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Inside C2

Southern DAILY

Make Today Different

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Costs of going unvaccinated in America are mounting for workers and companies

March 25 (Reuters) - Nearly a year after COVID vaccines became freely available in the U.S., one fourth of American adults remain unvaccinated, and a picture of the economic cost of vaccine hesitancy is emerging. It points to financial risk for individuals, companies and publicly funded programs.

Vaccine hesitancy likely already accounts for tens of billions of dollars in preventable U.S. hospitalization costs and up to hundreds of thousands of preventable deaths, say public health experts. For individuals forgoing vaccination, the risks can include layoffs and ineligibility to collect unemployment, higher insurance premiums, growing out-of-pocket medical costs or loss of academic scholarships.

For employers, vaccine hesitancy can contribute to short-staffed workplaces. For taxpayers, it could mean a financial drain on programs such as Medicare, which provides healthcare for seniors.

Some employers are looking to pass along a risk premium to unvaccinated workers, not unlike how smokers can be required to pay higher health premiums. One airline said it will charge unvaccinated workers \$200 extra a month in insurance.

“When the vaccines emerged it seemed like everyone wanted one and the big question was how long it would take to meet the demand,” said Kosali Simon, a professor of health economics at Indiana University. “It didn’t occur to me that, a year later, we’d be studying the cost of people not wanting the vaccines.”

Alicia Royce, a 38-year-old special education teacher in Coachella, California, opted out of getting the COVID vaccine or having her two vaccine-eligible children get it. Royce’s parents got the shots, but she has been concerned by issues including reports of adverse reactions.

The decision puts Royce in a delicate spot. Her school, like others in California, began a vaccine mandate for staff last year. For now, Royce has a religious exemption and gets tested for COVID twice a week before entering the classroom. The situation has prompted her family to plan a move to Alabama, where schools have not imposed mandates, after the school year.

“I’ll get paid less,” said Royce, who

expects to take a \$40,000-a-year pay cut. “But I’m moving for my own personal freedom to choose.”

PREVENTABLE CARE, BILLIONS IN COSTS

As the pandemic enters its third year, the number of U.S. patients hospitalized with COVID is near a 17-month low. Most Americans are vaccinated, and the country is regaining a semblance of normalcy, even as authorities predict a coming uptick in infections from the BA.2 sub-variant.

Yet as millions return to offices, public transportation and other social settings, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention figures show nearly 25% of U.S. adults haven’t been fully vaccinated, and the latest data suggests many holdouts won’t be easily swayed: The number of people seeking a first COVID vaccine in the U.S. has fallen to 14-month lows.

Vaccines have proven to be a powerful tool against the virus. CDC figures from 2021’s Delta wave found that unvaccinated Americans had four times greater risk

of being infected, and nearly 13 times higher risk of death from COVID. The disparities were even greater for those who received booster shots, who were 53 times less likely to die from COVID. Less than half of the country’s vaccinated population has so far received a booster.

In a December study, the nonprofit Kaiser Family Foundation, which tracks U.S. health policy and outcomes, estimated that between June and November of 2021, unvaccinated American adults accounted for \$13.8 billion in “preventable” COVID hospitalization costs nationwide.

Kaiser estimated that over that six-month period, which included the Delta wave, vaccinations could have averted 59% of COVID hospitalizations among U.S. adults. Kaiser tallied 690,000 vaccine-preventable hospitalizations, at an average cost of \$20,000. And it estimated vaccinations could have prevented 163,000 U.S. deaths over the same period.

If vaccine hesitancy accounted for half

of the more than 1 million new U.S. COVID hospitalizations since December, the added cost of preventable hospital stays could amount to another \$10 billion, Reuters found.

One thing is clear: As U.S. insurance providers and hospital networks reckon with vaccine hesitancy, it’s likely that patients hospitalized for COVID will end up shouldering a bigger portion of the bill.

“These hospitalizations are not only devastating for patients and their families but could also put patients on the hook for thousands of dollars,” Krutika Amin, a Kaiser associate director and one of the December study’s co-authors, told Reuters. Unlike earlier in the pandemic, Amin said, most private health insurers have stopped waiving cost-sharing or deductibles for COVID patients who end up hospitalized.

For some insurance plans, the cost to a hospitalized COVID patient can exceed \$8,000 just for “in-network” services, she added. The expenses could balloon for the uninsured and those turning to out-of-network care.



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FDIC LENDER

Oregon, California seek to protect election workers from threats

WASHINGTON, Feb 18 (Reuters) - Lawmakers in Oregon and California are calling for tougher legislation to protect election workers in response to a continuing wave of threats and harassment inspired by former President Donald Trump's false claims that the 2020 vote was rigged against him.

In Oregon, legislators are considering a measure that would make it a felony to harass or threaten election workers while they are performing their official duties, state officials said. The measure would also exempt the personal information of election workers, such as home addresses, from certain public records.

“In the months leading up to and since the 2020 election, election workers across the country have faced verbal abuse, harassment and violent threats on their lives,” Oregon Secretary of State Shemia Fagan, a Democrat, told state lawmakers on Tuesday. “As we head into the 2022 election season, we must do all we can to protect election workers against physical harm fueled by misinformation.”

Oregon joins at least nine other states considering stronger protections for election administrators who have faced a campaign of terror inspired by Trump's baseless claims of widespread fraud in the 2020 vote. Reuters documented more than 850 threats and hostile messages to election workers and officials nationwide in a series of investigative reports.

Reuters' reporting “made it clear that we had to do something to address the unprecedented rise in threats and harassment targeting election workers,” said Ben Morris, spokesperson for Fagan. The coverage “has been incredibly helpful in making the case for the bill.”

California is also considering legislation to provide stronger protections for frontline workers who administer elections. State Senator Josh Newman, a Democrat, introduced a bill on Wednesday that would give election workers the option of keeping their home addresses private. The measure is aimed at reducing harassment by preventing the public release of personal information online or on social media platforms.

“Once your personal information is on the internet, there's no shortage of people that may act on that information, especially when triggered,” said Newman. “It's got to be terrifying.”



Poll workers wait in line to grab breakfast prior to the polls opening at the Registrar of Voters on the day of the U.S. Presidential election in San Diego, California, U.S., November 3, 2020. REUTERS/Mike Blake

The bill would allow election workers to enroll in California's existing privacy protection programs that are available to survivors of domestic violence, judges and politicians, among others.

behavior.”

“U.S. election officials are overworked, underpaid, understaffed and now under attack, as has been well documented by Reuters,” said Kim Alexander, president of the California Voter Foundation, who helped draft the bill. “We also need law enforcement to intervene whenever election officials are harassed or threatened and prosecute attackers wherever possible to help deter this kind of heinous

Editor's Choice



People line up near a makeshift nucleic acid testing site outside a shopping mall in Beijing, China, March 21. REUTERS/Carlos Garcia Rawlins



Police and staff workers are tested for the coronavirus at a makeshift nucleic acid testing center inside barriers of an area under lockdown in Shanghai, March 24. China is posting a steep jump in daily COVID-19 infections, with new cases hitting a two-year high. REUTERS/Aly Song



Workers wearing personal protective equipment work at a coronavirus isolation facility in Hong Kong China, March 21. REUTERS/Tyrone Siu



A child has her swab sample taken at a mobile nucleic acid testing site near a Catholic church in Beijing, China, March 16. REUTERS/Tingshu Wang



A woman stretches at a coronavirus isolation facility in Hong Kong, China, March 21. REUTERS/Tyrone Siu



Workers in protective suits move boxes outside a sealed off area in Beijing, March 21. REUTERS/Carlos Garcia Rawlins

Russian War In World’s ‘Breadbasket’ Threatens Global Food Supply



Farmers harvest with their combines in a wheat field near the village Tbilisskaya, Russia, July 21, 2021. The Russian tanks and missiles besieging Ukraine also are threatening the food supply and livelihoods of people in Europe, Africa and Asia who rely on the vast, fertile farmlands known as the “breadbasket of the world.” Russia and Ukraine combine for about a third of the world’s wheat and barley exports and provide large amounts of corn and cooking oils. (Photo/Vitaly Timkiv, AP File)

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

BARCELONA, Spain (AP) — The Russian tanks and missiles besieging Ukraine also are threatening the food supply and livelihoods of people in Europe, Africa and Asia who rely on the vast, fertile farmlands of the Black Sea region — known as the “breadbasket of the world.” Ukrainian farmers have been forced to neglect their fields as millions flee, fight or try to stay alive. Ports are shut down that send wheat and other food staples worldwide to be made into bread, noodles and animal feed. And there are worries Russia, another agricultural powerhouse, could have its grain exports upended by Western sanctions.

While there have not yet been global disruptions to wheat supplies, prices have surged 55% since a week before the invasion amid concerns about what could happen next. If the war is prolonged, countries that rely on affordable wheat exports from Ukraine could face shortages starting in July, International Grains Council director Arnaud Petit told The Associated Press.

That could create food insecurity and throw more people into poverty in places like Egypt and Lebanon, where diets are dominated by government-subsidized bread. In Europe, officials are preparing for potential shortages of products from Ukraine and increased prices for livestock feed that could mean more expensive meat and

dairy if farmers are forced to pass along costs to customers.



Farmers harvest with their combines in a wheat field near the village Tbilisskaya, Russia, July 21, 2021. The Russian tanks and missiles besieging Ukraine also are threatening the food supply and livelihoods of people in Europe, Africa and Asia who rely on the vast, fertile farmlands known as the “breadbasket of the world.” Russia and Ukraine combine for about a third of the world’s wheat and barley exports and provide large amounts of corn and cooking oils. (Photo/Vitaly Timkiv, AP File)

Russia and Ukraine combine for nearly a third of the world’s wheat and barley exports. Ukraine also is a major supplier of corn and the global leader in sunflower oil, used in food processing. The war could reduce food supplies just when

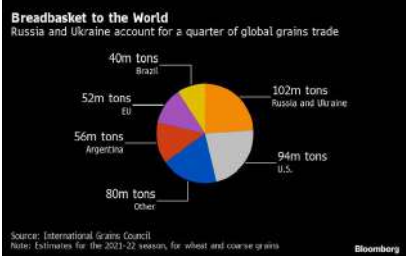
prices are at their highest levels since 2011. A prolonged conflict would have a big impact some 1,500 miles (2,400 kilometers) away in Egypt, the world’s largest wheat importer. Millions rely on subsidized bread made from Ukrainian grains to survive, with about a third of people living in poverty.

“Wars mean shortages, and shortages mean (price) hikes,” Ahmed Salah, a 47-year-old father of seven, said in Cairo. “Any hikes will be catastrophic not only for me, but for the majority of the people.”

Anna Nagurney, a professor of supply chains, logistics and economics at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, said, “Wheat, corn, oils, barley, flour are extremely important to food security ... especially in the poorer parts of the globe.”

With Ukrainian men being called on to fight, she said, “Who’s going to be doing the harvesting? Who’d be doing the transportation?”

Egypt’s state procurer of wheat, which normally buys heavily from Russia and Ukraine, had to cancel two orders in less than a week: one for overpricing, the other because a lack of companies offered to sell their supplies. Sharp spikes in the cost of wheat globally could severely affect Egypt’s ability to keep bread prices at their current subsidized level.



“Bread is extremely heavily subsidized in Egypt, and successive governments have found that cuts to those subsidies are the one straw that should be kept off the camel’s back at all costs,” Mirette Mabrouk, a senior fellow at the Middle East Institute, wrote in a recent analysis.

War-ravaged Syria recently announced it would cut spending and ration staples. In nearby Lebanon, where a massive explosion at the Beirut port in 2020 destroyed the country’s main grain silos, authorities are scrambling to make up for a predicted wheat shortage, with Ukraine providing 60% of its supply. They are in talks with the U.S., India and Canada to find other sources for a country already in financial meltdown.

Even before the war threatened to affect wheat supplies in sub-Saharan Africa, people in Kenya were demanding #lowerfoodprices on social media as inflation eroded their spending power. Now, they’re bracing for worse.

African countries imported agricultural products worth \$4 billion from Russia in 2020, and about 90% was wheat, said Wandile Sihlobo, chief economist for the Agricultural Business

Chamber of South Africa.

In Nigeria, flour millers believe a shortage of wheat supplies from Russia would affect the price of products like bread, a common food in Africa’s most populous country.



“All of us need to look elsewhere” in the future, said Tope Ogun with Honeywell Flour Mills Plc, one of Nigeria’s biggest flour milling companies. “We might not get what we need to, and there is likely going to be an increase in the price.”

Nigeria has taken pains to reduce its reliance on Russian grains, with farmers moving to plant more wheat fields to try to meet 70% of the country’s demand in five years, said Gambo Sale, national secretary of the Wheat Farmers Association of Nigeria.

“We have the land, we have the people, we have the money, we have whatever we can need in Nigeria” to grow wheat, he said. “All we need now is time.”

The disruption can be felt as far away as Indonesia, where wheat is used to make instant noodles, bread, fried foods and snacks.

Ukraine was Indonesia’s second-largest wheat supplier last year, providing 26% of wheat consumed. Rising prices for noodles, in turn, would hurt lower-income people, said Kasan Muhri, who heads the trade ministry’s research division.

Ukraine and Russia also combine for 75% of global sunflower oil exports, accounting for 10% of all cooking oils, IHS Markit said.

Raad Hebsi, a wholesale retailer in Baghdad, said he and other Iraqis are bracing to pay more for their cooking oil.



“Once the items stored are sold, we will see an increase in prices of these items,” he said. “We will likely purchase alternatives from Turkey, and Turkey will no doubt take advantage of the situation in Ukraine and raise its prices.”

Farmers in the United States, the world’s leading corn exporter and a major wheat supplier, are watching to see if U.S. wheat exports spike. In the European Union, farmers are concerned about rising costs for livestock feed.

Ukraine supplies the EU with just under 60% of its corn and nearly half of a key component in the grains needed to feed livestock. Russia, which provides the EU with 40% of its natural gas needs, is similarly a major supplier of fertilizer, wheat and other staples.

Spain is feeling the pinch both in sunflower oil, which supermarkets are rationing, and grains for the all-important breeding industry. Those imported grains go to feed some 55 million pigs. Jaime Bemis, a 58-year-old breeder with 1,200 swine on his farm in northeast Spain, fears the war will further increase the pain his business is facing because of climate change and drought.

Since October, Spanish pork products have been taking a loss from high costs, Bemis said. Those costs are driven by China stockpiling feed for its pigs as it claws its way out of a devastating outbreak of African swine fever.



In the first two days of Russia’s assault on Ukraine, the price of grain for animal feed jumped 10% on the open market in Spain.

“We are facing a moment of very elevated costs, and we don’t know what lies ahead,” Bemis said. “This is another cost of waging a war in the 21st century.” (Courtesy <https://thewestern-news.com>)

Related/Summary
Russian Invasion Threatens Global Food Supply

The big picture: The two countries combine for nearly one-third of global wheat and barley exports, AP reports. Ukraine is a major exporter of corn.

- **Lebanon, Egypt and Syria** are among the countries most dependent on affordable wheat. “Any [price] hikes will be catastrophic not only for me, but for the majority of the people,” Ahmed Salah, an Egyptian father of seven, told AP.
- **Supplies were already tight** because of droughts hitting the wheat belts of North America.

European livestock farmers are heavily reliant on Ukraine for corn and other grain additives for animal feed.

Between the lines: This also threatens efforts to help famine-stricken countries like Afghanistan, Yemen and Ethiopia, the Financial Times reports.

The bottom line: Ukraine and Russia “account for about 12% of the calories the world trades,” NPR reports. (Courtesy axios.com)

“The Embattled City” 2022

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor



Kiev, The Capital Of Ukraine -- Founded In 482



“We Fear No One.” Ukrainians Raise Flags To Defy Russia Invasion