



COVID Booster Vaccinations May Still be in Play Due to Rise in Delta Variant Cases

(Source: An article by Reuters and an article by Stefanie Hughes for Marketplace)

The World Health Organization is asking wealthier nations to hold off on giving COVID booster shots to people who are already vaccinated until at least the end of September. That effort is to help ensure there is enough vaccine to meet the WHO's goal of vaccinating 10% of the world's population. It comes during increased demand for booster shots, though need for these booster jabs is unclear.

The WHO estimates that more than 80% of vaccine doses distributed so far have gone to high- and upper-middle income countries. Scientists also point out that the more widespread the virus is globally, the more likely it is to mutate, which could result in more variants around the world.

A U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) advisory panel will now meet to discuss considerations for booster doses of COVID-19 vaccines, as the United States deals with increasing cases from the Delta variant of the coronavirus. The meeting of CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices will also discuss updates on additional doses in immune compromised individuals.

Following guidance issued in early July, the CDC is still not recommending additional doses of the vaccine for people who are fully vaccinated. However, the pharmaceutical companies are researching whether boosters are necessary and Pfizer/BioNTech has already announced plans to file for an emergency use authorization (EUA) for a booster jab. Moderna has also said it's hoping to produce a booster that could vaccinate against both COVID-19 and the flu. However the two viruses don't mutate in the same way. While the flu is seasonal the coronavirus is not.

Israel has already started administering a third booster shot to people aged 60 and above after the country's health ministry reported a decrease in the effectiveness of the Pfizer Inc vaccine in preventing infections and symptomatic illness.

Meanwhile, biotech company Novavax has launched trials of its widely anticipated vaccine as a third booster in people initially administered other vaccines. It has also announced it will be initially prioritizing regulatory submissions in countries with urgent needs such as India, Indonesia and the Philippines.

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In Brief...

♦ **AmerisourceBergen Corporation** reported Q3 2021 revenues of US\$53.4 billion, an increase of 17.7% year-over-year. "During the 3rd quarter, AmerisourceBergen continued to capitalize on our differentiated, pharmaceutical-centric value proposition and successfully executed on our key strategic initiatives including completing the acquisition of Alliance Healthcare," said *Steven H. Collis*, Chairman, President and CEO of ABC. "We are proud of the execution by our teams to deliver these results and pleased to increase financial guidance for fiscal 2021 to reflect continued strong performance across our businesses."

♦ **Cardinal Health** report revenues of US\$39.3 billion for Q3 2021, in line with the 3rd quarter of 2020. GAAP operating earnings for the quarter decreased 16% to US\$473 million, primarily due to the write-down of the net assets held for sale of from the planned divestiture of the Cordia business unit. "We remained focused on serving our customers and their patients and continue advance our strategic priorities" said *Mike Kaufmann*, Cardinal's CEO. "With our resilient business model and strong fundamentals, we are navigating the effects of the pandemic and finding opportunities to adapt, innovate and invest for future growth."

♦ **McKesson Corporation** reported their first quarter 2021 financial results, with revenues of US\$55.7 billion, in line with Q1 of 2020 results. Income for the quarter was US\$445 million, a 4% increase year-over-year. "I am proud of the dedication and discipline of McKesson's employees as we navigate the complexities and uncertainties of the COVID-19 pandemic while continuing to serve our customers and our communities," said *Brian Tyler*, McKesson's chief executive officer. "Thanks to the strong execution of our employees

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New Database Could Accelerate Drug Repurposing for Various Diseases

(Source: An article by World Pharma News)

Researchers have created a new open-access database of information on drug candidates and how they are metabolized by the body, which could help speed up the repurposing of old drugs as new treatments. There is an urgent need for more effective treatments for many conditions, including COVID-19, cancer and malaria. But the process of developing new drugs is costly, can take decades, and often leads to failed treatments.

The database, called NICEdrug.ch (<http://nicedrug.ch>), may help expedite the process by helping scientists find promising, existing drugs that might be repurposed for these diseases.

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COVID Booster (cont.)...

Novavax's COVID-19 vaccine is what's known as a protein subunit vaccine. It directly delivers lab-grown coronavirus spike proteins into the body in the form of nanoparticles created to mimic the structure of the virus.

New Database (cont.)...

"By finding a way to improve how we discover and design new drugs, we could reduce the time and costs involved in the drug-development process," says lead author Homa Mohammadi Peyhani, Postdoctoral Researcher at the Laboratory of Computational Systems Biotechnology, École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL), Switzerland.

To help, Peyhani and colleagues created the NICEdrug.ch database with information on 250,000 potential drug molecules. The database includes detailed analysis of the drugs' structures, the enzymes they target, how they are likely to be altered by human metabolism, and their potential side effects.

Using their database, the team showed that it could accurately predict the behavior of drug-enzyme pairs around 70% of the time, and that it was 100% accurate for half of the pairs tested. They then used the system to look for drugs that could be repurposed for cancer, high cholesterol, malaria and COVID-19.

Their search yielded some clues on how scientists might alleviate the toxic side effects of the cancer drug 5-fluorouracil. They also identified shikimate 3-phosphate as a potential drug to treat the liver stage of malaria with fewer side effects. Additionally they identified over 1,300 potential anti-COVID-19 drugs, including some that are already safely used to treat other conditions.

Further studies are now necessary to validate that these drugs can be repurposed for this disease. The researchers have made the NICEdrug.ch database available for others as an open-access resource. In addition to helping find new purposes for existing drugs, the system may help scientists understand why some drugs cause harmful side effects and either identify ways to alleviate them or explore alternative drugs.

"Our hope is that scientists and decision makers in the pharmaceutical industry alike can use this unique database to better inform their research and clinical decisions - saving time, money and ultimately lives," concludes senior author Vassily Hatzimanikatis, Associate Professor of Chemical Engineering and Bioengineering at EPFL.

In Brief (cont.)...

around the world, McKesson delivered first-quarter results ahead of our original expectations."

- ♦ **Walgreens** announced that it has surpassed 29 million vaccinations, noting that demand has been up more than 30% week-over-week in some areas, including U.S. states across the southern region. At the same time, it said that testing has more than doubled from June to July, mostly driven by the surge of the Delta variant. "As always, our top priority is ensuring the health and safety of our team members, customers and patients, and as a company deeply committed to health and wellness, our mission has never been more critical," said *Roz Brewer*, CEO, Walgreens Boots Alliance, Inc.
- ♦ As part of **Sanofi's** endeavor to accelerate the application

of messenger RNA (mRNA) to develop therapeutics and vaccines, the company has entered into an agreement with **Translate Bio**, a clinical-stage mRNA therapeutics company. Sanofi will acquire all outstanding shares of Translate Bio for US\$38.00 per share in cash, representing a total equity value of approximately US\$3.2 billion (on a fully diluted basis). The Sanofi and Translate Bio Boards of Directors unanimously approved the transaction.

- ♦ **Zuellig Pharma** was awarded the **EcoVadis** (a sustainability ratings specialist) 2021 Gold Medal achieving a score that placed it among the top 1% of its industry. Zuellig Pharma has made excellent progress in transitioning to renewable energy through solar panel installations at its distribution centers and other important initiatives. Around one-third of the electricity consumed at its warehouse is generated by its own system.

- ♦ Scientists from the **University of Chicago** have found that the drug *masitinib* may be effective in treating COVID-19. The drug, which has undergone several clinical trials for human conditions but has not yet received approval to treat humans, beCOVID-19, in human cell cultures and in a mouse model, leading to much lower viral loads. The research team, including scientists from the **U.S. Department of Energy's (DOE) Argonne National Laboratory**, found that the drug may be effective against many types of coronaviruses and picornaviruses. Because of the way it inhibits replication, it has also been shown to remain effective in the face of COVID-19 variants.

- ♦ Counterfeit versions of two of **Gilead Sciences'** most popular HIV drugs are circulating in the U.S., threatening the health of people taking them. Gilead's original *Biktarvy* and *Descovy* have been replaced by fake versions at some pharmacies, Gilead warned Thursday. Unauthorized distributors were able to sell fake drugs to retailers; and then, "genuine Gilead bottles" were filled with fake tablets, the company said. Gilead has alerted potentially impacted pharmacies and is working with the FDA, pharmacies and legal authorities to remove problematic pills from circulation and to prevent future distribution, the company added. Gilead didn't disclose the number of pharmacies affected or where they are located. The drugmaker didn't immediately reply to a request for further comments.

- ♦ The levels of IgG antibodies against SARS-CoV-2 spike protein remain stable, or even increase, seven months after infection, according to a follow-up study in a cohort of healthcare workers coordinated by the **Barcelona Institute for Global Health (ISGlobal)**, an institution supported by "**la Caixa**" Foundation, in collaboration with the **Hospital Clinic of Barcelona**. The results, published in *Nature Communications*, also support the idea that pre-existing antibodies against common cold coronaviruses could protect against COVID-19.

- ♦ **Moderna** has ditched a phase 2 asset in development for solid tumors, lymphoma and ovarian cancer to instead focus on a similar therapy that could put up a triple attack. The company announced that the standalone *OX40L* candidate *mRNA-2416* will be shelved in favor of *mRNA-2752*. Both therapies are part of Moderna's mRNA intratumoral immuno-oncology portfolio. (Sources: Company Press Releases, Drug Store News, FiercePharma, Fierce Biotech, Marketwatch, and World Pharma News)