

# Three Minute Read™

Insights from the Healing American Healthcare Coalition™

May 2023-2



HEALING AMERICAN HEALTHCARE  
COALITION

**From the Editor:** The article summaries include post-pandemic updates, approval of an RSV vaccine, private equity taking a rare hit and Leapfrog ranking **TMR's** home state hospitals #1. Click on the headline to read the full article.



[WHO declares end to Covid global health emergency](#), by Jennifer Rigby and Bhanvi Satija, Reuters, 5/5/23

**TMR Topline** – The global health agency's Emergency Committee met and recommended ending the global health emergency and said countries should now manage the virus that killed more than 6.9 million people along with other infectious diseases. WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus noted that the end of the emergency did not mean Covid was over as a global health threat. The Covid death rate has slowed from a peak of more than 100,000/week in January 2021 to just over 3,500 in the week of 4/24/23, reflecting widespread vaccination, availability of better treatments and a level of population immunity from prior infections.



[Covid dropped to 4th leading cause of death in US last year](#), by Mike Stobbe, Associated Press, 5/4/23

**TMR Topline** –The CDC reported that US deaths fell last year with Covid-19 dropping to the 4<sup>th</sup> leading cause of death. Injuries such as drug overdoses, motor vehicle fatalities and shootings took over 3<sup>rd</sup> place. Heart disease and cancer continue to be the leading cause of deaths.

The virus was the underlying cause of about 187,000 US deaths last year. The highest Covid-19 death rates were in the South and in an adjacent region that stretches west to Texas, Oklahoma and New Mexico, the CDC said.



[Experts See Lessons for Next Pandemic as Covid Emergency Comes to an End](#), by Sheryl Gay Stolberg and

Noah Weiland, New York Times, 5/11/23

**TMR Topline** – Clearly, a lot went wrong during the Covid-19 pandemic as the US struggled to respond to the coronavirus. Chronic underinvestment in public health made things worse. More than 1.1 million Americans died and over 1,000 still die every week. When managing an infectious disease outbreak, communication is not just part of the response. It is the response. The pandemic showed that [confusing messaging](#) worsened the spread of disease and eroded faith in public health institutions. Unlike Britain and Israel, which have national health care systems, the US has no mechanism for a free flow of data among public health agencies and private providers.

Early in the pandemic, frontline health workers faced [dramatic supply shortages](#), forcing them to reuse face masks, wear ill-fitting personal protective equipment (PPE) or go without protection. The federal government has substantially expanded its reserve of PPE, providing a head start in responding to the next pandemic. In March 2020, the Strategic National Stockpile had 13 million N95 masks and 12,700 ventilators. It now has 352 million N95 masks and 150,000 ventilators. Pre-pandemic, government purchases for the stockpile were weighted toward [protecting against bioterror agents like anthrax](#).

Many experts now agree that some schools were closed for too long and that abruptly moving millions of children from American classrooms [has had harmful effects](#) on their emotional and intellectual health. Both Drs. Anthony Fauci and Ezekiel Emanuel said the pandemic showed that officials should think carefully about school closures and limit them as much as possible. Both said better

indoor air circulation might be one way to safely keep schools open.



[R.S.V. Vaccine Approved for Older Adults](#), by Christina Jewett, New York Times, 5/3/23

**TMR Topline** – The [FDA has approved GSK's vaccine](#), Arexvy, for the respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) for adults 60 and older. It is the first to be approved to protect older adults from the potentially fatal respiratory illness. The FDA [estimates](#) that RSV is associated with at least 60,000 hospitalizations and up to 10,000 deaths annually in adults over 65. It's also a [leading killer of children](#) worldwide. [RSV contributed to the last winter's "triple-demic"](#) along with seasonal flu and Covid cases that swamped children's hospitals and some ICUs. In [announcing](#) the GSK approval, FDA vaccine division chief Dr. Peter Marks said: "Older adults, in particular those with underlying health conditions, such as heart or lung disease or weakened immune systems, are at high risk for severe disease caused by R.S.V." It will be several months before Arexvy is available. For Medicare patients with Part D drug coverage, there would be no out-of-pocket expense, GSK spokeswoman Alison Hunt said.

Pfizer and Moderna's RSV vaccines for older adults are also expected to be approved by the FDA in June. Astra-Zeneca and Sanofi are [seeking](#) FDA approval of a monoclonal antibody treatment to protect infants and toddlers up to 2 years old from RSV infections. Pfizer has also applied for separate approval of an RSV vaccine to be given in late stages of pregnancy to protect young infants.

**TMR'S Take:** With vaccines available for seasonal flu, Covid-19 and RSV, a tripledemic next winter is unlikely.



[From private equity to bankruptcy: Envision's last 5 years](#), by Alan Condon & Nick Thomas, Becker's Hospital Review, 5/18/23

**TMR Topline** – Envision Healthcare, a physician services company and ambulatory surgery center operator, has [filed](#) for bankruptcy almost five years after KKR acquired it for \$9.9 billion and took the company private. The full article details the lengthy battle between Envision and UnitedHealthcare over payment rates for its ED

physicians and anesthesiologists. Earlier this month, arbitrators sided with Envision and UnitedHealthcare was ordered to pay \$91 million in damages, but the insurer [filed](#) its own suit against Envision, alleging it overcharged the insurer by billing for unnecessarily complex care during what should have been routine visits. Factors that led to the bankruptcy filing included declining patient volumes, payers excluding Envision clinicians from their networks and not providing adequate reimbursement for care, the implementation of the No Surprises Act, rising inflation and the national clinician shortage.

**TMR'S Take:** There are no winners in the fight between the 800# gorillas of private equity and health insurance.



[Leapfrog Group safety grades reflect hospital struggles amid pandemic peaks](#), by Mari Devereaux, Modern Healthcare, 5/3/23

**TMR Topline** – Rates of infection and hospital performance on safety measures continued to worsen during peak periods of the pandemic in late 2021 and 2022, according to the Leapfrog Group, including a 60% increase in the average standard infection ratio of central line-associated bloodstream infections. "This is the first round of the hospital safety grades where we have data from hospital performance during the height of the pandemic," [Leapfrog Group](#) President and CEO Leah Binder said. The declines are a departure from pre-pandemic [data](#) that showed industrywide improvements. During the pandemic's peak, hospitals had to deal with sicker patients who had to be on ventilators longer and floating clinical staff to care areas they were unfamiliar with introduced more potential infection risks. Among hospitals, 29% earned an "A," 26% a "B," 39% a "C," 6% a "D," and less than 1% an "F." New Jersey, Idaho and Utah were the states with the highest percent-ages of "A" hospitals, with about 50% earning top marks.

**TMR's Take:** The Covid-19 pandemic exposed lots of flaws in US healthcare delivery. Get a head start on your summer reading by ordering "Lessons from the Pandemic" available in both soft-cover and eBook versions. Click [here](#) to buy it at a discounted price with coupon Printbook or ebook at checkout. If you would like to continue receiving the newsletter, please subscribe [here](#)

