

# Three Minute Read™

## Insights from the Healing American Healthcare Coalition™

August 2021-1



**From the Editor:** The articles summarized in this issue cover booster shots, the latest Commonwealth Fund rankings, Covid in children, a doomsday variant and FDA actions on biosimilar insulin and the Pfizer vaccine. To access each article, just click on the headline.



[WHO calls for a temporary moratorium on administering booster shots of Covid-19 vaccines](#), by Helen Branswell, STAT, 8/4/21

**TMR Topline™** - The World Health Organization called for a two-month moratorium on the use of Covid-19 vaccine booster shots by wealthy countries. Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said that the delay would get enough vaccine supply into COVAX, the WHO-led international distribution system, to vaccinate 10% of all countries populations, especially those at highest risk. More than 80% of the 4 billion vaccinations to date have been in high income countries. Currently it is not clear that booster doses are needed.



[U.S. plans to give extra COVID-19 shots to at-risk Americans, Fauci says](#), by Trevor Hunnicutt, Carl O'Donnell, Reuters, 8/5/21

**TMR Topline™** - The CDC is working to make third doses available sooner to immunocompromised people who may not be sufficiently protected by their existing

COVID-19 vaccinations. *"It is extremely important for us to move to get those individuals their boosters and we are now working on that,"* Fauci said. The US is joining Germany, France and Israel in giving booster shots, given rising cases resulting from the spread of the contagious Delta variant.

**TMR Take** - Why not provide booster shots to the 7 million immunocompromised Americans **and** honor the WHO's moratorium request? While Moderna and Pfizer both are urging booster shots after 6 months, data shows their vaccines retain a high degree of effectiveness. By September month-end more data will be available to decide whether booster shots are needed.



[US comes in last in health care rankings of high-income countries](#), by Tami Luhby, CNN, 8/4/21

**TMR Topline™** - The US once again ranked last among 11 high-income countries (Australia, Canada, France, Germany, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and the UK). The Commonwealth Fund's 7<sup>th</sup> [study](#) since 2004 has consistently ranked the US last overall. Norway, the Netherlands and Australia ranked best. The US ranked last in access to health care, equity and [outcomes](#) despite spending 16.8% of GDP on healthcare compared with a range of 9.1-11.7% of GDP by the other 10 countries (2019 data). It is the only one not to have [universal health insurance coverage](#).

**TMR Take** - Five years ago, your Editor wrote a three-part series, *"American Healthcare – Worst Value in the Developed World?"* documenting concerns that, despite having the best-equipped hospitals and most thoroughly trained physicians, the US delivers high-cost care of mediocre quality. Sadly, little has changed, and the US has the highest infant and maternal mortality rates among the 11 high-income countries, as well as the highest rate of avoidable deaths and lowest life expectancy at age 60.



## [The F.D.A. could grant full approval to Pfizer's vaccine by early September](#), by Sharon LaFraniere

and Noah Weiland, New York Times, 8/4/21

**TMR Topline™** - The FDA has accelerated its timetable to fully approve the Pfizer-BioNTech coronavirus vaccine, aiming to complete the process by Labor Day. The agency said its leaders recognized that approval might increase public confidence and had *"taken an all-hands-on-deck approach"* to the work. Recent KFF polls have found that 30% of unvaccinated people said that they would be more likely to take a fully approved vaccine.

**TMR Take** – Moderna also has applied for full FDA approval. With full FDA approval, employer vaccine mandates will be on firm legal ground and remove a key reason millions of Americans are delaying vaccination.



## [COVID-19 cases in children surge 84% in 1 week, study finds](#), by Patrick Reilly, New York Post, 8/5/21

**TMR Topline™** - the American Academy of Pediatrics [AAP] teamed up with Children's Hospitals of America to help collect and share data on pediatric Covid-19 cases. They were 14.3% of cumulative cases; that share rose to 19% for the week ended 7/29. While severe illness due to Covid-19 is uncommon among children, AAP is concerned about the millions of children returning to school over the next month and expressed an *"urgent need"* to learn more about the pandemic's long-term effects on children's physical, mental and emotional health. According to the CDC, 526 children have died from the virus; 4.2 million children have tested positive for the virus.



## [A Doomsday COVID Variant Worse Than Delta and Lambda May Be Coming, Scientists Say](#), by David H. Freeman, Newsweek, 8/4/21

**TMR Topline™** - Scientists keep underestimating the coronavirus. Delta, more than any other variant, has reset scientists' understanding of how quickly a virus can evolve into devastating new forms. Thanks to Delta's infectiousness, and the huge number of

people whose refusal or inability to get vaccinated leaves them primed to become living Covid-19 mutation labs, the conditions are ripe to produce yet more, potentially more dangerous, variants in the coming months. Delta is already one of the most transmissible viruses ever encountered, falling short only of the measles. There's anecdotal evidence that more young people are getting severely ill with Delta than has been the case with previous variants. The 1918 flu pandemic preferentially killed younger adults. It's not yet clear whether Delta is hitting the younger harder. Thus far, the vaccines remain highly effective in preventing Delta from causing severe illness leading to hospitalization or death. Fortunately, the virus will at some point run out of ways to become nastier, thanks to the relatively simple structure of the spike protein, which can only be mutated in a few hundred different ways, most of which won't make the virus more harmful.

**TMR Take** – The well-researched and lengthy Newsweek article is both alarming and reassuring. It's worth a read. Currently, 1,600 children are hospitalized with Covid-19, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis has made it illegal for school boards to mandate mask requirements in schools, and the state has the 3rd highest per capita rate of Covid-19 infections in the world behind Louisiana and Botswana. Gov. Greg Abbott's Texas is not far behind, and also banning mask mandates. Last century, the duo of Abbott & Costello was frightfully funny; today, the duo of Abbott & DeSantis is just frightening.

## [FDA approves use of biosimilar insulin as automatic substitute for costly brand-name](#), by Aimee Pichee, CBS/AP, 7/29/21



**TMR Topline™** - The FDA has given its approval to Semglee, the first biosimilar cleared as a substitute for Lantus, a widely used fast-acting insulin. The FDA agreed that Viatris Inc.'s Semglee was interchangeable with brand name Lantus. Unlike generic drugs, biosimilar drugs are *"highly similar"* [duplications](#). Semglee injector pens cost about \$150-190 without insurance for a typical month's supply, compared to \$340-520 for the same supply of Lantus. Acting FDA Director Janet Woodcock said: *"This is a momentous day for people who rely daily on insulin for treatment of diabetes, as biosimilar and interchangeable biosimilar products have the potential to greatly reduce health care costs."* **TMR** agrees.