Takeaways from the Senate’s surreal virtual hearing on the U.S. coronavirus response

Lawmakers (virtually) grilled four top federal officials overseeing the Trump administration’s coronavirus response yesterday, and while there weren’t any highly charged moments, the Senate hearing offered some insight on whether it’s safe for the country to reopen. Appearing with FDA chief Stephen Hahn, CDC Director Robert Redfield, and HHS assistant health secretary Brett Giroir, NIAID’s Anthony Fauci was direct in telling senators not to expect a vaccine anytime soon. He also warned that the U.S. Covid-19 deaths — which have surpassed 80,000 — are likely undercounted. “Most of us feel that the number of deaths are likely higher than that number,” Fauci said. STAT's Lev Facher has the six biggest takeaways from the hearing here.

Here's what else is happening with the Covid-19 crisis:

- Following reports that the NIH terminated funding for a project in China that was investigating the risk of coronaviruses emerging from bats, the nonprofit Research!America sent a letter yesterday to HHS Secretary Alex Azar asking him to clarify the decision. "The abrupt termination of this grant has generated concern, not only because of the relevance of this research to COVID-19 and future pandemics, but because the lack of transparency surrounding the
In a new STAT First Opinion, psychiatry resident Gabriel Felix writes about balancing his desire to wear a face covering in public to comply with Covid-19 regulations with his fear of being perceived as suspicious as a masked Black man. "My mask worries simply serve as another example of how Black people experience the world differently due to systemic racism," he writes.

PBS' science show "NOVA" is premiering a one-hour documentary this evening called "Decoding Covid-19." The film tells the story of the biology of the new coronavirus and follows many of the scientists who are involved in vaccine efforts against Covid-19. Watch the trailer and check your local listings here.

More than 26 million likely to lose employer-sponsored health insurance due to Covid-19

A new Kaiser Family Foundation analysis finds that nearly 27 million people will lose health insurance as a result of being laid off during the Covid-19 pandemic. The analysis was based on the fact that more than 31 million people filed unemployment claims between March and the first week of this month. The study further estimates that although the vast majority of those who lose insurance will be eligible to get coverage through Medicaid, Medicare, or the health care exchanges set up through the Affordable Care Act, nearly 6 million won't be eligible for coverage under the ACA and may have to pay the full cost of care. Eight states — including California, Massachusetts, Texas and Florida — will have at least a million residents who lose health insurance, and that nearly 17 million people will become eligible for Medicaid by January next year, which could put a strain on state budgets.

Even low alcohol and tobacco use in pregnancy associated with changes in infants' brain activity

The results of a new study further suggest that even low alcohol and tobacco use during pregnancy could negatively impact brain development in the fetus. Researchers recruited mother-newborn pairs from South Africa and the U.S., and found that babies born to
mothers who reported drinking a little alcohol during their pregnancy — a median of five drinks per trimester — had increased activity in a part of the brain that's associated with developmental problems later on in life. This was also observed among neonates born to mothers who quit drinking alcohol after the first trimester. Newborns born to mothers who said they quit smoking after the first trimester or smoked a low number of cigarettes during their pregnancy also had increased brain activity in a way that could signal future developmental issues, the study found. Future research will have to look at the long-term effects of these early observations, the authors suggest.

**Inside STAT: Remote heart monitoring could become tech’s next big target**

Even before the Covid-19 pandemic hit, health tech companies with cardiac monitoring products were pushing for more remote capabilities on these devices. Many big-name players like Apple and Facebook were also expanding into the cardiac space. Now, many of these companies and their products are having a standout moment. As some heart patients refrain from going into hospitals for critical care over Covid-19 fears, these cardiac monitoring tools — which include mini-EKGs and blood pressure cuffs connected to the internet — could help keep tabs on at-risk patients while also protecting them from possible exposure to the coronavirus at clinics. These devices will "help more and more as people start to figure out that they can get answers to their symptoms
New initiative looks to raise awareness of mental health among gaming community

Health care network Kaiser Permanente is partnering with esports organization Cloud9 in a new initiative — called "Presence of Mind" — to provide mental health resources and support to Cloud9's "League of Legends" video game team as well as to the broader gaming community. I spoke with Don Mordecai, KP's national leader for mental health and wellness, to learn more about this initiative.

What is the incentive for this partnership?
Mental health conditions tend to develop in youth — 50% start before age of 14 and 75% before the age of 24. And an estimated 75% of youth are taking part in the gaming community. We think this is a really great opportunity to reach youth in that community. It's also about decreasing the stigma associated with mental health and accessing care for it.

What will the initiative involve?
There are three aspects to the partnership. One is working directly with the [League of Legends] team and coaches [by] bringing in our experts and educating the team about mental health conditions. Another is working with [the streaming platform] Twitch, where millions of people spend time watching people play, to do a series of fireside chat interviews with gamers and our expert staff on mental health. And third is working with moderators who are in the midst of these games so that they better understand mental health and are bringing awareness to the topic.

Winners of WHO's first-ever film festival announced
The winners of the WHO's first-ever film festival were announced yesterday, and the awardees represent a breadth of areas across health and medicine. The contest, called the "Health for All Film Festival," received nearly 1,300 entries from 119 countries and asked contestants to submit short films in one of three categories, including
designated to celebrate these health workers in 2020. The winner in this category was "War and Grace," a movie that highlighted midwives helping deliver infants in war-torn South Sudan. The winner in the animation category was "Limbo," a film from Myanmar that chronicles sexual violence, while the winner in the video reports category was "A Doctor's Dream," which follows one group's fight for a medicine for sleeping sickness in the Congo. The winners get $10,000 each. See the winning and shortlisted films here.

What to read around the web today

- Stretched, secret supply chains hold Covid-19 patients' lives in the balance. The Bureau of Investigative Journalism
- Deluge of genome editing therapies end research drought for sickle cell disease. STAT Plus
- Unveiling ‘Warp Speed,’ the White House’s America-first push for a coronavirus vaccine. Science
- CDC docs stress plans for more virus flareups. Associated Press
- Facebook will pay $52 million in settlement with moderators who developed PTSD on the job. The Verge

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