

Three Minute Read™

Insights from the Healing American Healthcare Coalition™

Will 2025 mark the start of another pandemic? Lown Institute announces 2024 Shkreli Awards!

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From the Editor: Experts are concerned as the H5N1 virus mutates; Musk and RFK Jr. disagree on how to make America healthy. Click the headline for the full article. Click [here](#) to subscribe to TMR.



[Bird Flu Samples From Very Ill Patient Had 'Concerning' Mutations](#), by Benjamin Mueller, New

York Times, 1/27/24

TMR Topline – [Scores of people](#) in the US have contracted bird flu this year, most of them from infected cows or poultry. Nasal and throat swabs taken from a severely ill southwest Louisiana patient contained [mutations](#) that in theory might help the H5N1 virus infect people more easily. The CDC reported that the mutations seemed to develop as the virus adapted to its human host and were not present in H5N1 samples from the poultry flock that infected the patient. There is concern that as the flu season continues the viruses might swap genes in someone infected with both H5N1 and the seasonal flu, potentially making the bird flu capable of spreading between people as efficiently as the seasonal flu does. While the CDC scientists described the mutations as “concerning,” there has been no evidence yet of human-to-human transmission, and the viruses from the Louisiana patient were closely related to so-called candidate viruses that already are available for making bird flu vaccine.



[Bird flu kills 20 big cats at Washington sanctuary now under quarantine](#), by Angie Orellana Hernandez,

Washington Post, 12/27/24

TMR Topline – The Wild Felid Advocacy Center in Shelton WA has temporarily closed after a devastating bird flu outbreak killed most of its animals, including tigers, cougars and leopards, after developing pneumonia-like symptoms. Home to 37 big cats, 20 died from the disease. Authorities are investigating how the big cats contracted bird flu, such as consuming contaminated meat or water or coming into contact with infected migratory birds. According to the CDC, bird flu has been reported in 50 states since 2022 across different wild bird species, including terrestrial, seabird, shorebird and migratory. The sanctuary will be closed until March while volunteers decontaminate the facility.



[How America Lost Control of the Bird Flu, Setting the Stage for Another Pandemic](#), by Amy Maxmen, KFF Health News, 12/20/24

TMR Topline – Nearly a year into the first outbreak of the bird flu among cattle, the virus shows no sign of slowing. The government failed to eliminate the virus on dairy farms when it was confined to a handful of states by quickly identifying infected cows and taking measures to keep their infections from spreading. Now at least 875 herds across 16 states have tested positive. KFF Health News interviewed nearly 70 government officials, farmers and farm workers, and researchers with expertise in virology, pandemics, veterinary medicine, and more to understand how bird flu got out of hand. Key problems identified included deference to the farm industry, eroded public health budgets, neglect for the safety of agriculture workers, and the sluggish pace of federal interventions. Although the USDA announced a [federal order](#) to test milk nationwide, it should have happened months ago.

Dairy industry experts estimate that the virus kills 2-5% of infected cows and reduces a herd's milk production by about 20%. Worse, the outbreak poses the threat of a pandemic. Just a [few mutations](#) could allow the bird flu to spread between people. The government's handling of the outbreak reveals cracks in the US health security system that would allow other risky new pathogens to take

root. *"This virus may not be the one that takes off,"* said Maria Van Kerkhove, director of the emerging diseases group at the WHO. *"But this is a real fire exercise right now, and it demonstrates what needs to be improved."*

TMR's Take: The KFF report is detailed and disturbing. The US was extremely critical of China for its handling of the novel coronavirus – it's time to look in the mirror and reflect on the US government's failure to deal quickly with the H5N1 outbreak before the virus mutates and spreads between people. The Louisiana patient, who was over 65 and had underlying medical conditions, [died 1/6](#), marking the first such fatality in the US.



[Study retracted years after it set off an infamous COVID-19 treatment scandal](#), by Eduardo Cuevas, USA

Today, 12/18/24

TMR Topline – The International Journal of Antimicrobial Agents [retracted the March 2020 study](#) that introduced the world to hydroxychloroquine early in the Covid-19 pandemic. The early study of 36 patients touted the antimalarial drug as a possible treatment for the novel coronavirus. Follow-up studies failed to confirm its findings, leading to the retraction. [Hydroxychloroquine](#) has been linked to serious side effects, including cardiac arrest, heart rhythm issues, as well as liver failure and kidney disorders. The FDA issued a June 2020 [warning](#) for its use to treat a Covid-19 infection after President Trump had touted its use. The drug is used safely to [tamp down over-active immune responses](#) in rheumatoid arthritis and lupus, as well as to treat and prevent malaria. Its use to treat Covid-19 [sometimes made it difficult](#) for those patients to access the drug.



[A Rift in Trump World Over How to Make America Healthier](#), by Gina Kolata, New York Times, 12/19/24

TMR Topline – Trump advisor Elon Musk and Robert F. Kennedy Jr., nominated to serve as HHS Secretary, disagree on how to address Americans obesity. It has risen from 12% in 1991 to over [40%](#) of adults. In an interview on CNBC Kennedy [told Jim Cramer](#), *"The first line of response should be lifestyle."* Elon Musk wrote on X, *"Nothing would do more to improve the health, lifespan and quality of life for Americans than making GLP inhib-*

itors super low cost to the public." Health and nutrition researchers say they would prefer obesity to be treated through lifestyle changes alone, but they are not optimistic. Eating well is easier said than done, and researchers point to a history of attempts to teach people to change their diet and exercise habits. Multiple studies showed promise but failed over time as participants reverted to their old eating habits, losing the health benefits they achieved during the studies. Mr. Kennedy believes that it is wrong to use pharmaceuticals to manage obesity and related issues that are tied to unhealthy lifestyle and ultra processed foods. Mr. Musk, [who says he has used Wegovy](#), applauds the power of the new drugs to improve health and treat the seeming intractability of obesity.



[Shkreli Awards catalog 2024's worst actors in healthcare](#), by Aaron Toleos, Lown Institute, 1/7/25

TMR Topline – The independent healthcare think tank released the [8th edition of its Shkreli Awards](#), given each year to perpetrators of the most egregious examples of profiteering and dysfunction in healthcare. Named for infamous "pharma bro" Martin Shkreli, who raised Daraprim's price 5,000% after obtaining manufacturing rights, the 2024 awards include:

10. Texas medical school allegedly neglects to notify next of kin before selling body parts of deceased;
9. Out of the mouths of babes; a taste for tongue-tie cutting intensifies;
8. Pain patients shocked by device maker's billing practices;
7. Emergency flight ends with \$100K surprise for infant's family;
6. Rivers of cash flow from a Medicare catheter con;
5. No cash, no credit, no chemo: private equity hospital's passion for profits sends cancer patients packing;
4. Oncologist leaves unconscionable trail of alleged misdeeds, some of them deadly;
3. Drug company pursues high dose of profits despite risks to patients;
2. Corporate healthcare behemoth exercises crushing power; and
1. Wreck-it Ralph: CEO follows private equity playbook to bankrupt community hospitals while pocketing plenty.

TMR's Take: You can't make this stuff up! America's healthcare system continues to be a disgrace among high-income countries: high cost, mediocre outcomes.