

Three Minute Read™

Insights from the Healing American Healthcare Coalition™

August 2022-1



From the Editor: This issue opens with monkeypox and Omicron updates, followed by a study on Covid-19's origins and Amazon's latest foray into healthcare. To access each article, just click on the headline.



[W.H.O. Declares Monkeypox Spread a Global Health Emergency](#), by Apoorva Mandavilli, New York Times, 7/23/22

TMR Topline – At its June meeting, the WHO's advisers concluded that while monkeypox was a growing threat, it was not yet an international emergency. When the panel was unable to reach consensus at its July meeting, Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the WHO's director general overruled them and declared monkeypox a “public health emergency of international concern,” a designation used only to describe Covid-19 and polio. With more than 16,000 cases (five times the number when advisers met in June), the outbreak requires a coordinated international response. According to [preliminary genetic analyses](#) of samples from infected patients, the monkeypox genome seems to have collected nearly 50 mutations since 2018 and may have adapted to spreading more easily between people.

[WHO: No guarantee monkeypox won't spread beyond specific communities](#), by Julia Mueller, The Hill, 7/25/22

TMR Topline – Catherine Smallwood, senior emergency officer at the WHO, [said](#) that the global outbreak of monkeypox should not be expected to stay confined to specific groups. “At the moment, cases continually continue to be reported among men who have sex with

men, for the most part, but we should not expect that to remain as such,” Smallwood noted.



[The company with an approved monkeypox vaccine is considering expanding production to 24 hours a day](#), by

Chris Morris, Fortune, 7/25/22

TMR Topline – Denmark's Bavarian Nordic has won EU approval for its monkeypox vaccine, Imvanex. The company can produce 30 million doses per year and is expanding as the virus continues to spread. Developed initially to combat smallpox, the EU now has joined the US and Canada in approving it for monkeypox.



[As Monkeypox Spread in New York, 300,000 Vaccine Doses Sat in Denmark](#), by Joseph Goldstein and Sharon Otterman, New

York Times, 7/25/22

TMR Topline – The first monkeypox case in the US was confirmed on May 18. Unlike the Covid pandemic, an effective vaccine was available at the outset of the outbreak. Originally developed for smallpox, some 372,000 doses of Jynneos (Imvanex in the EU) owned by the US were stockpiled in Denmark. Yet the government was slow to deploy the vaccine. The US also owned well over a million Jynneos doses in vials ready for use. Much of that supply was tied up in bureaucratic red tape because the FDA had yet to [inspect and certify](#) a new facility where Bavarian Nordic now fills the vaccine into vials. Federal officials were reluctant to order all available doses early on due to concerns about cold storage and shelf life and requested 36,000 doses on May 20 and another 36,000 doses a week later.

TMR's Take: Nimble bureaucracy remains an oxymoron. Epidemiologists quoted in the articles expressed concern that monkeypox has spread widely enough that they doubt it can be contained anytime soon. On 7/27, the

FDA [announced](#) that it had finished its inspection, certified the Bavarian Nordic facility and 786,000 doses of monkeypox vaccine would be shipped. The CDC is expected to declare monkeypox a nationally notifiable condition effective 8/1 which will streamline reporting.



[Australia battles fresh Omicron outbreak as Covid deaths rise](#), Reuters, 7/21/22

TMR Topline – Australia is reporting the highest daily

numbers since the first Omicron wave earlier this year. With little public appetite to return to tough social distancing restrictions, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese has resisted pressure from some health experts to impose mask mandates. *"It's no good having a mandate unless it's enforced,"* Albanese told ABC Radio. About 95% of people above 16 have had two doses, but only 71% have received their boosters. Since the beginning of the pandemic, 10,968 Australians have died from Covid.

TMR's Take: It's winter Down Under and cases are climbing, but thanks to its early aggressive response to the pandemic, Australia's Covid fatality rate is third lowest among the OECD's 38 member nations. At #31, the US is trailed by seven former Soviet satellites. It's likely that the low 68% vaccination rate has something to do with America's bottom quartile performance.



[Bat Virus Studies Raise Questions About Laboratory Tinkering](#), by Carl Zimmer, New York Times, 7/15/22

TMR Topline – In mid-2020, a team of scientists [catching bats in Laotian](#)

[caves](#) discovered coronaviruses that were strikingly similar to SARS-CoV-2. Researchers have been studying one of them in a high-security Paris lab, the Pasteur Institute, in hopes of finding clues to how its cousin triggered the global pandemic that has killed an [estimated 15 million people](#). They found whole viruses of a strain they named BANAL-236 in the feces of a Marshall's horseshoe bat. The scientists discovered that [the bat virus was capable of latching on](#) to human cells, at least in Petri dishes. The new research suggests that if the Laotian virus were to ever jump from a bat to a person, it might cause a mild stomach bug rather than a life-threatening pneumonia. The research has rekindled a longstanding debate among scientists about the wisdom of tinkering with viruses that are so closely related to a

known pathogen and much of the article centers on that debate. Scientists who favor the market scenario as the origin of SARS-CoV-2 see the new results as supporting their position. If the researchers couldn't cause BANAL-236 to mutate like SARS-CoV-2 does, they reasoned, then it's unlikely that scientists in a Wuhan lab could have done so with it, as some proponents of the "lab leak" [theory](#) have suggested. *"This is another nail in the coffin of the lab leak theory that by now should be firmly sealed in the crypt,"* said Edward Holmes, a virologist at the University of Sydney. Scientists at the Paris lab are now exploring the possibility that ancestors of SARS-CoV-2 gained an infectious transmitting site while still in wild bats. The virus might have then spread to an intermediate host or directly to people exposed to bats — like those who collect bat guano, hunt bats, or eat them.

TMR's Take: Coupled with the studies reported on in February (see [TMR March 2022-2](#)) that pinpointed the virus's origin to a corner of Wuhan's Huanan Seafood Market, it's extremely unlikely that the novel coronavirus leaked from the Wuhan Institute of Virology.



[Dr. Amazon will see you now](#), by Tina Reed, Axios, 7/21/22

TMR Topline – Amazon has announced [a \\$3.9 billion all-cash deal](#) to

purchase One Medical, adding a brick-and-mortar network of clinics to a health portfolio that already includes wearables, an online pharmacy and virtual care. While Amazon will face plenty of regulatory hurdles and some challenges in gaining consumer trust, Elizabeth Mitchell, CEO of the Purchaser Business Group on Health, has a positive view: *"Self-insured employers are paying the bill for our health care system and they simply don't get the value they should and, to date, it's been frustrating to try to work through the existing players and the big incumbents in the market. I do expect to see more of this because frankly, the industry hasn't been responsive."* [Forbes reports](#) that the deal gives One Medical a massive war chest to further expand its reach nationally and Amazon a bigger foothold into health care delivery and patient data, including access to One Medical's [employer relationships](#) and its Medicare business.

TMR's Take: Time will tell whether Amazon's latest foray into healthcare delivery will reinvent healthcare or fizzle out like Haven, Amazon's [defunct health care partnership](#) with JP Morgan Chase and Berkshire Hathaway.