Health Watch USA℠ Newsletter

https://www.healthwatchusa.org **May 1, 2026**

Designated "Community Leader" for Value-Driven Healthcare
by the U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services

Activity for the Month of April - Health Watch USA℠:
-- 1 Continuing Education Course.
-- 1 OpEd
-- 3 Presentation Videos
-- 2025 HW USA Conference Videos are Available.
-- 2024 HW USA Conference Videos are Available

Health Watch USA℠ Nov. 1st, 2023 Conference Presentation Videos & Proceedings: Long COVID's Impact on Patients, Workers & Society: https://www.healthwatchusa.org/conference2023/index.html

Health Watch USA℠ Activities Reports: **2020** **2021** **2022** **2023** **2024**

Health Watch USA's 2025-2026 Public Health *Continuing Medical Education*

International speakers from New Zealand, Australia & Singapore.
Course Objectives:

1. Discuss the dangers imposed by four infectious pathogens, SARS-CoV-2, measles, H5N1, and antibiotic-resistant bacteria.
2. Identify preventative strategies to prevent the spread of airborne pathogens.
3. To better educate patients regarding misinformation surrounding vaccinations, in order to reduce patient infections and promote public safety.
4. Identify the role of bacteriophages in treating antibiotic resistant bacteria.

The course is currently available at https://healthconference.org and Combating Infectious Disease Course - Health Watch USA

This activity has been planned and implemented in accordance with the accreditation requirements and policies of the Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education (ACCME) through the Joint Providership of the Kentucky Medical Association and Healthwatch USA. The Kentucky Medical Association is accredited by the ACCME to provide continuing medical education for physicians. The Kentucky Medical Association designates this enduring material activity for 4.5 AMA PRA Category 1 credits.™ Physicians should claim only the credit commensurate with the extent of their participation in the activity.

Health Watch USA[sm] Newsletter Table of Contents

Health Watch USA^{sm} – Articles & Commentaries

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Hegseth's end of military vaccine mandates risks US security

"Whether in 1776 with the continental army's control of smallpox or with today's armed forces' mitigation of the impact of flu and COVID-19, we should not be minimizing the importance of vaccinations. As stated by author Jack McCallum, American military leaders need to be reminded that "disease and pathogens are as great a threat as any human adversary...One only needs to remember the devastation of the 1918 flu pandemic to realize the dangers of rescinding this mandate on maintaining troop readiness. The enemy would only have to surrender a few flu patients on the battlefield to wipe out our frontline readiness." References Courier Journal. Apr. 20, 2026. https://www.courier-journal.com/story/opinion/contributors/2026/04/30/military-vaccine-mandate-pete-hegseth-public-health-safety-national-security-cdc-covid/89737092007/

Health Watch USA^{sm} Presentations

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The Measles Outbreak & Mandatory Flu Vaccinations in the Military - Jack Pattie Show WVLK 97.3 FM

Dr. Kavanagh emphasizes the dangers of measles, noting severe complications such as blindness, deafness, and immune suppression, and points out that the disease was once nearly eradicated due to high vaccination rates. However, he states that misinformation and declining immunization rates have led to the resurgence of measles, with over 1,700 cases recently reported. The discussion also addresses the importance of herd immunity and the vulnerability of infants who are too young to be vaccinated. Dr. Kavanagh criticizes anti-vaccine messaging and urges renewed efforts to promote proven interventions. Later, the conversation shifts to COVID-19 vaccination, especially for elderly individuals or those with complex health issues. Dr. Kavanagh personally favors the Novavax vaccine and recommends consulting with a doctor for personalized advice. Dr Kavanagh also discussed that diseases, including the flu, pose as much risk to military readiness as combat. Vaccinations are crucial for troop health, noting flu's deadly impact historically and currently. The Spanish flu, whose origin has been traced back to a U.S. military base, caused as many deaths in World War I as combat itself. Jack Pattie Radio Show WVLK 97.3 FM, Lexington Kentucky. Apr. 23, 2026. YouTube Video: https://youtu.be/bNuMZPvmorY

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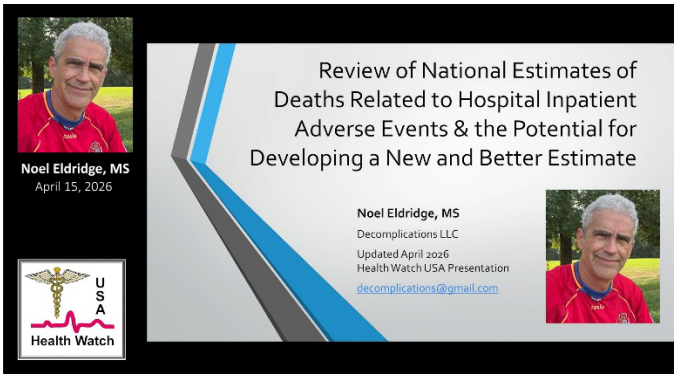
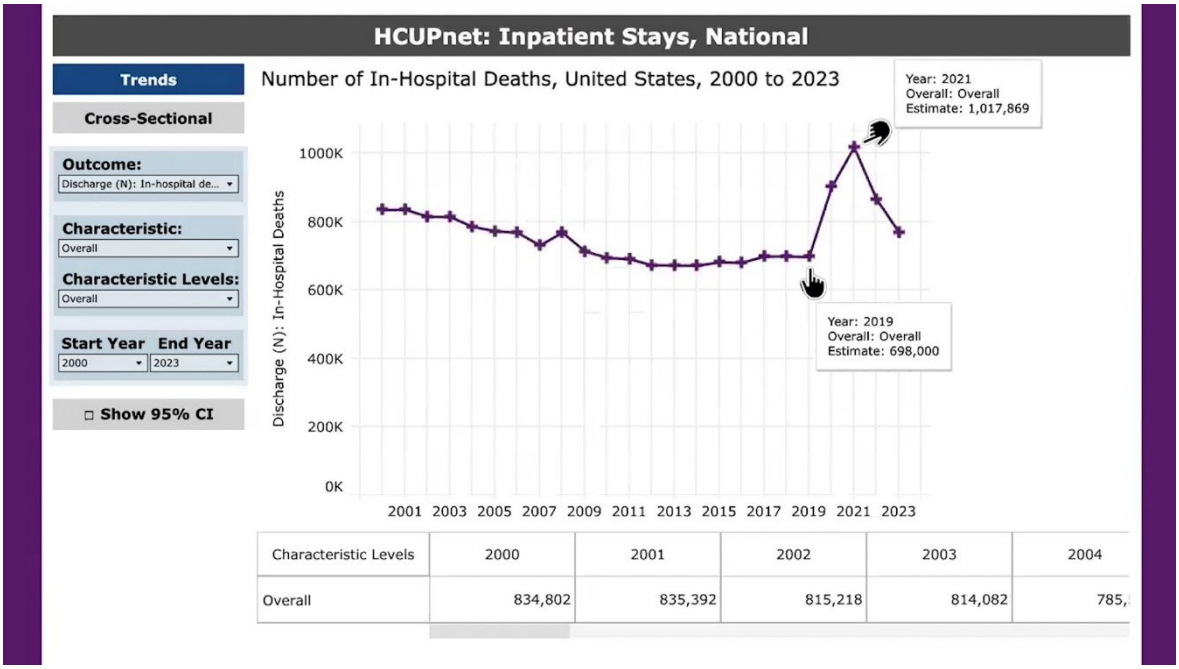


Review of national estimates of deaths related to hospital inpatient adverse events

Noel Eldridge, MS, begins his presentation by reviewing historical and recent estimates of deaths caused by hospital inpatient adverse events in the United States. He references the influential Institute of Medicine report, which estimated 44,000 to 98,000 annual deaths due to medical mistakes, and notes that many subsequent studies have produced widely varying figures—from 25,000 to 440,000 deaths, and that many estimates are not well-founded. Eldridge highlights the complexity in determining causality: not all adverse events that precede a death cause or even contribute to the death. Another issue is that studies frequently extrapolate small samples to national levels. He discusses efforts at the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) and other federal organizations to reduce hospital-acquired conditions and estimate preventable deaths, emphasizing the high degree of correlation between adverse events and inpatient deaths that was seen in AHRQ data published in JAMA in 2022, but emphasizing the challenge of distinguishing correlation from causation. Eldridge stresses the importance of accurate measurement, transparency, and continued work toward improved national estimates and patient safety. Health Watch USA[sm] meeting April 15, 2026. View Video https://youtu.be/bt1uzZCzmJQ

Hospital Inpatient COVID-19 Deaths

Noel Eldridge, MS, discusses Healthcare Utilization Project (HCUP) data for overall inpatient hospital mortality during the COVID-19 pandemic (1,017,869 in 2021 compared to 698,000 in 2019). Despite lower admissions during the COVID pandemic, the deathrate spiked, demonstrating the lethality of the COVID virus. And the deaths were significantly increased in 2020, before the vaccine had been nationally distributed. After 2021, associated with community COVID vaccination, hospital deaths significantly decreased. View Video: https://youtu.be/UHSBeCyY8E8



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Upcoming Meetings.

May 20, 2026 at 7 PM ET
Robert McDonald, MD, who will be discussing the rise of congenital syphilis in the United States.

June 17, 2026 at 7 PM ET
Ann Zaia, PhD, MSN, presentation regarding exposure to blood born pathogens

July 15, 2026 at 7 PM ET
Hamid Khosrowshahi, presentation regarding the prevention of ventilator associated pneumonia

Space is limited. To attend future meetings, send an email to kavanagh.ent@gmail.com

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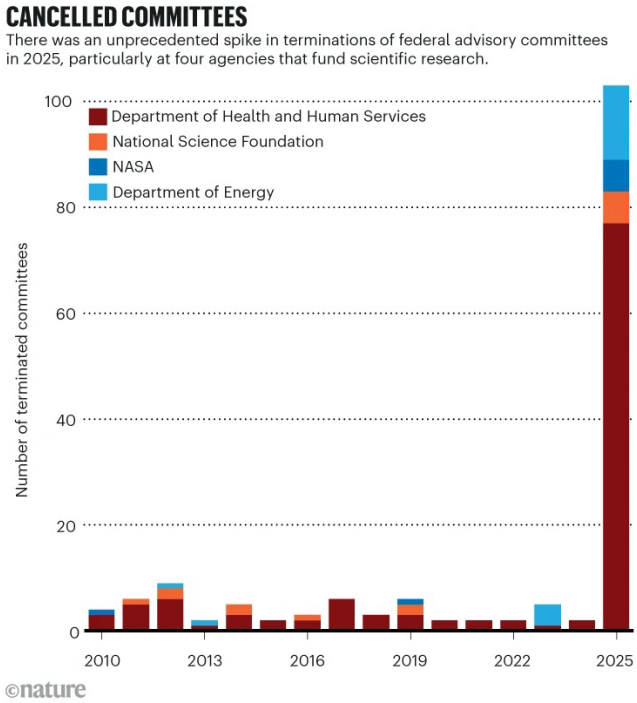
Health Watch USA℠ – Articles of Interest



Key US science panels are being axed — and others are becoming less open

"The scope of these committee terminations is unprecedented, a Nature analysis finds. For example, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), which includes the National Institutes of Health, disbanded 77 advisory boards — more than one-quarter of all its advisory committees — in 2025. By contrast, in fiscal year 2024, the agency terminated just two committees. " https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-026-01301-5

How the Trump Administration Ended Independent Science at the E.P.A.

"They are among more than 1,500 biologists, chemists and other experts at the Environmental Protection Agency's Office of Research and Development who have been laid off, reassigned or pressured to retire. Today, only 124 researchers remain, and this month they must decide whether to remain employed, abandon their work and move to different parts of the agency, or the country." https://www.nytimes.com/2026/04/27/climate/epa-science-trump-cuts.html

The US CDC on the brink

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"80% of the CDC's highest positions are vacant, with directors of 20 out of 25 centres having left. An estimated 2000 staff, almost one in five, have been fired, and about 300 are on administrative leave. There is still no CDC director since Susan Monarez was fired less than 1 month into her appointment in August, 2025 because she refused to pre-approve vaccine recommendations and to fire career scientists. The agency's ability to protect health in the US has been badly eroded."
https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(26)00799-3/fulltext

CDC won't publish report showing covid shots cut likelihood of hospital visits

"The report, which had cleared the agency's scientific-review process, had been delayed. It now won't be published at all, people familiar with the decision told The Post...The report showed that the vaccine reduced emergency department visits and hospitalizations among healthy adults by about half this past winter."
https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2026/04/22/covid-vaccine-report-blocked-cdc-mmwr/

It has been over 50 years since I started my medical education and practice. I have never before encountered a sign such as this. An era has ended.

The new study below outlines the expected detrimental effects of delaying the Hep B vaccine until 2 months of age.

CDC delay of infant hepatitis B shot likely to raise infections, studies show

"The Trump administration's decision to drop the long-standing recommendation that newborns receive a hepatitis B vaccine within 24 hours of birth will likely lead to hundreds of additional infections among children, along with more cases of liver cancer, deaths and millions in added health care costs, according to studies published Monday in JAMA Pediatrics."
https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2026/04/27/delaying-hepatitis-b-shot-newborns-infections/

Economic Impact of Delaying the Infant Hepatitis B Vaccination Schedule

"In this economic evaluation including 3.6 million infants, delaying administration of the first hepatitis B vaccine dose from birth to age 2 months for a single annual US birth cohort among infants whose birthing parents test negative for HBV could result in additional preventable HBV infections among children by age 18 years, including hepatocellular carcinoma cases, HBV-related deaths, and millions of dollars in excess lifetime health care co sts." https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapediatrics/article-abstract/2848162

The article below reviews the neurological impacts of COVID-19

Human brain matters: Navigating the neuropathology of COVID-19

"Potential disease mechanisms underlying neurological symptoms observed in severe COVID-19 are vascular and fluid-brain barrier abnormalities, chronic neuroinflammation, persistent axonal damage and protein aggregation. In PASC patients, an altered biofluid proteome with increased neuronal proteins and pro-

inflammatory cytokines was observed. The pathological burden in affected brain regions may contribute to manifestations such as anosmia, memory deficits, and cerebellar ataxia." https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/bpa.70101

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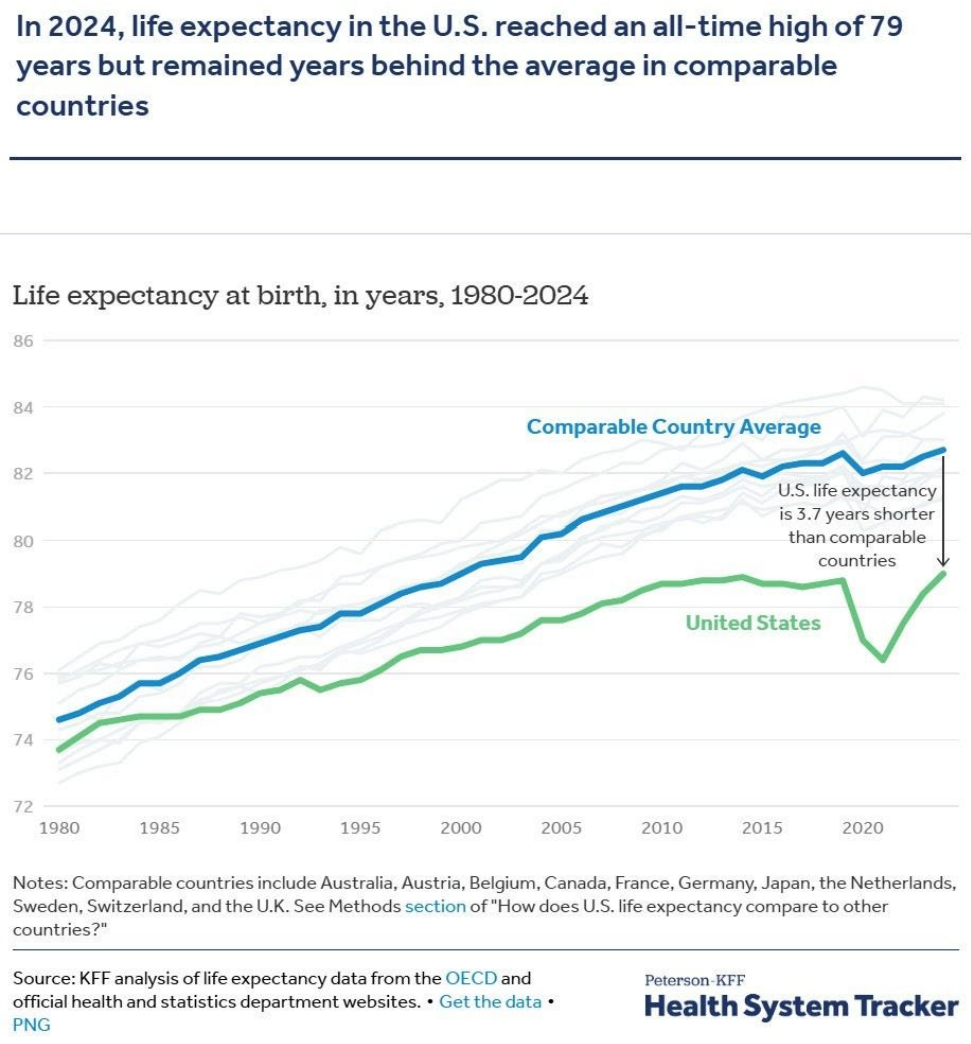
The article below is another in a long list of articles finding immune suppression associated with COVID-19

Acute COVID-19 is associated with altered CD8 T-cells indicative of impaired ability to control Epstein–Barr virus reactivation

Medical Microbiology and Immunology: "Increasing evidence suggests that reactivation of latent EBV in patients with COVID-19 may be linked to the development of post-acute sequelae of COVID-19, colloquially known as Long COVID....Collectively, these data point to an altered activation phenotype of circulating CD8 T-cells and that higher replicative senescence is associated with EBV reactivation. The data presented here suggests an alteration in the CD8 T-cell compartment with impaired ability to control the EBV reactivation in COVID patients." https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s00430-026-00873-3



How does U.S. life expectancy compare to other countries?

We spend far more on healthcare than any other country. "Life expectancy at birth in the U.S. increased 0.6 years from 78.4 years in 2023 to 79.0 years in 2024, its highest-ever level. However, the average life expectancy in comparable countries was 82.7 years, about 3.7 years longer than in the U.S., reflecting a persistently wide difference in life expectancy between the U.S. and comparable countries."

https://www.healthsystemtracker.org/chart-collection/u-s-life-expectancy-compare-countries/#Life%20expectancy%20at%20birth,%20in%20years,%201980-2024

Long COVID could cost OECD countries €116 billion a year over the next decade

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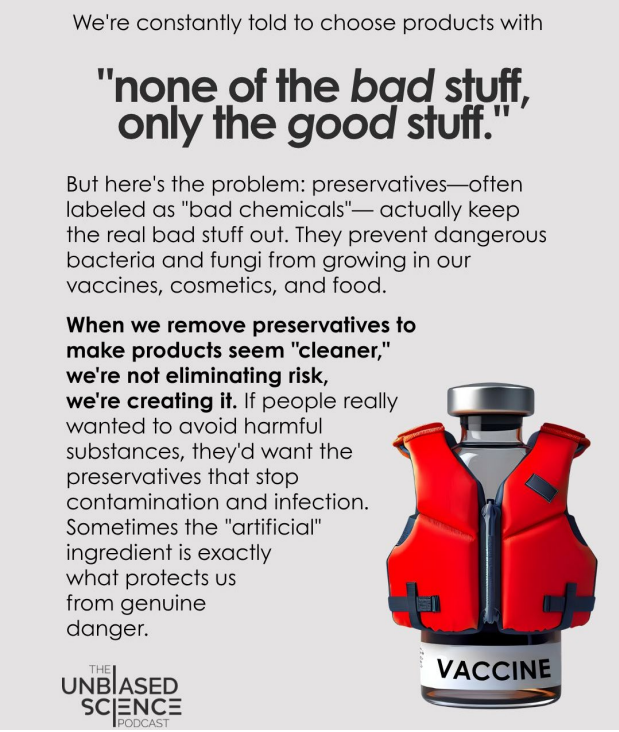
The chronic condition could cost OECD countries billions per year, with the total comparable to the annual health budgets of the Netherlands or Spain, a new report shows.

The long-term illness impacting some people who suffered a COVID-19 infection, known as long COVID, could cost OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries a total of $135 billion (almost €116 billion) per year over the next decade.

https://www.euronews.com/health/2026/04/09/long-covid-could-cost-oecd-countries-116-billion-a-year-over-the-next-decade



Health Watch USA℠ – Combating Misinformation

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We have posted a number of COVID-19 resources regarding common areas of misinformation.
These include:

• The Dangers of Long COVID and COVID-19 in Children: Download Resource

• COVID-19 Vaccine Prevention of Long COVID: Download Resource

• COVID-19 Vaccine's Effectiveness & Risks: Download Resource

• The ineffectiveness of Hydroxychloroquine & Ivermectin in the treatment of COVID-19: Download Resource

Health Watch USA Op-eds Regarding COVID-19 & Children

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• COVID is still a problem, and we need to do more to stop it | Opinion. Lexington Herald Leader. Nov. 1, 2024. https://www.kentucky.com/opinion/op-ed/article294875999.html#storylink=cpy

• COVID is closing Kentucky schools – again. Embracing disinformation paralyzes our response. Sept. 6, 2023. USA Today. https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2023/09/06/kentuckyschool-districts-close-covid-upgrade-buildings-ventilation/70765140007/

• 70% of COVID-19 Cases Transmitted By Children. Infection Control Today. June 5, 2023. https://www.infectioncontroltoday.com/view/70-covid-19-cases-transmitted-by-children

• FDA's ridiculous claims about COVID vaccines hurt KY kids. Courier journal. Dec. 31, 2025. https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2026/01/02/fda-covid-vaccine-cdc-trump/87974411007/

Active Public Health Continuing Education Courses

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2024: COVID-19: Endemic Impact & Responsibility

Four credit hours for Physicians - Category I AMA Credits and four hours of corresponding Kentucky Board Accreditation, Physical Therapy, Respiratory, EMS, & Nursing (4.8 hrs.)

Course Objectives:

- To better diagnose and recognize the multiple presentations of Long COVID, including behavioral health implications.
- To be able discuss with patients the importance of preventing COVID-19 and other respiratory diseases.
- To combat patient misinformation regarding vaccines and the risks of COVID and Long COVID.
- To identify and reschedule patients who missed disease screenings during the pandemic.
- To discuss how COVID-19 is spread through the air by a continuum of particle sizes.
- To discuss with office staff and other health care professionals strategies to prevent the spread of respiratory pathogens including use of N95 masks and improvement in indoor ventilation.
- To better discuss with patients the benefits and need for vaccinations.

Link to Course (Southern Kentucky AHEC) https://sokyahec.thinkific.com/courses/COVID-enduring

Download Brochure: https://www.healthconference.org/healthconference.org-files/2024Conference_downloads/20240901-HWUSA_Brochure-AHEC.pdf

2025-2026: Combating Infectious Disease Challenges

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International speakers from New Zealand, Australia & Singapore.
Course Objectives:

1. Discuss the dangers imposed by four infectious pathogens, SARS-CoV-2, measles, H5N1, and antibiotic-resistant bacteria.
2. Identify preventative strategies to prevent the spread of airborne pathogens.
3. To better educate patients regarding misinformation surrounding vaccinations, in order to reduce patient infections and promote public safety.
4. Identify the role of bacteriophages in treating antibiotic resistant bacteria.

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Health Watch USA^{sm} – 2023 & 2024 Conference Presentations

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COVID-19: Endemic Impact & Responsibility

Link to 2024 Presentation Videos:
COVID-19: Endemic Impact & Responsibility Sept. 1, 2024

Link to 2023 Presentation Videos:
Long COVID's Impact on Patients, Workers & Society

Download & View 2023 Conference Proceedings: Kavanagh KT, Cormier LE, Pontus C, Bergman A, Webley W. Long COVID's Impact on Patients, Workers & Society. Medicine. Published Mar. 22, 2024. https://journals.lww.com/md-journal/fulltext/2024/03220/long_covid_s_impact_on_patients,_workers,__.50.aspx

Download 2023 Brochure: https://www.healthwatchusa.org/conference2023/healthconference.org-files/2023Conference_downloads/20231101-HWUSA_Brochure-5.pdf

Health Watch USA^{sm} – 2025 Webinar Presentations

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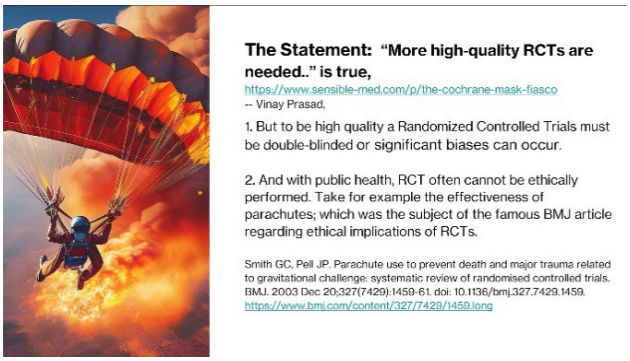


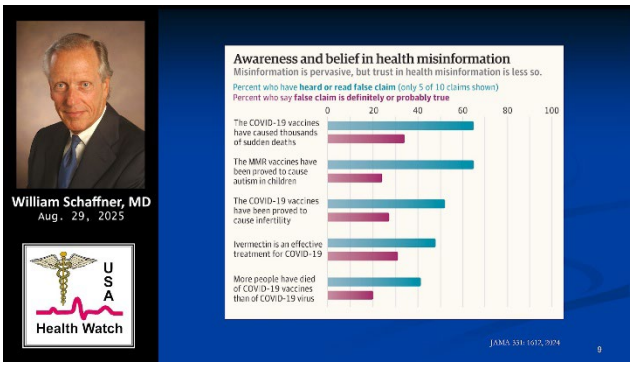
2025 Webinar Introduction & Science Behind Masking: Dr. Kevin Kavanagh, Board Chairman of Health Watch USA^{sm} gives the webinar introduction and discusses misinformation and disinformation regarding masking. Similar barriers found with adopting face masks can also be found with other public health strategies. Exposure dosage to an airborne pathogen is important in reducing the risks of transmission, which underscores the importance of masking and improving indoor air ventilation and quality. Health Watch USA^{sm} Webinar. Aug. 29, 2025. View Video View Slides

Associated Infection Control Today Article: How Misinformation Tries to Debunk the Science Behind Masking
https://www.infectioncontroltoday.com/view/how-misinformation-tries-discredit-science-behind-masking

Key Points from Webinar Introduction

- The webinar marks the 20th anniversary of Healthwatch USA, focusing on infectious disease challenges and progress.
- Topics addressed include vaccinations, worker safety, elimination strategies, bird flu, phages as treatment for antibiotic resistance, and public health misinformation.
- Misinformation and disinformation have significant impacts on public health efforts, sometimes leading to violence and the enactment of ineffective policies.

- Recent CDC events include armed attacks, layoffs, leadership changes, & being asked to endorse controversial policies.
- Exposure dosage is important in reducing the risks of transmission. Which underscores the importance of masking and improving indoor air ventilation and quality.
- Masking as a public health strategy faces difficulties in compliance and study design, impacting trial results.
- Evidence suggests that mask effectiveness depends on correct and consistent use, type of mask, and exposure time.
- A layered approach—using multiple strategies simultaneously—is essential for effective infection control.
- Randomized controlled trials for masking are challenging due to ethical and practical considerations.
- Large studies and reviews show that masks, especially N95 respirators, reduce transmission of respiratory pathogens.
- Ivermectin trials have failed to show benefit in treating COVID-19, suggesting research should focus elsewhere.
- Improved air quality and ventilation should complement masking, particularly in healthcare settings.
- Short-term use of N95 masks for specific situations remains a recommended public health strategy.



Communications and pandemic mitigation strategies—Health Watch USA 2025

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William Schaffner, MD discusses that dealing with vaccine hesitancy, such as a patient's reluctance to receive a flu shot, requires more than simply offering facts—it necessitates empathy, validation, and a focus on building trust. When a patient expresses uncertainty about vaccination, the healthcare provider's response should never be surprise or judgment. Instead, it is vital to acknowledge and validate the patient's concerns, maintaining open, supportive dialogue. Asking patients to share their specific worries and responding with understanding helps ease anxiety and fosters a sense of partnership. Providers are encouraged to normalize healthy behaviors by sharing relatable examples, such as mentioning that they and their families are vaccinated, and highlighting that most people in the community do the same. This approach leverages social norms and comfort to promote positive health actions. Even if a patient remains hesitant, it's important not to argue, but to accept their reluctance and assure them the conversation will continue in the future. Effective communication about vaccines also involves keeping messages clear, fact-based, and accessible. Healthcare professionals should be honest about the benefits and limitations of vaccines, offering reassurance and emphasizing the goal of preventing serious disease. Ultimately, how patients feel during these interactions—respected, understood, and cared for—has a lasting impact. The role of the healthcare provider is not only to impart knowledge but to nourish trust, serving as both teacher and caregiver in the journey toward better health outcomes. Health Watch USA[sm] Webinar Aug. 29, 2025. View Presentation Video: https://youtu.be/h45wnmG79xI

Measles 50 years later

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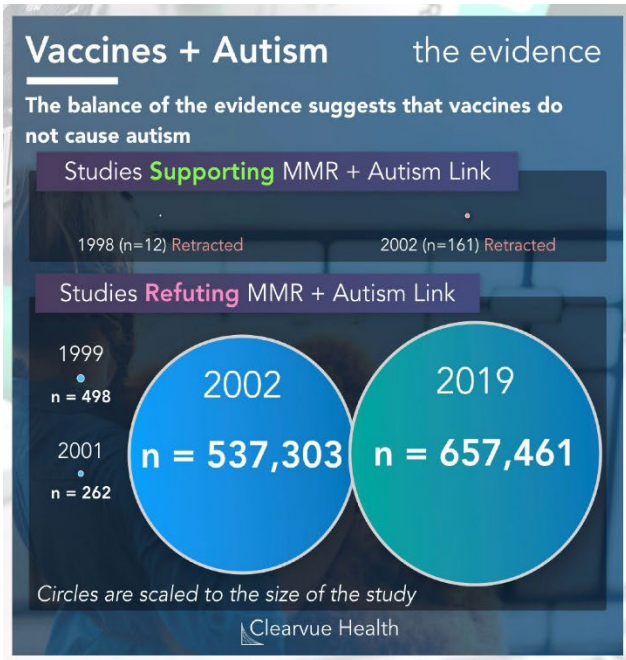
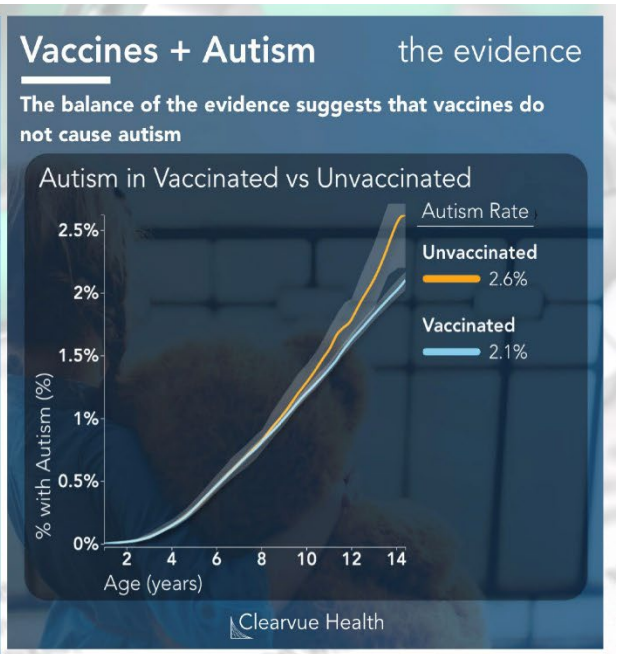
Wilmore Webley, PhD, Professor of Microbiology and Senior Vice Provost for Equity and Inclusion at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Dr. Webley discusses the research and vaccine history of the measles virus, along with its severe clinical impact. He emphasizes that measles causes not only acute illness but also "immune amnesia," erasing immune memory and leaving survivors vulnerable to other diseases. Due to the virus's extreme contagiousness, a high rate of immunity in the community, greater than 95%, is necessary for herd immunity to take place and to stop the spread of the virus. As the presentation discusses, the benefit of the vaccine greatly outweighs its risks. Unfortunately, misinformation is rampant, and immunization rates are falling. In many areas they are well below the level needed to achieve herd immunity. Much of the misinformation can be traced back to a deeply flawed 1998 study by Andrew Wakefield which was published in the Lancet and later retracted by the Journal. The study was not controlled, suboptimally conducted, and involved only 12-patients.(1) Numerous large studies have not found a relationship between vaccines and autism. In one study, unvaccinated individuals were even found to have a

statistically non-significant higher rate.(2,3) It is ironic that hundreds of thousands of patients have been studied to counter the initial 12-patient report. Research dollars could have been spent elsewhere, such as researching other causes of autism. Health Watch USA[sm] conference, Aug. 29, 2025. View Video of Presentation: https://youtu.be/AOgySUPnGKk





https://www.clearvuehealth.com/b/autism-mmr-stats/

(1) Godlee F, Smith J, Marcovitch H. Wakefield's article linking MMR vaccine and autism was fraudulent. BMJ. 2011 Jan 5;342:c7452. doi: 10.1136/bmj.c7452. PMID: 21209060. https://www.bmj.com/content/342/bmj.c7452.lon g

(2) Hviid A, Hansen JV, Frisch M, Melbye M. Measles, Mumps, Rubella Vaccination and Autism: A Nationwide Cohort Study. Ann Intern Med. 2019 Apr 16;170(8):513-520. doi: 10.7326/M18-2101. Epub 2019 Mar 5. PMID: 30831578. https://www.acpjournals.org/doi/10.7326/M18-2101

(3) Data on the MMR Vaccine & Autism | Visualized Health. Mar. 7, 2019. https://www.clearvuehealth.com/b/autism-mmr-stats/

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A View from the Frontlines: The Current State of Infection Control in U.S. Healthcare Facilities

Lisa Baum MA, a lead representative for the New York State Nurses Association, highlighted persistent issues in infection control within healthcare facilities, emphasizing the spread of nosocomial infections including airborne infectious diseases. Despite improvements, infection rates and associated deaths remain high, exacerbated by underreporting and insufficient data—particularly for airborne diseases. Critical contributing factors include understaffing, rapid room turnovers, inadequate cleaning, inadequate ventilation and lack of training on effective use of disinfectants, such as proper dwell time for pathogen elimination. Environmental services staff shortages and overcrowding in emergency departments further increase transmission risks, with patients sometimes placed in hallways or separated only by curtains. Ventilation is a recurring concern. While negative pressure rooms and advanced local exhaust systems exist; they are not widely implemented. There are inadequate regulation and the regulations that do exist are not adequately enforced. Personal protective equipment (PPE), though essential, is not the most effective control in the hierarchy, often hampered by supply chain challenges and improper fit. The pandemic revealed deeper systemic flaws, with crisis measures sometimes prioritizing operational needs over safety.

Lisa Baum advocates for layered controls: improved identification and isolation protocols, robust testing, enhanced staffing, better ventilation, and a shift to reusable PPE. She stresses the necessity of regulatory reforms to ensure consistent and effective infection prevention and supports empowering organizations like NIOSH to restore scientific leadership in occupational health. View Presentation Video: https://youtu.be/1Aa5AhHU0JA

Bacterial Phages, a New and Old Treatment for Antibiotic Resistant Bacteria

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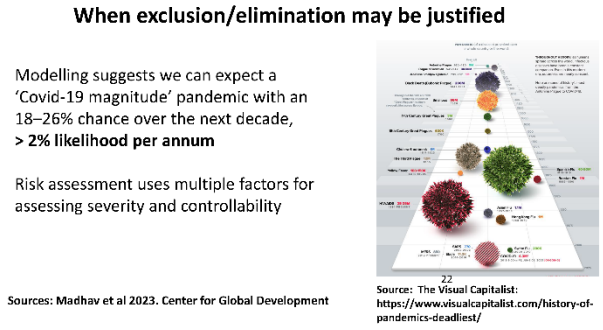
Ambassador Deborah Birx, MD, discusses bacteriophages and their potential for treating patients with life-threatening antibiotic-resistant infections.

Bacteriophages, viruses that infect specific bacteria, offer a promising alternative for treating infections caused by antibiotic-resistant bacteria such as Staphylococcus aureus and Pseudomonas aeruginosa. Unlike broad-spectrum antibiotics, phages are highly selective, targeting only their host bacteria without disrupting the beneficial gut microbiome. Interest in phage therapy is rising as antimicrobial resistance escalates, but regulatory approval is still pending in countries like the United States due to the challenges of manufacturing, purifying, and validating these biologics.

Clinical development has been slow because producing stable, pure phage preparations requires them to be grown on their host bacteria and thoroughly purified to avoid immune reactions. Most phage treatments in the United States have been used compassionately in critically ill patients, but rigorous placebo-controlled trials are essential for regulatory FDA approval.

Recent trials have investigated phage therapy for difficult cases of bacteremia and pneumonia, often in combination with antibiotics. Results show that phage therapy can reduce relapse rates, shorten hospital stays, and minimize adverse reactions. In a recent trial on patients with severe MRSA infections, including those with endocarditis. The response was 100 percent with the addition of phage without any relapse at one week post stopping antibiotics, as compared to a 25 percent relapse rate in the placebo arm.

The field now aims to prove efficacy through large phase three superiority trials, which could establish phages as a viable standard of care. Ultimately, phage therapy has the potential not only to treat resistant infections but also to lessen antibiotic use, preserve the microbiome, and improve outcomes in patients with serious bacterial diseases. Health Watch USA[sm] webinar Aug. 29, 2025. View Presentation Video: https://youtu.be/CQmpXcIiJg8



Why elimination should be the default strategy for future severe pandemics

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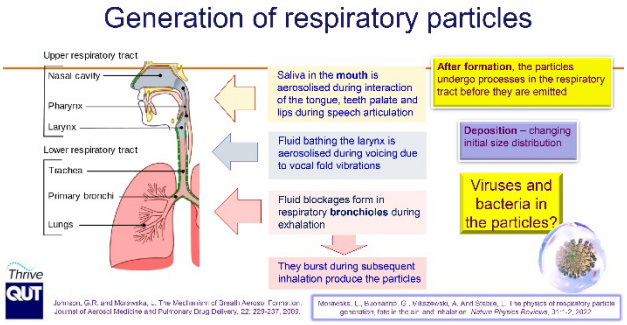
In this presentation, Professor Michael Baker, a key figure in New Zealand's COVID-19 response, discusses the country's elimination strategy against the pandemic. A public health physician and epidemiologist at the University of Otago, Baker highlights that a clear strategy is crucial for effective pandemic management. He emphasizes three primary response strategies: mitigation, suppression, and elimination. In March 2020, New Zealand adopted an elimination approach characterized by rapid border closures and stringent public health measures to stamp out infections despite having only 100 reported cases at the time.

Baker details how elimination allowed New Zealand to maintain near zero transmission of COVID-19 for almost two years, thereby affording time to enhance vaccination efforts and improve healthcare responses before widespread infection. This

strategy resulted in low cumulative mortality compared to other nations, which generally employed less coordinated approaches. He notes that the elimination strategy bought time to manage healthcare and maintain community functions, leading to fewer restrictions and economic impacts compared to countries that faced uncontrolled outbreaks.

However, he acknowledges challenges such as public compliance, equity concerns, and the logistics of implementing border controls. As new variants emerged, New Zealand transitioned from elimination to suppression and now operates under a mitigation strategy. Baker concludes that successful pandemic responses rely on evidence-informed strategies and political leadership, advocating for global coordination in health responses and preparedness for future pandemics. In discussion, he notes negative excess mortality in New Zealand during the pandemic, highlighting the role of infectious disease management in reducing overall mortality. Aug. 29, 2025. Health Watch USA[sm] Webinar: Combating Infectious Disease Challenges. View Video: https://youtu.be/I7DIJA87sI8



Understanding and Reducing the Spread of Respiratory Pathogens Through The Air

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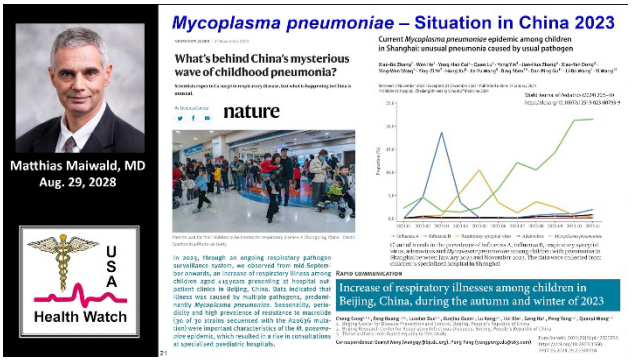
Dr. Lidia Morawska, PhD, an expert in air quality, discussed the science behind infectious respiratory particles, emphasizing the importance of understanding their generation and spread. All respiratory activities, especially louder ones like singing, produce particles that can remain suspended in the air for extended periods, increasing the risk of transmission of viruses such as SARS-CoV-2. Smaller particles, originating deeper in the respiratory tract, tend to carry higher viral loads.

Dr. Morawska highlighted historical resistance to recognizing airborne transmission, noting that scientific consensus and interdisciplinary collaboration were essential in shifting global perspectives, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. She cited the need for robust ventilation far beyond merely opening windows, as mechanical ventilation systems significantly reduce infection rates. A study in Italy demonstrated lower COVID-19 cases in classrooms equipped with mechanical ventilation compared to those without.

The presentation underscored the necessity for better building designs focused on indoor air quality and continuous monitoring of ventilation performance. Dr. Morawska advocated for indoor air quality regulations akin to outdoor standards, pointing out that voluntary measures often fall short, especially in schools. Low-cost CO2 sensors offer practical means for individuals and institutions to assess air quality and mitigate risks. Ultimately, Dr. Morawska called for clean indoor air as a public health norm, suggesting that improved air quality regulation would yield benefits comparable to other historical advances in sanitation, with far less investment required. Health Watch USA[sm] webinar. Aug. 29, 2025. View Presentation Video: https://youtu.be/MpDChemSBD8

More about Dr. Morawska: https://time.com/collection/100-most-influential-people-2021/6095975/lidia-morawska/

Portable CO2 Monitors: Dr. Lidia Morawska, PhD, explains the usefulness of carrying a portable CO2 monitor when one enters public spaces. (CO2 is a surrogate for clean air. Lower levels are better.) One can use the monitor to determine the safety of indoor air and to help you in deciding whether or not to wear a mask (N95 Respirator). Q & A period moderated by Noel Eldridge, MS, at Health Watch USA[sm]'s 2025 Conference. View Video: https://youtu.be/bmg_G2tEOKU



Unusual re-emergence of respiratory pathogens after lifting of COVID-19 restrictions in Singapore

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Dr. Matthias Maiwald presented an in-depth analysis of the trends in respiratory pathogens in Singapore following the lifting of Covid-19 restrictions. Using data from 120,000 clinical samples (mainly pediatric) collected between 2019 and mid-2025, he outlined how pandemic containment measures initially caused a dramatic decrease in common respiratory viruses and bacteria, such as influenza, RSV, and Mycoplasma pneumoniae.

As restrictions were gradually eased, certain non-enveloped viruses like enterovirus/rhinovirus and adenovirus reappeared first, likely due to their environmental stability at phases of increased social contact. Other pathogens returned in unusual patterns—RSV and influenza A exhibited out-of-season peaks, and Mycoplasma pneumoniae resurged after a long absence, concurrent with significant outbreaks in China. The outbreaks in China had notably high rates of macrolide resistance. Some pathogens, such as pertussis, remained nearly absent throughout the observation period.

Dr. Maiwald discussed several hypotheses for these patterns, including immunity debt (reduced exposure leading to greater vulnerability), innate immune system changes, and immune dysregulation after Covid-19 infection. He emphasized that the overall burden of respiratory infections in 2025 is approaching pre-pandemic levels but may still be slightly elevated. The reemergence of pathogens was quite uneven, with some surging above historical norms and affecting different age groups or presenting more severe cases. Health Watch USA[sm] webinar on Aug. 29, 2025. View Presentation Video: https://youtu.be/jRwadwS31T0

Bird Flu, the risks and prevention of a future pandemic

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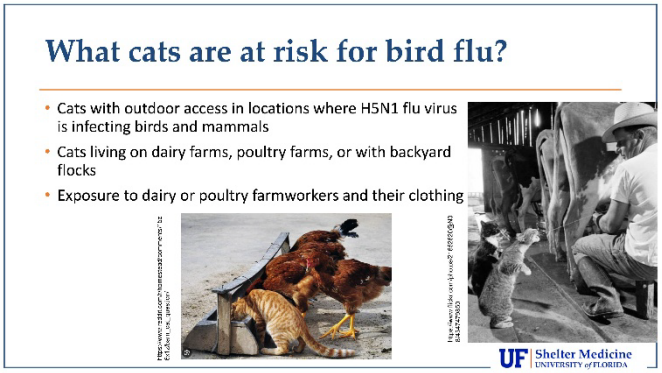
Dr. Richard Webby, a virologist at St. Jude's and a leading expert on influenza, presented an overview of the current landscape of H5N1 avian influenza ("bird flu") and its potential threats to human health. He explains that influenza viruses, especially those in wild migratory birds, are highly diverse. Most remain in their natural hosts, but occasionally spillover events infect other animals, including poultry, swine, and sporadically humans—though sustained human-to-human transmission has not been observed.

Dr. Webby highlights how certain influenza subtypes, like H5N1, have caused concern for decades. The virus first infected humans in Hong Kong in 1997, leading to fatalities but was contained by culling poultry. Since then, H5N1 spread globally through wild birds, leading to outbreaks in domestic animals and, more recently, a significant incursion into the Americas. In 2024, the virus unexpectedly infected US dairy cattle, a species not previously considered at risk, with human cases mostly limited to conjunctivitis in exposed workers. Despite this, the virus hasn't shown key mutations needed for efficient human spread.

Control strategies focus on surveillance, culling in poultry, movement controls in cattle, and, in some countries, vaccination of animals. Human vaccines exist but are rarely deployed. Dr. Webby emphasizes that the economic consequences, particularly for the poultry industry, have been severe, with billions lost, and stresses the importance of ongoing vigilance to prevent a future pandemic. Health Watch USA webinar Aug. 29, 2025.
View Video: https://youtu.be/GykR462luJQ



Chickens, Cows, and Cats: A Barnyard Story about Bird Flu -

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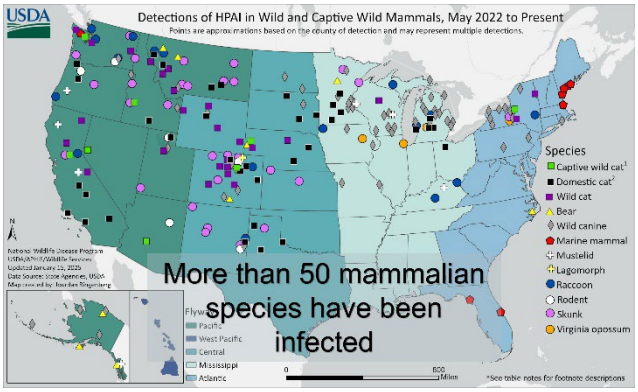
Dr. Cynda Crawford, DMV, PhD discusses H5N1 or "Bird Flu" and its impact on domestic cats, poultry and dairy cattle at the 2025 Health Watch USA[sm] webinar: "Combating Infectious Disease Challenges."

Presentation Summary: The presentation by Dr. Cynda Crawford explores the evolving ecology and impact of highly pathogenic H5N1 avian influenza (bird flu) across the United States. Traditionally, wild waterfowl are the natural hosts of influenza A viruses, but in recent years, the H5N1 subtype has spread extensively, affecting all 50 U.S. states' poultry, leading to the infection and depopulation of approximately 175 million birds.

Since 2022, H5N1 has spilled over from wild birds into commercial and backyard poultry, then into a wide range of mammals—over 200 terrestrial and marine species, including seals, sea lions, and for the first time, dairy cattle. Dairy cows experience H5N1 as a localized mammary gland infection resulting in mastitis and sudden drops in milk production, with high viral loads detected in milk but generally nonfatal outcomes for the animals. New genotypes have been identified, highlighting frequent viral reassortment.

A notable event occurred in March 2024 when barn cats on a Texas dairy farm died rapidly after consuming raw milk from infected cows, marking the first documented mammal-to-mammal transmission of H5N1 via milk. Cats suffer severe, often fatal neurological disease, and the mortality rate among infected cats is estimated at 50–70%. There is no current evidence of cat-to-cat or cat-to-human transmission. The situation raises public health concerns about cows and cats as potential "mixing vessels" for new, more dangerous H5N1 strains, emphasizing the need for enhanced surveillance, biosecurity, and consideration of vaccines for at-risk animals. Health Watch USA[sm] webinar. Aug. 29, 2025. View Presentation Video: https://youtu.be/drvk7vSj6LE



Following H5 Influenza As It Moves Through North American Food Animals

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Dr. Carol Cardona discussed the evolution and spread of H5 influenza, focusing on its movement through North American food animals. She noted the initial incursion of goose Guangdong H5 in 2014, leading to widespread outbreaks in commercial poultry, which were controlled through mass depopulation. The virus returned in 2021, this time driven by wild waterfowl as primary reservoirs, with poultry now mostly victims rather than sources of transmission.

Cardona highlighted that stamping out poultry, while effective in halting farm-to-farm spread, does not control the virus in wild birds. Over 170 million birds have been depopulated due to outbreaks, including 150 million from wild bird infections and another 20 million related to bovine infections. H5 has expanded into more than 50 mammalian species and continues to adapt to new hosts, including cattle, goats, alpacas, and bears.

Control options for H5 include stamping out, vaccination (which faces economic and export barriers), and biosecurity, though each has limitations due to the virus's evolving host range. Cardona stressed the lack of surveillance in wild mammals and called for improved prevention strategies. She addressed misconceptions about asymptomatic carriers and pointed to genetic resistance in some animals, although no mechanism is known in chickens. The presentation concluded by emphasizing the unpredictable nature of influenza and the need for adaptable control measures. Health Watch USA sm Webinar Aug. 29, 2025. View Presentation Video: https://youtu.be/SALHVe_aAJ4

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