

# Three Minute Read™

## Insights from the Healing American Healthcare Coalition™

January 2021-3



**From the Editor:** President Biden took office on January 20 declaring war on Covid-19. This special edition of **TMR** highlights some steps being taken to control the pandemic, two states successes in testing and vaccinating, and on a lighter note, summarizes the 2020 Shrkeli Awards. To access each article, just click on the headline.



1/20/21

[Biden looks to galvanize COVID-19 fight, vaccinations as he takes office](#), by Susan Heavey, Patricia Zengerle, Reuters,

**TMR Topline™** - Inaugurated the day after America's death toll surpassed 400,000, President Biden asked for a moment of silent prayer during his address, stating: *"We're entering what may be the toughest and deadliest period of the virus and must set aside politics and finally face this pandemic as one nation."* Biden's first three Executive Orders targeted Covid-19: requiring masks on federal property, rejoining the World Health Organization and establishing a White House Covid-19 response team led by Jeff Zients. Biden's executive actions are also intended to set an example for state and local officials as they try to rein in the virus and drew praise from U.S. Chamber of Commerce President Suzanne Clark calling it *"a smart and practical approach."*

[Biden signs burst of virus orders, vows 'Help is on the way'](#), by Ricardo Alonso-Zaldivar and Zeke Miller, Associated Press, 1/21/21

**TMR Topline™** - The 10 orders signed by Biden are aimed at jump starting his [national COVID-19 strategy](#) to increase vaccinations and testing, lay the groundwork for reopening schools and businesses, and immediately increase the use of masks — including a requirement that Americans mask up for travel. Promising stringent adherence to public health guidance, Biden declared: *"To a nation waiting for action, let me be clear on this point: help is on the way."*

Hampered by a lack of cooperation during the transition, Biden's advisors say they don't have a complete understanding of their predecessors' actions on vaccine distribution. When a reporter suggested that his goal of [100 million shots in his first 100 days in office](#) is too low, Biden responded *"When I announced it, you all said it's not possible. Come on, give me a break, man."* Dr. Fauci told reporters that if the vaccination campaign goes well, the US could return to *"a degree of normality"* by the fall.



Times, 1/22/21

[Here's What's in Biden's Executive Orders Aimed at Curbing the Pandemic](#), by Noah Weiland, New York

**TMR Topline™** - The series of Executive orders and presidential directives issued during President Biden's first full day in office signal a more centralized federal response to the spread of Covid-19, including:

- Ramp up the pace of manufacturing and testing.
- Require mask wearing during interstate travel.
- Establish a Pandemic Testing Board.
- Establish a health equity task force.
- Publish guidance for schools and workers.
- Find more treatments for Covid-19 and future pandemics.

Agencies also are directed to identify areas where the administration could invoke the Defense Production Act to increase manufacturing, such as PPE, swabs, reagents, pipettes and syringes.

**TMR's Take** –Delivering on his campaign promise, President Biden launched an all-out war against the coronavirus that, in less than a year, has claimed more American lives than perished during the four years of World War 2. Had the US merely matched Canada or Germany's performance during 2020, more than 200,000 of our fellow Americans would be alive today. Such leadership is a welcome change from the laissez-faire malign neglect of the prior administration.



[The U.S. Needs More Covid Testing, and Minnesota Has Found a Way](#), by Susan Berfield and Michelle Fay Cortez, Bloomberg, 1/11/21.

**TMR Topline™** - With a progressive governor and a budget surplus, Minnesota has spent \$150 million on testing, including a major ramp-up of the saliva test developed at Rutgers last spring. Infinity BiologiX's Oakdale lab, located about 10 miles from downtown St. Paul next to a UPS depot, receives four deliveries daily and is processes up to 30,000 tests per day with results available within 48 hours. The [saliva tests](#) are as sensitive and accurate as the nasal PCR tests according to data posted by the FDA and can be self-administered. Governor Walz notes that when neighboring North Dakota and South Dakota had the highest positivity rates in the nation, Minnesota was ranked 21st. *"Our strategy was effective," he says. "but its effectiveness was blunted by the sheer magnitude of cases."*



['Little old West Virginia' sets pace on vaccine rollout](#), by Cuneyt Dil, Associated Press, 1/19/21.

**TMR Topline™** - West Virginia rejected the federal partnership with CVS and Walgreens, instead relying on its mom-and-pop pharmacies to vaccinate residents. It was first in the nation to finish offering first doses to nursing home residents by the end of December. Also, 250 local pharmacists set up clinics in rural communities and the Mountaineer state leads the US in per capita vaccination rates. The initiative has not been error free: one county health department has been barred from the program after administering an antibody

treatment to 44 people instead of the vaccine. Noting concerns about vaccine safety, Michael Rotholz of the American Pharmacists Association said: *"having access to a health care provider like a community pharmacist provides a comfort level to the patients and communities."*

**TMR's Take** – Kudos to the governors of Minnesota (a Democrat) and West Virginia (a Republican) for their leadership in protecting their residents from Covid-19.



['Shkreli Awards' Shame Healthcare Profiteers](#), by Cheryl Clark, Contributing Writer,

MedPage Today 1/6/21

**TMR Topline™** - Named for entrepreneur Martin Shkreli, who gained notoriety in 2015 by raising the price of Daraprim (the only known cure for toxoplasmosis) from \$13.50 to \$750 a pill, the [Lown Institute's](#) 2020 Annual Shkreli Awards focus on *"pandemic profiteers."* Here are the top three of the ten awards:

- **3rd Place** - four California hospital systems that refused to take Covid-19 patients or delayed transfers from hospitals that were out of beds. [A Wall Street Journal investigation](#) found the refusals or delays were based on patients' ability to pay; many were on Medicaid or uninsured.
- **2nd Place** - vaccine maker Moderna, which set a price of \$32-37 per dose, more than the US agreed to pay for other Covid vaccines. Moderna received \$955 million in federal funding to develop its vaccine working in partnership with scientists at the National Institutes of Health.
- **1st Place** – Jared Kushner and the federal government's [Project Airbridge](#), to *"airlift PPE from overseas and bring it to the U.S. quickly"* to go to designated pandemic hotspots. Instead, the supplies were given to six private medical supply companies to sell to the highest bidder, setting off a bidding war among the states. No officials from the 10 hardest hit counties said that they received PPE from Project Airbridge.

**TMR's Take** –Wallet biopsies during a pandemic? EMTALA was enacted in 1986 to end them. Moderna's pricing seems direct from the Gordon Gekko *"Greed is good"* school in 1987's *"Wall Street."* But **TMR** agrees. The Project Airbridge fiasco tops them all.