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Hello *Nature* readers,
Today we explore how molnupiravir appears to have succeeded against COVID-19 where other antivirals have struggled. Plus, we learn how pandemic restrictions have affected the spread of other illnesses and hear that young people's mental health is finally getting the attention it needs.

If authorized, molnupiravir would be the first oral treatment for COVID-19. (Merck & Co Inc/Handout/Reuters)

Behind the promising first oral COVID drug

An antiviral pill called molnupiravir has been shown to cut the risk of hospitalization or death in half for people newly diagnosed with COVID-19, say its makers, Merck (called MSD outside the United States and Canada) and Ridgeback Biotherapeutics. It works by interfering with how SARS-CoV-2 replicates inside our cells, causing it to mutate itself to death. The treatment is a pill — a big advantage over antiviral injections that work against COVID-19, such as remdesivir.
But whether this clinical-trial success story will translate into a global game-changer in the fight against the pandemic isn't yet clear.

Nature | 8 min read
Reference: Merck press release

Brace for a fierce flu rebound

Health practices taken up to combat the COVID-19 pandemic are continuing to have unusual and unexpected effects on a number of respiratory diseases — some illnesses have been quashed, others have ploughed through and still more are rebounding off-season. Seasonal influenza typically kills hundreds of thousands of people every year, but for most of 2020 and 2021, it practically vanished from much of the globe. Pandemic measures also seem to have suppressed some bacterial infections, including those that cause pneumonia and meningitis. Researchers warn that we might see a rebound effect as restrictions are lifted and flu spreads through previously uninfected people — so get your flu shot, if you can.

Source: Foley, D. A. *et al. Clin. Infect. Dis.* http://doi.org/10.1093/cid/ciaa1906 (2021).

Myocarditis risk from vaccine is very low

The risk of developing inflammation of the heart muscle after receiving the Pfizer–BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine is very low. Two large studies from Israel indicate that teenage boys and young men are most at risk of developing the condition, known as myocarditis. But even in this group, the vast majority of cases are mild and people recover quickly. In one study of more than 5 million people who had received the Pfizer–BioNTech vaccine, 136 developed myocarditis. The other study, of more than 2.5 million people who received the shot, identified just 54 cases of myocarditis. Epidemiologist Ran Balicer hopes the findings will "help alleviate some of the worries around the risks associated with vaccination in the younger age groups".

Nature | 7 min read

Features & opinion

Spotlight on young people's mental health

Worldwide, at least 13% of people between the ages of 10 and 19 live with a diagnosed mental-health disorder, according to a report published last week by the United Nations children's charity UNICEF. It's the first time in the organization's history that this flagship report has tackled the challenges in and opportunities for preventing and treating mental-health problems among young people. It reveals that adolescent mental health is highly complex, understudied — and underfunded. These findings are echoed in a parallel collection of review articles in a number of Springer Nature journals, which dive deep into the state of knowledge concerning interventions — those that work and those that don't — for preventing and treating anxiety and depression in young people aged 14–24.

Nature Editorial | 6 min read & Full collection
Reference: *State of the World's Children* report