

Health News: November 14, 2021

- When a **generic drug is discontinued**, forcing a patient to buy a different option, the price difference can be staggering. Kaiser Health News (KHN) presents a case study of a parent's struggle to obtain treatment for his child, who was diagnosed with central precocious puberty, a rare condition marked by early onset of sexual development. The implantable drug treatment he requested cost \$4,800, while the one he ultimately had to get, made by the same company (Endo), cost \$43,000. The parent, himself a doctor, suspected that while the shortage and ultimate discontinuation of the drug was blamed on a **manufacturing issue**, the reason was more likely profit-motivated.

<https://khn.org/news/article/hormone-blocker-sticker-shock-again-as-patients-lose-cheaper-drug-option/>

- President Biden nominated **Robert Califf** to be the new Food and Drug Administration Commissioner. Califf was previously the FDA commissioner for about a year during the Obama administration. His nomination is not being warmly received by consumer advocate groups (like Public Citizen) and some in Congress because of his ties to Pharma companies and most recently **Google Health**.

<https://www.denverpost.com/2021/11/12/robert-califf-lead-fda/>

- Drug labels for two antidepressants, Effexor XR and Pristiq, were changed to warn about serious risks associated with discontinuing the drug or reducing dosage. These include suicide and suicidal thoughts, aggression and violent behavior, visual changes, and increased blood pressure.

[Effexor label change](#)

[Pristiq label change](#)

Check out Ask a Patient's article on **antidepressant withdrawal effects**.

<https://www.askapatient.com/news/antidepressant-withdrawal.asp>

- **Drug pricing** overhaul measures are included in the House's "Build Back Better" bill that will be voted on next week and then go to the Senate for a vote. The measures may not become law if pharmaceutical industry lobbyists succeed in getting them removed. Organizations like **AARP** and **Patients for Affordable Drugs** are asking consumers to contact their congressional representatives to express support for **Medicare drug price negotiation** and other drug pricing and related reforms. AARP says that its members have called and emailed Congress more than 1.5 million times this year, with more than 300,000 emails and 9,000 phone calls into Member offices in the last few days alone.

<https://www.rollcall.com/2021/11/10/lobbyists-advocates-seek-to-revise-budget-bills-drug-price-changes/>

A site established by **Patients for Affordable Drugs** has a template to send an email expressing support for medicare negotiation directly to your member of Congress: <https://medicarenegotiation.org/>

- Valisure, the independent pharmacy lab that has detected cancer causing chemicals and impurities in drugs, sunscreens, and hand sanitizers, has now found **benzene** in some **aerosol spray antiperspirants**. The company filed a **citizen petition** with the FDA calling for tighter regulation of the products and recalls of certain products. Of the 108 batches of products from 30 different brands tested, 54% contained detectable benzene, Valisure said in an announcement of its findings. Some batches contained up to nine times the emergency FDA limit of 2 parts per million. Samples of Old Spice, Secret, Equate, Suave, Tag, Sure, Right Guard, Brut and others were found to contain unsafe levels of benzene, a carcinogen.

<https://www.valisure.com/blog/valisure-news/valisure-detects-benzene-in-body-spray-products-3/>

- When asked how it feels to be almost 100, **99-year old wellness guru** Deborah Szekely says "I really can't believe I'm 99. I have all my marbles and I do everything the same." Although she was a co-founder of California's Golden Door and Mexico's Rancho la Puerta health resorts, Szekely says it's not necessary to go to a spa to be healthy. Read more about her experience and healthy tips in this Q&A:
<https://getfitwinnipeg.com/health-news/qa-nearing-100-deborah-szekely-is-still-a-wellness-guru-and-role-model/>

Health Research Findings

- A synthetic progestogen drug commonly used in the 1950's and 1960's to **prevent miscarriage** increases the **risk of cancer over the lifetimes** of children exposed to the drug in utero, according to a population-based study. Risk of cancer was highest for offspring exposed to the drug in the first trimester, University of Texas researchers wrote in the *American Journal of Obstetrics & Gynecology*.

<https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2021/11/211109120334.htm>

- Growth lines on **baby teeth** may help identify those kids at risk for **mental disorders** later in life. University of Bristol researchers examined the tooth growth lines of donated primary teeth and found that children whose mothers had lifetime histories of severe depression or other psychiatric problems, as well as mothers who experienced depression or anxiety at 32 weeks of pregnancy, were more likely than other kids to have thicker neonatal lines (NNL). The study was published in *JAMA Network Open*.

<https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2021/11/211110104603.htm>

- A 25-year long University of Eastern Finland study of more than 3,200 peri- or post-menopausal women found **bone loss over time to be significantly lower** (10% on average 25 years post-menopause) than has been previously suggested. The lead researcher said, "There were also surprisingly few risk factors affecting bone mineral density. The most significant factor protecting against bone loss was hormone replacement therapy. Weight gain during the follow-up also protected against bone loss." The study was published in *Journal of Bone and Mineral Research*.

<https://www.uef.fi/en/article/bone-mineral-density-decreases-less-than-expected-after-menopause>

- The **EVALI** ("e-cigarette, or vaping product use associated lung injury") health crisis during late 2019 killed at least 68 people and sickened thousands. The culprit most often blamed was **vitamin E acetate**, a viscous additive normally found in food but used by some to dilute marijuana oil that was vaped, and it was found to be coating victims' lungs. A team of researchers at Medicine Creek Analytics wondered if users can be poisoned by leached metals in the vaporizer itself. They conducted tests comparing 13 different commercial devices, and found that chromium, copper, nickel, as well as smaller amounts of lead, manganese, and tin migrate into the cannabis oil and inhaled vapor phase. The results were published in *Chemical Research in Toxicology*.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/chrisroberts/2021/10/31/is-your-marijuana-vaporizer-leaching-toxic-heavy-metals-its-possible-study-claims/>

- Northwestern University researchers may have developed a breakthrough treatment for traumatic **spinal injury**, based on study results in mice. A single injected gel treatment of tiny nanoscale fibers **regenerated severed nerves** in the spinal cords of recently paralyzed mice, allowing them to walk again within four weeks of treatment. Those not treated did not regain the ability to walk. Because of the lack of noticeable

side effects, researchers think the therapy is so promising it could skip testing in large animal models and soon go straight to human clinical trials. This article includes a **three minute narrated video** explaining the treatment and showing the mice before and after the experiment. The research was published in *Science*. <https://news.northwestern.edu/stories/2021/11/dancing-molecules-successfully-repair-severe-spinal-cord-injuries/>

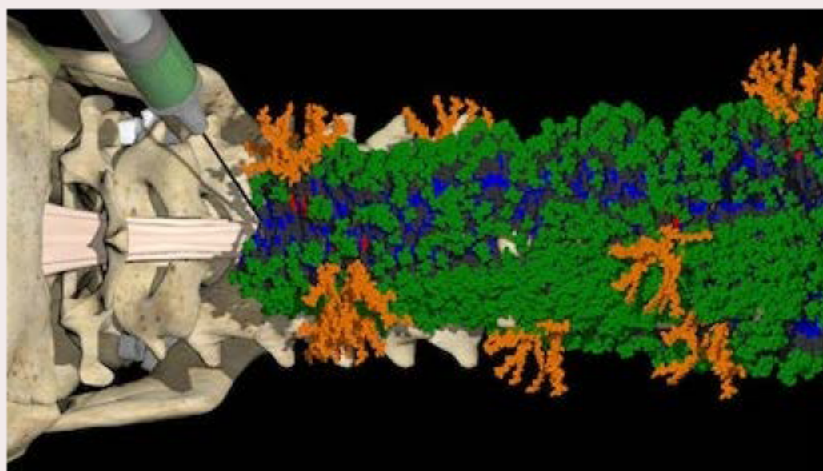


Image Source: Northwestern University

A new injectable therapy forms nanofibers with two different bioactive signals (green and orange) that communicate with cells to initiate repair of the injured spinal cord. Illustration by Mark Seniw

Covid-19 News

- A U.S. appeals court **upheld its decision to put on hold** an order by President Joe Biden for companies with 100 workers or more to require COVID-19 vaccines, rejecting a challenge by his administration. "The mandate is a one-size-fits-all sledgehammer that makes hardly any attempt to account for differences in workplaces (and workers)," Circuit Court Judge Kurt Engelhardt wrote for the panel.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/federal-appeals-court-affirms-stay-biden-vaccine-mandate-2021-11-12/>

- Covid-19-related **medical waste items**, including masks, testing materials, syringes, gloves, and hand sanitizers, are becoming a major threat to the environment, especially in countries like India and China with poor levels of waste management. By year's end, the total amount of global pandemic-generated plastic waste is estimated to reach 11 million tons, with 34,000 tons ending up in the ocean. The mass fraction of plastics washing in seawater, the seafloor and beach is expected to reach 13%, 16% and 71%, respectively, according to the study published in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.

<https://www.helsinkitimes.fi/world-int/20340-more-than-25-000-tons-of-covid-19-protection-waste-floats-in-oceans.html>

- State officials in California, Colorado, and New Mexico announced that anyone over the age of 18 may receive a **booster shot** after 6 months of receiving the second Moderna or Pfizer shot or 2 months after receiving a J&J (Janssen) dose.

<https://www.chron.com/news/article/New-Mexico-clears-way-for-boosters-amid-rise-in-16617150.php>

- **Hospital-acquired Covid-19 infections** have been a devastating problem, especially early in the pandemic. Because the CDC does not specifically track them and "there is no standard way for measuring COVID-19 hospital-associated transmissions," its prevalence is difficult to assess. A Kaiser Health News

investigation reveals that about 21% of the patients who contracted Covid in the hospital from April to September last year died. In contrast, nearly 8% of other Medicare patients died in the hospital at the time. Sepsis, kidney failure, schizoaffective disorder, and heart attack are the top reasons patients were admitted to a California hospital where they subsequently caught Covid during April – December 2020.

<https://khn.org/news/article/hospital-acquired-covid-nosocomial-cases-data-analysis/>

- The FDA announced a recall of more than 2 million **Ellume** brand at-home Covid tests due to reports of **false positive** results. Negative results are considered to be valid, as there have been no reports of false negatives. Earlier this year, Ellume received a \$231.8 million government contract to help boost the availability of at-home tests in the U.S. market. In May, the Australian company opened its first plant in the U.S. in Frederick, Maryland. The affected tests were distributed between April and August 2021.

<https://www.npr.org/2021/11/11/1054606822/fda-recalling-2-million-ellume-at-home-covid-19-test-kits-because-of-false-posit>

[Ellume's list of lot numbers](#)



Covid Statistics

Cases & Testing

The average U.S. 7-day average daily case load is on the rise, with an average 78,552 cases a day as of November 12, compared with 71,545 average cases a day as of November 5. The average percentage of COVID-19 NAATs (nucleic acid amplification tests) that are positive (percent positivity) for the week ending November 10 was 5.82%. Two weeks ago, the positivity rate was 4.9%.

https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#trends_dailycases

Vaccines

As of November 12, **79.4% of those age 12 and up** have received at least one vaccine, while 68.7% of those age 12 and up are fully vaccinated. Data on vaccines administered to children age 5 -11 has not yet been released by CDC, but according to the White House, as of 10 November, 900,000 children age 5 to 11 have received a vaccine. That represents 3% of the 28 million newly eligible people in this category. Another 700,000 children in that age range have scheduled appointments to get their first shot, according to the White House.

<https://www.c-span.org/video/?c4986067/900k-children-ages-5-11-receive-covid-19-shot-jeff-zients>

34.8% of people age **65 and older** have received a booster dose and 98.9% of people age 65 and up have received at least one vaccine.

https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#vaccinations_vacc-people-onedose-pop-12yr

Vaccination rates among **pregnant women** remain much lower than the rest of the population, with just over 35% of all pregnant women being fully vaccinated (including prior to and during pregnancy) as of November 6, 2021.

<https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#vaccinations-pregnant-women>

Hospitalizations

The current 7-day daily average number of new hospitalizations for November 5 – November 11 2021 was 5,150. This is a 1.7% increase from the prior 7-day average (5,063) from October 29–November 4, 2021.

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

Global Cases

Weekly COVID-19 cases increased slightly during the past week, with over 3.1 million new worldwide cases and over 48,000 new deaths, a 1% increase and 4% decrease respectively. The European Region reported increases in case and death incidence, while other regions reported declines or stable trends.

<https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/weekly-epidemiological-update-on-covid-19---9-november-2021>

Have you or your child received a Covid-19 vaccine or booster? Click to read comments about these

Covid-19 vaccines and/or add your experience:

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

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