



# Around the world of U.S. healthcare in 360 words or less

Center for Healthcare Regulatory Insight



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Editor's note

*This note is produced every Friday by the [KPMG Center for Healthcare Regulatory Insight](#) and is intended to be short and succinct, no more than 360 words, to provide a digestible bite of healthcare and life sciences news from the past week. Please share this email with colleagues and other interested individuals, and encourage them to [subscribe to our mailing list here](#).*

We welcome your feedback. Let us know if KPMG can help. Please [reply here to me](#), **Larry Kocot**, principal and national leader, KPMG Center for Healthcare Regulatory Insight or simply reply to this email with any comments or requests.



## Special Supplement: COVID-19 News

In light of the continuing daily volume of COVID-19 activity and news, we have summarized [COVID-19 news for the week in this special supplement](#).



## Healthcare regulatory news

ONC and The Sequoia Project [published](#) the [Trusted Exchange Framework](#) and [Common Agreement](#) to accelerate [electronic health information exchange](#).

FTC and Department of Justice are [seeking comment on bolstering merger oversight](#).

HHS awarded [\\$103M to address healthcare worker burnout/wellness](#).



## Healthcare law and policy news

President Biden [acknowledged Democrats may have to break up Build Back Better](#) for passage.

Francisco Health will [acquire IBM's Watson Health data and analytics business](#)... DaVita [acquired MedSleuth](#)... [GlaxoSmithKline rejected Unilever's most recent offer to buy its consumer health business](#) (\$68B)... UCB [will acquire Zogenix \(\\$1.9B\)](#)... Encompass Health is [spinning off its home health/hospice business](#).

Teva Pharmaceuticals [will pay \\$420M to settle](#) generic drug price fixing allegations... Endo International [will pay up to \\$68M to resolve opioid-related claims](#) in Florida... Gilead alleged a network of drug suppliers/distributors [sold counterfeit versions](#) of its HIV treatments... Sanofi asked an appeals court to [revive antitrust claims against Mylan over allegedly creating/holding](#) a monopoly for EpiPen.

Bristol Myers Squibb became the 12<sup>th</sup> drug manufacturer to [restrict 340B discounts](#) to contract pharmacies... Mark Cuban Cost Plus Drug Company launched [its online pharmacy with 100 generic](#) drugs.

A [CBO analysis found](#) average net prescription prices fell 2009-2018 in Medicare (\$57 to \$50) and Medicaid (\$63 to \$48), largely attributable to increased generic use (75% to 90%)... National Health Interview Survey [data show 5.3M Medicare beneficiaries](#) had difficulty affording medications in 2019; Black and Latino adults reported 1.5 to 2 times higher difficulty than whites.

CBO reported [greater market power leads to higher physician/hospital prices](#) for commercial insurers, as compared to Medicare fee-for-service... Altarum found [health care prices grew just 2.3% year-over-year](#) in December, well below CPI (7%).

MedPAC [reported 46% of Medicare beneficiaries are enrolled](#) in Medicare Advantage (MA)... Axios reported [roughly three-quarters of MA beneficiaries are covered by six plans](#)... A [Nature study](#) found just 6% of biologic medicine-related patents cover active ingredients, suggesting [widespread use of patent "thickets" to prevent biosimilar competition](#)... A [Health Affairs study](#) found Black patients were [2.54 times likelier than white patients to be described with stigmatizing](#) terms in EHRs.

A [record 41,354 Americans underwent an organ transplant](#) in 2021.

A House Oversight subcommittee gave HHS [a “D” grade on cybersecurity](#).



Questions or comments, please send to [us-hcinsight@kpmg.com](mailto:us-hcinsight@kpmg.com).

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# COVID-19 News Supplement

Center for Healthcare Regulatory Insight



## COVID-19 by the Numbers

[Nearly 70 million COVID-19 cases have been documented](#) in the US, with a death toll over 860,000... The country is now [averaging roughly 745,000 cases/day](#) over the past week, down from nearly 800,000/day a week ago; COVID-related deaths are averaging approximately 1,800/day over the past 7 days.... [461 out of every 1 million COVID-19 patients](#) in the country were hospitalized as of January 18.

Over 530 million COVID-19 [vaccine doses have been administered](#) in the US (just over 300,000/day over the past week)... Roughly 250 million Americans ([85% of Americans 12 and older](#)) have received at least one COVID-19 vaccine dose; roughly 210 million Americans are fully vaccinated (72% of Americans 12 and older); over 80 million Americans have received a booster or additional dose... CDC data show that [only 19% of children ages 5 to 11](#) are fully vaccinated; 28% have received at least one dose... CDC data show that [unvaccinated adults 65 and older who are infected with COVID-19 are 49 times more likely to be hospitalized](#) than those in the same group who are vaccinated and have gotten a booster dose.

## Executive and Administrative Action

HHS Secretary Xavier Becerra [extended the public health emergency declaration](#) by another 90 days, effective January 16.

The Biden Administration [launched a website](#) for Americans to request rapid COVID-19 tests be shipped to their home addresses.

CDC [updated its masking guidance](#) to encourage more Americans to wear N95 and KN95 masks to help reduce spread of COVID-19... The Administration unveiled a [plan to distribute hundreds of millions of free, high-quality masks](#), beginning with 400 million non-surgical N95s, through pharmacies and community sites.

The Administration [formed the Pandemic Innovation Task Force](#) to prepare new countermeasures for the emergence of future COVID-19 variants and other pandemic threats.

A federal court [dismissed a lawsuit filed by Texas](#) challenging the Administration's healthcare worker vaccine mandate, effectively making the requirement enforceable across the country. Health care workers in the state [must be fully vaccinated by March 21](#).... Following last week's Supreme Court decision lifting the injunction, CMS [guidance gives medical facilities in two dozen states until March 15](#) to get their employees fully vaccinated against COVID-19. Medical facilities in the remaining 25 states that did not challenge the mandate must meet the vaccine requirement by February 28.

GAO [made 5 recommendations on improving transition](#) of Countermeasures Acceleration Group (formerly Operation Warp Speed) responsibilities, including vaccine activities, over to HHS.

## Healthcare Law, Business, and Policy News

A KFF analysis found that [just six of the country's 13 largest health insurers directly cover the cost](#) of rapid at-home COVID-19 tests (i.e., no upfront costs for enrollees).

CDC data show that both vaccination and prior infection offered strong protection against COVID-19 during the Delta variant wave, but individuals [who had previously recovered from COVID-19 were less likely](#) to be infected or hospitalized than those who were vaccinated alone... A [CDC study found Hispanic patients](#) received COVID-19 monoclonal antibody therapy 54% less often than non-Hispanic patients, while Black, Asian, or other race patients received the treatment 22%, 48%, and 47% less often, respectively, than did White patients from November 2020 through August 2021.

An NIH-funded study found that [COVID-19 vaccines do not appear to hinder](#) fertility.

A Morning Consult poll found that [56% of adults and 55% of private sector workers support employer vaccine](#) mandates.

## Surveillance, Testing, and Treatment

White House Chief Medical Advisor and NIAID Director Anthony Fauci said the FDA [could authorize Pfizer-BioNTech's COVID-19 vaccine for children](#) under age 5 in the next month.

The FDA plans to [participate in an internationally coordinated program](#) to decide if, when, and how to update COVID-19 vaccines... FDA Biologics Center Director Peter Marks predicted [that individuals will need to receive an annual booster COVID-19 vaccine](#), similar to the flu vaccine.

An Israeli study found a fourth dose of Pfizer-BioNTech's COVID-19 vaccine [raised antibody levels, although not enough to prevent infection](#) with the Omicron variant.

[A pre-print study on mix-and-matching](#) COVID-19 vaccines found that most combinations appeared to increase antibodies against the Omicron variant, [except two doses of Johnson & Johnson's](#) vaccine.

Covax has [now delivered 1 billion COVID-19 vaccine doses to 144 lower-income countries](#); 88 of the 194 World Health Organization's member countries have vaccinated less than 40% of their population... Covax plans to deliver the [next 1 billion doses twice as fast](#).

Pfizer reported that its [antiviral pill was effective against the Omicron variant](#) in three separate lab tests.

Merck and Ridgeback Biotherapeutics [signed an agreement with UNICEF to supply up to 3 million courses of their antiviral pill](#) for distribution in 100 low- and middle-income countries... A group of 27 generic drug manufacturers also [reached an agreement with the Medicines Patent Portal to manufacture the antiviral](#) for low- and middle-income countries.