



Health Watch USAsm Newsletter

www.healthwatchusa.org Jan. 1, 2022

Member of the National Quality Forum and a designated "Community Leader" for Value-Driven Healthcare by the U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services

In the Month of Dec. Health Watch USAsm has:

- 7 articles/opeds regarding COVID-19.
- 9 Radio Shows concerning the COVID-19 virus.
- 1 Presentations.

Our 2021 COVID-19 Conference Presentations and additional resources can be accessed from: <http://www.healthwatchusa.org/COVID19.htm> & www.healthconference.org

Health Watch USA's June 15, 2021 Annual Conference: COVID-19: A Global Perspective

<http://www.healthconference.org>

Health Watch USA's 2020 Activities Report:

<http://www.healthwatchusa.org/HWUSA-Officers/20201231-HWUSA-Report-2020.pdf>

Health Watch USA - Presentations



COVID-19: A Perspective from Healthcare Professionals from Around The World.

On Dec 15, 2021, a meeting of prominent infectious disease experts from around the world was conducted by Health Watch USAsm. Authorities from the United States, Singapore,

Australia, Germany, and Peru were in attendance along with a short narrative update from the United Kingdom. Overall, all nations are reporting a significant rise in cases due to the Delta Variant. Omicron is starting to take hold and the United Kingdom is bracing for an onslaught of patients which may overrun their healthcare system. Preventative strategies and barriers of the various countries are presented. Strategies discussed are masking, testing, travel bans, vaccine passports, natural immunity, vaccinations and financial disincentives. The United States, similar to other countries around the world, have little or no reserve to muster to confront an onslaught of hospitalizations due to the

highly infectious Omicron Variant. Unless the United States starts to embrace public health advice, COVID-19 may become a catastrophe both in lives ruined, lost and in economically breaking dollar costs. Health Watch USAsm Meeting. Dec. 15, 2021.

<https://youtu.be/QOgZcBPqBEk>

Health Watch USA - News Articles & OpEds



Kentucky's nursing shortage not about supply but retention in tough working conditions

I am not surprised that Kentucky is facing a nursing crisis with a projected need of an additional 16,000 nurses by 2024. This is a problem of retention not production of nurses. A problem which has been decades in the making. If we wish to maintain a viable healthcare system, rather than a crippled understaffed delivery system which triages care, we need to slow down the spread of COVID-19. We need to curtail spending COVID-19 relief funds on quasi-related projects and focus on changing our society to live with this endemic virus. This means investing in proper infrastructure including improvements in building ventilation, the provision of high-quality protective gear and the frequent testing for all employees. For me, I religiously follow a no-mask, no tip rule. Lexington Herald Leader. [References](#) Dec. 16, 2021. <https://www.kentucky.com/opinion/op-ed/article256656052.html>



Why the Biden administration needs to take decisive action on COVID-19 | Opinion

We are now enduring our fifth wave caused by a new variant "Omicron," having immune escape properties and by some estimates over three times as infectious as the Delta Variant. We can expect continued surges in the future caused by a variety of different variants. Herd immunity and returning to "Normal" is no longer an option. As a country, we need to rally around a transformative plan which will take our country in a new direction. To this end, reenactment of the Coronavirus Task Force along with creation of a National Public Health System would be the first steps to accomplish this imperative. The United States Department of Veterans Affairs' fourth mission of responding to health emergencies in the United States, may be able to serve as a foundation to build a national public health system. [References](#) Courier Journal. Dec. 27, 2021.

<https://www.courier-journal.com/story/opinion/2021/12/27/omicron-should-spur-biden-administration-take-decisive-action-opinion/9005223002/>

COVID-19 spread on heels of tornadoes stirs fears of looming crisis

Dr. Kevin Kavanagh, a retired Somerset physician who follows COVID-19 infection, said testing is important to track the spread of COVID-19 in the area. But he said prevention is most important, especially in the area affected by tornadoes. "I think they need to concentrate on keeping them from being infected," said Kavanagh, chairman of the patient advocacy group Health Watch USA. "The virus is heartless, it is absolutely heartless. It does not care that these are stricken, frail individuals." Courier Journal. Dec. 21, 2021. <https://www.courier-journal.com/story/news/local/2021/12/21/covid-spread-in-tornado-ravaged-kentucky-stirs-fears-looming-crisis/8969520002/>



Omicron More Infectious in Younger People, People of African Ethnicity, Study States

Omicron can significantly avoid immunity created by both prior infections and vaccines, and younger people and people of "African ethnicity" have higher rates of infection with Omicron than with Delta, says a new study. Many are looking at the total infections and see a much lower hospitalization rate, not realizing that there is a much larger number of cases and the expansion is largely due to reinfections and breakthrough infections which produce milder disease. The unvaccinated and those not previously infected are looking at a fate similar to Delta and those with waning immunity from vaccines or previous infections may endure a fate not that much better. The bottom line is if we ignore the pandemic, it is possible that with the high infectivity of Omicron the sheer number of cases may overwhelm the world's health care systems. No one knows for sure. But what is known is that everyone needs to obtain a booster if they are 6 months after the second dose of an mRNA vaccine, and to become vaccinated even if they had a previous infection. [References](https://www.infectioncontroltoday.com/view/omicron-more-infectious-in-younger-people-people-of-african-ethnicity-study-states) Infection Control Today. Dec. 23, 2021. <https://www.infectioncontroltoday.com/view/omicron-more-infectious-in-younger-people-people-of-african-ethnicity-study-states>

Countries Around the Globe Deluged by Delta, as Omicron Threat Grows

Even though Omicron may not have as high of a fatality rate, its infectivity being 3 times higher than the Delta variant creates grave risk to nations. Overstressed health care

systems may collapse. Strategies of travel bans, masking, testing, financial incentives, vaccinations and natural immunity were discussed. For example: Singapore requires mask-wearing outside of the home (indoors and outdoors) for people above the age of two. In Germany, a medical grade mask—surgical or N95—is required in indoor spaces. The US may need to follow the financial model of Singapore. Unlike Singapore, a substantial portion of the US population is not becoming vaccinated and/or is not following prevailing public health advice. If there is a safety net of 100% payment from public money, there is no tangible disincentive against promoting and/or engaging in dangerous behavior. Infection Control Today. [References](#) Dec. 20, 2021.

<https://www.infectioncontrolday.com/view/countries-around-the-globe-deluged-by-delta-as-omicron-threat-grows>

Omicron's Mild Symptoms Can't Mask Danger It Poses.

The high rate of infection of the Omicron variant, which is beginning to eclipse Delta infection in the United Kingdom, poses a grave risk to the US health care system. The US has a low rate of vaccination, a low rate of individuals obtaining boosters, and a relatively large segment of our population which is elderly or immunocompromised.

70% efficacy for Omicron hospitalizations with a two-dose mRNA vaccine Sound great. But this is South African data and they have just been recently vaccinated. Immunity may not have waned. Please obtain a booster. [References](#) Infection Control Today. Dec. 14, 2021. <https://www.infectioncontrolday.com/view/omicron-s-mild-symptoms-can-t-mask-danger-it-poses>

Omicron Proving to Be Nothing to Sneeze At

Only a small percentage of the Omicron variant of COVID-19 cases require hospitalization so far, but high infectivity may turn this small percentage into a large number of patients, which will further stress our health care system. In the United Kingdom, it has been observed that the Omicron variant causes less severe disease, but it risks overwhelming their health care system with 5 thousand admissions to the hospital each day. Omicron currently is responsible for 30% of all cases in London. [References](#) Infection Control Today. Dec. 11, 2021. <https://www.infectioncontrolday.com/view/omicron-proving-to-be-nothing-to-sneeze-at>

Viewpoint: What Doesn't Kill You Mutates and Tries Again

The looming surge from the Omicron variant may well have a lower case-fatality-rate but its high infectivity will further strain our health care system and fill our hospitals. Hospital costs for complex cases (on the ventilator or in the ICU) ranges from \$132,000 to \$472,000. Co-Pays (without waivers) for privately and employer-insured patients average \$3,800 per hospitalization. The looming surge from the Omicron variant may well have a

lower case-fatality-rate but its high infectivity will further strain our health care system and fill our hospitals. [References](#) Infection Control Today. Dec. 8, 2021.

<https://www.infectioncontrolday.com/view/viewpoint-what-doesn-t-kill-you-mutates-and-tries-again>

Radio / Podcasts

Dec. 24, 2021. Omicron: Skyrocketing Cases, Significant Risks for the Unvaccinated

Dr. Kevin Kavanagh from Health Watch USAsm discusses the risks and severity of Omicron infections in the unvaccinated and those who are not immune. Much of the rosy picture being painted regarding severity of disease is because of inclusion of breakthrough infections and reinfections that produce relatively mild disease. Two new drugs are coming on the market, one from Pfizer, paxlovid, and the other from Merck, molnupiravir. Both will probably not be widely available during the Omicron surge and should not be viewed as a substitute for vaccination. Only one monoclonal antibody, the one from GSK, is effective against Omicron. Home testing is critical, but unfortunately, the announced Federal Program is too little too late. Finally, you need to upgrade your masks to N95s. Jack Pattie Show with Kruzer. <https://youtu.be/HLLnG-TdsyA>

Dec. 20, 2021. Omicron: 1 Million Cases a Day, Too Few Boosters Taken Bodes a Hard Winter.

Kevin Kavanagh from Health Watch USAsm discusses the urgent need for those who are vaccinated in Kentucky to obtain a booster. In Kentucky, less than 20% of those eligible have obtained one. With the Omicron Variant, if unvaccinated there is a 30% less chance of hospitalization compared to previous variants. Vaccination in South Africa is reported to provide 70% protection against hospitalization. Omicron cases are expected to peak at 1 million cases a day in the United States. This will overrun our healthcare system. In the United Kingdom cases are already at 100,000/day and rising. The UK has about 1/5 the population of the United States. Only one monoclonal antibody is effective against the Omicron Variant (Vir/GSK) but there are only around 250,000 doses available. Home testing is imperative but prevention with mask wearing and vaccination to prevent infection is by far the best strategy. Deal with mandates at the polls, deal with the virus by getting vaccinated and receiving a booster. Jack Pattie Show with Kruzer. Dec. 20, 2021. <https://youtu.be/wof7lbzOPaA>

COVID-19 Articles of Interest

First confirmed US death related to Omicron variant was unvaccinated and had been infected before

"A Texas man, whose death was the first confirmed Omicron-related in the US, was unvaccinated and had previously been infected with the coronavirus...."

https://www.cnn.com/world/live-news/omicron-variant-coronavirus-news-12-21-21-intl/h_4b2c2a65d6e94951dc987c52a4dd27f0

Pfizer antiviral pills may be risky with other medications

"Pfizer's Paxlovid for mild to moderate Covid in people as young as 12. However, could cause severe or life-threatening interactions with widely used medications, including statins, blood thinners and some antidepressants."

https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/us/pfizer-covid-pills-may-be-risky-with-other-medications/ar-AAS9to1?ocid=MSNHP_W069&li=BBnb7Kz

Israel recommends fourth Covid-19 dose for people over 60 as it enters the throes of a fifth wave

""We don't really have data yet on the level of immunity, like we did when we decided on the third dose, but on the other hand, there is really scary data out there in the rest of the world, Professor Galia Rahav said. "In a situation like this, if you don't act immediately, you miss the train," she added. Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett welcomed the recommendation and encouraged citizens to get the shot as quickly as they could."

<https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/israel-begins-fourth-covid-19-dose-vaccine-rollout-for-people-60-and-over-as-omicron-cases-surge/ar-AAS2eKU>

'We're paralyzed': Wisconsin hospitals struggle to transfer and place new patients

"Because the majority of COVID-19 patients coming in to the hospitals are unvaccinated, the duration of care is longer & patients require additional resources, which means patients needing to be transferred from smaller hospitals aren't able to receive care."

<https://www.postcrescent.com/story/news/2021/12/03/covid-wisconsin-hospitals-turning-away-patients-cases-climb-staffs-struggle/8855404002/>

Pro-Trump counties now have far higher COVID death rates.

Misinformation is to blame

"Since May 2021, people living in counties that voted heavily for Donald Trump during the last presidential election have been nearly three times as likely to die from COVID-19 as those who live in areas that went for now-President Biden. That's according to a new analysis by NPR that examines how political polarization and misinformation are driving a significant share of the deaths in the pandemic."

<https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2021/12/05/1059828993/data-vaccine-misinformation-trump-counties-covid-death-rate>



COVID-19 Lessons Learned: A Global Perspective

*Health Watch USAsm &
Massachusetts Nurses Association*



White Paper: COVID-19 lessons learned: a global perspective

On June 15, 2021, infectious disease authorities from around the world participated in a joint webinar to share experiences and lessons learned in combating the COVID-19 pandemic. One of the overriding goals of the conference "COVID-19 Lessons Learned: A Global Perspective" was to provide documentation of worldwide COVID-19 response strategies, in order to combat the plethora of misinformation and conspiracy theories that are being actively disseminated. This misinformation is having a profound negative impact on controlling the pandemic in many countries. Misinformation which was addressed in the conference included challenging the seriousness of COVID-19 infections, a refusal to recognize aerosolization as the major mechanism of spread, a belief that schools can be opened safely without implementation of extensive control strategies, and that masks and vaccines are not effective. A second goal was the identification of common strategies between nations. Common strategies included the implementation of a range of closures, mask mandates, travel bans and the need for expanded testing. But of utmost importance there was recognition of the need to implement a coordinated national strategy, which is depoliticized

and led by scientists. ARIC. Aug. 26, 2021.

<https://aricjournal.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s13756-021-00992-x>

Conference Videos are Now Available. Continuing Educational Credits through Southern Kentucky AHEC. For more information on continuing education go to www.healthconference.org

COVID-19: Introduction To Suppression Strategies

Dr. Kevin Kavanagh from Health Watch USAsm discusses strategies used by many countries including exclusion, elimination, suppression, and mitigation; along with the disruptive influences of misinformation and false hopes for herd immunity. YouTube Video:

<https://youtu.be/Ej98j5WiGUw>

COVID-19: Lessons Learned in Australia

Professor Imogen Mitchell, Clinical Director of the Australian Capital Territory COVID-19 Response, discusses lessons learned in Australia. To date there are 910 deaths from COVID-19. If the United States did as well, adjusted for population, we would have lost less than 13,000 individuals. Australia is a federated nation, early on the State and Territories formed a national governing committee, guided by scientists, to formulate and direct the nation's COVID-19 response. Strategies included a zero tolerance for cases with cities imposing lockdowns, masking, physical distancing, along with strong testing and contact tracing for as few as 1 or 2 cases. Travel restrictions and 14-day quarantine were imposed on those entering the country and travel between State and territories was restricted during outbreaks. YouTube Video:

<https://youtu.be/UpFrw3Wdbmw>

COVID-19: Lessons Learned in Singapore

Dr. Matthias Maiwald, Adjunct Associate Professor at the Department of Microbiology & Senior Consultant in Microbiology, National University of Singapore, discusses the COVID-19 response in Singapore. Strategies used were social distancing, mask wearing, and the closing of schools and non-essential businesses during a full lock-down. In addition, contact tracing was facilitated by phone app reporting of contacts in Singapore's population. Outbreaks occurred in migrant workers' dorms, and other outbreaks were associated with the airport, a hospital and a shopping mall. At hospitals, all patients were tested for SARS-CoV-2 upon admission and staff were tested every two weeks, if vaccinated; and once a week, if not vaccinated. An important observation was that during the full lock-down, infectious diseases caused by many other respiratory viruses all but disappeared. Rhinoviruses and enteroviruses reappeared 13 weeks after the end of lock-down, later adenoviruses reappeared. However, influenza stayed at a very low level well into 2021. This is a testament as to how effective the transmission of SARS-CoV-2 is in comparison to other respiratory viruses, and how difficult it will be to eradicate it around the world. YouTube Video: <https://youtu.be/-WPQv9ghTy0>

COVID-19: Lessons Learned in Kenya

Dr. Paul Yonga discusses lessons learned in Kenya. Kenya adopted a suppression strategy guided by a newly formed National Emergency Response Committee. The country utilized

regional and localized lockdowns, mandatory masking, curfews and social distancing. Barriers included stigmatization of the disease, large political rallies and a lack of vaccines, the latter of which inhibited the long-term effectiveness of a suppression strategy. There were also poor working conditions for frontline workers and healthcare staff, including a lack of PPE and pay shortages. Currently, Kenya is expecting another wave, possibly driven by the Delta Variant which comprises 90% of sequenced cases in some regions. YouTube Video:

<https://youtu.be/oTOFJiLYa2Q>

COVID-19: India In Crisis -- Vineeta Gupta, MD, JD

Dr. Vineeta Gupta describes the conditions in India and the socioeconomic challenges which inhibit the pandemic's control. The impact of the Delta (B1617.2) Variant on India and the United States is also discussed. <https://youtu.be/vsOj76yBH9g>

COVID-19: Lessons Learned in Spain

Dr. Jesús Rodríguez-Baño, MD, PhD from University Hospital Virgen Macarena, University of Sevilla discusses Spain's COVID-19 response. Spain is a federated nation. The country underwent three waves. During the first wave a national emergency was declared, and a hard lockdown was enacted. In the second and third waves regional governments guided the response. During these waves there were limits on gatherings and universal masking was mandated. Spain did not have a well-developed anti-vaccination movement as was seen in other European countries. However, the COVID-19 response became politicized during the second and third waves, a phenomenon seen in several other countries, including the United States. There was also intense discussion over the use of the AstraZeneca vaccine. Politics and economics took the lead in some of the decisions instead of healthcare, but everyone agreed there needs to be a balance in every decision taken. YouTube Video:

<https://youtu.be/pWuu10Gg7ro>

COVID-19: Lessons Learned in Germany

Dr. Sebastian Hoehl presents on COVID-19 lessons learned in Germany. Dr. Hoehl was one of the first to recognize that asymptomatic spread is a major contributor to the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic. In his presentation he discusses strategies used by Germany to quell COVID-19 surges and the importance of frequent testing in the opening of schools. He also discusses the social disparities of COVID-19 and how it targets and disproportionately affects the socially disadvantaged. YouTube Video: https://youtu.be/_9is03QomGI

COVID-19: Lessons Learned In The United Kingdom

Dr. Stephanie Dancer provides an extensive description of how SARS-CoV-2 spreads and the importance of aerosolization. COVID-19 clusters at NHS Lanarkshire, Scotland, was caused by spread from the community, and was transmitted in hospitals by both patients and staff. Corrective measures included the use of masks, opening of windows and minimizing the risks in bathrooms and of toilet plumes. Air exchanges in most hospitals were deficient. They were improved to six complete air exchanges per hour for general wards and ten for bathrooms. Proper building ventilation is of utmost importance in controlling respiratory pathogens. YouTube Video: <https://youtu.be/sMW3wUWUboA>

COVID-19: Lessons Learned in the United States

Dr. Kevin Kavanagh from Health Watch USAsm discusses how the United States has viewed and dealt with COVID-19. Barriers to true acceptance are exemplified by Kubler-Ross stages of grief: Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression and Final Acceptance. The role of foreign adversaries and misinformation is discussed and how this is preventing true acceptance of COVID-19 and an effective pandemic response. YouTube Video:

<https://youtu.be/eV8lBv7ADU4>

COVID-19: Comments Regarding Variants

Dr. Kevin Kavanagh Discusses COVID-19 Variants

1. The Delta Variant detected in The United States & the need for more genomic sequencing to detect community spread.

2. Mutations and Variants can be tracked on the websites.

<https://nextstrain.org/> and <https://outbreak.info/>

3. How Variants are named and How The Spanish Flu Got its Name.

4. Almost all nations in almost all pandemics mitigate the severity and extent of disease and deaths.

YouTube Video: <https://youtu.be/U9Xs6JizJSE>

COVID-19: Veteran Administration's Fourth Mission

Acting Deputy Secretary Carolyn Clancy and Under Secretary Dr. Beth Taylor discusses the Veteran Administration's fourth mission to aid and support state and local health care systems in times of pandemics and other health emergencies. The presentation details the Veterans Administration activities to support health care systems during the COVID-19 pandemic along with lessons learned during the reassignment of resources and staff to support the United States' pandemic response. YouTube Video: <https://youtu.be/oBtNJeoNW2k>

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