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Insights from the Healing American Healthcare Coalition™

With RFK Jr's confirmation pending, Ebola, Measles and Bird Flu outbreaks mount

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From the Editor: RFK Jr.'s confirmation as HHS secretary is pending as concerning outbreaks spread. FDA approves a non-addictive pain treatment and a wearable treatment for Parkinson's disease. Click the headline for the full article; subscribe to TMR [here](#).



[Cows Have Been
Infected With a
Second Form of Bird
Flu](#), by Emily Anthes and
Apoorva Mandavilli, New

York Times, 2/5/25

TMR Topline – Dairy cows in Nevada have been infected with a new version of the avian flu virus known as D1.1, which has been spreading in wild birds and poultry. The D1.1 form of H5N1 has also shown itself to be dangerous to people. Of the 67 Americans known to have become ill with H5N1 so far, the only one who died was infected with this version. According to Dr. Louise Moncla, an evolutionary biologist at UPenn, the spread of D1.1 to cows “doesn’t change the average person’s life,” but it poses risks for dairy workers and the dairy industry.



[Measles Outbreak
Mounts Among
Children in One of
Texas' Least
Vaccinated Counties](#),

by Amy Maxmen, KFF Health News, 2/7/25

TMR Topline – A measles outbreak is growing in a Texas county with dangerously low vaccination rates. Two school-aged children in Gaines County were hospitalized with measles, and 12 cases have been confirmed

with six more pending. The county has one of the lowest childhood vaccination rates in Texas - nearly [1 in 5 children](#) in kindergarten had a vaccine exemption for philosophical or religious reasons in 2023-24. Measles is extremely contagious and, as a rule, at least 95% of people need to be vaccinated against measles for a community to be well protected. An outbreak among a largely unvaccinated population in Samoa in 2019 and 2020 caused [83 deaths](#), mainly among children, and more than 5,700 cases. Public health practitioners are concerned that a swell of [vaccine misinformation](#) has led to record rates of parental exemptions. With RFK Jr's nomination to become HHS Secretary, scores of Nobel Prize laureates wrote to the Senate that having him head HHS “would put the public’s health in jeopardy.”



[Travelers and health-care providers should be on alert due to Ebola disease outbreak in Uganda, CDC warns](#), by Jen Christensen, CNN, 2/6/25

TMR Topline – The CDC has issued a [health alert](#) about an outbreak in Uganda of deadly [Sudan virus disease](#), a viral hemorrhagic fever that is in the same family as Ebola and has a case fatality rate of 41-70%. It also [issued a Level 2 travel alert](#), which encourages travelers to practice enhanced precautions, to avoid contact with sick people and contact with their bodily fluids, including blood and semen, and to avoid contact with bodies of people who died or with items that have been in contact with them.



[CDC ordered to stop working with WHO immediately](#), by Mike Stobbe, Associated Press, 1/27/25

TMR Topline – Within days of taking office, President Trump issued an executive order to withdraw from the World Health Organization (WHO) immediately. It comes as health authorities around the world are monitoring outbreaks of Marburg virus and mpox in Africa and bird flu in US livestock. Leaving

WHO requires both Congress's approval, a one-year notice, and that the US meets its financial obligations for the current fiscal year. A CDC official, John Nkengasong, sent a memo to senior leaders at the agency telling them that all agency staff who work with the WHO must immediately stop their collaborations and "await further guidance." "Stopping communications and meetings with WHO is a big problem," said Dr. Jeffrey Klausner, a University of Southern California public health expert who collaborates with WHO, adding that WHO and US health officials benefit from each other's expertise.

TMR's Take: With outbreaks of measles in Texas and Ebola in Uganda, avian flu mutating and communications with WHO shut down, the pending confirmation of RFK Jr. as Secretary of HHS is quite troubling. For those who don't remember the chaos of the Trump 1.0 response to the Covid-19 pandemic, Chapter 4 of Lessons from the Pandemic, *"With Science Sidelined, U.S. Deaths Surge,"* is a good refresher. It's available at Amazon in both soft-cover and eBook versions. Click [here](#) to buy it.



[F.D.A. Approves Drug to Treat Pain Without Opioid Effects](#), by Gina Kolata, New York Times, 1/30/25

TMR Topline – The FDA has approved Vertex Pharmaceuticals' non-addictive medication to treat pain from an injury or surgery. In [two large clinical trials](#), approximately 1,000 patients who had pain from surgery were randomly assigned to get a placebo; to get the opioid sold as Vicodin, a widely used combination pain medicine of acetaminophen (Tylenol) and hydrocodone; or to get suzetrigine. Patients are expected to take two pills a day, for a total cost of \$31 a day. It will be sold as Journavx, and works only on nerves outside the brain, blocking pain signals. Dr. David Altshuler, chief scientific officer at Vertex, said about 85,000 people a year become addicted after taking a prescription opioid.



[FDA OKs New Wearable Treatment for Parkinson's Disease](#), by Judy George, MedPage Today, 2/4/25

TMR Topline – The FDA has approved Supernus Pharmaceuticals [apomorphine hydrochloride infusion device \(Onapgo\)](#) to treat motor fluctuations in adults with advanced Parkinson's disease. Initially rejected a year ago, it provides continuous

treatment during the day. The company [resubmitted a new drug application](#) for the drug-device combination supported by the [phase III TOLEDO trial](#) of 107 Parkinson's patients in Europe with persistent motor fluctuations. The treatment should be available by mid-year.



[Rural hospitals push to be spared from possible funding cuts](#), by Alex Kacik, Modern Healthcare, 2/7/25

TMR Topline – With Republicans targeting [Medicaid](#) spending reductions to help fund President Trump's tax cuts in the coming budget reconciliation bill, rural providers are looking for exemptions from any [potential changes to federal policy](#) that could limit Medicaid or Medicare funding. Proposals include replacing Medicaid's financing structure with a per capita system that offers a fixed amount of federal funding per patient or block grants that cap overall Medicaid spending. Other proposals focus on Medicare, such as the [site-neutral policy](#).

"We need to find out how rural hospitals and clinics can be held harmless in this discussion," said Brock Slabach, COO of the National Rural Health Association. Rural providers hoping to boost revenue are limited by a patient population that skews heavily toward government-sponsored insurance coverage. Those facilities don't have the financial reserves or the commercially insured patient populations to offset the reductions. High operating costs and [reimbursement pressure](#) has forced many rural providers to [close maternity wards](#), creating [vast care deserts](#) throughout the US. The New Mexico Hospital Association estimates that up to eight rural hospitals would be at risk of closing.



[Centene, Aetna, Kaiser lead in Medicare Advantage denials](#): KFF, by Nona Tepper, Modern Healthcare, 1/29/25

TMR Topline – MA insurers increased their use of Prior Authorizations (PAs) by 7.8% to 49.8 million PA requests in 2023. On average, insurers denied 6.8% of PA requests. Centene (13.6%), Aetna (11%) and Kaiser-Permanente (10%) had the highest PA denial rates. When policyholders appealed nearly 12% of the denied claims, insurers reversed their initial decision 81.7% of the time.