



Health Policy Briefing

October 24, 2022

ACIP Recommends COVID-19 Shots for Immunization Schedules

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) voted unanimously last week to add the Moderna, Pfizer, and Novavax COVID-19 vaccines to the 2023 childhood, adolescent, and adult immunization schedules. The schedules are updated by ACIP every fall and go into effect the following year. While the recommended schedules are not a mandate, states use the CDC's guidance to determine required vaccines, particularly for school-aged children. Following the ACIP vote, many congressional Republicans, including House Energy and Commerce Committee Ranking Member Cathy McMorris Rodgers (R-Wash.), called on governors to not mandate the COVID-19 vaccine for children. "Rather than work to rebuild the trust it has eroded with the American people, this is another example of the CDC issuing COVID-19 recommendations without being transparent with their data and the science," Rodgers stated. "The CDC owes parents answers as to why its recommended vaccine schedule for COVID-19 is out of step with other countries who have said there is 'no clear benefit' to vaccinating young children." Earlier in the week, ACIP also voted to add Moderna Inc.'s and Pfizer Inc.'s vaccines for children six months to 18-years-old to the federal Vaccines for Children Program, which purchases and distributes vaccines to state and local health agencies to provide to children who are uninsured or underinsured at no cost.

Select Coronavirus Panel Releases Report on Trump Administration's CDC Interference

The House Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis has released its latest [report](#) detailing how the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) changed the editorial process of its Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Reports (MMWR) in response to the demands from the Trump administration. At least five MMWR reports were changed or delayed by officials within the administration, who allegedly tried to interfere with at least 19 different reports due to their potential political ramifications for the President. The panel's investigation details numerous attempts by political appointees to interfere with the operations of the CDC, including by blocking the agency from holding its weekly press briefings and misusing its Title 42 quarantine authority to close the southern border.

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GAO Makes Recommendations on SNS Risks

The Government Accountability Office (GAO) released a new [report](#) last week revealing that annual reviews of the Strategic National Stockpile (SNS) were not completed from 2020 through 2022. As a result, any purchases made have been based on past reviews and the discretion of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). While HHS has completed reviews for 2023 and 2024, GAO found that the reviews did not meet most statutory requirements. GAO states that the stockpile contains most recommended medical countermeasures, but often not in the recommended quantities.

Administration Releases National Biodefense Strategy

President Joe Biden signed a national security memorandum last week directing government agencies to implement the [National Biodefense Strategy](#) and to incorporate its objectives into future budgets. The newly released strategy aims to ensure that the U.S. is prepared to rapidly detect and respond to the next large-scale viral or biological threat. It calls for a test for a new pathogen to be produced within 12 hours of its discovery and for enough vaccine to immunize the nation to be produced within 130 days. The plan prioritizes the expansion and training of the public health workforce and outlines a strategy for preventing pandemics and biological incidents that come from both accidental and deliberate sources.

Federal Officials Elected to National Academy of Medicine

Nine Biden administration officials have been elected to the National Academy of Medicine, a top honor in health and medicine recognizing outstanding professional achievement and a commitment to service. One hundred [new members](#) were elected to the Academy's 2022 academic class, including

- Rachel Levine, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) assistant secretary for health (ASH);
- Liz Fowler, director, Center for Medicare and Medicaid Innovation (CMMI);
- Carlos Blanco, director, division of epidemiology, services, and prevention research at the National Institute on Drug Abuse, National Institutes of Health (NIH);
- Namandje N. Bumpus, chief scientist, Food and Drug Administration (FDA); and professor of pharmacology, Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine;
- Eugene V. Koonin, evolutionary genomics group leader and NIH distinguished investigator, computational biology branch, National Center for Biotechnology Information, National Library of Medicine, NIH;
- Peter Wayne Marks, director, Center for Biologics Evaluation and Research (CBER), FDA;
- John N. Nkengasong, global AIDS coordinator and special representative for global health, President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, Department of State;
- Bruce J. Tromberg, director, National Institute of Biomedical Imaging and Bioengineering, NIH;
- Jennifer Webster-Cyriaque, deputy director, National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research, and NIH laboratory chief, viral oral infections in immunosuppression and cancer, National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases.

Studentaid.gov Goes Live

The Biden administration [launched](#) the application for federal student loan debt relief last week at [studentaid.gov](#). However, at this time, debt discharges are blocked due to a recent court order. The federal student loan debt relief program will provide eligible borrowers with full or partial loan relief of up to \$20,000 to Federal Pell Grant recipients and up to \$10,000 to non-Pell Grant recipients. Individuals who made less than \$125,000 in 2021 or 2020, and families that made less than \$250,000 in 2021 or 2020, qualify for debt relief. This one-time debt relief is provided by the U.S. Department of Education as part of the Biden-Harris administration student debt relief plan. The application will remain open through December 31, 2023. Applications will continue to be reviewed and applicants will not need to reapply should the ability to process discharges begin.

Recently Introduced Health Legislation

H.R.9187 — To rename the program under part C of title XVIII of the Social Security Act, and for other purposes. Sponsor: Pocan, Mark [Rep.-D-WI-2]; Committees: House - Ways and Means; Energy and Commerce

H.R.9186 — To authorize the Secretary of Agriculture to provide grants to States to address contamination by perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) on farms, and for other purposes. Sponsor: Pingree, Chellie [Rep.-D-ME-1]; Committees: House - Agriculture

H.R.9178 — To amend the Controlled Substances Act to fix a technical error in the definitions. Sponsor: Burchett, Tim [Rep.-R-TN-2]; Committees: House - Energy and Commerce; Judiciary

H.Res.1437 — Expressing support for the goals of “World Sight Day” by promoting the importance of accessible, affordable, and inclusive eye care. Sponsor: Veasey, Marc A. [Rep.-D-TX-33]; Committees: House - Energy and Commerce

H.Res.1434 — Reaffirming the preemptive authority of the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act (21 U.S.C. 301 et seq.) and the Public Health Service Act (42 U.S.C. 201 et seq.) (including regulations thereunder) with respect to State laws that inhibit access to or use of any reproductive health product. Sponsor: Jones, Mondaire [Rep.-D-NY-17]; Committees: House - Energy and Commerce; Judiciary

H.R.9200 — To amend the Public Health Service Act to increase access to accelerated nursing degree programs, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Stevens, Haley M. [Rep.-D-MI-11]; Committees: House - Energy and Commerce

H.R.9201 — To amend the Public Health Service Act to direct the Secretary of Health and Human Services, acting through the Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, to promote mental wellness and resilience and heal mental health, behavioral health, and psychosocial problems through age and culturally appropriate community programs, and award grants for the purpose of establishing, operating, or expanding community-based mental wellness and resilience programs, and for other purposes; Sponsor: Tonko, Paul [Rep.-D-NY-20]; Committees: House - Energy and Commerce