

# Concerned Scientists' Weekly News Bulletin

## [May 17, 2021]



*Our weekly bulletin collects and digests news of the past week.  
Contributions welcome.*

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### **NEWS ITEMS AND ARTICLES**

Politico: [States, retail giants lift mask mandates](#)

*Virginia's governor (Democrat Ralph Northam) and Maryland's governor (Republican Larry Hogan) both lifted their states' indoor mask mandates last Friday, joining individual large corporations such as Costco and Walmart. The states also plan to lift their capacity and social distancing restrictions, with exceptions for schools, health care facilities, and public transit. This follows the CDC announcement that fully vaccinated individuals can safely be in group settings indoors and outdoors without masks. The governors state that masks are still strongly recommended for unvaccinated individuals.*

New York Times: [C.D.C. advisers endorse Pfizer vaccine for children ages 12 to 15](#)

*Clinical trials of the Pfizer vaccine have shown that the same dose used in adults is safe and effective for adolescents aged 12-15. The CDC's endorsement came last Wednesday, and several states have begun opening up vaccine appointments for the age group. There are 17 million 12-15-year-olds in the US, making up 5.3% of the population. It is hoped this will allow for the reopening of schools and in-person learning to students this fall.*

New York Times: [The C.D.C. confirms more cases of a rare blood clot disorder linked to the J.&J. vaccine](#)

*28 individuals, 6 men and 22 women, have developed the rare blood clotting disorder associated with the Johnson & Johnson COVID vaccine. Officials say women aged 30-49 appear to be at elevated risk. The blood clots often develop in the brain and can be life-threatening, with 3 of the 28 individuals having died. Despite this, the risk remains low as the vaccine had been distributed to over 9 million individuals in the US. The*

*Pfizer and Moderna vaccines employ a different technology than the J&J vaccines and have had no confirmed cases of related clotting disorders.*

*American Institute of Physics: [Senate taking Endless Frontier Act dispute into floor debate](#)  
The Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee approved the Endless Frontier Act, despite disagreements on how the proposed R&D funding should be allocated. The version that was passed with a vote of 24 to 4 includes a technology-focused directorate for the National Science Foundation but reduces this budget from what was originally proposed and instead allocates more funding towards the Department of Energy. The Senate plans to vote on the bill by the end of the month.*

*The Guardian: [Solar pushback: How US power firms try to make people pay for going green](#)  
Large power companies in Kansas are advocating for fees targeting individuals who install rooftop solar panels, displaying a similar pattern seen across the country as states try to increase their use of solar power. Corporations in opposition to the adoption of individually owned solar panels and power generation argue that, without power or money coming back into their grid, they would have to increase their rates for neighbors without solar panels.*

*New York Times: [How a genetic trait in Black people can give the police cover](#)  
Sickle cell trait is carried by 1 out of 13 Black Americans. Two genes are needed to develop sickle cell disease, and the possession of the single sickle cell trait is almost always benign. Despite this, law enforcement has repeatedly used the possession of this trait as a major factor or cause of death of Black individuals in custody. The condition has been claimed as a factor in death at least 47 times in the past 25 years and, when used, can create enough doubt to release officers from criminal or civil penalties. About 2/3 of the examined cases found the individuals to have been restrained, pepper-sprayed, and/or shocked with stun guns by authorities before their death.*

*Nature: [China has landed its first rover on Mars—here's what happens next](#)  
China's rover Zhurong touched down on the surface of Mars on May 15<sup>th</sup>, after being released from the Tiawen-1 spacecraft orbiting the planet. This makes China the third country to land on Mars after the US and Russia. Goals of the mission include detecting new geological information and potentially permafrost.*

## **REGIONAL NEWS**

*Indiana Environmental Reporter: [EPA awards Brownfields grants to three Indiana communities](#)*

*The EPA awarded Bloomington, Union City, and the town of Clarksville hundreds of thousands of dollars in multipurpose, Assessment and Cleanup grants through the Region 5 Land Revitalization Program. Bloomington's assessments will focus on the College Avenue/Walnut Street corridor. Mayor John Hamilton said that Bloomington has "identified over 25 vacant or underutilized commercial and/or industrial brownfields properties located in low-income residential and/or mixed-use areas as target properties for this grant."*

*Indiana Environmental Reporter: [IDEM commissioner comments on "pretty tough" 2021 legislative session](#)*

Indiana Department of Environmental Management Commissioner Bruno Pigott expressed frustration at the outcome of the 2021 Indiana Legislative session. Pigott said the department was “less than satisfied with the outcome of the bill” that has now become Public Law 160, removing state protections for most state wetlands and Public Law 100, which establishes state regulation of coal ash. The IDEM will work to implement the new laws “despite [their] positions regarding the law.”

*IndyStar*: [Indianapolis maintains mask mandate despite new CDC guidelines](#)

Marion County health officials confirmed Thursday that the county-wide mask mandate will continue despite updated guidelines from the CDC (Center for Disease Control). Indiana State Health Commissioner Dr. Kristina Box said in a media briefing on Wednesday: “I do think that when you’re still in very large groups because there’s still a significant percentage of people that have not had the opportunity or taken the opportunity yet to get vaccinated, so it’s probably wise to still have your mask on.” About 29% of all residents in Marion County are fully vaccinated, lower than the national average of 36% of the U.S. population.

## **OPINION AND ANALYSIS**

*Washington Post*: [How did an outbreak become a pandemic? Too easily](#)

The 13-member Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness and Response concluded that those nations suffering the most were those that “devalued science, denied the potential impact of the pandemic, delayed comprehensive action, and allowed distrust to undermine efforts.”

*Bloomberg*: [The CDC’s new mask rules just follow the science](#)

Scientists have been saying for months that masking alone outdoors is not likely to save anyone — something mainstream media outlets like *New York Times* took much longer to admit to. Vaccines have faced a much more stringent level of scrutiny.

*Grist*: [He thinks scientists must move out of their ivory towers and take to the streets](#)

Biochemist and March for Science organizer Lucky Tran harnesses facts and research to speak out on social injustice, and he trains his colleagues to do the same. In an interview with *Grist*, he speaks about how scientists can be better advocates.

*Swissinfo.ch*: [Have lessons been learned from the science on climate change?](#)

Scientists have warned over the years that changes in land use disrupt the balance in nature and provoke diseases to spill over from animal hosts to humans. Their voices were met mostly with indifference from policy makers. That is expected to change. Since the start of the pandemic, COVID-19 has shed light on the link between environment and climate change for policy makers, through the impacts on health of environmental degradation.

*InsideClimate News*: [Extreme heat risks sometimes left out of major climate reports](#)

Many models are underestimating the short-term threat to the most vulnerable areas—densely populated tropical regions, and the threats aren’t clearly communicated. In the U.S., the risk of power failures during such heatwaves could increase the death toll.

*YaleE360*: [As the climate warms, could the U.S. face another dust bowl?](#)

*Improved agricultural practices and widespread irrigation may stave off another agricultural calamity in the Great Plains. But scientists are now warning that two inescapable realities – rising temperatures and worsening drought – could still spawn a modern-day Dust Bowl.*

**UCS:** [Four things to know—and a word of caution—about EPA’s Climate Change Indicators Website reboot](#)

*By tracking the progression of climate change across different human and natural systems, the website provides an accessible place for planners and the public to explore data generated primarily by federal agencies on climate change and its impacts on our lives. But the UCS’s senior climate scientists also warns that some indicators are influenced by more than climate.*

## **TAKE ACTION AND RESOURCES FOR ACTIVISTS**

**UCS:** [Give farmers the tools they need to build resilience and adapt to the climate crisis](#)

*We know soil is the literal foundation of our farming system, making most of our food supply possible. But healthy, spongy soil can also make other important things possible—such as clean water and flood control. That means soil is vital infrastructure for our climate future. Right now, Congress is debating legislation that represents one of the best opportunities in decades to incorporate the science behind soil into our national climate solutions—but they need to hear from constituents. Tell Congress to prioritize soil health and resilience in comprehensive infrastructure and climate legislation.*

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*Our CSIU news bulletin is intended to provide a brief update on recent news, editorials, as well as action items related to science integrity and science policy. Note that editorial pieces and action items are assembled from a variety of sources and organizations; they do not necessarily reflect the opinions or policy priorities of Concerned Scientists @ IU. This week’s news bulletin was compiled by CSIU member Christoph Irmscher of IU’s Department of English and by ASIU member Emma Hand, a rising senior majoring in biology. **We are delighted to welcome ASIU member and rising sophomore Rose Schnabel, an aspiring science writer, to our team!** If you’d like to volunteer—or if you have additional links you’d like to share for future bulletins, send them to Christoph at [cirmsche@indiana.edu](mailto:cirmsche@indiana.edu).*

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