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RFK Jr. – Let Bird Flu Spread! Covid Pandemic 5 Years Later

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From the Editor: Covid reaches endemic status as the US battles bird flu and its worst measles outbreak this century. Also, Covid lockdowns, Optum's PA promise and Medicare site-neutral payments. Click on the headline for the full article; subscribe to **TMR** [here](#).



[RFK Jr. Suggests Letting Bird Flu Spread](#), by HealthDay, U.S. News & World Report, 3/19/25
TMR Topline – HHS Secretary [Robert F.](#)

[Kennedy Jr.](#) recently suggested that instead of culling infected birds, farmers should instead allow the virus to run through flocks to identify naturally immune birds. Agriculture Secretary [Brooke Rollins](#) has also expressed interest in testing the idea. Veterinary experts say this could backfire, warning that allowing the virus to spread could increase the risk of it mutating. Kennedy has suggested that some poultry may have natural immunity, but experts disagree. [Dr. Gail Hansen](#), a former state veterinarian for Kansas, told the New York Times, “*The way we raise birds now, there’s not a lot of genetic variability. They’re all the same bird, basically.*”

Kennedy Links Measles Outbreak to Poor Diet and Health, Citing Fringe Theories
In a recent interview, the health secretary also suggested that the measles vaccine had harmed children in West Texas, center of an outbreak.



[Kennedy Links Measles Outbreak to Poor Diet and Health, Citing Fringe Theories](#), by Teddy Rosenbluth, New York Times, 3/10/25
TMR Topline – HHS Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. outlined a [strategy](#) for containing the measles outbreak in West Texas, suggesting that measles vaccine injuries were more common than known, contrary to [extensive research](#). He cheered on questionable treatments like [cod liver oil](#), and said that local doctors had achieved “*almost miraculous and instantaneous*” recoveries with steroids or antibiotics. He

claimed that it was “*very difficult*” for measles to kill a healthy person, and that malnutrition played a role in the Texas outbreak. Gaines County Dr. Wendell Parkey, with many Mennonite patients, said the idea that the community was malnourished was mistaken. Mennonites often avoid processed foods, raise their own livestock and make their own bread, he noted. “*They’re the healthiest people out here*,” he said. “*Nutritionally, I would put them up against anybody.*” Kennedy plans to have HHS conduct clinical trials on several unproven treatments for measles, including a steroid, budesonide; an antibiotic called clarithromycin; and cod liver oil, which he said was “*the safest application of vitamin A.*”



[White House withdraws nomination for David Weldon to head CDC](#), by Tom Howell, Jr. The Washington Times, 3/13/25

TMR Topline – The White House has withdrawn former Florida Congressman [Dave Weldon’s](#) nomination to lead the CDC. Dr. Weldon is a physician who served from 1995 to 2009. He faced a unique problem: as a vaccine skeptic, he had focused on finding links between vaccines and conditions like autism during his time in Congress. Given the current measles outbreak in the Southwest, primarily among unvaccinated children, his nomination became untenable



[Five years since the pandemic began, covid may now be endemic, experts say](#), by Lindsey Bever and Catilin Gilbert, Washington Post, 3/13/25

TMR Topline – At last - US health experts said Covid-19 is now more consistent with an endemic disease. It’s similar to influenza in terms of the risk of severe illness, hospitalization and death and, although more transmissible, the coronavirus is now less deadly. The overall rate of Covid-related hospitalizations was down dramatically this season, although the hospitalization rate was over nine times greater for those over 65. According to Census estimates, roughly [5.3%](#) of US adults, or 14 million people, were living with [long Covid](#) last year experiencing [fatigue](#), brain fog and other symptoms. Vaccine boosters

remain the primary line of defense as [research has shown](#) that the coronavirus vaccine is effective at preventing severe illness, hospitalization and death.



[Five years on: The countries that never locked down for Covid-19](#)

by Chris Baraniuk, BBC News, 3/5/25

TMR Topline – After the WHO declared a [pandemic](#) in March 2020, most countries implemented some form of lockdown to curb the spread of a terrifying virus that had already killed [many thousands](#) worldwide. [Sweden](#), [Taiwan](#), [Uruguay](#), [Iceland](#) and a few others never enacted a lockdown that involved severe restrictions on people's movements. Instead, they chose other measures, such as restrictions on large gatherings of people, extensive testing and quarantining infected people or travel restrictions. Sweden relied mainly on voluntary [behavioral changes](#) from its citizens while Norway, Finland and Denmark closed schools and most other aspects of public life while also asking people to work from home. Researchers found a noticeable spike in excess deaths in Sweden during the spring and winter of 2020 while excess mortality fell in the other three countries, rose compared to Sweden in 2021 and 2022.

Taiwan never imposed a lockdown, relying on [near-universal mask-wearing](#), border restrictions and intensive contact tracing. Taiwan and South Korea avoided lockdown through fine-grained monitoring and control of an entire population. Japan never enforced a legally binding lockdown, but its people [changed their behavior](#) significantly anyway. Studies show that [social isolation](#) and loneliness affected thousands of people during the pandemic. This was a particularly acute problem during [national lockdowns](#). There were negative [impacts on single parents](#) who found it harder to earn an income while looking after their children. There were concerns that the sudden loss of [social interaction](#) and access to education affected the development of [young children](#), with some evidence pointing to an impact on their [language skills](#).

TMR's Take: TMR monitored fatality rates/100,000 monthly for the OECD's 38 member nations through 12/31/22. The OECD's average fatality rate/1,000 was 231.8/100,000. For four countries that imposed lockdowns (Denmark, 133.6; Finland, 142.6; [New Zealand](#), 45.5; and Norway, 84.5) the fatality rate averaged 101.6/100,000. For four countries that didn't (Iceland, 60.9; Japan, 46.0; South Korea, 62.6; and Sweden, 212.8) the fatality rate averaged 95.6/100,000. The

Pacific Rim countries' success is partly attributable to the lessons learned from the 2003 SARS epidemic and their cohesive cultures. [Sweden](#) was the outlier among the Scandinavian countries, having initially treated SARS-CoV-2 like the seasonal flu. "Lessons from the Pandemic" recommendations included that "America should emulate the Scandinavians." Click [here](#) to buy it.



[Optum Rx to drop prior authorization for dozens of prescription drugs](#)

by Alexandra Murphy, Becker's Hospital Review, 3/19/24

TMR Topline – Optum Rx, the pharmacy benefit manager (PBM) division of UnitedHealth Group (UHG), announced it will [eliminate](#) prior authorization (PA) requirements for approximately 80 prescription drugs in an effort to simplify access to medications for patients with chronic conditions. The changes are expected to reduce PAs by 25%. This is part of a broader initiative by UHG to reduce PA requirements. The company [eliminated](#) 20% of PA requirements in 2023 and introduced a gold card program in 2024 that allows certain providers to skip PA for specific services. UHG's PA policies came under scrutiny in 2023 when families of two deceased UnitedHealthcare MA members sued the company alleging that UHG's AI tool wrongfully denied post-acute care to their family members who died.

TMR's Take: Long past due, UHG finally is responding to provider and consumer outrage over PA abuses!



[Site-neutral Medicare pay eyed to fund Trump tax cuts](#)

by Michael

TMR Topline – In the search for savings to help fund Trump's tax cuts, Republicans are looking to "site-neutral" Medicare reimbursements for outpatient care which would require health systems to charge the same prices for services whether they are performed in a hospital or another location. The Blue Cross Blue Shield Association estimates such policies would save nearly \$500 billion overall, with about \$272 billion accruing to the federal government. The American Hospital Association opposes them, arguing that hospitals provide greater levels of safety than off-site facilities and must support much greater overhead costs, including round-the-clock staffing and advanced medical equipment.