

Three Minute Read™

Insights from the Healing American Healthcare Coalition™

November 2021-2



From the Editor: Covid-19 cases are increasing in the West, Upper Midwest and Northeast as the holiday season approaches, raising concerns about a winter surge. The CDC and FDA have approved booster shots for all adults; that should help to stave off a surge. To access an article, just click on the headline.



[Singapore will stop covering Covid costs for those who decline to be vaccinated.](#) by

John Yoon, New York Times, 11/9/21

TMR Topline™ - Effective 12/8, Singapore will no longer cover the medical costs of Covid-19 patients who are eligible to get vaccinated against the virus but choose not to. Those who are not eligible for the shots will be exempt from the rule, it said, including children under 12 and people with certain medical conditions. The Health Ministry is concerned that the number of severe cases, mostly among the unvaccinated, remains too high and is stretching the country's health resources.



[50 percent of people who survive Covid-19 face lingering symptoms, study finds,](#) by Linda Searing, Washington Post, 11/15/21

TMR Topline™ - At least 50% of Covid-19 survivors experience a variety of health issues for at least 6 months after their initial recovery, according to [research on the](#)

[long-term effects](#) of the disease, published in the journal JAMA Network Open. Data from 250,351 adults and children found that more than half experience a decline in general well-being, resulting in weight loss, fatigue, fever or pain. These symptoms can occur even in those who had no symptoms or just mild ones, but [additional research](#) published in a subsequent issue of the journal found that cognitive dysfunction has occurred more often among those who had more severe cases of Covid-19 and required hospitalization, and their brain fog issues have lingered for seven months or more.



[How common is belief in Covid and vaccine misinformation?](#)

[What a poll found](#) by Bailey Aldridge, McClatchy DC, 11/10/21
TMR Topline™ - The Kaiser Family Foundation poll released Nov. 8 found that 78% of respondents either believe or said they are unsure if they believe at least one of the eight myths that the poll covered. Here's the breakdown:

1. The government is exaggerating the number of Covid-19 deaths: 60%
2. Pregnant women should not get the Covid-19 vaccine: 39%
3. Deaths due to the Covid-19 vaccine are being intentionally hidden by the government: 35%
4. Covid-19 vaccines have been shown to cause infertility: 31%
5. Ivermectin is a safe and effective treatment for Covid-19: 28%
6. You can get Covid-19 from the vaccine: 24%
7. Covid-19 vaccines contain a microchip: 24%
8. Covid-19 vaccines can change your DNA: 21%



[Pfizer Says Its Antiviral Pill Is Highly Effective in Treating Covid,](#) by Rebecca Robbins, New York Times,

11/5/21; updated 11/16/21

TMR Topline – Pfizer’s [Paxlovid](#) has been found to be 89% effective at preventing severe illness among at-risk people who received the drug soon after they exhibited symptoms. Along with Merck’s [molnupiravir](#), there now are two pills seeking emergency use authorization for treating Covid-19 although the results of the Pfizer clinical trial showed a higher degree of effectiveness. The company has been in talks with a United Nations-backed nonprofit, the Medicines Patent Pool, to allow the pill to be made and sold inexpensively in such countries; Merck has already reached a similar deal.



[Regeneron's antibody drug shows protection against Covid for up to 8 months](#), Reuters, 11/8/21

TMR Topline – Regeneron Pharmaceuticals said a single dose of its REGEN-COV antibody cocktail

reduced the risk of contracting Covid-19 by 81.6 percent in a late-stage trial. It is currently authorized in the United States to treat people with mild-to-moderate Covid and for prevention of infection in those exposed to infected individuals, and others at high risk of exposure in settings such as nursing homes or prisons. Data showed that Regeneron's drug has the potential to provide long-lasting immunity from Covid infection making it particularly helpful for immunocompromised people and those unresponsive to vaccines.

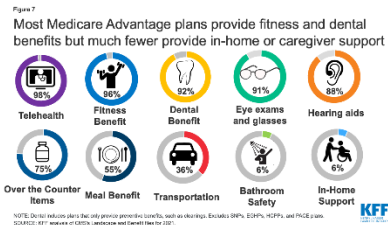
TMR's Take – While there's good news on the Covid treatment front, prevention remains the best strategy for preventing long-Covid. Ignore the misinformation and. If you haven't done so, get vaccinated!



[Costly Alzheimer's Drug Fuels Record Medicare Premium Hike](#), by Peter Sullivan, The Hill, 11/12/21

TMR Topline – The monthly

premium for Medicare Part B will increase by \$21.60, from \$148.50 in 2021 to \$170.10 in 2022. About half the increase is to make sure the program has enough money to pay for Aduhelm, Biogen's new Alzheimer's drug that will cost \$56,000/year. The FDA approved it despite experts doubts about its effectiveness. Democrats said the news shows the need to get drug prices under control, pointing to provisions in President Biden's Build Back Better plan to lower drug costs.



[Researcher: Medicare Advantage Plans Costing Billions More Than They Should](#), by Fred

Schulte, Kaiser Health Network, 11/11/21

TMR Topline™ - Richard Kronick, a former federal health policy researcher and a professor at the University of California-San Diego, said his analysis of recently released Medicare Advantage (MA) billing data indicates that Medicare overpaid private health plans by more than \$106 billion from 2010 through 2019. MA plans have [enrolled](#) nearly 27 million members, roughly 45% of those eligible for Medicare according to America's Health Insurance Plans (AHIP). MA plans offer extra benefits, such as eyeglasses and dental care, not available under original Medicare. Professor Kronick called the growth in MA costs a "systemic problem across the industry" that CMS has failed to address. With 6 million MA members Kronick estimates that United Healthcare had received excess payments of roughly \$6 billion.

"This is not small change," said [Joshua Gordon](#), director of health policy for the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, a nonpartisan group. "The problem is just getting worse and worse." MA plans are paid using a coding formula called a "risk score" that pays higher rates for sicker patients and less for those in good health. Whistleblower lawsuits and government investigations have alleged that health plans illegally manipulated risk scores by making patients appear sicker than they were or billing for medical conditions patients did not have. Cutting MA payments faces political opposition. On 10/15, 13 U.S. senators sent a [letter](#) to CMS opposing any payment reduction. Kronick said that if CMS keeps the current coding approach in place, MA spending will increase by \$600 billion over the next 9 years. Kronick estimates that as much as two thirds could be going toward insurer profits.

TMR's Take – These two articles demonstrate the lobbying power of the insurance-pharmaceutical complex. As MA enrollees, TMR's editor and publisher are aware of the tactics employed by MA plans to get 5-star ratings. When the Medicare Modernization Act passed in 2003, TMR's Editor described it as the full employment act for insurers and the profit protection act for Big Pharma. It's far beyond time to level the playing field. Let Medicare negotiate drug prices and reduce its overall cost.