Today I heard some encouraging news. The CEO of one of the largest drug store chains reports that compared to last year, there is a 400% increase in the number of people coming in for their flu shot. This is positive for the obvious reason -- more are protected against flu this year -- but it also indicates that the public has growing awareness that this fall and upcoming winter are unlike any we have seen before and they should avail themselves of all protective measures. No one should risk getting the flu and then potentially getting COVID-19 on top of that.

**Cool Tool:** Here is a [website for identifying all of the locations you can get ANY vaccine](http://www.vaccinefinder.com) (wish I knew about this last year when I was on the hunt for the shingles vaccine).

**Now Is the Time to Update Your Vaccines:** HHS released an announcement on [updating vaccines before the flu season begins](https://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/anticipating/plans/2019-2020-flu-plan.htm). This year’s flu season may be complicated by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Because some of the symptoms of flu and COVID-19 are similar, it may be hard to tell the difference between them based on symptoms alone, and testing may be needed to help confirm a diagnosis.

**In JAMA: OWS on Developing Safe and Effective COVID Vaccines - Operation Warp Speed’s Strategy and Approach:** Dr. Moncef Slaoui and Dr. Matthew Hepburn wrote an article for The New England Journal of Medicine on [Developing Safe and Effective COVID-19 Vaccines](https://nejm.org). The article serves as a great overview of the work that OWS is doing to advance development, manufacturing, and distribution of vaccines, therapeutics, and diagnostics to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, OWS’s role is to enable, accelerate, harmonize, and advise the companies developing the selected vaccines. The companies will execute the clinical or process development and manufacturing plans, while OWS leverages the full capacity of the U.S. government to ensure that no technical, logistic, or financial hurdles hinder vaccine development or deployment.

**Funding**

-Trump Administration Announces the Distribution of $2.5 Billion to Nursing Homes for COVID-19 Relief Funding: HHS is announcing it has now distributed almost $2.5 billion of a planned $5 billion distribution to nursing homes to support increased testing, staffing, and personal protective
equipment (PPE) needs. This funding allocation was made through the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) as a targeted distribution from the $175 billion Provider Relief program funded through the bipartisan CARES Act and the Paycheck Protection Program and Health Care Enhancement Act. This distribution of almost $2.5 billion in additional funding to over 15,000 nursing homes nationwide supplements the $4.9 billion that was previously distributed to skilled nursing facilities. HHS plans on distributing another $2 billion to nursing homes later this fall based on certain performance indicators that will be shared in the future.

**Testing and Contact Tracing**

FDA Authorizes First Diagnostic Test Where Results Can Be Read Directly From Testing Card: FDA issued an emergency use authorization for the first antigen test where results can be read directly from the testing card, a similar design to some pregnancy tests. This simple design is fast and efficient for healthcare providers and patients and does not need the use of an analyzer. The emergency use authorization was issued to Abbott Diagnostics Scarborough, Inc for its BinaxNOW COVID-19 Ag Card.

Investigating a COVID-19 Case: CDC updated a step-by-step guide for conducting a COVID-19 case investigation, including operational questions that a jurisdiction should consider while planning their activities.

Contact Tracing for COVID-19: CDC updated steps and consideration that jurisdictions can use to develop a protocol for the tracing of close contacts. CDC also updated Notification of Exposure: A Contact Tracer's Guide for COVID-19.

Testing Updates: To date, the FDA has currently authorized 224 tests under EUAs; these include 181 molecular tests, 40 antibody tests, and 3 antigen tests.

**Treatment**

BARDA Establishes Four New Partnerships to Explore Innovative Vaccine Delivery Technologies: BARDA will explore the feasibility of two innovative approaches with four new partners: Esperovax, Inc., the University of Connecticut, Vaxess Technologies, and Verndari, Inc. The novel routes of administration they are developing could reduce the dependence on needles and syringes that are used to deliver vaccine via intramuscular injection. Instead, a wearable skin patch or oral option for vaccines may support rapid, large-scale immunization while reducing the strain on the manufacturing supply chain.
FDA Warns Consumers About Hand Sanitizer Packaged in Food and Drink Containers: FDA is warning consumers about alcohol-based hand sanitizers that are being packaged in containers that may appear as food or drinks and may put consumers at risk of serious injury or death if ingested. The agency has discovered that some hand sanitizers are being packaged in beer cans, children’s food pouches, water bottles, juice bottles and vodka bottles. Additionally, the FDA has found hand sanitizers that contain food flavors, such as chocolate or raspberry. FDA also released information on if your hand sanitizer is on FDA’s list of products you should not use. Both resources are provided in multiple languages on FDA’s website.

CMS Updates

CMS Releases Additional Frequently Asked Questions on the Treatment of Coronavirus Disease Relief Payments on the Medicare Cost Report: CMS released an additional list of FAQs to Medicare providers regarding the HHS Provider Relief Fund and the Small Business Administration’s Paycheck Protection Program payments, also referred to as COVID-19 relief payments. The FAQs provide guidance to providers on how to report provider relief fund payments, uninsured charges reimbursed through the Uninsured Program administered by Health Resources and Services Administration, and Small Business Administration (SBA) Loan Forgiveness amounts. The FAQs also address that provider relief fund payments should not offset expenses on the Medicare Cost Report.

CMS Posts Guidance for Implementing New Testing Requirements in Nursing Homes and Labs: CMS released guidance for nursing homes and clinical laboratories to assist in enhancing their abilities to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 to nursing home residents and their front line staff. This guidance requires all nursing homes to test all residents and staff for COVID-19. A new survey tool is included with this guidance as well. A second memo recommends that facilities that conduct patient lab tests use authorized detection antigens as another deterrent in infection prevention and control (IPC). There are detailed memos on the laboratory testing update and nursing home testing update available for review.

PPE

About Masks: CDC updated their guidance for wearing and selecting masks.

Information for Specific Populations

HHS Secretary Azar Declares Public Health Emergency in California due to Wildfires: HHS Secretary Alex Azar today declared a public health emergency in California due to wildfires, following President Trump’s major disaster declaration for the state. The public health emergency declaration and related waiver give the HHS CMS beneficiaries and their healthcare providers and suppliers greater flexibility in meeting emergency health needs created by the wildfires. Air quality and extensive smoke produced by the wildfires can present a significant health threat for people with asthma and other lung conditions and can increase demands on the healthcare system, a particular concern as healthcare providers respond to COVID-19 cases in the state. The Disaster Distress Helpline 1-800-985-5990 provides immediate crisis counseling to people in northern California affected by wildfires.

HHS Secretary Azar Declares Public Health Emergencies in Louisiana and Texas due to Hurricane Laura: Following the lead of President Trump’s emergency declarations for Louisiana and Texas, HHS Secretary Alex M. Azar today declared public health emergencies in the two states as Hurricane Laura continues its track in the Gulf of Mexico. The declarations and related waivers give HHS’ CMS beneficiaries and their
healthcare providers and suppliers greater flexibility in meeting emergency health needs. Public health and safety information for responding to a hurricane during a pandemic can be found on CDC’s website on Hurricanes and COVID-19.

**Interim Operational Considerations for Public Health Management of Healthcare Workers Exposed to or with Suspected or Confirmed COVID-19:** CDC updated recommendations to be used by healthcare facilities and public health authorities in non-US healthcare settings, particularly focusing on low- and middle-income countries, assisting with the management of HCWs exposed to a person with confirmed or suspected COVID-19.

**Data on COVID-19 During Pregnancy:** CDC updated the data they are tracking on COVID-19 during pregnancy to protect women and their babies.

**People with Asthma:** CDC updated information for people with asthma. People with moderate to severe asthma may be at higher risk of getting very sick from COVID-19.

**The Role of Healthcare Providers in Getting Children Up-to-Date on Vaccines:** The Office of Minority Health at HHS released a blogpost by RADM Dr. Felicia Collins for families on catching up and getting ahead on childhood vaccinations.

**New Episode of Learning Curve:** HHS released a new episode of "Learning Curve", where Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs Michael Caputo sits down with IHS Director Michael Weahkee to discuss the COVID-19 response in Indian Country, growing up in New Mexico, and the Public Health Service Commissioned Corps.

**Research Updates**

**NIAID Establishes Centers for Research in Emerging Infectious Diseases:** The National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) today announced that it has awarded 11 grants with a total first-year value of approximately $17 million to establish the Centers for Research in Emerging Infectious Diseases (CREID). The global network will involve multidisciplinary investigations into how and where viruses and other pathogens emerge from wildlife and spillover to cause disease in people. NIAID intends to provide approximately $82 million over 5 years to support the network. “The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic serves as a potent reminder of the devastation that can be wrought when a new virus infects humans for the first time,” said NIAID Director Anthony S. Fauci.

Stay Safe.

Laura

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