

## Health

## HIV outbreak probe sought

## FDA approves new ADHD drug for kids

NEW YORK, April 6, (AP) — US regulators have approved the first new drug in over a decade for children with ADHD, which causes inattention, hyperactivity and impulsivity.

The Food and Drug Administration late Friday OK'd Qelbree (KELL'-bree) for treating attention deficit hyperactivity disorder in children ages 6 to 17. It comes as a capsule that's taken daily.

Unlike nearly all other ADHD medicines, Qelbree is not a stimulant or a controlled substance, making it harder to abuse than older drugs. That's been a problem with earlier ADHD treatments like Ritalin, nearly all of which contain the stimulants amphetamine or methylphenidate.

Qelbree, developed by Supernus Pharmaceuticals of Rockville, Maryland, carries a warning of potential for suicidal thoughts and behavior, which occurred in fewer than 1% of volunteers in studies of the drug.

Supernus wouldn't disclose the drug's list price, but it's sure to be higher than the many cheap generic ADHD pills.

ADHD affects about 6 million American children and adolescents. For many, problems include trouble paying attention and completing tasks, fidgeting and impulsiveness.

Experts say the drug may appeal to parents who don't want to give their child stimulants.



Walensky

It also could be an option for kids who have substance abuse problems, dislike the side effects of stimulants or need additional therapy, said Dr. David W. Goodman, director of Suburban Psychiatric Associates near Baltimore and an assistant professor of psychiatry at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine.

Goodman said most ADHD patients taking medication currently are prescribed long-acting stimulants, which are harder to abuse to get a high than the original, fast-acting versions.

In a key late-stage study funded by Supernus, 477 children ages 6 to 11 took the drug for six weeks. Inattention and hyperactivity symptoms were reduced by about 50% compared to the placebo group. Qelbree, also known as viloxazine, helped reduce symptoms in some study volunteers within a week. Common side effects include sleepiness, lethargy, decreased appetite and headache.

Supernus is in late-stage testing for adults with ADHD. That's a much smaller group than children, but that market is growing because few adults currently take ADHD medicines.

## Antidepressant

Viloxazine was sold as an antidepressant in Europe for several decades, but was never approved by the FDA. The maker ended sales for business reasons nearly two decades ago, as popular pills like Zoloft and Prozac came to dominate the market.



US Sen **Joe Manchin** on Monday submitted a congressional inquiry with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention regarding an HIV outbreak in West Virginia's largest county.

The West Virginia Democrat asked for the inquiry on behalf of the Kanawha County Commission two months after a CDC official warned that the county's outbreak was "the most concerning in the United States."

Commission President **Kent Carper** said in a statement that the outbreak "is an important public health issue and is deserving of our full understanding."

In a letter to **Dr. Rochelle Walensky**, the CDC director, Manchin asked that the CDC review the commission's concerns and reply by Friday.

Later Monday, Manchin released a letter from the CDC saying it was eager to meet with public health officials. It said **Dr. Jonathan Mermin**, director of the CDC's National Center for HIV/AIDS, would be included in the meeting.

In early February, **Dr. Demetre Daskalakis**, the CDC's chief of HIV prevention, gave a presentation at a meeting of a Kanawha County HIV task force.

"It is possible the current case count represents the tip of the iceberg," Daskalakis said. "There are likely many more undiagnosed cases in the community. We are concerned that transmission is ongoing and that the number of people with HIV will continue to increase unless urgent action is taken."

The commission's letter to Manchin asked whether the CDC has completed an official investigation into the county's HIV surge. The letter said the commission is concerned that the statements referring to the outbreak as the most concerning in the nation "are being made without factual and empirical evidence."

As recently as 2014, only 12.5% of HIV cases in West Virginia were the result of intravenous drug use. By 2019, 64.2% were, according to state health department data. The increase was due primarily to clusters in Kanawha and Cabell counties.

Kanawha County, which includes Charleston and has 178,000 residents, had two intravenous drug-related HIV cases in 2018. The number grew to 15 in 2019 and at least 35 last year, said **Shannon McBee**, a state epidemiologist.

## Diagnosis

By comparison, New York City, with a population of more than 8 million, recorded 36 HIV cases tied to intravenous drug use in 2019, according to the CDC. Counties in other states with populations similar to Kanawha had an average of less than one HIV diagnosis among people who inject drugs, Daskalakis said.

The surge, clustered primarily around the capital of Charleston and the city of Huntington, is being attributed at least in part to the cancellation in 2018 of a needle exchange program that offered clean syringes to injection drug users not able to quit the habit altogether.

Needle exchange programs are included in the CDC's recommendations for controlling disease outbreaks among intravenous drug users. Such programs exist in dozens of states, but they are not without their critics, including in West Virginia, who say they don't do enough to prevent or stop drug abuse.

With less than a week left in the regular session, the state Legislature is considering a bill to regulate needle exchange providers.

The nonprofit organization Solutions Oriented Addiction Response provides addicts with clean needles in Charleston and group shares information about HIV testing with residents, including the homeless. SOAR co-founder **Sarah Stone** has said the legislation could shut down her group's needle exchange program.

## Also:

**NEUCHÂTEL, Switzerland:** Masimo announced the results of a prospective, observational study published in Critical Care in which researchers in Genoa, Italy, evaluated the impact of a variety of rescue therapies on the systemic and cerebral oxygenation of mechanically ventilated COVID-19 patients suffering from acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS). To gauge the impact, the researchers used the Masimo Root @ Patient Monitoring and Connectivity Platform with O3 @ Regional Oximetry, which uses near-infrared spectroscopy (NIRS) to enable monitoring of tissue oxygen saturation (rSO2) in the region of interest, such as the brain.

**Dr. Chiara Robba** and colleagues noted that "neurological complications are common in mechanically ventilated critically ill patients with COVID-19 and may lead to impaired cerebral hemodynamics," and further, that respiratory rescue therapies "may have detrimental effects on brain physiology." Observing, however, that there is currently little data available regarding the effect of rescue therapies on these patients' brains, and in particular on cerebral oxygenation, the researchers sought to assess the impact of different ventilatory rescue therapies on the brain to help guide clinicians in choosing the most appropriate therapies for their COVID-19 patients.



Medical workers tend to a patient affected with the COVID-19 in the Amiens Picardie hospital, March 30, 2021, in Amiens, north of Paris. European countries scrambled, April 5 to tamp down a surge in COVID-19 cases and ramp up vaccinations, hoping to spare hospitals from becoming overwhelmed by the pandemic's latest deadly wave of infections. (AP)

## Coronavirus

## Polish hospitals struggle with spike of virus patients

## EU scrambles to tamp down virus surge

BOCHNIA, Poland, April 6, (AP) — European countries scrambled Monday to tamp down a surge in COVID-19 cases and ramp up vaccinations, hoping to spare hospitals from becoming overwhelmed by the pandemic's latest deadly wave of infections.

The crush of coronavirus patients has been relentless for hospitals in Poland, where daily new infections hit records of over 35,000 on two recent days and the government ordered new restrictions to prevent large gatherings over the long Easter weekend. France's health minister warned that the number of intensive care unit patients could match levels from a year ago.

But in a sign of the disparities from one country to the next, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced that barbers, gyms and outdoor bar and restaurant patios would be able to open next week after the country reported progress with vaccines and its recent lockdown. Meanwhile, the US vaccination campaign kept accelerating, with 40 percent of the nation's adult population receiving at least one dose.

On Sunday, coronavirus patients filled almost all of the 120 beds at the County Hospital of Bochnia, 40 kilometers (25 miles) east of the southern city of Krakow. One patient, 82-year-old Edward Szumanski, voiced concern that some people still refuse to see the virus that has killed over 2.8 million people worldwide as a threat. About 55,000 of those deaths have occurred in Poland.

"The disease is certainly there, and it is very serious. Those who have not been through it, those who do not have it in their family, may be deluding themselves, but the reality is different," he said.

The more contagious and more aggressive virus variant identified in Britain is fueling much of the increase in Europe. Meanwhile, voters in many countries are angry at the European Union's strategy but also at their own governments' handling of the pandemic and the failure to prevent repeated spikes in infections.

France's health minister, Olivier Veran, warned Monday that the number of COVID-19 patients in the country's intensive care units might match the level of the first crisis a year ago. Speaking on TF1 television, he said the country could approach the ICU saturation levels of April 2020, when French ICUs held more than 7,000 virus patients, many of whom were in temporary facilities because demand far outstripped the country's pre-pandemic ICU capacity.

Veran expressed hope that France's new infections could peak this week thanks to new partial lockdown measures. After long resisting calls for a new lockdown, the French government closed schools and shuttered all non-essential stores nationwide and imposed travel restrictions for four weeks.

"We will manage," Veran said.

The British government announced Monday that all adults and children will be able to have routine coronavirus tests twice a week as a way to stamp out new outbreaks. The tests are being introduced as Johnson announces the next steps in the country's road map out of its three-month lockdown.

Britain has recorded almost 127,000 coronavirus deaths, the highest toll in Europe. But both infections and deaths have fallen sharply during the lockdown and since the start of a vaccination campaign that so far has given a first dose to more than 31 million people, or 6 in 10 adults.

## Lockdown

Authorities in Ukraine's capital, Kyiv, introduced tighter lockdown restrictions following a recent spike in virus cases. All schools in the city of 3 million people will be closed for the next two weeks, and only people with special passes will be allowed on public transport.

"The hospitals are almost full. The situation is difficult," Kyiv Mayor Vitali Klitschko said.

Elsewhere, North Macedonia has delayed mass immunization amid vaccine shortages as its hospitals fill up following record new COVID-19 infections and deaths last week.

In Greece, which is struggling to emerge from a deep recession, most retail stores were allowed to reopen Monday despite an ongoing surge in COVID-19 infections. Lockdown measures have been in force since early November, although shops opened briefly around the Christmas season. The prolonged closures piled pressure on the economy.

Serbia also has eased measures against the coronavirus despite high numbers of infections and a slowdown in vaccinations. The government on Monday allowed bars and restaurants to serve guests outside at reduced capacity and with respect of social distancing rules.

In the US, a top public health official said young people are driving the latest uptick in COVID-19 cases, as the increasing rate of vaccination in older Americans prevents the most

serious cases among seniors.

Dr. Rochelle Walensky, the director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, cited the increasing spread of variants as well as a rise in youth sports and extracurricular activities as factors contributing to the steady increase in cases over the last four weeks.

But Walensky pointed to positive developments among seniors, who are the most vulnerable age group. Senior virus deaths have fallen to their lowest level since the early fall. More than 75% of those age 65 or older nationally have received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine, and nearly 55% are fully vaccinated.

"What we're seeing is both a decrease in emergency department visits as well as hospitalizations associated with that demographic," she said Monday.

More than 23% of all adults in the US are fully vaccinated, according to the CDC.

Many states are making vaccines available to younger demographics. Starting Monday, any adult in Florida is eligible to receive the vaccine. In addition, the state announced that 16- and 17-year-olds also could get the vaccine with parental permission.

Polish hospitals struggled over the Easter weekend with a massive number of people infected with COVID-19 following a huge surge in infections across Central and Eastern Europe in recent weeks.

Tougher new pandemic restrictions were ordered in Poland for a two-week period surrounding Easter in order to slow down the infection rate. The country hit new records of over 35,000 daily infections on two recent days, and deaths have been in the hundreds each day.

The aim of the new restrictions was to prevent large gatherings over the long weekend culminating with Easter Monday. Meanwhile, the government is also trying to speed up the country's vaccine rollout, but the pressure on the country's hospitals is still relentless.

On Easter Sunday, coronavirus patients filled almost all of the 120 beds at the County Hospital of Bochnia, 40 kilometers (25 miles) east of the southern city of Krakow.

"It is a difficult situation, because there are a lot of patients," said Bozena Gicala, a nurse treating COVID-19 patients who spoke to Associated Press reporters visiting the hospital.

She said the support of her colleagues was critical in managing the unprecedented situation.



Vaccine against the coronavirus and the COVID-19 disease from AstraZeneca, Moderna and Pfizer/Biontech are storage at the vaccination centre in the district of Harz in Quedlinburg, Germany, April 5. (AP)



George



Gudmundsson

## Discovery

**New fissure opens up:** Steam and lava spurted Monday from a new fissure at an Icelandic volcano that began erupting last month, prompting the evacuation of hundreds of hikers who had come to see the spectacle.

The new fissure, first spotted by a sight-seeing helicopter, was about 500 meters (550 yards) long and about a kilometer (around a half-mile) from the original eruption site in the Geldinga Valley.

The Icelandic Department of Emergency Management announced an immediate evacuation of the area. It said there was no imminent danger to life due to the site's distance from popular hiking paths.

The Icelandic Meteorological Office said the new volcanic activity wasn't expected to affect traffic at nearby Keflavik Airport.

The long-dormant volcano on the Reykjanes Peninsula in southwest Iceland flared to life March 20 after tens of thousands of earthquakes were recorded in the area in the past three weeks. It was the area's first volcanic eruption in nearly 800 years.

The volcano's proximity to Iceland's capital, Reykjavik, about 32 kilometers (20 miles) away, has brought a steady stream of tourists to the area, even with the country in partial lockdown to combat the coronavirus. Around 30,000 people have visited the area since the eruption began, according to the Icelandic Tourist Board.

Live footage from the area showed small spouts of lava coming from the new fissure.

Geophysicist **Magnus Gudmundsson** said the volcanic eruption could be moving north from its original location.

"We now see less lava coming from the two original craters," he told The Associated Press. "This could be the beginning of second stage." (AP)



**Right whales births rise:** North Atlantic right whales gave birth over the winter in greater numbers than scientists have seen since 2015, an encouraging sign for researchers who became alarmed three years ago when the critically endangered species produced no known offspring at all.

Survey teams spotted 17 newborn right whale calves swimming with their mothers offshore between Florida and North Carolina from December through March. One of those calves soon died after being hit a boat, a reminder of the high death rate for right whales that experts fear is outpacing births.

The overall calf count equals the combined total for the previous three years. That includes the dismal 2018 calving season, when scientists saw zero right

whale births for the first time in three decades. Still, researchers say greater numbers are needed in the coming years for North Atlantic right whales to rebound from an estimated population that's dwindled to about 360.

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"What we are seeing is what we hope will be the beginning of an upward climb in calving that's going to continue for the next few years," said **Clay George**,



This undated image provided by Supernus Pharmaceuticals in April 2021 shows bottles for different dosages of the drug Qelbree. On April 2, the US Food and Drug Administration approved the medication for treating attention deficit hyperactivity disorder in children ages six through 17. (AP)

a wildlife biologist who oversees right whale surveys for the Georgia Department of Natural Resources. "They need to be producing about two dozen calves per year for the population to stabilize and continue to grow again."

Right whales migrate each winter to the warmer Atlantic waters off the Southeastern US to give birth. Trained spotters fly over the coastline almost daily during the calving season, scanning the water for mothers with newborns.

Survey flights over Georgia and Florida ended Wednesday on the last day of March, typically the season's end. Spotters will monitor waters off the Carolinas through April 15, hoping to pick up any overlooked newborns as the whales head north to their feeding grounds.

This season's calf count matches the 17 births recorded in 2015. Right whale experts consider that number fairly average, considering the record is 39 births confirmed in 2009.

Scientists suspect a calving slump in recent years may have been caused by a shortage of zooplankton to feed right whales in the Gulf of Maine and the Bay of Fundy off Nova Scotia. They say the uptick in births this season could be a result of whales being healthier after shifting to waters with more abundant food sources. (AP)