arm-and-a-leg-health-care-copay-accumulator-deductible-search/>

- The 10th annual **World Happiness Report** for 146 countries has been released. The rankings for the 2022 report use data from the Gallup World Poll surveys from 2019 to 2021, and are based on answers to the main life evaluation question asked in the poll called the **Cantril ladder**. Respondents are asked to think of a ladder, with the best possible life for them being a 10 and the worst possible life being a 0. They are then asked to rate their own current lives on that 0 to 10 scale. This year, **Finland takes the top spot** for the fifth year, with a 7.821 score. Canada dropped to 15th place from 5th place 10 years ago. Denmark continues to occupy second place, with Iceland up from 4th place last year to 3rd this year. The U.S. ranked 16th with a score of 6.977 rating and the U.K. ranked 17th with a 6.943 rating.

<https://worldhappiness.report/ed/2022/happiness-benevolence-and-trust-during-covid-19-and-beyond/#ranking-of-happiness-2019-2021>

McGill University overview of [report highlights](#)

- A study by Massachusetts General Hospital showed that using **cannabis** products to treat **pain, anxiety and depression** failed to improve symptoms while doubling the risk of developing the addictive symptoms of cannabis use disorder (CUD). Patients often **overused marijuana** within a short time frame. People with medical marijuana cards choose their own products and dosing, suggesting the need for better controls over dispensing, use, and professional follow-up of these patients. The study was funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse.

<https://www.massgeneral.org/news/press-release/Marijuana-for-medical-use-may-result-in-rapid-onset-of-cannabis-use-disorder>

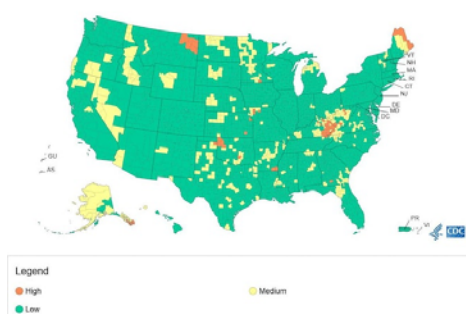
- The Omicron "stealth" subvariant, called **BA.2** is spreading in Europe and has also been detected in the U.S. When asked whether Americans should be worried about it, CDC director Rochelle Walensky said "It's slightly more transmissible than omicron, than the general omicron, BA.1. But it doesn't seem to evade our vaccines or our immunity any more than the prior omicron. And it doesn't seem to lead to any more increased severity of disease. So that is all good news. Early studies also demonstrate that if you've previously had omicron, you likely have pretty good protection against BA.2, at least for now." Interview transcript:

<https://www.wksu.org/2022-03-18/cdc-eyes-the-latest-omicron-subvariant-which-is-spreading-in-europe>

Almost all (more than 98%) of the U.S. population is living in a community with **low** or medium Covid-19 transmission levels. Use this CDC interactive [tool](#) to check the level in your city or county.

U.S. COVID-19 Community Levels by County Map

Maps, charts, and data provided by CDC, updates every Thursday by 8 pm ET  
Updated: March 17, 2022



## Global Statistics

After a consistent decrease in the number of new weekly COVID-19 cases reported globally since the end of January 2022, during the week of 7 through 13 March 2022, the number of new weekly cases increased by 8% as compared to the previous week. Western Pacific Region, the African Region and the European Region reported an increase in new weekly cases of 29%, 12% and 2%, respectively, as compared with the previous week; while a decrease has been reported by the Eastern Mediterranean Region (-24%), the South-East Asia Region (-21%) and the Region of the Americas (-20%)

<https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/weekly-epidemiological-update-on-covid-19---15-march-2022>

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