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## Wellness Through Answers News v37:no.1 January/February 2022

Wendy Urciuoli  
urciuoli@uchc.edu

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## Wellness Through Answers News

January - February 2022

*Linking Connecticut Patients, Families, and Residents to  
Reliable Health Information*

### Vaccine News

- Pfizer vaccine for children under five could be available by the end of February
- CDC tells pharmacies to give a fourth shot to immunocompromised people
- OSHA withdraws its emergency workplace vaccinate or test rule
- What the Supreme Court's block of vaccine mandate for large businesses means for the public
- COVID booster vaccine drive is faltering
- Corbevax no-patent COVID vaccine could be a pandemic game-changer
- The majority of vaccine side effects are attributed to the nocebo effect
- Latest data on COVID vaccinations by race and ethnicity
- Johnson & Johnson vaccine gets new warning for rare bleeding disorder- immune thrombocytopenia
- COVID vaccines are safe during pregnancy
- COVID vaccines do not affect male or female fertility
- Pfizer vaccine is 91% effective against multisystem inflammatory syndrome in 12 - 18-year-olds

## COVID-19 Updates

### Masks

- Updated [CDC guidance](#) on masks and respirators
- Why most of us should be wearing [N95 masks](#)
- Are [cloth masks](#) good enough?
- [How to find](#) a genuine N95 or KN95 face mask and avoid fakes
- [12 Signs](#) you have a fake N95, KN95, or KF94 mask
- [What to do](#) with your wardrobe of cloth masks?
- Pharmacies and community health centers to offer [free N95 masks](#)

### Testing

- Private insurance must cover eight [at-home COVID tests](#)
- No free at-home test kits [for Medicare](#) insureds
- Which at-home test kits are [easiest to use](#)?
- [NIH calculator](#) tells you when to get tested for COVID
- Everything you need to know about [at-home tests](#)
- Order free at-home tests from the [COVIDtests.gov](#) website
- "Those Nerdy Girls" clarify [what to do](#) after a positive COVID test

### Other COVID News

- US COVID [hospitalizations slow](#)
- [Endemic](#) doesn't mean harmless
- [WHO chief warns](#) current conditions ripe for new COVID virus variants
- Catching Omicron is not a [ticket to normalcy](#)
- [Five reasons](#) you should not purposely get COVID
- CDC [shortens isolation and quarantine](#) for the general population
- You're over COVID symptoms but still testing positive. [Are you infectious?](#)
- Study finds no live virus in [breastmilk](#) of moms infected with COVID
- The [Public Health Communications Collaborative](#) offers tools and resources to dispel misinformation
- Get the facts about [Medicare Coverage](#) for COVID
- Yale researchers develop a [wearable air sampler](#) that detects COVID exposure
- Novartis seeks [speedy approval](#) for COVID antiviral drug after positive early results
- [Generic drug makers](#) sign on to make Merck's antiviral drug
- Coronavirus drug and treatment [tracker](#)

- Desperate patients spend thousands for [long COVID cures](#)
- The Global Healthy Living Foundation offers a free [COVID support program](#) for chronic disease patients and their families

### **Fake Pop-Up COVID Testing Sites**

As demand for COVID testing soars, curbside test sites seem to [pop up overnight](#). Some of these businesses are legitimate, offering timely, reliable results. Others are fly-by-night operations gouging consumers and offering fraudulent tests. Worse, some unauthorized COVID testing operations collect personal identifying information for identity theft.

Spotting a fake test operation is not always easy. The Philadelphia Department of Public Health [offers these tips](#):

- Ask who the testing site is affiliated with and check with that organization.
- Look for the institutional logos on the paperwork and signage at the testing site; call those institutions to ensure the testing site is legitimate.
- Check your state's or city's COVID website for a list of approved test sites/operators. [Connecticut's official website lists](#) free, state-sponsored COVID test sites.
- Test sites may ask you for insurance information but should not charge you for the test.
- Test sites should not ask you for your social security number.

Consumers who suspect COVID test sites are fraudulent can call the US Department of Health and Human Services hotline: 800-HHS-TIPS.

### **Surgery Is Not Always the Best Treatment Option for Common Joint Injuries**

Carpal tunnel syndrome is a condition commonly treated by orthopedists. [Treatments](#) for this condition range from conservative measures like ice, pain relievers, and splinting, to surgery. Surgery is the [most effective treatment](#) for carpal tunnel syndrome, however, it is not always the best treatment for bone and joint problems. Patients may do [equally well](#) with conservative measures.

Effective care plans follow scientific evidence and [patient preferences](#). British researchers reviewed randomized controlled trials to see how surgery compared to conservative treatments for ten frequently treated injuries of the

shoulder, spine, hip, knee, and wrist. The researchers evaluated comparative data for pain and the need for additional treatments.

Surgery was the **treatment of choice** for carpal tunnel syndrome and knee replacement. **Anterior cruciate ligament tears, rotator cuff injuries, and four other conditions responded equally well to conservative measures:** physical therapy, exercise, weight management, psychological therapy, and medications.

Patients thinking about orthopedic surgery should ask their doctor for evidence-based comparative information for conservative treatments. Surgery may offer no benefit over non-operative care. **Surgery is also riskier, more costly, and often requires longer recovery times.**

### Low-Value Pediatric Care

Broad-spectrum antibiotics for uncomplicated pneumonia and CT scans for stomach pain are examples of medical treatments or tests that are potentially more harmful than helpful. Health experts refer to these services as "low value" and do not recommend them. A **new study** published in *JAMA Network* reported widespread use of low-value services in pediatric hospitals. Low-value services are also costly. In 2019 the hospitals billed almost \$17 million for 30 low-value pediatric services.

The American Board of Internal Medicine Foundation's "**Choosing Wisely**" program identifies **five services** providers, patients, and caregivers should question. Questionable services are unproven, duplicative, harmful, and unnecessary. The JAMA study included these five services and unbeneficial treatments and tests flagged by other researchers.

### Prenatal Screening Tests for Rare Conditions Are Often Wrong

Noninvasive prenatal testing (NIPT) is highly accurate for identifying common genetic disorders like Down syndrome. Diagnostic labs claim the technology can also find rare conditions with high accuracy. A **New York Times investigation** disputes these claims. The Times investigation of NIPT tests reported positive test results for rare genetic disorders were **incorrect over 85% of the time**. Amniocentesis, a highly accurate but invasive test that risks miscarriage, can confirm prenatal blood test results. However, it is administered too late in pregnancy for abortion to be an option.

NIPTs are an example of "[Lab Developed Tests](#)," which are not regulated by the FDA. Lab-developed tests (LDTs) are not commercially produced and sold to other companies. The FDA considers LDTs low risk and does not require them to meet strict safety and effectiveness regulations. Companies offering LDTs can advertise their products without FDA approval.

Why are blood tests that reliably screen for Down syndrome so inaccurate at identifying rare genetic disorders? It is a statistical challenge. Even when a test is highly accurate, conditions like Wolf-Hirschhorn syndrome, which occurs in 0.005 of births, will still result in a high percentage of false positives. Pregnant women should consult with their obstetricians regarding positive and negative test results. Additional tests can confirm or disprove LDT findings. Obstetricians can also refer their patients to genetic counseling services that can interpret LDT test findings and discuss other tests for conditions that may affect a baby during infancy or childhood.

Additional Resources:

- [Pew Charitable Trust report](#) on Lab-Developed Tests
- [CDC guidance](#) on genetic counseling during pregnancy
- UConn Health's Division of [Medical Genetics](#) offers pregnancy counseling services

### **Women Are Less Likely to Have Complications with Female Surgeons**

Both men and women are less likely to die, have complications, or be readmitted to the hospital after surgery when their [surgeon is female](#). For women patients, however, the sex of their surgeon significantly affects how well they do. Researchers reported this finding after examining the postoperative results for over one million patients treated by almost 3,000 surgeons in a new [JAMA Network](#) study. The study looked at common elective and emergency surgeries and excluded sex-specific surgeries.

Earlier studies of women heart attack patients support the importance of physician gender on patient outcomes. Male doctors undervalued the significance of female patients' symptoms. Female patients under-reported pain to male doctors.

The JAMA study's authors also wondered whether their results reflect a difference in how female surgeons practice medicine. They observed female doctors:

- consult specialists more often
- share more information postoperatively with patients
- spend more time building relationships with patients

Understanding why female patients do better with female doctors may improve care for patients of both sexes.

### Surprise Medical Bills Are Now Illegal

On January 1, 2022, the "[No Surprises Act](#)" made it illegal for hospitals, doctors, and other healthcare providers to bill patients who inadvertently receive their services out-of-network. Surprise bills can be huge because they do not reflect discounts insurance companies negotiate. The Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF) estimates patients receive 10 million surprise medical bills a year.

Patients who receive a surprise bill, however, must take care of it themselves. The law created a consumer complaints center where patients can call a help desk at 1-800-985-3059 from 8 am to 8 pm EST, seven days a week, or [file a complaint](#) online.

Consumer advocates point to [a gap in the law](#) that does not bar ground ambulances from sending surprise bills that average \$450. Congress created a federal advisory committee to study the issue. Learn more about surprise medical bills and the new nationwide ban in a short [KFF video](#).

### More News and Resources You Can Use

- Do [weighted blankets](#) help you sleep better?
- Break-through AI technology enables a musician amputee to become the [World's fastest drummer](#) and creates opportunities for others with disabilities
- [My Human Kit](#) prints prosthetics for less than \$1,000 through Open Source technology and 3D-printers
- Eighteen steps to [fall-proof](#) your house
- How to read and better [understand a scientific paper](#)
- [Upsolve](#) shows consumers how to use bankruptcy laws to resolve their medical debts
- Recommended book- "[The ICU Guide for Families: Understanding Intensive Care and How You Can Support Your Loved One](#)"
- It's hard to spot [fake clinical trials](#)

- Learn how to [be happier at work](#) with a self-paced online course from the Greater Good Science Center. Free to audit
- Can't get to the gym? Try these at-home [bodyweight exercises](#)
- Most inspirational [science books](#) of 2021
- [Lend your eyes](#) to someone with vision impairment
- Poynter Institute offers new [fact-checking tips](#)
- Overdrive's [Libby app](#) offers enhanced accessibility options
- Texas teen [creates app](#) to give his non-verbal sister a voice

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Wendy Urciuoli, MLS, Editor  
Wellness Through Answers  
UConn Health Sciences Library  
[hnet@uchc.edu](mailto:hnet@uchc.edu)  
(860) 679-4055



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