

Comparing the Frequency and Severity of Adverse Events among Adult Vaccinations in 2019-2021

Andrew Huang, Emma McMillan, Ben Mosong, Yanyu Tao Brown University, Providence, RI, USA



ABSTRACT

The Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS) is a national vaccine post-marketing surveillance program designed to detect adverse events that were not detected in smaller, pre-marketing studies. Using a dictionary for symptoms, we coded events as serious or non-serious and used frequency tables and proportional reporting ratios (PRRs) to compare reports among most frequently reported vaccines and adverse events between Jan 1, 2019 and March 26, 2021. RESULTS. DISCUSSION

INTRODUCTION

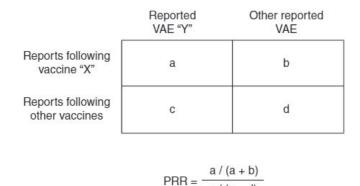
- Vaccines are highly successful means of preventing illness, but pose risks of adverse events and complications
- Pre-marketing clinical trials are limited in ability to detect adverse events due to small cohort sizes, short durations, and lack of enrolled patient diversity (Sultuna, 2013)
- Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS) is post-marketing surveillance system co-sponsored by FDA & CDC used to detect safety issues in USA authorized vaccines
- Reports entered by patients, vaccine manufacturers, physicians
- VAERS data cannot be used to determine causality, since events reported with specific vaccinations may have occurred coincidentally and are not related to vaccination itself
- Symptom data coded using Medical Dictionary for Regulatory Activities (MedDRA), but VAERS does not provide serious vs. non-serious event breakdown, which we created for this project

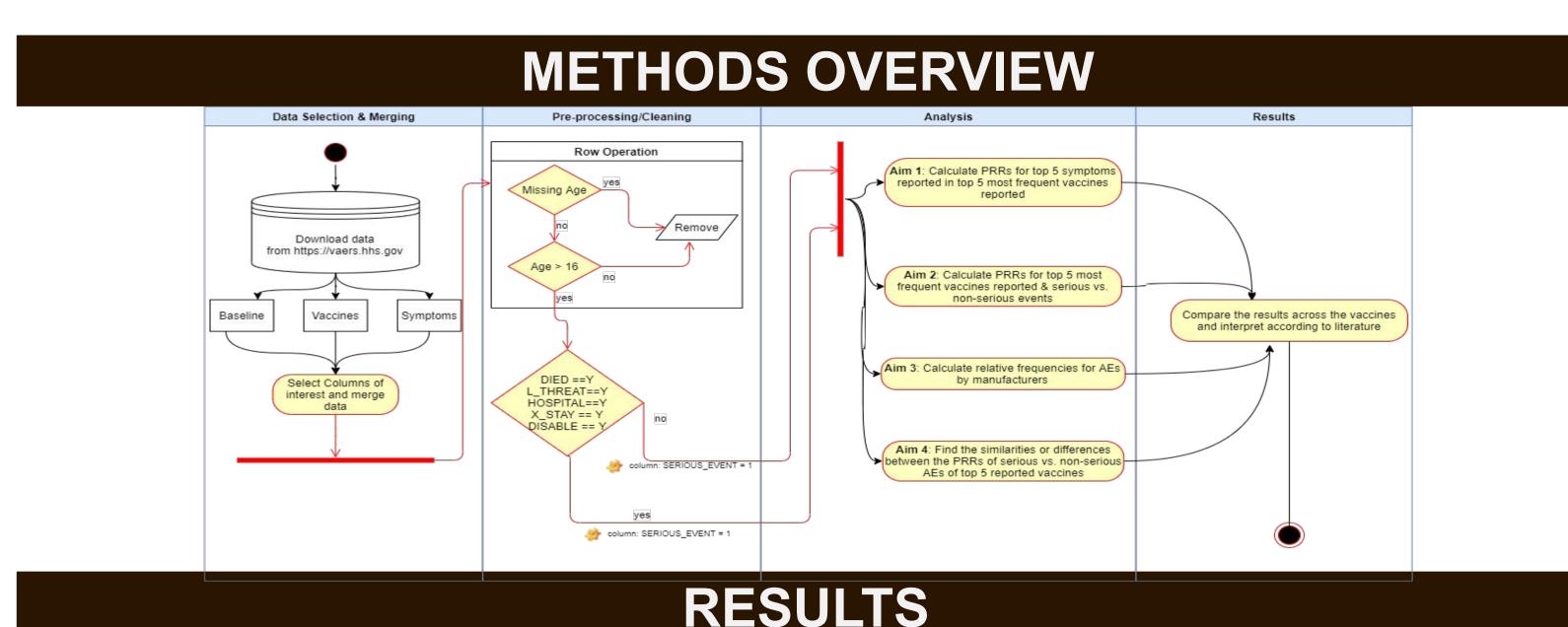
RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Among reports of all vaccine recipients from 2019-2021, which vaccines are most frequently reported in the VAERS dataset among adult patients? What are the symptoms/adverse events most commonly reported for this vaccine? (Aim 1)
- 2. Among these vaccines, what are the proportional reporting ratios for serious vs. non-serious events? (Aim 2)
- 3. What are the relative frequencies of serious events (and general, all AEs) for groups of vaccine distributors? (Aim 3)
- 4. What are the proportional reporting ratio of serious AEs between age groups across the emergency use authorized COVID-19 vaccines, including Pfizer/BioNTech, Moderna, and Janssen)? (Aim 4)

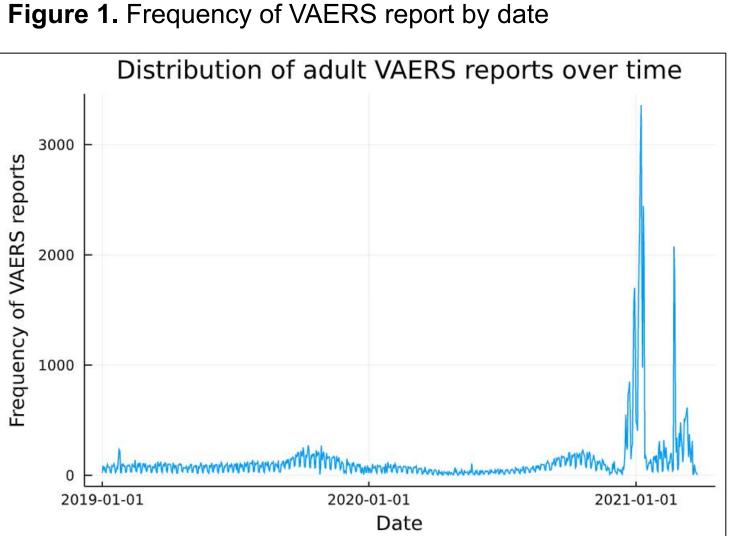
ANALYSIS METHODS

- Export data from VAERS site: 3 files from VAERS data (data) symptoms, vaccine), from Jan 1, 2019 - Mar 26, 2021
- 2. Pre-process and conduct exploratory data analysis in Julia a. Packages used: CSV, Dataframes, Plots, StatsPlots, StatsBase, FreqTables, Missing, Query, HypothesisTests
- b. Included rows of px ≥16 yrs old and w/o missing age data
- Codebook to dichotomize events as serious or non-serious based on FDA Code of Federal Regulations ("CFR"))
- 4. Tabulate frequencies of events by vaccine, top adverse events, serious vs. non serious events, vaccine manufacturer
- 5. Calculate Proportional Reporting Ratios (PRRs) for vaccines/adverse event pairs specified using above Aims using contingency tables and formula in Julia (modeled from below)





- Identified a total of 103,050 reported adult vaccinations from 1/1/2019 to 3/26/2021 submitted to VAERS, and includes 112 vaccines and 5,565 MedDRA symptoms.
- 9.6% (n=10,054) of all reports contained reports of serious events
- Among the 94,840 reporting adults, 27% were 16 to 39 years old, 41% age 40 to 64, and 32% were age 65 and older. 72% identified Female.



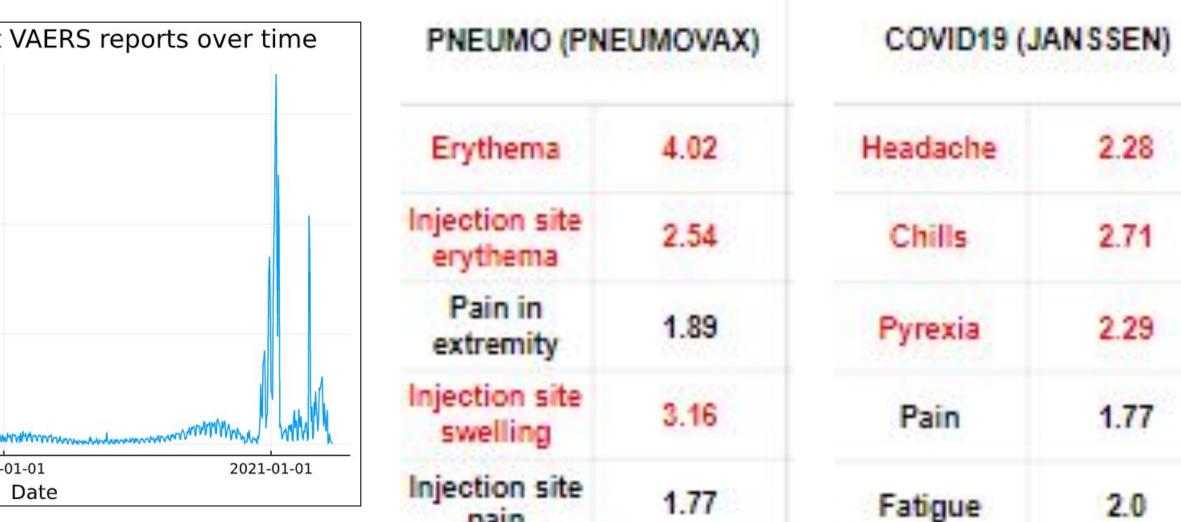


Table 1. Number of serious reports & PRR by vaccine (Aim 2)

of serious events for PRR serious vs. specific vaccine non-serious # of reports **COVID-19 Pfizer** 23,630 3,621 **Zoster (Shingles)** 21,666 COVID-19 Moderna 20,815 Pneumovax

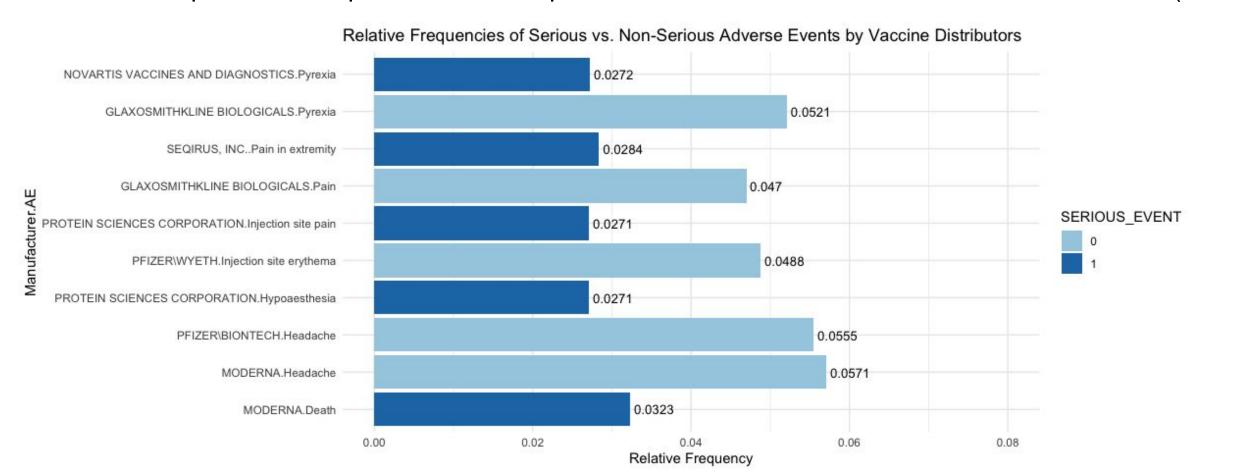
COVID-19 Janssen 2,774

Table 2. PRR of Serious Event by COVID-19 Vaccine by Age Group (Aim 4)

Figure 2. PRRs of symptoms that raises potential signals

Age Group	COVID-19 Pfizer	COVID-19 Moderna	COVID-19 Janssen
16 to 39	1.07	1.05	0.49
40 to 49	1.02	1.19	0.62
50 to 59	1.62	2.16	0.59
60 to 64	2.16	2.69	0.88
65 to 74	4.29	4.49	0.97
75+	2.91	3.08	1.38
All (16 to 75+)	1.89	2.22	0.56

Figure 3. Relative frequencies of top 5 serious vs. top 5 non-serious AEs for different vaccine distributors (Aim 3)



DISCUSSION

- Summary Reporting Ratios
 - Aim 1:COVID19 (JANSSEN) and PNEUMO (PNEUMOVAX) raised 3 potential signals each for possible investigation.
 - Aim 2: larger PRRs associated with 3 COVID-19 vaccines and serious events
 - o Aim 4: similar PRRs between Pfizer and Moderna, within strata of age; smaller PRRs for Janssen.
- Summary Frequency by Distributor
 - o In Aim 3, found relative frequencies of serious AEs are approximately half of the frequencies of non-serious AEs, across all distributors
 - No difference in the means of number of reported AEs between Moderna and Pfizer
 - Difference in the means of number of reported AEs between Moderna and Segirus
- Limitations of approach
 - VAERS dataset is a passive surveillance system that relies on unverified reports of health events occurring after vaccination
 - Cannot determine whether patient, provider, parent or manufacturer submitted report
 - PRRs cannot be used to assume causal relationship b/t vaccines and adverse events
 - Codebook for serious did not code office visits or emergency department visits as serious, likely underestimating total # of serious events
 - 3 of 5 of most frequently reported vaccines are COVID-19 vaccines, and studied since end 2020
- Strength(s)

2.28

2.71

2.29

1.77

2.0

o In analysis, we were able to classify events using simple, novel codebook, as serious vs. non serious

CONCLUSION

Post-marketing surveillance of safety data from vaccines is critical to ensure that benefits of vaccines continue to outweigh their risks. Applying analytical tools and statistical methods (i.e. contingency tables, PRRs)t, we were able to identify differences among vaccine reports. At the same time, we developed a novel system to simplify characterization of reported events as being serious or non-serious. It is imperative that this post-marketing safety data is collected and made accessible to everyone in a responsible manner. Further analysis and publication of such analysis can help ensure appropriate transmittal of vaccine safety data to the public, ultimately supporting public health.

References

- "CFR Code of Federal Regulations Title 21." Accessdata.fda.gov, www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/cdrh/cfdocs/cfcfr/cfrsearch.cfm?fr=312.32.
- 2. Sultana J, Cutroneo P, Trifirò G. Clinical and economic burden of adverse drug reactions. J Pharmacol Pharmacother. 2013 Dec;4(Suppl 1):S73-7. doi: 10.4103/0976-500X.120957. PMID: 24347988; PMCID: PMC3853675.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to Dr. Chen, Dr. Sarkar, Dilum, Michelle for support on our project.

Create dict of VAERS reports and symptoms

Original VAERS data structure:

SYMPTO	AERS_ID	1
Arra	Int64	
["Injected limb mobility decreased", "Injection site joint p	794156	1
["Apathy", "Arthralgia", "Asthenia", "Injection site erythema", "Injection site pa	794157	2
["Injection site pruritus", "Injection site swelling", "Injection site warmth", "Listless", "Night swe	794157	3
["Chills", "Headache", "Nausea", "Pain", "Pyre	794158	4
["Injection site erythema", "Injection site swelling", "Injection site warmth", "Pa	794159	5
["Injection site swelling", "Lip blister", "Lip swelling", "Pa	794160	6
["Asthenia", "Chills", "Fatigue", "Influenza like illness", "Injection site eryther	794160	7
["Pyre	794161	8

New VAERS data structure:

SYMPTON	AERS_ID	٧
Array	Int64	
["Injection site joint pain", "Injected limb mobility decrease	794156	1
["Apathy", "Injection site pain", "Injection site pruritus", "Asthenia", "Arthralgia", "Injection site erythema", "Injection swarmth", "Injection site swelling", "Night sweats", "Listles	794157	2
["Pain", "Headache", "Nausea", "Pyrexia", "Chill	794158	3
["Lip swelling", "Lip blister", "Pain", "Influenza like illness", "Asthenia", "Injection site erythema", "Fatigue", "Injection s swelling", "Chill	794160	4
["Pyrexi	794161	5

Code (https://github.com/methods2021/8_v-team):

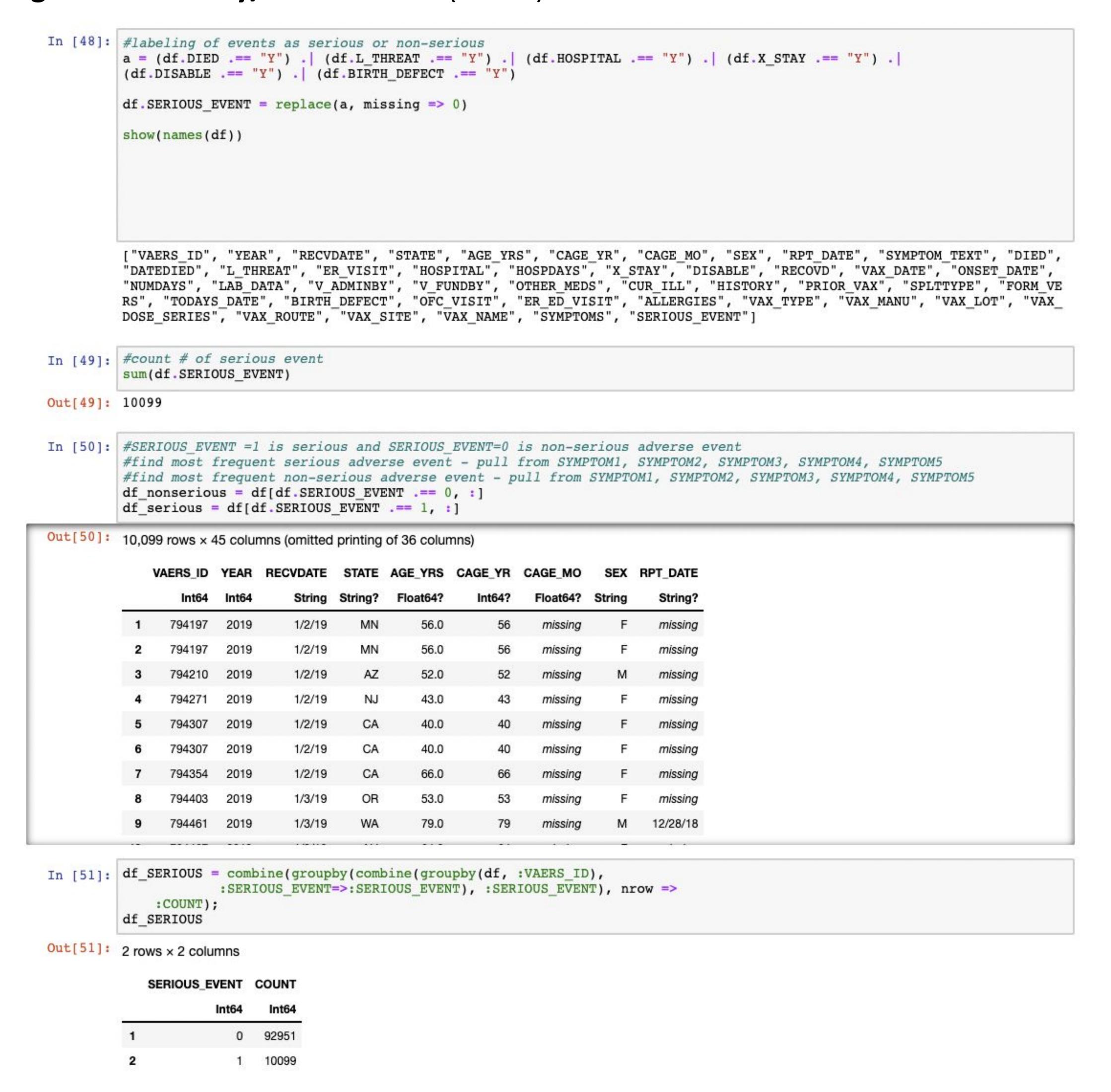
```
# Collapse the rows so that we get a dict of symptoms for each VAERS ID
# Step 1: Create the dict
vaers_id_to_symptoms_dict = Dict{Int, Set{String}}()
# Step 2: Populate the keys (VAERS_ID) of the dict
for rownumber in 1:size(test, 1)
    vaers id = test[rownumber, :VAERS ID]
   if !haskey(vaers_id_to_symptoms_dict, vaers_id)
        # this is the set where we will store all of the symptoms for this VAERS ID
        vaers_id_to_symptoms_dict[vaers_id] = Set{String}()
   end
end
# Step 3: Populate the values (SYMPTOMS) of the dict
for rownumber in 1:size(test, 1)
   vaers_id = test[rownumber, :VAERS_ID]
    symptoms = test[rownumber, :SYMPTOMS]
   for symptom in symptoms
        push!(vaers_id_to_symptoms_dict[vaers_id], symptom)
   end
# View dict
vaers_id_to_symptoms_dict
Dict{Int64, Set{String}} with 135054 entries:
```

1ct{Int64, Set{String}} with 135054 entries:
1043880 => Set(["Platelet count decreased"])
1043880 => Set(["Aspiration", "Death", "Insomnia", "Seizure"])
1043880 => Set(["Coronavirus infection", "Cough", "Dyspnoea"])
105057 => Set(["Influenza"])
1051582 => Set(["Abdominal distension", "Flatulence", "Abdominal pain upper",...
1051588 => Set(["Product storage error"])
1051588 => Set(["Paraesthesia"])
1048923 => Set(["Pain", "Pyrexia", "Pain in extremity"])

Special thanks to Dilum for helping write the code in Office Hours!

Label reports as serious or non-serious

Per FDA CFR (intended for randomized trials), a serious adverse event = "if in the view of either the investigator or sponsor, it results in any of the following outcomes: death, life-threatening adverse event, inpatient hospitalization or prolongation of existing hospitalization, persistent or significant incapacity or substantial disruption of the ability to conduct normal life functions, or a congenital anomaly/birth defect" ("CFR")



Github: https://github.com/methods2021/8_v-team/blob/master/serious%20vs%20nonserious%20labeling.jl

Calculate PRRs for top 5 symptoms reported in top 5 most frequent vaccines reported (Aim 1)

ZOSTER (SH	lINGRIX)	COVII (PFIZER-BIC		PNEUMO (PN	IEUMOVAX)	COVID19 (M	ODERNA)	COVID19 (J	ANSSEN)
Pyrexia	1.59	Headache	1.40	Erythema	4.02	Headache	1.2	Headache	2.28
Chills	1.68	Fatigue	1.35	Injection site erythema	2.54	Pyrexia	0.95	Chills	2.71
Pain	1.46	Chills	1.11	Pain in extremity	1.89	Chills	1.04	Pyrexia	2.29
Headache	1.24	Pyrexia	0.92	Injection site swelling	3.16	Fatigue	1.16	Pain	1.77
njection site pain	1.66	Pain	0.92	Injection site pain	1.77	Pain	0.86	Fatigue	2.0

```
list symptoms mostlikely = Dict{String, Vector{String}}()
for vax in ["COVID19 (COVID19 (PFIZER-BIONTECH))",
            "ZOSTER (SHINGRIX)",
            "COVID19 (COVID19 (MODERNA))",
            "PNEUMO (PNEUMOVAX)",
            "COVID19 (COVID19 (JANSSEN))"]
    # Create dict of most reported symptoms for each vaccine
    df vax = filter(row -> row.VAX NAME == vax, df)
    symptoms_all_dupes = reduce(vcat, df_vax.SYMPTOMS)
    symptoms freq dict = StatsBase.countmap(symptoms all dupes)
    list symptoms = unique(reduce(vcat, df vax.SYMPTOMS))
    freq_per_symptom = [symptoms_freq_dict[val] for val in list_symptoms]
    perm = sortperm(freq_per_symptom; rev=true)
    # only pick the top 5 symptoms for each of the vaccine
    list symptoms mostlikely[vax] = list symptoms[perm[1:5]]
end
prr dict = Dict()
for (vax, symptoms) in list symptoms mostlikely
    symp_prr = []
    for symptom in symptoms
        push!(symp_prr, string(symptom, "(PRR: ",
    end
    prr_dict[vax] = symp_prr
```

prr_dict

When PRR > 2, it's a potential signal for investigation

COVID19 (JANSSEN) and PNEUMO (PNEUMOVAX) raised 3 potential signals each

Headache, Pyrexia and Chills are the common symptoms among the top 5 common symptoms among the top 5 vmp_prr, string(symptom, "(PRR: ", round(get_PRR(get_freqtable(df, vax, symptom)); digits=2), ")")) vaccines. Their PRRs ranks high too.

https://github.com/methods2021/8_v-team/blob/master/ben_aim1.jl

Calculate PRRs for top 5 most frequent vaccines reported & serious vs. non-serious events (Aim 2)

PRR using Julia (via Jupyter notebooks) sample:

In [62]: #function for aims analysis, to calc PRR from contingency tables created below function get_freqtable(df, vax_name_str, symptom_str) test = select(df, ["VAX NAME", "SYMPTOMS"]) # Create dummy variable for vax name test.VAX_IND = (test.VAX_NAME .== vax_name_str) # Create dummy variable for symptom test.SYMPTOM_IND = zeros(size(test, 1)) for rownumber in 1:size(test, 1) if symptom str in test[rownumber,:SYMPTOMS] test[rownumber,:SYMPTOM_IND] = 1 end end # Create frequency table tbl = freqtable(test, :VAX_IND, :SYMPTOM_IND) return tbl end; function get_PRR(tbl) # Calculate PRR a = tbl[2,2]b = tbl[2,1]c = tbl[1,2]d = tbl[1,1]PRR = (a/(a+b))/(c/(c+d))return PRR end; In [63]: # PRR for #1 freq VAX = "COVID19 (COVID19 (PFIZER-BIONTECH))" and serious report df.COVID19_PFIZER = (df.VAX_NAME .== "COVID19 (COVID19 (PFIZER-BIONTECH))"); tbl = freqtable(df, :COVID19 PFIZER, :SERIOUS EVENT) Out[63]: 2×2 Named Array{Int64,2} COVID19 PFIZER \ SERIOUS EVENT false 72960 6460 19991 3639 true In [64]: #PRR for Pfizer COVID-19 get_PRR(tbl)

Out[64]: 1.8932837121306416

PRR by hand sample:

$$PRR = \frac{A/(A+B)}{C/(C+D)}$$

	Reported adverse event of interest (serious AE)		Total
Reports for COVID-19 Pfizer	3,621 (a)	20,009 (b)	23,630 (a+b)
Reports for all other vaccines	6,433 (c)	72,987 (d)	79,420 (c+d)
Total	10,554	92, 996	103,050

PRR Interpretation: There is 1.89 times (a much greater) probability that there were serious events detected in the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine group vs. all other reports of all other vaccines and non-serious events in the dataset.

GitHub: https://github.com/methods2021/8_v-team/blob/master/emcmill2_aim2_analysis_v2.jl

Construct function of calculating counts for AEs by groups (i.e. vaccine types, distributors); Calculate relative frequencies for AEs by manufacturers (Aim 3)

```
# this function takes in VAERS dataframe, one column name(default), or two column names
# and calculate the overall frequency/counts for col-AE (or col1-col2-AE) pairs
function get freq(df, col1, col2 = nothing)
    # when only one column name specified
    if isnothing(col2)
        # one observation is associated with 5 symptom columns,
        # calculate the frequency/counts for coll-AE pairs separately by symptom column
        count1 = dropmissing(rename!(combine(groupby(df, [Symbol(col1), :SYMPTOM1]),
                    nrow => :COUNT), :SYMPTOM1 => :SYMPTOM), :SYMPTOM);
        count2 = dropmissing(rename!(combine(groupby(df, [Symbol(col1), :SYMPTOM2]),
                    nrow => :COUNT), :SYMPTOM2 => :SYMPTOM), :SYMPTOM);
        count3 = dropmissing(rename!(combine(groupby(df, [Symbol(col1), :SYMPTOM3]),
                    nrow => :COUNT), :SYMPTOM3 => :SYMPTOM), :SYMPTOM);
        count4 = dropmissing(rename!(combine(groupby(df, [Symbol(col1), :SYMPTOM4]),
                    nrow => :COUNT), :SYMPTOM4 => :SYMPTOM), :SYMPTOM);
        count5 = dropmissing(rename!(combine(groupby(df, [Symbol(col1), :SYMPTOM5]),
                    nrow => :COUNT), :SYMPTOM5 => :SYMPTOM), :SYMPTOM);
        # concatenating, note that coll-AE pairs may not be unique at this step
        count raw = reduce(vcat, [count1, count2, count3, count4, count5]);
        # recalculating frequency/counts by summing up the counts for non-unique col1-AE pairs
        count = combine(groupby(count_raw, [Symbol(col1), :SYMPTOM]), :COUNT => sum)
    # when two column names specified
    else
        count1 = dropmissing(rename!(combine(groupby(df, [Symbol(col1), Symbol(col2), :SYMPTOM1]),
                    nrow => :COUNT), :SYMPTOM1 => :SYMPTOM), :SYMPTOM);
        count2 = dropmissing(rename!(combine(groupby(df, [Symbol(col1), Symbol(col2), :SYMPTOM2]),
                    nrow => :COUNT), :SYMPTOM2 => :SYMPTOM), :SYMPTOM);
        count3 = dropmissing(rename!(combine(groupby(df, [Symbol(col1), Symbol(col2), :SYMPTOM3]),
                    nrow => :COUNT), :SYMPTOM3 => :SYMPTOM), :SYMPTOM);
        count4 = dropmissing(rename!(combine(groupby(df, [Symbol(col1), Symbol(col2), :SYMPTOM4]),
                    nrow => :COUNT), :SYMPTOM4 => :SYMPTOM), :SYMPTOM);
        count5 = dropmissing(rename!(combine(groupby(df, [Symbol(col1), Symbol(col2), :SYMPTOM5]),
                    nrow => :COUNT), :SYMPTOM5 => :SYMPTOM), :SYMPTOM);
        count raw = reduce(vcat, [count1, count2, count3, count4, count5]);
        count = combine(groupby(count raw, [Symbol(col1), Symbol(col2), :SYMPTOM]), :COUNT => sum)
    return count
end
```

Calculate overall counts for MANU-SYPM pair:

```
#get the manufacturer w/ the most frequent aderse event overall
tb1 = sort!(get freq(df, "VAX MANU")
                                                :COUNT sum, rev = true)
19,054 \text{ rows} \times 3 \text{ columns}
                       VAX MANU
                                           SYMPTOM COUNT_sum
                                               String
                            String
                                                             Int64
    GLAXOSMITHKLINE BIOLOGICALS
                                                             5848
                                               Pyrexia
                                                             5300
  2 GLAXOSMITHKLINE BIOLOGICALS
  3 GLAXOSMITHKLINE BIOLOGICALS
                                                Chills
                                                             5151
#get the manufacturer with most frequent non-serious adverse event overall
tb2 = sort!(filter(x -> x.SERIOUS EVENT == 0.
         get_freq(df, "VAX MANU", "SERIOUS_EVENT"))
     :COUNT sum, rev = true)
13,357 \text{ rows} \times 4 \text{ columns}
                    VAX_MANU SERIOUS_EVENT
                                                    SYMPTOM COUNT_sum
                                       Int64
                                                                   Int64
                        String
                                                       String
                                                                   5700
   GLAXOSMITHKLINE BIOLOGICALS
                                                      Pyrexia
  2 GLAXOSMITHKLINE BIOLOGICALS
                                                                   5143
                                                        Pain
```

Calculate relative frequencies by manufacturers:

Chills

5066

Top 3 Manufacturers with the highest frequencies of non-serious AEs:

Moderna (headache), Pfizer (headache), GSK (pyrexia) Top 3 Manufacturers with the highest frequencies of serious AEs:

Moderna (death), Seqirus (pain in extreme), Novartis (pyrexia)

11377×5 Row	DataFrame VAX_MANU String	SERIOUS_EVENT	SYMPTOM String	COUNT_sum Int64	freq Float64
1 2 3 4	MODERNA PFIZER\\BIONTECH GLAXOSMITHKLINE BIOLOGICALS PFIZER\\WYETH	0 0 0	Headache Headache Pyrexia Injection site erythema	2526 3136 5700 362	0.0570667 0.0554828 0.0520976 0.0487739

3 GLAXOSMITHKLINE BIOLOGICALS

Github: https://github.com/methods2021/8 v-team/blob/master/ytao aim3 analysis.jl